Jackie Goes Home

Young Working-Class Women: Higher Education, Employment and Social (Re)Alignment

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements of the University of the West of England, Bristol for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Faculty of Arts, Creative Industries and Education

Department of Education and Childhood

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February 2020

Word count: 83,920

Abstract

This thesis builds on and contributes to work in the field of sociology of education and employment. It provides an extension to a research agenda which has sought to examine how young people's transitions from 'undergraduate' to 'graduate' are 'classed' processes, an interest of some academics over the previous twenty-five years (Friedman and Laurison, 2019; Ingram and Allen, 2018; Bathmaker *et al.,* 2016; Burke, 2016a; Purcell *et al.,* 2012; Tomlinson, 2007; Brown and Hesketh, 2004; Brown and Scase, 1994). My extension and claim to originality are that until now little work has considered how young working-class women experience such a transition as a classed and gendered process.

When analysing the narratives of fifteen young working-class women, I employed a Bourdieusian theoretical framework. Through this qualitative study, I found that most of the working-class women's aspirations are borne out of their 'experiential capital' (Bradley and Ingram, 2012). Their graduate identity construction practices and the characteristics of their transitions out of higher education were directly linked to the different quantity and composition of capital within their remit and the (mis)recognition of this within various fields. Further, I found that the ways in which they experienced and negotiated their social mobility routes were again based on their capital and were differentiated by the 'type' of university through which they obtained their degrees. Moreover, most of those who experienced upward social mobility struggled to reconcile their cleft habituses (Bourdieu, 2007; 2000).

Overall, this work found that experiencing and graduating from university is a gendered, as well as classed, process. I have drawn on Bourdieu's conceptual work to make visible the invisible structures and routes through which social order and the reproduction of privilege are continually (re)established in different social fields. This work has implications for policy and practice at governmental level and in universities. It also makes recommendations for the academic community by setting a research agenda which advocates for further intra-class comparative research and work which promotes a social justice, not social mobility agenda.

Context of title

The British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) television play written by Jeremy Sandford and directed by Ken Loach *Cathy Come Home* (1966) influenced the title of this thesis. Although this research was conducted a little over fifty years after the release of the television play, the political and social discourses which stigmatise working-class women, positioning them, like Cathy, as 'problems', without 'respectability' and 'low in character' is ever-present and effective in its aim.

First, it is essential to note that the young women who took part in this research share with Cathy much of the positive experiences of being a working-class woman, a phenomenon rarely explored in academic writing. Within Cathy's story and many of the narratives of the young women in this PhD project there is the strong presence of community, solidarity and honour.

However, while most of the women I am about to introduce to you are not yet married or have children, most encounter(ed) similar issues to those that Cathy faced. Many have faced navigating the low-waged, unstable, precarious jobs market and have struggled to access private rented and social housing. They too do a disproportionate level of caring responsibility for their families and have had to wrestle with an inflexible welfare state, leaving them to experience the stigma of being considered "layabouts, vagabonds and scroungers" (*Cathy Come Home*, 1966, no page number).

Dedicated to

Daniel Thomas Round

Ten different desks, eight house moves and five years later I'm submitting my thesis, and I have you to thank for getting me through each stage of equally the best and most challenging years of my life.

Acknowledgements

I am only here having completed this thesis because I stand on the shoulders of giants. Here I would like to take a moment to thank them. First, I will be forever indebted to the fifteen women who took part in my project. The time and energy you committed to the study is immeasurable, and I cannot thank you enough. I hope I have done your stories justice.

Second, thank you to my supervisors Harriet Bradley and Richard Waller who have both been Director of Studies, colleagues and mentors to me. I must also thank Nicola Ingram, who supervised me in my first academic year and has been there to offer guidance since. All three have encouraged and supported my academic development and have been there to help me personally.

Thank you to the Leverhulme Trust for funding this project and thank you to those in the UWE graduate school for their support, particularly Helen Frisby and Samantha Watts.

Tamsin Bowers-Brown, thank you for introducing me to the idea of postgraduate study, for encouraging me to apply for this PhD scholarship and for introducing me to the work of Pierre Bourdieu. Next, many thanks to my other colleagues on the Paired Peers research project, and my friends and informal mentors: Vanda Papafilippou, Jenny Thatcher, Stephanie Aspin, Karen Scott, Zoe Baker, Steph Lacey, Katie Morgan, Teresa Crew, Alice Cope, Ajlaa Mokhtar, Joy Umekwe, Kate Haddow, Heather Mew and Lisa Morriss. You are my community of cheerleaders who have all played such an important role in me getting to this point.

Finally, much love to my mashed-up family of Bentleys, Copleys, Rounds, Daintys and Dainty-Shares. Without lending me your spare rooms for an office, making me Sunday dinners, video chatting with me, being shoulders to cry on as well as making me belly laugh, this thesis would not be what it is.

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List of Acronyms

ASA: American Sociological Association

BERA: British Education Research Association

BIS: Department for Business Innovation & Skills

BSA: British Sociological Association

DfE: Department for Education

ECAs: Extra-curricular activities

FWC: Firmly-working-class

GCSE: General Certificate of Secondary Education

HE: Higher education

HEIs: Higher education institutions

HESA: Higher Education Statistics Agency

IFS: Institute for Fiscal Studies

MA: Master of Arts degree

NCOP: National Collaborative Outreach Programme

NS-SEC: National Statistics Socio-economic Classification

ONS: Office of National Statistics

PG study: Postgraduate study

PGCE: Postgraduate Certificate in Education

POLAR: Participation of Local Areas

PP1: Paired Peers phase one

PP2: Paired Peers phase two

RG: Russell Group university

SMC: Social Mobility Commission

UCAS: University and Colleges Admissions Service

UoB: University of Bristol

UWC: Upper-working-class

UWE: University of the West of England

List of Keys

…: Pause in the narrative

[…]: Part of the narrative omitted

[CAPS]: Anonymising

(non-caps): Contextual additions to the text

(I2): Interview two

Chapter one: Introduction

Historically, young working-class women have accessed Higher Education (HE) in fewer numbers than their male and more affluent counterparts. Currently, while we know that women were recruited in equal numbers to men for the first time in 1992 (Gilchrist *et al.,* 2003) and have since increasingly outnumbered them, it is also known that the most privileged young people are still more likely to enter university than those from working-class backgrounds (University and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS), 2018a). As the class background and gender of HE students have long been collected as separate data sets, the rates of access for working-class women are difficult to gain an understanding of.

At that, while much qualitative research over the previous twenty-five years has uncovered the ways in which young undergraduate students' experiences of accessing and navigating HE are stratified along class lines, only a few go further to consider how gender also plays a role as well. Thus, the experiences of young working-class women in HE have been relatively underexplored in sociological research. Indeed, their experiences of preparing for graduation, transitioning into 'graduate life' and their trajectories henceforth have been starkly under-researched, until now. This is because, like the data on 'access' to university, data on post-graduation trajectories tend to be collected as separate data sets. So, while it is known that working-class graduates are:

- Almost half as likely than those from the least deprived backgrounds to graduate with a 2:1 or First (Crawford *et al.,* 2017) and are less likely to access postgraduate study (Bradley *et al.,* 2017; Wakeling and Laurison, 2017);
- More likely to hold a degree from a post-1992 institution, which holds less value in the graduate labour market (Bathmaker *et al.,* 2016; Burke, 2016a);
- More likely to be paid less than middle-class graduates and more likely to be found in the non-graduate employment market (Friedman and Laurison, 2019; Ingram and Allen, 2018; Burke, 2016a; Brown and Hesketh, 2004; Brown, 2003);
- Less likely than middle-class graduates to understand the demands of 'professional' graduate employers due to their cultural mismatching (Tomlinson, 2012; Greenbank, Hepworth and Mercer, 2009).

And female graduates:

- Are more likely than male graduates to experience periods of unemployment and are 5.5 times more likely to be unemployed because they are looking after family members (Office for National Statistics (ONS), 2017);
- Are less likely than male graduates to be employed in high- or upper-middle-skilled roles, are four times more likely to be in part-time employment and are paid on average three pounds less per hour (Friedman and Laurison, 2019; ONS, 2017; Elias and Purcell, 2013);
- Who are employed by "top graduate employers" are paid on average one-third less than men (Gray, 2018);
- Are more likely than men to be in austerity-affected employment roles and be considered among the 'precariat' (Bradley, 2015; Standing, 2011), the definition of which I outline in the next chapter.

Little is known on what characterises the post-graduation experiences (and the preparation practices for these) of working-class women. While it is acknowledged that there are significant differences in graduate employment rates and earnings by socio-economic background, gender and institution (Britton *et al.,* 2016; Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE), 2016), working-class women's voices have most often been rendered mute in the research in this area. As the 'graduate opportunities' for working-class and female graduates are less lucrative relative to their more privileged counterparts, it is likely that working-class women graduates face a double disadvantage in transitioning out of HE into graduate life. However, this so far is unknown and, as the first failure to act is the failure to acknowledge, this research aimed to gather such a snapshot.

Through embarking on this qualitative sociological enquiry, I gather an in-depth understanding of what characterised the experiences of fifteen working-class women as they prepared for graduate life, transitioned out of university and experienced their graduate trajectories henceforth. To gather such a snapshot, I analyse fifteen unstructured and one-hundred and nine semi-structured interviews conducted with these women over a seven-year period (2010-2017).

This study was driven not only by a significant gap in the academic literature (introduced above and further explored in chapter three) but also by calls from academics to address particular research gaps. Further, as a young working-class woman myself I felt intrinsically drawn to studying those who I felt most akin too, the justification for, and the implications of, this are discussed in chapter two. As well as

bridging particular research gaps, this work has gone some way to fulfil a desire I hold: to uncover and work to address power structures which work to (re)produce privileges and inequities.

1.1 Project in immediate context

This PhD departs from what most would agree is the 'standard model' in the UK as it was set in the context of a large, longitudinal research project called the 'Paired Peers research project' (2010-2017). I worked on this project, which I refer to as the 'original study' throughout this thesis, as a research assistant between 2014-2017 and I drew from its vast dataset in this PhD project, which I refer to as the 'secondary study'. While the two are connected in some methodological ways (which I outline below), they are separate research projects. However, it is important to define the original study in order to then move on to distinguish this PhD research from it.

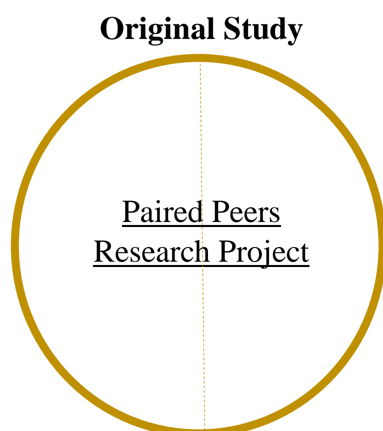


Figure one

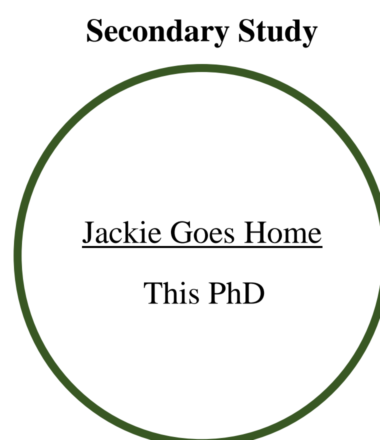
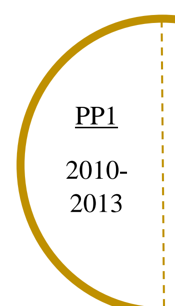


Figure two

The original study is a mixed-methods, longitudinal sociological research project funded by the Leverhulme Trust. Including myself, eleven researchers have worked on the project since 2010 and together collected around one thousand hours of interview data. In short, we sought to uncover how social class affects young people's experiences of HE and the graduate labour market. As figure one shows, the project was split into two phases.

The first phase of the project (PP1) began in autumn 2010 and concluded in summer 2013. It tracked the experiences of forty-five pairs of students from working- or middle-class backgrounds throughout their undergraduate degrees.



At the outset, the project aimed to answer five research questions. These were:

1. “What are the differences between the experiences of ‘traditional’ and ‘non-traditional’ students’ in two universities, one ‘old’ and one ‘new’?
2. Is it possible to identify the negative and positive experiences of these groups of students and how do these change over a three-year degree?
3. How do these groups of students compare in terms of educational outcomes and preparation for entry into the world of work?
4. What are the relative impacts on experience and achievement of different class backgrounds, degree courses, places of study and geographical locations?
5. How do different forms of capital (economic, social and cultural) impact on student performance and subsequent preparation for entry to the labour market, and how are these capitals valued, accumulated or discounted?”

(Paired Peers, 2010, para. 2)

In order to address these questions and achieve the desired comparisons across class and university boundaries, ninety students were paired up based on their social and educational characteristics using a three-step system. First, prospective participants had to be students at either the University of Bristol (UoB), an elite, Russell Group (RG) university, or the University of the West of England (UWE), a post-1992, teaching focussed university.[1] Second, the students had to be studying at undergraduate level and had to be studying one of eleven of the disciplines which were taught at both universities.[2] Finally, from within each of the disciplines, the project recruited two students from ‘non-traditional’ HE attendance background (working-class) and two ‘traditional’ HE attendee backgrounds (middle-class) at each university.

Simply demonstrated, below is an example of two pairs. Elliot and Emma, for example, were paired together as they were both studying the same subject, were from the same class background but studied at separate universities:

[1] The characteristics of these two different universities are explored further in Chapter six: Characterising the Participants & the Universities.

[2] Biology, Drama, Economics/Accounting/Finance, Engineering, English, Geography, History, Law, Politics, Psychology, Sociology.

	Drama	
	UoB	**UWE**
	Middle-class	
Pair 1	Elliot	Emma
	Working-class	
Pair 2	Melissa	Ruby

Table one: The pairing system in practice

Researchers conducted unstructured and semi-structured interviews which lasted on average about an hour with ninety students. They aimed to interview each participant six times over a three-year period. Their findings, which can be found in their most major output from the project (see Bathmaker *et al.,* 2016), led them to be interested in these young people's lives post-graduation. After further funding was secured, the second phase of the project (PP2) began in autumn 2014 when I joined the team as a research assistant and began this PhD research.

The aim of PP2 was to follow as many of the participants from PP1 into the graduate labour market as possible. We managed to re-recruit fifty-six of the original ninety young people to contribute to up to four interview stages. Through the collection of this data, we were able to examine the:

- "Impact of students' classed and gendered identities on their life and employment trajectories;
- Effects of institution and subject choice on outcomes and destinations;
- How the graduates made use of various capitals brought into university and/or acquired during their university years to achieve labour market positioning;
- Examine the ways in which post-university experience serves to modify original choices and aspirations, and how these are shaped by class and gender."

(Paired Peers, 2014, para. 2)

I have worked with colleagues to disseminate findings from the project (Bentley, Ingram and Papafilippou, 2018; Bradley *et al.,* 2017; Papafilippou and Bentley, 2017; Bentley and Papafilippou, 2016; Bradley, Bentley and Abrahams, 2016; Papafilippou

and Bentley, 2016) and the main output from this project will be a book published in 2020.

1.2 The secondary study: **My PhD**

While working as a research assistant on the original project, I began to consider different topics for this PhD research. I chose to focus on the fifteen working-class women who participated in both phases of the original project and who had given their consent for me to analyse their narratives for my PhD. This choice was made after meeting with seven of the women and finding significant gaps in the academic literature. As well as this, I made such a decision as PP1 researchers had already collected such rich, in-depth data and had not disseminated anything on the working-class women's narratives as a group on their own.

First, I drew on data from the original study which I had consent to use. In the context of this PhD research I considered this to be 'secondary data' as other members of the Paired Peers research project had collected this. This secondary data set comprised of:

- Fifteen unstructured interviews conducted by researchers working on PP1;
- Ninety-eight semi-structured interviews conducted by researchers on PP1 and PP2.

In addition, for this PhD research I analysed what I consider to be 'primary data' (that which I collected) from four of the fifteen working-class women which took the form of eleven semi-structured interviews. I analysed all these data with the aim to answer the three research questions that were central to this, the secondary study. These were:

1. What are the constructions of a graduate identity framed by, for young working-class women?
2. What do young working-class women's transitions from 'undergraduate' to 'graduate' comprise of?
3. Do young working-class women experience social (im)mobility as a result of their university experience?
    i. If so, what are the characteristics of this (im)mobility?

As other researchers on PP1 and PP2 have collected a great proportion of the data analysed in this secondary study, it has to be said that those working on the Paired Peers research project has played a sizable role in constructing the landscape which this PhD sits in the foreground of. While this is the case, all analysis and writing done here is my

own. Many of my claims for 'originality' lay in the differences between the two projects as:

- I was the only researcher on the original project to focus solely on the working-class women in the cohort;
- I dropped the 'paired' element, which was central to the original project. Here I focus on each of the fifteen working-class women as single entities and as a collection;
- I am the only one who has worked on the project to have written about the intra-class differences between working-class interviewees.

Already, I have solely disseminated findings from this PhD research (Bentley, 2018a; 2018b; 2018c; 2017a; 2016a; 2016b; 2015), writing these along the way has aided me in constructing this thesis, the structure of which is outlined below.

1.3 Thesis structure

Chapter two: Research context

This chapter provides the historical and political context of this PhD research. Most importantly, the political context from 2010 (when the women in this study accessed Higher Education (HE)) is outlined with reference to HE and employment policies and important academic literature. Lastly, the personal context of this PhD is provided in order to give insight into my positionality as the researcher.

Chapter three: A Review of the Literature

In chapter three, I provide the comprehensive systematic literature review conducted during this research process. I review and map out the state of the most relevant literature in the academic fields that this thesis contributes to.

The chapter reviews arguments which stake a claim for how undergraduates begin to build a graduate identity and the resources and capital required to do so. It also considers the literature on how different graduate identities are legitimised and considered valuable in different fields. Further, it examines the literature on the ways in which unequal access to 'high-value' resources and capital (re)produces social inequalities in HE and the labour market, before finally turning to a critical consideration of the literature on social mobility.

Throughout this chapter, I work to amalgamate two sections of sociological literature: the gendered practices and experiences and 'classed' practices and experiences of

preparing for the post-graduate transition, the experiences of such a transition and the negotiations of social mobility. Throughout I critically consider the literature on how working-class women have been found to experience these, while also identifying gaps in the academic literature to which this PhD research contributes.

Chapter four: Employing Bourdieu

In this chapter, I outline the theoretical framework employed in this thesis. First, I justify choosing the Bourdieusian theoretical framework and outline its appropriateness to this research. Then, I turn to outline Bourdieu's (1977) 'theory of practice', the key concepts within this, and the role of these in distributing agents into the social universe and into class 'categories'. Throughout this, I make clear how each of his 'thinking tools' are relevant to my research by drawing on empirical examples and how I use them to excavate the hidden routes through which social reproduction occurs. Finally, I outline how social class is conceptualised in this thesis and how the participants are categorised relationally as 'working-class' and as either 'firmly-working-class' or 'upper-working-class'.

Chapter five: Methodology and Methods

Here I outline the methodology and methods which sit at the core of this research project and interweave the ethical considerations I faced when doing this project throughout the discussion. First, I outline which philosophical positions I align with and critically consider what I view to be the effects of these in practice. Then I move on to discuss how I located and recruited the participants in this study and the practical processes through which I identified them as 'working-class'.

Next, I outline the research design process and where this, the 'secondary project', in some ways overlaps with the 'original project' in terms of its methods and highlight the points at which it departs from it too. I then move on to discuss the ways in which the data was collected and consider how my class and 'type' of femininity, my 'insider'/'outsider' status, changed throughout the project in relation to the women's changing social positions and thus had an impact on this research. Finally, I outline my approach to the analysis and dissemination of the results of this research.

Chapter six: Characterising the Participants & the Universities

This chapter provides key contextual characteristics of the participants and the universities through which they studied. First, I place each young woman into one of three groups based on their university of study and fractions in their social class identities. A selection of biographies are presented which provide details on the

women's social histories, positions and dispositions towards the future, as told by them. Through these biographies, the defining classed elements of each of the three groups are elucidated and 'understood' in light of academic literature and Bourdieusian social theory.

Differentiations between the groups become clearer as I then move on to provide contextual information and data on the two universities through which these women studied: the University of the West of England (UWE) and the University of Bristol (UoB).

Chapter seven: Aspirations & Preparations for Graduate Life

The three analytical chapters are in chronological order. The first of these is chapter seven which explores (i) what frames the career decision 'choices' of young working-class women, (ii) how these women began constructing their graduate identities while at university and (iii) what these development processes were structured and/or restricted by. These three points of analysis enable me to provide a response to my first research question: 'What are the constructions of a graduate identity framed by, for young working-class women?'.

Chapter eight: Establishing Distinction? Initial Transitions out of University

This chapter explores the initial transitions of working-class women out of university and into (un)employment. First, I outline the young working-class women's initial outcomes from university in terms of their grades, geographical mobility and wages. Then, I examine the narratives of those who graduated to 'non-graduate jobs', 'traditional graduate jobs' and 'new graduate jobs', and provide their experiences of these. Then I turn to consider their engagement with precarious employment structures, how these practices can both exploit the labour of these women and be used to benefit them. Examining the narratives of the women in these ways enabled me to answer my second research question: 'What do young working-class women's transitions from 'undergraduate' to 'graduate' comprise of?'.

Chapter nine: Social Mobility & Future-Gazing

In the final 'findings' chapter I address my final research question: 'Do young working-class women experience social (im)mobility as a result of their university experience? i. If so, what are the characteristics of this (im)mobility?'. First, I analyse data on their pay and occupational positions in relation to their parents'. Then, I explore their subjective reflections on their social (im)mobility and how this has impacted their ability to re-establish their social connections upon moving home. Likewise, I then turn to consider

how their (new) social positions affect their work-based interactions (in graduate and non-graduate employment) and their orientations towards future work.

Chapter ten: Conclusion

Finally, I conclude this research by drawing out the main findings and arguments from the analytical chapters. Within this, I outline how this research has answered my research questions and addressed the gaps in the literature. Thus, I demonstrate how this work contributes to current discourse on how working-class women prepare for, and experience, the ‘undergraduate’ to ‘graduate’ transition in the fields of higher education and graduate employment, and the characteristics, aspirations and negotiations of their social (im)mobility.

Then, I outline the limitations of this research project and critically consider the extent to which the findings are ‘trustworthy’. I follow this with a discussion on the implications of this work and my recommendations for policy and practice while setting a research agenda which responds to the findings of this research.

Next, developing the key contextual notions mentioned in this chapter, chapter two examines the historical, political and personal context of this study.

Chapter two: Research Context

First, this chapter explores the historical context of class and gender-based stratification in students' access to and 'success' in Higher Education (HE), while also providing a brief political history of this. Then, the political context of this PhD research is outlined (from 2010 onwards). This is an important period to outline as the working-class women accessed, participated and graduated from university in this decade. Lastly, the personal context of this PhD is outlined. This is a crucial reflexive element to any research project which works to call itself 'feminist' (Cotterill and Letherby, 1993; Stanley, 1993).

2.1 Historical

Relative to its history, working-class women have only recently gained access to HE. In the early twentieth century, university was perceived as:

> "a finishing school for people with wealth and standing… Many of the students who came were already prosperous, their teachers were little inclined to provide training for particular professions and consequently presented a view of education which… produced better men [sic] with alert minds who would be able eventually to fulfil their proper calling within a governing elite."
> (Gordon, Aldrich and Dean, 1991, p.233)

From this point, the HE system in the UK has been a mechanism for social stratification and for reproducing existing inequalities; universities operated to systematically exclude those who did not fit the hegemonic student identity, characteristics of which are outlined above. From the late 1920s to late 1940s only 1.4 per cent of all young men from 'manual backgrounds' entered university[3], and no figures were published on the number of women who accessed university from the same background (Glass, 1954). Participation rates remained consistent until after the Second World War when a dedicated effort towards university expansion was made. Through the implementation of the Education Act 1944, there was a greater demand for university places, and even greater access was encouraged by subsequent reports such as the *Higher Technological Education Report (1945)*, often referred to as the Percy Report and the *Scientific Man-Power Report (1946)*, often referred to as the Barlow Report. Over the five years following the end of the war, the number of scholarships available had doubled and at that point one in thirty people were accessing university (University Grants Committee

[3] in contrast, 8.9 per cent of all young men from 'non-manual backgrounds' attended university (Glass, 1954). Social classifications were produced using the details of students' father's occupations (Glass, 1954).

(UGC), 1953, cited by Ross, 2003a). Though some from the middle-class gained access, most were similar to those in previous generations: men of high social status who had experienced a private education (Kelsall *et al.,* 1972).

The ‘class chances’ of children whose fathers were in professional occupations meant that they were almost one hundred times more likely to enter university in 1956/7 than those whose father were unskilled manual workers (Kelsall *et al.,* 1972).

For working-class students to negotiate access to HE, they had to present themselves as successful products of a grammar school education. Not only was this route inaccessible for the masses (only 10-25 per cent of all grammar school educated children in the 1950s were from working-class origins (Ross, 2003a)) grammar schools were imbibed with symbolic violence[4] which was, and still is, enacted upon working-class culture (Ingram, 2018; Reay, 2017). The “middle-class atmospheres” of these institutions played “at least a partial role in ‘resocializing’ people of non-middle-class origins to typically middle-class norms, values and behaviour patterns” (Kelsall *et al.,* 1972, p.128).

For the most part, the cultural and social processes of ‘being working-class’ had to be cast aside and ‘middle-classness’ had to be embodied to be perceived as a successful product of a grammar school education. Consequently, it was only those from the upper echelons of the working-class category who were said to have accessed HE in the 1950s as only 0.3 per cent of children from unskilled, manual working-class backgrounds at this time achieved two A-levels or more in grammar schools (Clarke and D’Arcy, 2016). These tended to be academically-inclined working-class boys with very few places held by women from the same background (Sutherland, 2008; Walkerdine and Lucey, 1989).

Despite the perception held by some that working-class students were “handicapped” by their “limited backgrounds” [sic] (UGC, 1958, p.8, cited by Ross, 2003a), the most prominent education-orientated policy discussions in the 1960s were aimed towards expanding the HE sector. In 1963, after collecting evidence of uneven distributed educational privilege and unequal access to resources, a committee led by Lord Robbins

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[4] Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992) saw that schooling was the principal mechanism of symbolic violence, a type of violence which is “wielded with tacit complicity between its victims and its agents, insofar as both remain unconscious of submitting to or wielding it” (Bourdieu, 1998, p.17). Those who exercise this violence do so from a position of power. Success in enacting this violence upon a non-dominant group is achieved through the imposition of meanings, having them recognised as legitimate and then concealing the power relations which are the basis of its force (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1990). Further key Bourdieusian terminology is provided in Chapter four: Employing Bourdieu.

concluded, among many other things, that there were "large reservoirs of untapped ability in the population, especially among girls" (Committee on Higher Education, 1963, p.268) and particularly girls whose fathers worked in "manual occupations" (Committee on Higher Education, 1963, p.51). At this time, though girls from "richer households" had increased their participation from 21 per cent in 1958 to 36 per cent in 1970, the rate of "girls from low-income families" accessing university between these years stayed at 6 per cent (Saunders, 2010, p.40).

Throughout the seven years that followed the 1963 publication, and alongside the instatement of a vast number of new plate-glass universities and polytechnics, the Dearing Report (Committee on Higher Education, 1997), formally known as *The Reports of the National Committee of Inquiry into Higher Education*, noted a period of intense growth. The number of university graduates doubled[5] and then doubled again between the publication of the *Education Reform Act 1988* and the *Further and Higher Education Act 1992*.[6] Although the fastest rate of growth in the latter period was from those who were categorised as from the 'lower socio-economic classes' their presence was still under-represented as only one-quarter of all university students were considered to be from working-class origins (Ross, 2003b).

In order to utilise growth, polytechnics, known at the time to be successful at recruiting higher numbers of 'non-traditional students' such as ethnic minorities, mature women, and, to a lesser degree, working-class students (Blackburn and Jarman, 1993), and a handful of colleges were dissolved and re-instated as universities in 1992 and more followed soon after.[7] Though the 1992 act had abolished the binary divide between universities and polytechnics, the formation of the Russell Group in 1994 reflected "the fact that the Old, pre-1992, universities continued to be held in higher regard than New, post-1992 universities" (Boliver, 2015, p.609), that the hierarchy of Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) still existed, and only a select few could be considered the "jewels of the crown" (Russell Group, 2012a, p.1).

While such a divide existed, social progression in other areas was being achieved. In 1992, women were recruited in equal numbers to men for the first time (Gilchrist *et al.,* 2003) and within four years the rate of young people from the lowest social class

[5] Between 1962/3 and 1970/71 the Age Participation Index (API), which refers to the percentage of 17-30-year olds who access university, had doubled to 14.5 per cent (Finegold, 2006).
[6] In 1992/3 the API was 32.6 per cent (Finegold., 2006).
[7] This came after the publication of the *Further and Higher Education Act. Chapter 13.* (1992) London: The Stationery Office Limited.

accessing university had more than doubled (Committee on Higher Education, 1997). However, those from the highest social class were still ten times more likely to have gone to university than those from the lowest social class (Committee on Higher Education, 1997) and "less socioeconomically advantaged" students were, and continue to be, more likely found in post-1992 universities (Boliver, 2015, p.624). These universities are often considered as forming "a distinctive bottom tier". These universities have lower access requirements and are considerably less well-resourced than all other universities (Boliver, 2015, p.624). Among the many reasons for the social stratification, Archer (2003, p.128-129) found that 'good' and 'better' institutions:

> "were often talked about (by working-class students) as maintaining strict access criteria, not only in academic terms but socially, for example, only admitting students with titled, professional parents. […] In comparison, respondents described the 'worst' institutions as the 'sad', 'concrete' inner-city universities, without trees and catering for the 'working-class'."

Additionally, not only are institutions stratified by class, but the subjects they teach are too. Werfhorst, Sullivan and Cheung (2003, p.59) analysed data collected between 1958 and 1991 by the National Child Development Study (NCDS) and found a "strong class effect" in regard to first-degree subject choice:

> "Children of the professional class were more likely to enter the prestigious fields of medicine and law than children of unskilled manual workers. Crucially, this difference is not attributable to individual ability at the age of 11 or O level/CSE attainment. So, even among those with equal attainment earlier in the educational career, those from professional class backgrounds were more likely to choose medicine and law."

Which subsequently stratified these young people into specific employment fields, reproducing generational privilege.

UK political discourse at this time was set on further expanding HE. In 1997, New Labour (1997-2010) set out their flagship policy to have 50 per cent of 18-30-year olds experience some form of HE by 2010 (Department for Education (DfE), 2003). They did this in the aim to increase the number of 'non-traditional' students, while at the same time doubling fees to £3,000 per academic year.[8] An increase in the number of young people from the lowest socio-economic class accessing university was somewhat

[8] *Higher Education Act. Chapter 8.* (2004) London: The Stationery Office Limited.

realised with mixed success across the UK.[9] This ‘success’ was at a much slower rate than hoped by the government as a substantial 14.1 per cent access gap between the highest and lowest social class categories remained (Lupton and Obolenskaya, 2013).

On the surface, there were elements of top-down socialism in New Labour’s education policy as they intended to use state intervention in the pursuit of their vision of equality. Blair’s (2004, p.1-7) intention was to create “an opportunity society”, he saw that by putting “middle-class aspirations in the hands of working-class families” HE would become “the coalmines of the 21st century” and all would leave behind “deficit and disadvantage” if they ‘chose’ to acquire “skills and knowledge”.

However, education policies published under the Blair government fed the Conservative’s penchant for making education a utilitarian instrument (Bull and Allen, 2018). Blair’s government developed ‘character’ education policies and interventions which sought to develop “‘character strengths’ such as optimism, resilience, and grit” (Bull and Allen, 2018, p.392). Their approach to reach their main goal of eradicating child poverty was to “put education at the heart of government”, Blair (1996a, no page number) cited his “three main priorities for government” as “education, education, and education”. Their aim was, through education, to create a new “revolutionary skills stock”, to increase competitiveness in the “knowledge economy”, to further “back the wealth creators” in the business by showing them that New Labour was the “new party for them” (Blair, 1996b, no page number). This narrative was echoed throughout subsequent New Labour government publications which reported that the UK lacked “world class skills” (Leitch Review of Skills, 2006, p.5), and the workforce must adapt “to retrain, upskill and change jobs more often during the course of longer working lives” (Leitch Review of Skills, 2006, p.32). The aim to “increase human capital” (Leitch Review of Skills, 2006, p.29) via education was considered the requirement for progression.

Through this, Blair’s government had hyper-mobilised an interest in the employment positions of those graduating from university and how their ‘skills’, both hard and soft, suited the requirements of businesses. A university education was spoken of as a ticket to gain access to professional employment, a view threaded throughout the Dearing Report (Committee on Higher Education, 1997). It positioned universities as the ones in

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[9] 30.7 per cent of young full-time first-degree entrants in the UK from National Statistics Socio-economic Classification (NS-SEC) classes 4, 5, 6 or 7 accessed university in 2009/10, compared to 28.4 per cent in 2002/3 (Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA), 2010). However, rates in Scottish and Northern Irish universities declined by 1.6 and 2.2 per cent (HESA, 2010).

charge of equipping “graduates with the skills and attributes needed to be effective in a changing world of work and upon which to find and manage a number of careers” (Committee on Higher Education, 1997, p.57). This agenda continued to be developed under subsequent Coalition and Conservative governments (2010+), particularly in line with the discourse of “creating an aspiration nation” which positioned upward social mobility as accessible to everyone if they choose to “just get on in life” (Cameron, 2012a, p.9).

2.2 Political (2010 onwards)

May 2010 was an important month in the history of this study. At this time the fifteen participants in this thesis had met the University and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS) deadline to apply to university. At the same time, the political landscape in the UK was turbulent with a general election in full swing. By the end of the month the leader of the Conservatives, David Cameron, had reached across the aisle to the leader of the Liberal Democrats, Nick Clegg, to form a coalition government. Many young people watched to see how, as Deputy Prime Minister, Clegg would work to scrap university tuition fees, a policy which his party ran on and which was widely credited with giving the Liberal Democrats an increased share of the young vote.[10]

2.2.1 Higher education

Instead of scrapping tuition fees, a majority within the coalition government worked to triple the annual cost to £9,000 (Department for Business Innovation and Skills (BIS), 2010), a move supported by the Browne Review (2010). David Willetts, the Minister of State for Universities and Science at the time, justified this call by positioning students as “a burden on the taxpayer that had to be tackled” (Shepherd, 2010, p.1). After a five-hour debate in the Commons, which was surrounded by the largest student protest of this century in England thus far (Davis, 2010), the motion passed. At this point, as Cutts and Russell (2015, p.72) said, the government “were the main focus of public anger and distrust”. Beyond the vote which saw the increase in fees with no plans in place to promote access, over time there were further successful motions which put more financial restraint on the HE and Further Education (FE) sector and those within it. The two Conservative Ministers of State for Universities and Science and the three Conservative Ministers of State for Universities, Science, Research and Innovation since 2010, when in office, voted alike. These five privately and Oxbridge educated ministers voted synonymously to raise the tuition fee cap (2010), voted to end

[10] Increased from 26 per cent of the vote in 2005 to 30 per cent in 2010 of all 18-24 year old voters (Ipsos MORI, 2010).

Education Maintenance Allowance (EMA) (2011) and HE maintenance grants (2015) and consistently voted against reinstating these (2017) (voting records can be found at www.parliament.uk). Despite changes to the financing of education, Justine Greening (2016, p.14), the Secretary of State for Education (2016-2018), called for an education system which takes on "rough diamonds in oppressed areas", most of whom would have experienced the most impact from the financial cuts.

Despite concerns that student numbers would deplete in the face of such sharp financial changes, there was little significant change in full-time undergraduate numbers year on year. However, there has been a drop in part-time students (51 per cent decline between 2010 and 2015 (Callender and Thompson, 2018)), a drop in long-distance learners (for example, the Open University had a 63 per cent decrease in numbers between 2010 and 2015 (Callender and Thompson, 2018) and mature students (42 per cent fall between 2011 and 2016 (MillionPlus, 2018)), all of whom are more likely to originate from working-class communities (Office for Fair Access, 2017).

Overall, while the rates of young people from all socio-economic levels accessing university increased to record levels in 2017 (almost 1,600,000 (HESA, 2018e)), so did the gap between the most advantaged and disadvantaged young people (UCAS, 2017).[11] The most advantaged one-fifth of young people were still 3.8 times more likely to enter HE than the poorest one fifth (UCAS, 2017) and were twice as likely to complete their studies (Office for Fair Access (OFFA), 2017).

Analysing the data of working-class women in particular, the number of those accessing HE has increased, though their presence in HE remains relatively marginal. In 2010/11, only 0.96 per cent of the total HE population were women who had (i) previously attended a state school, (ii) from a low participation neighbourhood (POLAR4) and (iii) had a socio-economic classification of 4-8 (see appendix one, p.252, for this unpublished data from HESA). Though their numbers continued to grow through the 2010/11-2014/15 decline, by 2017/18 they still only represented 1.54 per cent of all students in HEIs.

Finkel (2019) and Martell (2013) have argued that the increase in the numbers is due in part to the marketisation and industrialisation of HE and policy which aims to have

[11] The lowest rate of increase was among the more disadvantaged fifth at 0.2 percentage point while the highest increase was among the most advantaged fifth at 1 percentage point (UCAS, 2017).

young people 'job ready'[12] upon graduation to meet the needs of the economy. Reay (2018, no page number) notes:

> "they (politicians) do not see education as an end in itself but as a means to economic ends. So, preparing young people for the labour market (in this way) is inherently problematic because there has been a move away from the whole person and fulfilling their potential to looking at them as a means to economic ends."

Identifying a university education as instrumental to access and success in the professional, graduate employment market is not new; New Labour was keen to position themselves as the spearhead of such a narrative (Blair, 1996; 2004). But, this has continued to develop since in political discourse. Under the current Conservative government (2016 – present), the Department for Education (DfE) instated the Office for Students (OfS) in 2018. Those working for this independent regulator of HE deem themselves the "driving force of the accountability revolution" (OfS, 2018a) and stand alongside ministers who call for 'accelerated degrees'[13] and further increases to tuition fees. The aim of this "revolution", as the previous Minister of State for Universities, Science, Research and Innovation (2017-2018) Sam Gyimah (2018a, no page number) also called it, was to redefine the term 'access' and said that it should be:

> "defined as not just 'entry or enrolment to university' but access as 'success at university, going on to get a well-paid job'."

This definition of 'access' is one which puts the onus on universities to provide students with a 'return on investment', to produce graduates which are 'job ready' to compete in the 'credential society' (Brown and Souto-Otero, 2018). This is mirrored within the previous Prime Minister's speeches as she said: "many graduates are left questioning the return they get for their investment" (May, 2018, no page number). The call for universities to be able to "justify investment" and "call time on low-quality threadbare degrees" (Gyimah, 2018b, no page number), to prepare young people for "global opportunities" via delivering "world class education" is not a new phenomenon, but is one that is accelerated under recent Conservative education policy (see H M Government (2019) for more evidence of this).

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[12] Speaking at the THE Research Excellence Summit: Asia Pacific, Finkel (2019, no page number) argued that "people expect universities to produce job ready graduates. That's not their job. Universities have to produce work capable graduates and there's a significant difference between those two things".

[13] The DfE (2018, p.9) proposed that accelerated degrees' will take place over "two years rather than three, saving time and money and allowing graduates to enter the job market a year ahead of their contemporaries on traditional courses".

The fifteen working-class women in this work studied and became graduates amid these political debates and within a discourse through which students are considered consumers. This happens within a “ranking culture”, which is “hyper-individualised” and “hyper-competitive”, and where working-class people ‘lose’ out to the middle-classes (Reay, 2018, no page number) while at the same time the political classes on the right say “nothing is really impossible if you put your mind to it” (Cameron, 2016, no page number).

2.2.2 Employment

On top of this, the fifteen working-class women graduated into a saturated UK employment market where the ‘stock’ of graduate talent has been rising year on year, particularly over the past decade (Office for National Statistics (ONS), 2017). This started a ‘global war for talent’ where work and educational experiences must be packaged within a narrative of employability in order for graduates to be able to gain “positional advantage” continually throughout their careers (Brown, Lauder and Ashton, 2011, p.142). The efforts to expand HE, which materialised much faster than previous governments had envisaged (Committee on Higher Education, 1997), were not mirrored in the efforts to adequately prepare the high-skilled labour market for such an influx of skilled prospective employees. While the UK has the second-highest graduate rate in the EU, it also has the third-highest rate of graduates in what is considered to be ‘non-graduate’ employment (58 per cent of all graduates) (Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD), 2017).

However, what constitutes as a ‘graduate job’ has gone through stages of re-categorisation over the previous thirty years. What is now considered ‘graduate level, professional employment’ includes some work which was until recently considered ‘non-professional’. Analysing Labour Force Survey data, Elias and Purcell (2013, p.18) showed that the number of young women (aged 22-34) in non-graduate employment with degrees rose from 4.5 per cent to 24.1 per cent between 1994/5 and 2011/12.

Consequently, there has been a devaluation of undergraduate degrees and a reduction in the ‘graduate premium’. This is the wage premium of having a degree relative to non-graduate workers. However, as Kemp-King (2016) notes, the premium is hard to grasp a firm understanding of. He notes that a report from the BIS in 2011 cited the graduate premium for women to be £82,000 over a lifetime, but then two years later a publication from the same department judged cited a much higher figure of £252,000 (BIS, 2013, cited by Kemp-King, 2016). Kemp-King’s (2016, p.32) extensive research into this

matter found that although there is a graduate premium which is “enjoyed in later years”, this is shrinking and is ultimately “wiped out by the accruing interest” on student loans.

As competition is tight, strategies of distinction are played to gain positional advantage by students and graduates and ‘top’ graduate employers (e.g. PwC, Goldman Sachs, HSBC, the BBC, TeachFirst) target their recruitment efforts towards only the most elite universities. For example, the University of Bristol was fourth “most-often targeted” in 2017 and on their list of twenty-five universities, all were Russell Group and/or ‘ancient’ universities (High fliers, 2018). This reflects the qualitative findings of Khan’s (2011, p.7) research as he noted that, “one of the best predictors of your earnings is your level of education; attending an elite educational institution increases your wages even further”.

While there are a proportion of students at these universities who are working-class, those who graduate from one of these HE providers do not necessarily have the opportunity to ‘cash in’ on this ‘elite’ cachet in the same way as their wealthier counterparts, as is discussed in the next chapter. It has been found that regardless of which universities working-class young people studied at, only 10 per cent of Britain’s state schools (including grammars) produced 53 per cent of applicants to graduate schemes considered ‘prestigious’ in 2017 (Rare, 2018). The ‘top jobs’ are most often occupied by those from socially privileged backgrounds (Social Mobility and Child Poverty Commission, 2015), in particular, the areas of media, politics, medicine and law are heavily dominated by privately educated people (Sutton Trust, 2016).

Even when working-class graduates access ‘professional employment’, they have been found to earn 16 per cent (£6,400) less on average than those from ‘professional and managerial’ backgrounds (Friedman and Laurison, 2019). This sum is arrived at after taking into consideration a person’s educational credentials, level of training and experience and the hours they work. Further, working-class women face a double pay penalty and earn almost 40 per cent (£19,000) less than men from ‘professional and managerial’ backgrounds, and the penalty is even higher for non-white women (Friedman and Laurison, 2019). This penalty is also dependent on the occupational field a working-class woman enters. For example, in law, medicine and finance, working-class women earn on average £7,500 per year less than women from upper-middle-class backgrounds and the gap between working-class women and upper-middle-class men is on average 60 per cent (Friedman and Laurison, 2019). When a female graduate does

work with a 'top graduate employer' they are paid on average a third less than men (Gray, 2018).

Moreover, the university through which a woman graduates impacts her earnings. The gender pay gap is evident in all degrees from the 'top ten' universities but it widest among graduates of law (80 per cent of women earning less than £30,000 compared to 60 per cent of men) and business studies (56 per cent compared to 34 per cent of men) (CIPD, 2017).

However, while the number of men applying to HE in the UK has increased by two-thirds between 1994 and 2018 (up 66 per cent), the number of women applying has more than doubled (129 per cent) and women are more likely to graduate with a 'good' degree classification (UCAS, 2018b; Purcell *et al.,* 2013). Though women benefit in this manner, they are less likely than men to study at postgraduate (PG) level (particularly doctoral degrees), which is linked to higher earnings (Wakeling and Hampden-Thompson, 2013). Post-graduation, they are more likely to experience periods of unemployment and are five times more likely to be unemployed because they are looking after family members (ONS, 2017). Female graduates in employment are less likely than their male counterparts to be employed in high- or upper-middle-skilled roles, are over four times more likely to be in part-time employment and be paid on average three pounds less per hour (ONS, 2017).

The graduate labour market sits within the wider labour market, which has increasingly seen levels of employment growing year on year (ONS, 2019a). Though the number of people 'in-work' is currently at its highest on record (ONS, 2019a), four in five jobs created between 2010 and 2013 have been 'low-paid' (less than £8 per hour) (Trades Union Congress (TUC), 2013). As well as this, this work is not always secure as the increase in those on zero-hour contracts increased significantly from 2010 from 0.6 per cent of all of those in employment to 2.9 per cent in 2018 (ONS, 2019b).

Those engaged in this work tend to fall into what Standing (2011a) calls the 'precariat'. Disproportionately the 'precariat' are immigrants, women, working-class and/or "young educated, cultivated people" (Standing, 2011b, no page number).[14] This is not a new phenomenon, "women took on their shoulders most of the flexibilization of the economy that has happened since the seventies" (Widmer and Ritschard, 2009, p.37), but in austerity-Britain, the effects of inequality are magnified. Within the first three

[14] I unpack and problematise Standing's (2011) 'types' of 'the precariat' in Chapter three: A review of the Literature.

years of the 2008 recession, women's unemployment had risen by 18 per cent, whereas men's rates had risen by 1 per cent (Bradley, 2015). Commenting on this rise, Bradley (2015, p.214) noted that the "recession has made life harder for both sexes, but is likely to inhibit the rise of women into good careers, especially those from BME and working-class families".

The fifteen working-class women in this research graduated in the context of these employment and social structures and four years into the coalition government's austerity programme: a programme which is known to have disproportionately affected women in cuts to services, jobs and welfare (TUC, 2015). Many of the women in this study have faced navigating the sharpest ends of the austerity-ridden employment market and like 60 per cent of British people who are in poverty and also working (Hick and Lanau, 2018), some of these women have struggled to 'make work pay' and live independent from their families. The experiences of these young women reflect what ONS (2019c) found in their study on the shift of 'common' milestones of adulthood: that women aged 18-34 are most likely to be in some form of education and/or be living at home with their parents. These markers of adulthood have shifted largely from twenty years prior. In 1997, women of this age were most likely to have finished their education, moved out of their parents' home, be living with a partner and be a first-time parent (ONS, 2019c).

These scholarly interests of mine were not only borne out of the gap in the literature (outlined in chapter three) but out of a desire to explicate and work to help 'put right' the social inequalities faced by working-class women. Maguire (2001, cited by Brine and Waller, 2004) would perhaps consider me a 'community stalwart', that is, a working-class woman is committed to 'give something back' to those who have supported her, and to her community. This goal, to "make a contribution to society", is a common factor in mature working-class women's pursuits for HE (Reay, 2003, p.304).

I do not conceive this as a 'natural' desire of mine. Instead, I view it as socially constructed and is a resulting consequence of my lived experiences. These are part of this research process, and in order to *do* feminist work, I had to present a self-socioanalysis through which I reflexively subjectify myself. Just as *Sketch for Self Analysis* was "not an autobiography" (Bourdieu, 2007, p.1), throughout the following section, where I outline the personal context of this study, I intended at all costs to avoid being self-indulgent. Instead, I lay bare my position(s) which provide insight into how I

approached this study and the lens through which I viewed the research data. This section also provides my personal justification for choosing the topic.

2.3 Personal

Just as Cotterill and Letherby (1993, p.67) believe, I see that doing feminist research involves, in part, "weaving the stories of both the researcher and the researched". Thus, in this section I outline my social positions, my personal and family's experiences of navigating a 'classed' and 'gendered' social universe, some of which the young women in this study have also experienced. I have also considered how I may have impacted upon this research process.[15] Going beyond providing superficial characteristics, the social and historical contexts which I stand within, and from which I have constructed, conducted and view this work are reviewed critically here. This consideration, and my acknowledgement that my subjectivity is important, is paramount to fulfilling my aim to join feminist researchers who have problematised the positivist's desire for objectivity in social research over the previous five decades (Gill and Ryan Flood, 2010). This body of work sees that:

> "gender, race, ethnicity, sexuality, age and nationality, are now understood as central to the production of knowledge that is taken to be constructed, partial and situated."
> (Gill and Ryan Flood, 2010, p.12)

I also go beyond outlining where I sit in these social categories to layout my changing and fragmented social class position. To achieve this, I utilise three of Bourdieu's (1986) key theoretical concepts as tools for self-analysis.

I am a white, able-bodied, cis-gender young working-class woman from Barnsley, South Yorkshire. As with all the research participants in this study, I was born on the cusp of third-wave feminism in the early nineties. Though I was raised in an era of "Girl Power" (Spice Girls, 1997), this discourse proved superficial as I grew up understanding little about the politics of feminism and the subjugation of women. Instead, it was through the personal processes I encountered and watched women in my family experience, which demonstrated how the intricate workings of patriarchy, class and other systems of power which, when they work together, can compound working-class women into crisis, poverty and systematic stigmatisation.

Both of my parents were raised in working-class households in the late sixties to late eighties on the outskirts of a Barnsley pit village in what my dad coins "a posh bit of

[15] This is returned to in Chapter five: Methodology and Methods and Chapter ten: Conclusion.

tarn[16]". While they were working-class, they did not see themselves as such because they were not raised in a council house. Their parents were, and still are, a depiction of Thatcher's 'aspirational working-class'[17] and raised their children to cultivate the same outlook, a view which was particularly anti-feminist.

Their fathers were labourers (a steelworker and plasterer) for over forty-five years, and their mothers worked part-time jobs as secretaries and dinner ladies around raising their children. Though my mum was raised in the height of second-wave feminism in the 1970s, her mother had worked to instil a value system within her which presented one option within her "field of possibilities" (Bourdieu, 1984, p.110): to be a 'good mother and wife'. My mum viewed her education as irrelevant to her future roles as mother and wife and "anyway", she said to me, "I wasn't any good at school, I was always sat on the duggie table[18]".

She left school with three GCSEs (Cs in English, Sewing and Typing) and went on to do one year of a Youth Training Scheme in Typing while waiting to meet a "nice, older man" as her mother recommended. When she met my dad, she soon fell pregnant and left her training course without gaining the formal qualification. She became a domesticated mother and embodied 'respectable' working-class femininity which, for Skeggs (1997) comprises of motherhood, heterosexuality, domesticity which supports the local community as well as their families.

However, by her early thirties she was unable to continue living this life and left the family household with no financial capital, with what Burke (2016a) would define as 'low' social capital and little in the way of 'valuable' cultural capital that could be exchanged for secure work. In response to her struggle, for as long as I can remember, she has always told me: "Make the most of your education, earn your own money and but most importantly, be happy". Through this, my mum was sponsoring my educational achievement and my independence, unlike her mother, who advocated for her domesticity, conformity and femininity.

From being ten years old, I was raised in a traditionally-gendered manner by my dad and so I cannot remember a time that I was unaware of my gender. However, it was only through education that I noticed my class. Though I spent most of my time in

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[16] 'Tarn' is a common colloquial word for 'town' used by people from Barnsley.

[17] This narrative was part of process of individualisation which negates wider social inequalities, and which perceives 'successes' and 'failures' "through notions of individual effort, self-management, enterprise and risk-taking" (Allen, 2013, p.761).

[18] This is a colloquial term for the classroom table where those who are considered to be 'lowest ability' sit.

school being a ‘gob on legs’ and mentally elsewhere, I have vivid memories of myself and others being exposed to social ills by the education system. Like many of the other women in this thesis, while I had little class consciousness at school, I saw differences in the economic and cultural capital held and embodied by my peers. Looking back now, I know that I was “overlooked and disregarded in schooling, part of an anonymous backdrop that middle-class children shine against” (Reay, 2017, p.138). One stark memory I hold was when my favourite teacher congratulated two girls on achieving the highest grade for a presentation. These girls consistently got the highest grades in most of the subjects we shared. These two girls, the teacher exclaimed, were her “superstars!” and “*the two* who will go to university”. Though I did not understand what university consisted of exactly, I knew I had to be one of “*the two*” in the room to go to university if I was to become a primary school teacher in Barnsley who would work to help put ‘right’ social ills in the education system. So, I made a concerted effort to ‘try harder’.

Overall, I achieved average ‘pass’ grades in nine of my GCSEs and B, C, D in my A-Levels which I took at my local college. I had achieved the grades to go to university. While it is argued that parents with the cultural capital of a university education tend to try to inculcate this into their children’s trajectories (Khan, 2011) in my case, having a dad who had previously gone to university had the opposite effect. He said I could not go to university because it was not free like when he studied Engineering at Huddersfield Polytechnic in the mid-80s. The £3,000 annual tuition fee debt made him anxious but no more anxious than the idea of me moving out and shaking the responsibility of doing most of the physical and emotional labour in the household. Instead, he said:

> “Why don’t you get an apprenticeship as a typist or something, you’ll find an older man who probably already has a house and a car like your mum did”.

After much negotiation, I applied to the five post-1992 universities closest to home. I accessed Sheffield Hallam University to study English and Education Studies in 2011, one year after the fifteen women in this study accessed HE. Here, my only friends were the other ‘non-traditional’ students and the rest referred to me most often as “Barnsley”. Though my mum supported me in my aspirations to teach, her ultimate dream for me was to become a Redcoat at Butlins. The day of my graduation, she said to me:

> “I am so proud that you’re doing all the things I never got the chance to do. I’ve never regretted having you, I just wish I’d been able to do all the things you’re doing now.”

I remember hearing this, having already started my PhD, receiving a monthly stipend that was almost twice her wage as a cleaner, and feeling overwhelmed with sadness, anger and guilt due to the injustice of my mum's position and my lack of social coherence with her. This is bookmarked as one of the many moments when I felt the pain of my educational successes and the dramatic change in my "conditions of existence" (Bourdieu, 1984, p.466). My experience stands in opposition to that held by Ankle (2019, p.2) who said that "once you become a member of the higher education work – either as a student or researcher – my experience is that social class no longer matters".

Though I am currently considered part of the 'precariat' (the 'bottom' 15 per cent of the country), according to Savage *et al.*'s *Great British Class Calculator* (BBC, 2013), over the previous five years I have been upwardly socially mobile due to my success in HE. My story, in many ways, mirrors some of the narratives shared by the working-class women in this study, which I introduce in chapter six.

As a PhD student who has worked on a university-based research project alongside established academics, I now have middle-class cultural and social capital within my reach. I am privileged because of these experiences. Like the educationally successful working-class students in Khan's (2011, p.63) work, I "developed the capacity to interact across social boundaries of class", however I have not developed this ability without experiencing the consequences of this. As previously acknowledged by other working-class academics,[19] I face the ramifications of being a part of what I call the 'murking-class'. That is, I am part of a class milieu between working- and middle-class which is complex and murky. I no longer have a comfortable sense of 'place', I am betwixt and in between, socially and culturally dislocated and alienated. Like the young working-class men in Ingram's (2018; 2011) work, I too have engaged in a reconciliation process between two fractions of my identity: being working-class and being perceived as an educational success. This process, a combat saturated by hysteresis[20], occurs in my habitus clivé (Bourdieu, 1999), referred to as a 'cleft habitus' in other work (Bourdieu, 2007; 2000). This is a habitus which is "divided against itself

[19] see Mahony and Zmroczek (1997) for a comprehensive insight into the multiple consequences of being a working-class woman in the academy, I also cover much of this literature in chapter three.
[20] 'hysteresis' is experienced when there is a mismatch between habitus and field and thus a habitus clivé is formed (Bourdieu, 1999). Like the students interviewed in Bourdieu's (1996, p.107) *The State of Nobility*, I am a class "transfuge" caught in a "painful" social liminality experiencing a "double isolation" from my working-class familial field and academia, a strikingly middle-class field.

and doomed to a kind of double perceptions of self, to successive allegiances and multiple identities" (Bourdieu, 1999, p.511).

This is a habitus which Ingram (2018; 2011) describes as being made up of 'tugs'. While this resonated with me, what I experienced is much more visceral than a 'tug'. I have experienced what I refer to as a 'habitus war' (Bentley, 2018a; 2018b; 2017b) because the set of dislocating symptoms that I have experienced were brought about not only due to my class, but also due to my gender.

I have experienced much worry and guilt over the family I have 'left behind'. I have done this not only as a 'class traitor' but as a woman who has 'failed in her role as a woman' for 'abandoning' the responsibility to provide copious amounts of physical and emotional labour for family members. To add to this, I felt as though most of those in my 'newer' social fields expected me to hold an infinite volume of grit. There are expectations that I will become a 'success' in academia, the definitions of which are set by a middle-class bias and become an 'inspirational working-class academic'. I have felt, for a significant proportion of the time since accessing PG study, social dislocation and alienation from both working- and middle-class fields and agents. This 'habitus war' (Bentley, 2018a; 2018b; 2017b) within has left me feeling 'ugly', and, as Bourdieu (2007) felt, 'traitorous'.

Further, as an upwardly socially mobile woman, when I consider my future, I face difficulties in plotting a way forward. This is because those women who had defined what was socially and culturally possible for me before the age of twenty-one, before starting this PhD, have not trodden a path such as this. On top of this, only fifteen per cent of UK academics are from working-class backgrounds (Friedman and Laurison, 2019), and only a small number identify as 'working-class academics'. This makes it difficult to imagine the steps I need to take next in order to become a successful working-class academic.

Despite the dislocating 'hidden injuries' (Sennett and Cobb, 1977) of being upwardly socially mobile, one which Reay (2017, p.115) describes as "full of doublings-back, loops and curves, cul-de-sacs and diversions", I recognise that I am privileged. I am a British, heterosexual, cis, able-bodied person operating within a culture in which these positions are dominant. Additionally, while my parents were socially and culturally working-class, and thus imbibed this into my practices, my dad's economic income was that of a lower-middle-class man. In the mid-1980s, he was the first in his family to benefit from the expansion of HE following the Robbins Report (Committee on Higher

Education, 1963). Within a few years of graduating with a good degree in Electronic Engineering, he had progressed to become a senior engineer, a role which Waller (2011, p.9) called a "solidly middle-class job". He experienced upward social mobility in purely economic terms. This is common for those who enter engineering from manual backgrounds as engineering is considered to be one of the most meritocratic professions (Friedman, Laurison and Miles, 2015). Just as Gilbert (2018, p.1) says, "not all working-class children are poor" and I was not. Thus, I have never known what it is like to go to bed hungry, unlike some of the participants in this PhD thesis and other working-class people in the UK.

Equally, as a white woman, I know there will be unintended evasions and silences of black women's voices, as there too often is in the research of white feminists (Davis, 1983). Out of the fifteen working-class women who took part in this study, two were black. As is explained in chapter five, the cohort for this study was in most ways pre-determined and thus, unfortunately, I was unable to draw on more black working-class women's narratives.

However, I have had, and continue to have, direct experience with some aspects of the phenomena that I have studied. Just as Jensen (2008) did which led her to ask "how can I keep thinking and feeling separate? Or, do I even want to?". These are questions I have asked myself, and ones that feminist academics have long asked in relation to their scholarly work. But as outlined above, in opposition to realists, I reject independence as desirable or achievable and thus, as a result of this, I have had to do much psychological work in order to do this PhD.

Though identity is considered to be always in process (Hall, 1996), and though there are class fractions and some fluidity within my class position,[21] I am a working-class woman, and there will be limits to this study due to this. These limits may lay within my analysis, my interpretations of literature and theory, and there will be bias within the way that I have worked as a researcher that I am not aware of. It is possible that when interviewing the working-class women and analysing the data, I have unknowingly searched for things that are not there and missed themes which are. There may be issues with how I have chosen to foreground the stories of those who have been impacted upon most by structural inequalities, not just out of scholarly choice but also out of personal and political choice. However, I believe that any possible implications of my class

[21] Theories and definitions of social class are set out in Chapter four: Employing Bourdieu and I explore my class position in relation to the participant's in more depth in Chapter five: Methodology and Methods.

position are outweighed by the empathy, passion and level of complex understanding I was able to bring to this study through my experiences of being in this social position.

I have, through the lens of being a working-class woman, foregrounded the voices of other working-class women and will continue to work to show how analysis of gender inequality says little without the consideration of how the structure of social class unevenly distributes privileges and inequities. Now the context is set, next I turn to review the literature in the fields most relevant to this research topic.

Chapter three: A Review of the Literature

In this chapter, while reviewing and mapping out the 'state' of the different fields of literature, I examine the key concepts and questions raised and debated which are most relevant to this thesis.

This review critically explores literature which examines how the formation of a 'successful graduate' identity is distinctly social and not separate from political discourse. It reviews the arguments which stake a claim for how undergraduates begin to build a graduate identity and the resources and capital required to do so while also considering the literature on how different graduate identities are legitimised and considered valuable. I consider the literature on the ways in which unequal access to 'high-value' resources and capital (re)produces social inequalities in Higher Education (HE) and the labour market before then finally turning to a critical consideration of the literature on social mobility.

Throughout this chapter, I work to amalgamate two areas of sociological research: the gendered practices and experiences and 'classed' practices and experiences of preparing for the post-graduate transition, the experiences of such a transition and the negotiations of social mobility. Throughout I gather the little literature on how working-class women have been found to experience these, while also identifying gaps in the academic literature to which this PhD research contributes to. First, I consider how a 'successful graduate' identity is developed and how working-class women engage in, and experience, such a practice.

3.1 Constructing a 'successful graduate' identity

The development of possible career identities, where "individuals consciously link their own interests, motivations and competencies with acceptable career roles" is considered to begin in childhood and developed further throughout the life course (Praskova, Creed and Hood, 2015, p.145). Through early socialisation, children have been found to "identify caring tasks with women, machines and technology with men", thus, when young adults begin to consider future career-selves few stray from these and other hegemonic gendered ideas of suitable careers (Bradley, 2015, p.111).

To add to this, Burke (2016a, p.62) found that the 'entitled middle-class' graduates in his study (with a "middle-class/dominant mindset directed by a middle-class/dominant habitus"), held "high levels of expectations and aspirations" for their education. They demonstrated this through presenting a "clear sense of confidence in their abilities"

from a young age (Burke, 2016a, p.60). They "appeared quite relaxed when discussing their educational trajectories" and demonstrated a long-standing certainty that they would access 'the best' schools and universities (Burke, 2016a, p.60). Burke (2016a, p.61) found that these high levels of expectations and aspirations "clearly" followed them from education into the workplace as these graduates outlined that they would not "settle for a lower-status, non-graduate job". When in employment, these graduates presumed they would "either enter suitably high-status positions within their company/institution or that they will eventually, although relatively quickly, reach these offices" (Burke, 2016a, p.61). On the other hand, the 'strategic' and 'static' working-class graduates held "very low levels of aspirations and expectations", demonstrating relatively lower confidence in their educational abilities and much less certainty over their educational progression and successes (Burke, 2016a, p.71). This continued into the labour market as they "resigned to settle for low-status and non-graduate jobs" (Burke, 2016a, p.71).

Thus, not only does this research show that early socialisations and educational experiences play a role in impacting what working-class women view as 'expected' and what is considered 'aspirational' 'to the likes of them' in the workplace, but it also conditions what they view as desirable and worth-while (Archer and Leathwood, 2003). This, plus subsequent literature in this review, demonstrates how the perceived opportunities for graduate work and the practical constructions and negotiations of a graduate identity are distinctly socially constructed.

The development of a 'successful graduate' identity, who is better positioned to embody such an identity and why this is the case, has long been considered in academic literature. In 1972, Kelsall *et al.* published *Graduates, The Sociology of an Elite* which examined data collected via a mixed-methods enquiry from a total of 9,400 men and women who graduated from UK universities in 1960. This landmark publication went beyond simply gathering data on the social characteristics of those who satisfied the requirements of an academic degree. Kelsall *et al.* (1972) used social theory to be critical of how HE did little to eradicate social inequalities and instead went some way to consolidate existing social class structures. They found that while the elite in British society was a 'graduate class', most graduates were not considered part of the elite (Kelsall *et al.*, 1972). Beyond that, they showed how social class origins (calculated based on participants' fathers' occupations at the time they accessed HE) impacted on the aspirations that they held as undergraduate students and the fields of employment they entered as graduates (Kelsall *et al.*, 1972). For example, as undergraduates, those

who had been previously privately educated as children aspired to work in an "administrative and professional (other than teaching)" capacity, whereas the previously state-educated undergraduates "placed an emphasis on teaching or research, design or production" (Kelsall *et al.*, 1972, p.69-70). However, the few state school educated Oxbridge undergraduates, compared to state school educated graduates of less prestigious universities, aspired to work in the "more prestigious professions, management and university teaching" (Kelsall *et al.*, 1972, p.70). Thus, not only did Kelsall *et al.* (1972) find that social class origins played a role in forming aspirations and career destinations, they found that the status of the university attended played a role in 'resocializing' working-class young people's career-patterns, values and behaviours into that of a middle-class person's.

Kelsall *et al.*'s (1972) work is an important historical publication in the academic field I wish to contribute to, and it is the under-discussed aspects of their work which has most relevance to mine: the women's data which had 'classed' dimensions. In one of their chapters, they considered the effects of gender, as well as social class, on career aspirations, career constructions and trajectories of women from intermediate and professional backgrounds. They noted that these women had been attracted to do a university degree out of a desire to "step into the eye of an 'appropriate' male" (Kelsall *et al.*, 1972, p.161). Most were considered to have "ignored many (career) opportunities and made only half-hearted preparations for work" (Kelsall *et al.*, 1972, p.161). They also reported that these young women avoided being "too competitive, thereby being careful not to prejudice their chances of attracting the 'right' man" (Kelsall *et al.*, 1972, p.161). As they moved into the graduate labour market, Kelsall *et al.* (1972, p.165) found these women to achieve relatively less success than men and found a "decline in the number of career-orientated women who are eager to reach the top". Due to this, those who Kelsall *et al.* (1972) identified as 'achieving success' were disproportionately men from 'professional' backgrounds.

Even though the data was collected fifty years ago, and only 19 per cent of their female cohort were from manual backgrounds (none were from unskilled manual backgrounds), Kelsall *et al.*'s (1972) work holds significant to my study. This is due to their approach which considers both women and their class origins in tandem, just as my work does.

For the remaining years of the twentieth century, British academics in the field of Sociology of Education continued to write about the impact of social class on access,

transitions and experiences of HE and continued to find that those who were able to attain the 'successful graduate' identity[22] were disproportionately from the elite and middle-classes (Brown and Scase, 1994; Jackson and Marsden, 1966). While increasing numbers from the working-classes had begun to access university at this time, they tended to be socially excluded from attaining such an identity because the HE system (and graduate employment market) was geared culturally and socially to benefit the middle-classes and elites (Brown and Scase, 1994). These student cohorts were the ones who consistently monopolised the "superior jobs" in the graduate labour market (Brown and Scase, 1994, p.17).

At this time, the work of Brown and Scase (1994) was important to the development of a research agenda which sought to uncover how HE facilitated the reproduction of social inequities throughout education and post-graduation. However, this work paid little attention to how women from different social strata prepared for, and transitioned into, the graduate labour market and their experiences of negotiating this trajectory. Where women (and to a greater degree working-class women) were considered, their space was marginal, and analysis was often approached in a descriptive, superficial manner, rather than a critical or feminist one. For example, in the few pages where Brown and Scase (1994) mentioned working-class women and their relationships to, and experiences of, higher education and graduate work, they spent this time outlining that the numbers of these women had increased in the university and the professional employment fields and mentioned that these spaces were 'gendered'.

The shift towards a post-industrial society over the previous fifty years has meant that the UK economy has evolved "from one based on hard skills and labour to soft skills and knowledge" (Bowers-Brown, 2016, p.56). Due to this, in the last two decades of the twentieth century, Holmes (1995, 1998) reported that the 'graduate' identity concept had evolved in political discourse to centralise the 'skills and attributes' approach. This was an approach that governmental figures at the time desired to further embed within the HE system (as evidenced in the Dearing Report (Committee on Higher Education, 1997) and discussed in chapter two) to 'better equip' students for future work. The Dearing Report claimed that 'key skills' and 'personal competencies' could be taught by Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) to meet the needs of employers. They said, "the value attached by employers to personal and inter-personal skills should be included as priorities" (Committee on Higher Education, 1997, p.40). Holmes (1998) was critical of

[22] Which I define as those in work considered 'managerial' and 'professional'.

this stance, taking the position that these ‘soft skills’ were not empirically real and thus open to multiple interpretations. Despite his concerns, this approach seeped into academic literature published around the time. For example, Hawkins and Winter (1996, p.5) spoke of the “complete graduate” as an identity built on an individual’s “self-reliance” and achievable to all those who:

- Demonstrate self-awareness and come equipped with a portfolio of evidence of abilities;
- Self-promote (to sell oneself as a “benefit” to the “customer”, also known as the employer (Hawkins and Winter, 1996, p.6));
- Create opportunities for themselves/presenting themselves as a ‘self-starter’;
- Engage in relevant work experience throughout their time in university;
- Have negotiation skills and show that they can successfully achieve what they want from a position of powerlessness;
- Are flexible;
- Are self-confident;
- “Use your contacts: Develop the art of networking;
- Do something completely different;
- Do not panic” (Hawkins and Winter, 1996, p.9)[23]

Much subsequent academic work around the turn of the century focussed on how HE policy and practice could better facilitate students in developing ‘graduate capabilities’, otherwise referred to as their ‘graduateness’ (Jameson and Holden, 2000), throughout their time in HE in order to better prepare students for the workplace (Villar *et al.,* 2000; Gow and McDonald, 2000; Hart, Bowden and Watters, 1999). Or, rather, how HE can “transform” or “convert graduates into entrepreneurs” (Roffe, 1999, p.201) ready to meet the demands of business.

As the twenty-first century came around, Holmes (2001) continued to publish in opposition to the skills and attributes agenda as an approach to graduate employability. However, this time his analysis was more critical and found that in order to achieve the ‘successful graduate’ identity, a “performance-of-a-kind” which is situated in social practices and identities considered “appropriate” must occur. However, he did not consider how these performances of language, identity and interpretation can be viewed in terms of class, gender and other structures of social power and identity.

In concluding his work, Holmes (2001), like Rae (2007) after him, recommended that the undergraduate curriculum be edited to provide students with the tools to develop a

[23] List based on Hawkins and Winter (1996) and Harvey and Green (1994).

‘successful graduate’ identity for themselves. This approach to the ‘graduate’ identity is in line with human capital theory, where it is believed knowledge stock and the embodiment of the list outlined above can be imparted by HEIs and utilised by graduates to meet the needs of the knowledge economy (Bridgstock, 2009). This approach has become embedded within the practices of universities, as found by my colleagues on the ‘original project’ (the Paired Peers project) who interviewed staff at the University of the West of England (UWE) and the University of Bristol’s (UoB) university career services (unpublished).

Though these papers did well to illustrate the abstracted ways that graduates were expected to develop their ‘inner-self’ into a graduate identity suitable for employers, they did little to critically explore how the social recognition of ‘successful graduate’ identities are achieved or ‘spoiled’, as Goffman (1963) would see it. These works did little to consider who is more likely to attain the ‘successful graduate’ identity, and if and how attaining such an identity is a classed and gendered endeavour. As well as this, they did not consider the effects of attaining or *failing* to attain, ‘success’ on young working-class female graduates. However, soon a more critical approach arose in the academic literature and found that universities are “limited in their capacity to enhance the employability of their students” (Tomlinson, 2007, p.303). Tomlinson (2007), Cranmer (2006), Brown and Hesketh (2004), Brown (2003) worked in the early 2000s with interview data and class theory and found that ‘success’ and ‘failure’ in the graduate labour market could not be mitigated or attained purely by education.

Brown’s work (e.g. 2003; Brown and Hesketh, 2004) demonstrated how rather than a lack of skill, some graduates were more likely than others to be marginalised from the ‘successful graduate’ identity due to wider existing patterns of social inequality. This, for Brown (2003) and Hesketh (2004), was outside of the control of HE policies and practice. From this time, developing ‘graduateness’ (or an ‘employable-self’) was increasingly understood by undergraduate students as more than *just* demonstrating their formal education credentials (Brown and Hesketh, 2004; Brown, 2003). Research was beginning to show that undergraduate students believed they had to draw on their ‘economy of experience’ developed outside of their university curriculum (Tomlinson, 2007; Brown and Hesketh, 2004; Brown, 2003), as well as graduate with a ‘good’ degree, in order to be considered for professional and managerial graduate work. This awareness developed in eminence as Bathmaker, Ingram and Waller’s (2013, p.739-

740) recent work showed that both working- and middle-class undergraduate students are aware that "a degree is no longer enough, and that to gain positional advantage in the graduate recruitment 'game' they would need to mobilise additional capitals that might be gained through a variety of activities beyond their formal curriculum".

Critically, this developing research agenda sought to explore further how the socially advantaged had access to various forms of what graduate employers considered 'high-value capital' (Brown, 2003; Brown and Hesketh, 2004). This enabled the privileged to engage with graduate employers from a positional advantage over the working-classes in the graduate labour market and thus were more likely to attain 'success'. Out of these works came the concept of the 'opportunity trap' (first published by Brown in 2003 and developed in 2006 and 2013) which challenges an economic and social policy agenda (such as those at the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD)) which purports "the more we learn the more we earn" and "credentials are the currency of opportunity" (Brown, 2013, p.142).

The concept of the 'opportunity trap' is situated in a context of increasing globalisation, insecurity and the widening of HE, where increasingly the competition for middle-class jobs and livelihood is intensified and 'opportunities' (educational and occupational) are increasingly harder to cash in on as the number of 'good' applicants outstrip demand. With this concept in mind, Brown (2003) found that middle-class families increasingly had to adopt "desperate measures to win positional advantage", they were "having to run faster, for longer, just to stand still" (Boudon, 1973, cited by Brown, 2003, p.142). This was found to be the case not just for initial graduate employment, but on a lifelong basis. However, as Brown (2003, p.164) observes, "some are more trapped than others". For the working-classes, their upward social mobility has most often depended on acquiring education credentials (Skeggs, 1997), but, "in entering the competition for middle-class occupations they are forced to compete with those in significant cultural and social advantages" (Brown, 2003, p.164). However, Brown (2003) noted, working-class families did not have the option not to participate as they cannot afford to opt out of competition for a livelihood and thus, they are forced to 'play' but from a disadvantaged position.

To add to his analysis, Brown (2003, p.153-154), citing the work of Crompton (1999), noted the increase in women accessing HE and reported that women, "especially from middle-class backgrounds, are serious contenders for professional and managerial employment". However, like many of the academics featured in this literature review

thus far, he says little more beyond this on how women prepare for, and 'achieve', 'success' or 'failure', and does not touch on how this is mitigated by class.

Fitting in with the 'opportunity trap' concept and narrative of competition, in 2007, Tomlinson published on three different approaches the undergraduates in his study took to preparing for future employment. One of these approaches was that of the "careerist", otherwise referred to as the "player" approach (Tomlinson, 2007, p.294).[24] The "careerist" students were eager to "play the game" and were among those most willing to assimilate to the cultural makeup of the power structures of the graduate labour market (Tomlinson, 2007, p.294). These students were less likely to view this process as a potential for exploitation of their labour or as a "corrosion of character" (Sennett, 1998 cited by Tomlinson, 2007, p.296). He finds that the students in his cohort overlooked economic and social structures "which might shape their opportunities and outcomes" referring to "personal dispositions, attitudes and individual characteristics as determining labour market outcomes" (Tomlinson, 2007, p.289).

Tomlinson (2007) refers to the work of Bourdieu and Passeron (1990), like others have before him in this field of literature (Brown, 2003; Brown and Hesketh, 2004), to situate graduate identities within wider social structures which have relationships with the cultural context of the individual. Tomlinson (2007, p.298) found that some of the women 'shied away' from employment spheres considered 'competitive' and male-dominated whereas others (the female 'careerists') exemplified an individualistic approach to their future careers through "playing down potential structural and institutional barriers which may have traditionally impeded female career progression". This reflects a trend highlighted by Hakim (2000) and Crompton (1999) (cited by Tomlinson, 2007, p.295) where women now "exercise greater levels of preference, choice and autonomy".

Though Tomlinson (2007, p.302) goes further than most at this time to comment on women's narratives of 'graduate success', the women in his cohort were "largely

[24] 'Careerists' comprised about half of Tomlinson's sample of fifty-three undergraduate students and their approaches were defined as "work and careers formed a central part of their future aspirations" (2007, p.293). The second largest group was the 'ritualists' who were "committed to the task of developing a career and achieving a labour market return. At the same time, they were much more passive in their approach to career progression and employability management" (Tomlinson, 2007, p.297). Lastly, two participants were considered 'retreatists'. These young people were dissatisfied, anxious and "had developed a dislocated sense of where they stood in relation to their future labour market trajectories" (Tomlinson, 2007, p.300).

middle-class, high-achieving". Thus, again, working-class women's voices were not being explored.

To add to Tomlinson's (2007) work, Hinchliffe and Jolly (2011) and Hager and Hodkinson (2009) found that those undergraduates who were able to acquire the cultural capital of the professional labour market prior to graduation (through internships, volunteering and work experience) were better able to negotiate 'successful' access to the graduate employment market. However, recent research has found that working-class undergraduates are less likely to have the capacity and economic, social and cultural capital to access and participate in these work-based activities (Friedman and Laurison, 2019; Ingram and Allen, 2018; Antonucci, 2016; Bathmaker *et al.,* 2016; Burke, 2016a; Bathmaker, Ingram and Waller, 2013; Purcell *et al.,* 2012).

Additional strategies for distinction, such as engaging in extra-curricular activities and PG study, which provide credentials and cultural capital, or 'experiential capital' (Bradley and Ingram, 2012), desired by graduate employers, have been found to be more accessible to middle-class undergraduates. Established middle-class undergraduates have also been found to be more likely to understand what it is to be a 'good player', to be able to 'embody' and represent themselves as such and, as 'the game' is structured to benefit the middle-classes, these are more likely to 'achieve' success (Bourdieu, 1999).

As this is such, working-class undergraduates and graduates have been found to be less likely to know of 'the game', to have the tacit knowledge of how to 'play' and also have less resources and capital to participate (Friedman and Laurison, 2019; Ingram and Allen, 2018; Wakeling and Laurison, 2017; Antonucci, 2016; Bathmaker *et al.,* 2016; Burke, 2016a; Bathmaker, Ingram and Waller, 2013; Purcell *et al.,* 2012). Thus, they graduate to a disadvantaged position (one which many are unaware of).

In the graduate labour market, middle-class graduates have been found to be more "comfortable" in approaching graduate-level fields of employment (Tomlinson, 2017, p.344). They are considered to be better able than those from "alternative graduate backgrounds" to articulate their skills more effectively to graduate employers because they have higher levels of what is considered 'legitimate' cultural capital in the graduate labour market field (Cox, Al Daoud and Rudd, 2013, p.41). Middle-class students have also been found to be more 'skilled' at understanding and articulating the demands of their graduate employers due to their cultural matching (Greenbank, Hepworth and

Mercer, 2009; Savage, 2003). In addition, these students were less likely to feel as though they had to *do* a "proper accent" (de-accentuate) in the fields of professional graduate employment, unlike the working-class women in Morrison's (2014, p.189) work.

As middle-class students and graduates are, as Tomlinson (2012, p.415) puts it, "more adept at exploiting their pre-existing levels of cultural capital, social contacts and connections", these students are better able to present themselves as the desired 'package' to graduate (professional and managerial) employers. Consequently, this research shows that those less able to 'achieve' the 'successful graduate' identity are those typically considered 'non-traditional' HE entrants. In response, though their outcomes were "likely to reflect structural inequalities" (Tomlinson, 2012, p.420), working-class students who were not able to 'successfully' transition were found to internalise and pathologise this. The misrecognition, de-valuing or non-legitimising of working-class cultural capital in the graduate labour market, which positions them as having inferior ability and value, does not start at the point at which they graduated. Instead, these patterns of misrecognition etc., and thus symbolic violence, are a continuation of those which occurs throughout working-class students' experiences in HE (Mallman, 2017) and throughout their education prior to university.[25]

As is demonstrated above, there has been much work which has explored how a 'successful graduate' identity is more readily obtained by the socially privileged. Most of this work has opted to control for social class origins as the leading approach to analysis, others have considered how being a woman goes some way to mitigate preparations and aspirations for the transition into the graduate labour market. For example, for the women in Finn's (2015, p.11) work, who were defined as coming from "the 'new' middle classes", weekly or fortnightly trips 'home' as undergraduates were common. Routines of work (paid and domestic) and "gendered practices of care", without which these women felt the family dynamic would be imbalanced, that were established pre-university, were continued to be practised throughout their time in university (Finn, 2015, p.44).

As time is important to developing a graduate identity and finding 'success' is dependent on actualising cultural and social practices, it was unsurprising that some of

[25] See Reay (2017), particularly chapter three: *working-class educational experiences* (p.57-74), for a comprehensive examination of how the education system at each stage disadvantages, and is symbolically violent towards, working-class people.

the women in Finn's (2015) work adjusted away from their original aspirations to do typically middle-class graduate employment. They did this so they could do work in line with 'what people like them do' (Finn, 2015). Due to this, some of the women in her study opted to do what they considered a "normal" career route (Finn, 2015, p.137), which, for some, included deciding against doing a master's degree, though they desired this. Instead, they negotiated their career aspirations via a "multitude of overlapping spheres – family, intimacy and the wider gender order" (Finn, 2015, p.137).

Additionally, these women tended to do work which "others around them could recognise and make sense of" and when they did work which juxtaposed that of their parent's (particularly unpaid internships), they felt they "had to consider other options" (Finn, 2015, p.132).

Bathmaker *et al.* (2016, p.108) also found gendered patterns of career aspirations and practices. They found that the longer that the women (both working- and middle-class) in their study spent in university, the more likely they were to "cool off" their aspirations for employment (for example, from becoming a barrister to a solicitor). Also, they found a substantial difference in the ratio of women to men who aspired to teach, with disproportionately more women aspiring for a teaching career. Out of forty-one female participants, six had applied to do a Postgraduate Certificate in Education (PGCE) before graduation, whereas none of the twenty-eight men had. Though these are relevant findings, nothing was reported on how these gendered findings played out on class lines.

3.1.1 Working-class women

There are some academics who have sought to bridge the gaps highlighted here, to look at working-class women's participation in HE. Using German Life History Data (a large-scale representative study which collected data between 1983 and 2004), Jacob (2010, p.288) found that due to a lack of resources in the family, parents cannot "plan educational investments for all children simultaneously" and prioritise their son's education (Jacob, 2010, p.288). This shows how structures of class and gender inequality work to double-disadvantage working-class women in this context. However, Jacob (2010, p.288) also found that working-class women with older sisters "are more likely to graduate (from university) than are women with older brothers".

Work by Archer and Leathwood (2003) reported that women's engagement with HE, the routes in which they travel within HE, and the identities they encompass as undergraduate students were grounded in classed discourses of femininity. In their

chapter, *Femininities and HE participation,* Archer and Leathwood (2003) highlight some of the barriers to participation for working-class women. These are a lack of finances, unpleasant previous experiences in education, caring responsibilities in the home and a lack of formal qualifications. An additional and overriding barrier is that of family resistance, as having the desire to access university was interpreted by their families "as trying to 'get above their station'" (Archer and Leathwood, 2003, p.189). This is because 'escape' could be seen as a challenge to working-class values and lifestyle, and so this "poses a threat to those 'left behind'" (Archer and Leathwood, 2003, p.189).

Though this publication is from an earlier time and different policy context, Archer and Leathwood's (2003) chapter stands as an excellent 'prequel' to this work as they outline working-class women's negotiation of accessing HE. However, they do not touch upon how women from working-class origins prepare for and experience their transitions out of HE.

Finally, Morrison's (2014; 2015) work examines working-class women's perceptions of the employment market and dispositions towards the field. He found that those working-class women who aspired to teach displayed ambivalence about their prospects. While they thought that as women they would be entering an occupation in which they "clearly match the accepted social fit" (Morrison, 2014, p.193), they perceived that male applicants would overshadow their applications due to a lack of men in the sector. Also, they worried about not fulfilling a perceived criterion of "sounding posh" due to their regional accents (Morrison, 2014, p.191).

However, those working-class women who aspired to enter male-dominated environments (accountancy and sales management) worried less about their 'working-class-ness' as they perceived these employment fields as more meritocratic but expressed concerns over their social fit on a gendered basis. Being both working-class and female, for these undergraduate students, meant that they perceived disadvantage, and sometimes double-disadvantage, whether they entered the female-dominated field of teaching or the male-dominated field of accountancy and sales.

Next, I turn to review the literature on graduate outcomes, and in particular, I examine work which has focussed on working-class women's experiences of the transition from 'undergraduate' to 'graduate' (returning home, finding graduate and non-graduate work, and having to (re)calibrate aspirations when faced with under- and unemployment).

3.2 Working-class women's transitions out of university

Acquiring postgraduate (PG) qualifications is increasingly becoming the norm (Smith, 2018) and 'young' postgraduates (under 30) are more likely than graduates of undergraduate degrees to be found in high-skilled employment (73 per cent and 57 per cent respectively) (Department for Education (DfE), 2017). Over half a million people made the transition from undergraduate to PG study in 2017/18 (Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA), 2018a). This is a 5 per cent increase in the number of people accessing PG study since the women in this work graduated from university in 2013 (HESA, 2018a). Though more recent growth could be attributed to the introduction of the Postgraduate Master's Loan in 2016 (GOV, 2019d), it does not appear, as of yet, to have made much of a difference to the rate of growth in numbers. This is because there had been a steady (but large) increase in the number of those engaging in PG study over the previous two decades with the number of those accessing such study in 2017/18 39 per cent higher than the rate in 2000/01 (HESA, 2018a).

Brown *et al.,* (2016) found that the growth in the number of those graduating with a PG qualification is due, at least in part, to the decline in the value an undergraduate degree holds. Thus, families who seek to reproduce their social status or be upwardly socially mobile are increasingly acquiring master's and PhD qualifications in order to stand out in a crowded graduate employment market. Those who are able to compete in such a manner, and benefit from such a strategy, are those "with the financial resources able to sustain a prolonged campaign" (Brown *et al.,* 2016, p.193). These are the established middle-classes and their more affluent counterparts (Brown *et al.,* 2016). Though George Osborne (2014, p.13), the Conservative Chancellor of the Exchequer who announced the introduction of the Postgraduate Master's Loan, said this would "revolutionise" access to PG courses for "bright students from poorer backgrounds", after students pay for their tuition fees there remains little over £1,000 of the maximum £10,900 loan to cover the cost of living. To bridge this gap, Jo Johnson (Conservative Minister for Universities and Science at the time) said students could choose to "live very modestly and have a frugal existence" or "can borrow from their parents if they wish" (Weale and Adams, 2017, p.2). However, as Finn (2015) found in her research, not all students have access to such financial support.

In Purcell, Elias and Wilton's (2004) work, women were twice as likely than men to be found doing PG study (6 per cent, as opposed to 3 per cent for the latter). Though men

were once more likely to embark on 'taught' master's[26] (Purcell *et al.,* 2012), the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) (2018b) have found that this has now changed as 60 per cent of those accessing this form of education in 2016/17 identified as 'women'. However, what is unknown is the socio-economic background of these women. But it is known that a student is more likely to engage in PG study if both of their parents hold a degree and if they graduated from a high tariff HEI with a first-class honours degree (Purcell *et al.,* 2012). Hence, it is perhaps safe to assume that working-class women are less likely to engage in PG study compared to their more privileged counterparts. However, the numbers are unknown as the majority of students do not use the University and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS) to apply for PG courses, and so data on variables through which we are able to gain an understanding of social class cannot be collected by HESA.[27]

Findings from the 'original project' (Bradley *et al.,* 2017) would support my assumption as it was found that a disproportionate number of middle-class undergraduate students went on to do master's courses. We reported that "a major obstacle for working-class participants is the lack of family economic capital to aid them in career-oriented moves, for example in taking an LPC (Legal Practice Course) or a master's degree" (Bradley *et al.,* 2017, p.14). This suggests that the working-class women who took part in the project, who are also the same women who took part in this 'secondary' PhD project, were less likely than their middle-class peers to engage in PG study. As a project we also reported that there were a "number of female graduates who left university unsure of their next steps" (Bradley *et al.,* 2017, p.4), suggesting that transitions out of university are not only classed but also gendered in some way.

3.2.1 Returning home

While most literature on 'graduate transitions' concerns itself with the 'university to employment' transition, which I explore below, the 'university to home' transition is less researched but of equal importance to this thesis. First, I explore this.

Post-graduation, Finn (2015) and Stone, Berrington and Falkingham (2014) observed a significant proportion of the women in their studies 'boomerang' back to their parental home, irrespective of class backgrounds. Graduating from university was found to be

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[26] 'taught' master's are those face-to-face, mostly teacher-led "programmes which exists to extend subject knowledge", rather than those "intended to qualify a graduate for a particular profession" such as teaching training courses (Wakeling and Laurison, 2017, p.537).
[27] I discovered this through submitting a data request form to the HESA.

"an important catalyst" for returning home, with this increasingly perceived as a "normative transition" for young female graduates in their early 20s, particularly since the late 2000s due to the recession and increase in student debts (Stone, Berrington and Falkingham, 2014, p.273). Purcell *et al.,* (2012, p.42) found that the women in their study were more likely than men to report that they faced limitations after graduation, one of these being that they "had to return to live at home". However, overall more young men aged 18-34 live with their parents than women of the same age (37 per cent and 26 per cent respectively) (Office for National Statistics (ONS), 2019c).

Moving home was framed by the women in Finn's work as the "inevitable next step" post-university "before making a more permanent move elsewhere" (Finn, 2015, p.106). Finn (2015) found that the kinship between parent and daughter went through multiple processes of evolution upon living together once again. Some experienced a strengthening of their relationships, while others were unsettled by the change and struggled with a lack of agency they had while living at home. However, for most, moving home allowed them to feel emotionally and socially supported, and in turn, their "parent's views, values and advice regarding work, love and pensions […] became centrally important" (Finn, 2015, p.103). Familial cultural norms played a role in forming their graduate transitions into work, as outlined above, as they tended to opt for work which their parents recognised and valued, also found in the work of West *et al.* (2016) on middle-class graduates.

In Finn's (2015) work, eight out of ten women made the transition home immediately post-graduation as they foresaw this as a move which would provide financial support and facilitate their career development. Their decisions were also "framed in romanticism and nostalgia and depicted as a haven or retreat after a brief (university-based) hiatus" (Finn, 2015, p.107). This is far different from the working-class women in Lawler's (1999) work, who were keen to 'escape' that which was synonymous with a working-class life. The women in Finn's work (2015, p.11) were from a "diverse range of social class backgrounds". She viewed them as part of the 'newer middle-classes', this was determined by considering their different 'types' of capital and whether their parents had attended university (Finn, 2015). There were, as she puts it, "intra-class complexities that render binary class distinctions unhelpful and over-simplistic" (Finn, 2015, p.11).

Thus, they will have faced, relative to the women in Lawler's (1999) work, less symbolic violence as they were less associated with living the life of a working-class

woman, which has long been associated with “all that is dirty, dangerous and without value” (Skeggs, 1997, p.74). Moreover, the women in Finn’s (2015) work were more inclined to return to their origins as they saw this as providing a benefit to them, rather than harming them in some way.

3.2.2 ‘Graduate’ and ‘non-graduate’ jobs

Academics of sociology have long been concerned with the employment of graduates in the UK. In 1943, Truscot reported on the stratification of graduates into different forms of employment based on gender, social class and university status:

> “The large firms, which often apply to the Oxford or the Cambridge Appointments Board for promising young graduates, seem to forget that there are nine other English universities as well. What remained? For women, secretaryships and librarianships (generally ill-paid), marriage (which a gratifyingly large number of them achieve early) and – teaching.”
> (Truscot, 1943, p.153)

Since the early 2000s, there has been an increase in the academic debate surrounding graduate transitions, something which Finn (2015, p.118) said needs “rebalancing” as it has “for the most part, has been concerned with individuated notions of career pathways and experiences of underemployment”. However, due to the abundance of the literature, it is worth considering these works here to define what a ‘graduate job’ is before then moving on to review the literature on how the social structures of gender and class play a role in mitigating who gets a ‘graduate job’.

In this, the post-industrial, knowledge-driven economy, ‘jobs for life’ are rare (Donald *et al*., 2017). Instead ‘careers’, predominantly for the young, are becoming increasingly fluid and ‘boundaryless’ (Donald *et al*., 2017), and so ‘graduate jobs’ are difficult to capture a definition of. Young graduates are encouraged to build ‘portfolio careers’ through which they “make a job” through “taking control of your destiny and making your own opportunities” through “going mobile, making tough calls, going it alone or teaming up and having gusto” (Barton, 2016, no page number). This is a view unacknowledging of the place of structural constraints which exert unequal impact on the lives of those from different socio-economic backgrounds.

Writers such as Ball (2016, slide 2) have questioned, what are ‘graduate jobs’? He asks, is a ‘graduate job’ a “job suitable for a graduate? A high skilled job? A job done by a graduate? A job you need a degree to get? A job you need a degree to do? A job I’d be happy for my kids to do?”. After much consideration, Ball (2016) settled on the

definition of a ‘graduate job’ being: a professional and/or managerial job (Standard Occupational Classifications (SOCs) 1-3) that graduates do.

This is a relatively straight forward definition, and one which I accept, but like Green and Henseke (2016, p.4), I acknowledge the “inevitable fuzziness” around the term. This is due, at least in part, to researchers being able to find graduates among all social strata (Savage *et al.,* 2015). Savage *et al.*’s (2015) study, for example, found graduates in all seven of their social class categories.[28] Thus, the work that graduates do is now widespread and they no longer stream mostly into ‘professional’ and ‘managerial’ professions. However, as Mason (2002) pointed out, non-graduate jobs do not simply become graduate jobs due to an influx of graduates working in, or as Elias and Purcell (2013) call it ‘crowding’, these roles.

Research conducted by Purcell, Elias and Wilton (2004) examined the post-graduation trajectories of 4,500 graduates who gained their first-degrees from one of thirty-eight UK HEIs in 1995 and developed a conceptual framework which classified graduate occupations into four classifications. The first three were named according to the “decades in which jobs in each group had become typical jobs for graduates” (traditional graduate job, modern graduate job, new graduate job) (Elias and Purcell, 2013, p.17).[29] The fourth, the ‘niche graduate job’ category, was:

> “established to cater for occupations in which ‘pockets’ of jobs existed within a particular unit group of the Standard Occupational Classification where graduate skills and knowledge were being utilised, yet the majority of jobs within the unit group were not graduate jobs.”
> (Elias and Purcell, 2013, p.17)

However, as described by Burke (2016a), there was a backlash in the academic community to this conceptual framework as it had led Elias and Purcell (2004) to conclude that 80 per cent of graduates were in graduate jobs within seven years of graduation. Burke (2016a) has written about those who spoke out at the time against this, reporting that the definition of a ‘graduate job’ was too broad, particularly the ‘niche graduate job’ category.

In response, Elias and Purcell (2013) revisited and reconsidered their categories of ‘graduate jobs’. The analysis of what a ‘graduate job’ was now reflected “the relationship between the types of skills and experience required for competent

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[28] These social categories were the “elite, established middle-class, technical middle class, new affluent workers, traditional working class, emerging service workers, precariat” (Savage *et al.,* 2015, p.368).
[29] For the definitions of these see Purcell, Elias and Wilton (2004, p.6).

performance of the associated tasks and their links to higher education" (Elias and Purcell, 2013, p.17). This time they conceptualised three occupational 'types' of graduate job. These built on Brown *et al.*'s (2011, p.80) classification of knowledge workers as 'developers', 'demonstrators' and 'drones', the latter of which Elias and Purcell (2013, p.4) refer to as "pessimistic". Elias and Purcell's (2013, p.7) categories of graduate jobs are as follows:

- "Experts: Those in knowledge-intensive occupations that require them to draw on and use their specialist HE knowledge and skills in the course of their daily work, and whose appointment to their jobs and capacity to carry out the tasks and responsibilities required is directly related to possession of their specialist knowledge and/or high level skills. Examples include Chemical Scientists, Civil Engineers, Pharmacists, Solicitors, Physiotherapists, Chartered Surveyors, and Airline Pilots.
- Orchestrators: are in jobs that require them to draw on and orchestrate their knowledge and the knowledge of others to evaluate information, assess options, plan, make decisions and co-ordinate the contributions of others to achieve objectives. The list of these is dominated by managers and directors but includes senior officers in the armed services, the police force and other public sector areas. As we have defined this group, it is unlikely that many recent graduates will be found in it, since it normally requires extensive experience in the fields of activity in question.
- Communicators: require interactive skills that may be based on interpersonal skills, creative skills or high-level technological knowledge, capacity to access and manipulate information and/or an understanding of how to communicate information effectively to achieve objectives. Examples include Journalists, Actors, Conference and Exhibition Organisers, Web-design and Development Professionals and Marketing Associate Professionals."

Elias and Purcell (2013) found, based on all their graduate cohort aged 22-34, 'experts' occupied 90 per cent of what they had previously defined in Elias and Purcell (2004) as 'traditional graduate job' and just over half of the 'modern graduate job' categories. The 'new graduate jobs' were mostly done by 'experts' and 'communicators' and around 40 per cent of 'niche graduate jobs' were done by 'experts' and an additional 40 per cent done by 'non-graduates' (Elias and Purcell, 2013). Further, the analysis showed an interesting gender breakdown as female graduates were more likely than their male counterparts to be concentrated in 'non-graduate jobs' (24 per cent of the former were in non-graduate jobs, compared to 18 per cent of the latter) (Elias and Purcell, 2013). Further, in order to be in with a better chance to access 'traditional graduate jobs', women had to be considered 'experts', as opposed to men who could be classified as

‘experts’, ‘strategists’ or ‘communicators’ (Elias and Purcell, 2013). Overall, women are more likely to be found in roles which classified them as ‘communicators’ and men, ‘experts’ and ‘orchestrators’ (Elias and Purcell, 2013).

While women are “encouraged to compete on equal terms with men” (Brown, 2003, p.153), transitions into the workplace found been found to be ‘gendered’, particularly when those workplaces are disproportionately dominated by one gender (Papafilippou and Bentley, 2017). Finn (2015, p.133) found that the women in her study who occupied ‘traditional’ graduate managerial positions in male-dominated environments faced “ridicule” and “humiliation” from men based on how they were dressed which made them “uncomfortable” and “very low”. Moving into occupational roles traditionally considered masculine, which are also traditionally considered ‘beyond’ their class, appears to compound the consequences of social disadvantage faced by working-class women. This, according to Walkerdine, Lucey and Melody (2001, p.297), is a “massive shift for them, requiring a complete internal and external ‘makeover’, where complex unconscious defences, put in place as protection, can also act as deep obstacles to the exercise of choice, and to the fulfilment of consciously held goals”.

Working-class women are, compared to their more privileged counterparts, less likely to access graduate-level jobs (Friedman and Laurison, 2019). This is increasingly considered to be the case since, with structural changes to the employment market and socio-cultural changes to what a ‘career’ is, forms of capital and resources have grown to be more highly influential on graduate career trajectories (Friedman and Laurison, 2019; Sidhu and Dall’Alba, 2017; Burke, 2016a; Morrison, 2014). Abstract ‘soft skills’ (“boldness, curiosity, a sense of adventure, flexibility and self-reliance”) become forms of embodied cultural capital which are valued highly in the graduate labour market (Sidhu and Dall’Alba, 2017, p.481). These are not tangible and are highly subjective. In addition to drawing on other forms of high-value capital, those from ‘professional’ and ‘managerial’ backgrounds are able to demonstrate these through ‘correct’ (or ‘valued’) social codes, engaging in travel, PG study and unpaid work, all of which are desired by those employing for graduate jobs (Burke, 2016a; Purcell *et al.,* 2012; Brown and Hesketh, 2004; Brown and Scase, 1994). Thus, what Ingram and Allen (2018, p.723) refer to as “social magic” occurs, that is, “the cultural arbitrary becomes disguised, and cultural forms of capital are endowed with symbolic recognition. This conversion

allows (and is necessary for) the legitimation of privilege". This reproduces "persistent inequalities related to social class, as well as gender, ethnicity and institution" (Ingram and Allen, 2018, p.723).

Though this has long been the case, working-class and middle-class young graduates have been found to be concerned with uncertainty and precarity at a higher rate than those found in previous decades (Mendick *et al.,* 2018; Formby, 2017) and the accumulation and 'cashing in' on capitals is growing ever more significant. With significantly high levels of poverty and inequality, record levels of youth under-employment and the remnants of austerity, the poorest are the most susceptible to 'failure' (Mendick *et al.,* 2018).

3.2.3 Under- and unemployment

There has been increasing concern within the academic literature on the underemployment of graduates in the UK (Finn, 2015). Though graduates are less likely than non-graduates to experience unemployment (ONS, 2017; Bathmaker *et al.,* 2016), graduates from routine and manual ('working-class') backgrounds are more likely to be unemployed than their more privileged counterparts (Friedman and Laurison, 2019). This has meant that for some graduates, they are forced to navigate the stigma of accessing benefits through the Jobcentre (Formby, 2017).

Since the 1990s, the risk of graduates being under- and unemployed has increased alongside a resurgence in the widening participation agenda (Antonucci, 2016; Green and Henske, 2016). This is because, the more of those who acquire such credentials, the less value, or purchase-power, these have in the graduate labour market. However, Antonucci (2016, italics in the original) notes that "if access to HE becomes widespread, having a degree is not a substantial gain, but at the same time *not* having a degree represents a disadvantage in the labour market", a similar sentiment to Brown's (2003) 'opportunity trap' concept.

While the Institute for Fiscal Studies (IFS) (2018) reported that the proportion of graduates in low-skilled jobs has increased from 5.3 per cent in 2008 to 8.1 per cent in 2016, Green and Henske (2016) cite a much higher figure of 30 per cent. As well as this, while Purcell *et al.,* (2012, p.93) found "no significant differences in the rates of non-graduate employment or unemployment among graduates from different socio-economic backgrounds", Friedman and Laurison (2019) found that graduates from routine and manual ('working-class') backgrounds are more likely to be under-employed than their more privileged counterparts. Contrasting findings such as these

provide evidence for Ball's (2016) call to academics to unite on the definition of what a 'graduate job' is.

One notion generally accepted in the academic community is that the widening of HE has de-valued the undergraduate degree, as explored above. Though graduates have been found to be "largely absent from the precariat" (Savage *et al.,* 2015, p.229), the graduate labour market has been increasingly afflicted by the 'gig economy' through increasing levels of insecurity which disproportionately impact young graduates, such as zero-hour contracts, unpaid internships and 'temping' (Leonard *et al.,* 2015). Precarious employment is defined as more than *just* 'low waged work'. While this is a common characteristic of precarious employment, the most defining features are: structural insecurity through temporary or fixed-term contracts, underemployment, and flexploitation and blackmailability due to low-hour or zero-hour contracts (Bradley, 2015; Standing, 2011). According to Standing (2011a) the 'precariat' includes three 'types' of people: (i) Migrants, (ii) those from working-class communities and traditions and, (iii) young, university-educated people. Women are disproportionately represented in this 'type' of employment (Bradley, 2015; Standing, 2011).

This is reflected in findings from Aronson, Callahan and Davis (2015, p.1097) who reported that female, first-generation HE graduates were most likely to "fare the worst in terms of their employment status, debt and income levels, and subjective assessments of job opportunities and financial stress". The work of Purcell *et al.* (2013) reflected much of the same findings as they found that female graduates were more likely than male graduates to be working in non-graduate occupations for more than nine months. Also, if these women did not access PG study, if they attended a non-high tariff HEI, had parents who did not attend university, they were more likely to be found in non-graduate work (Purcell *et al.*, 2012). A significant gender pay gap was found too.[30]

Research by Furlong and Cartmel (2005) and Power *et al.* (2003) showed that working-class graduates were more likely than their wealthier counterparts to engage in quick-found forms of employment which do not align with their qualifications, out of financial necessity. As was true for many of the middle-class women in the 'original project' (Paired Peers), Morrison (2014, p.182) noted that middle-class graduates are more likely to have sources of intergenerational economic capital and so are better "able to contemplate a more leisurely and multiple sets of career moves based upon a desire for

[30] For a comprehensive review on how the gender pay gap has "remained effectively unchanged from the situation in the 1990s" see Purcell *et al.,* (2013, p.192).

career self-actualisation". This, being in the position to afford to work a part-time job after graduation (in SEC classes 6 and 7) on first entry to the labour market has been found by Goldthorpe (2016) to weaken the 'stickiness' of class and increase social fluidity for women.

However, this does not 'save' middle-class graduates from 'failure'. Burke's (2017) work, which focuses on two middle-class Northern Irish university graduates, explores middle-class graduates who fail to reproduce their social position with support from the 'glass floor'[31] (Waller, 2011). Burke (2017, p.394) found that these under-employed middle-class graduates experienced 'inverted symbolic violence', which he defined as:

> "a form of symbolic violence that works 'against' the dominant group and forms a position of 'what is for the likes of them' through the doxic[32] expectations of members from particular dominant groups, incompatible with an objective reality."

A form of violence, which he argues, is as violent as symbolic violence is on working-class graduates.

There are working-class people who, as a result of successfully graduating from university, have experienced a degree of upward mobility (Christie *et al.,* 2017; Waller, Ingram and Ward, 2017; Burke, 2016a; Finn, 2015; Archer, Hutchings and Ross, 2003). However, my concern is that, as graduate destinations have been established to be socially patterned in terms of socio-economic background, that working-class women's narratives of preparing for and transitions out of HE have been somewhat rendered mute. The two social structures of class and gender have yet to be brought together to consider how young working-class women experience this liminal time, which was what this PhD work aimed to do. However, fortunately, much work has explored working-class women's experiences of social (im)mobility, which I now turn to explore.

3.3 Working-class women and social (im)mobility

The social mobility agenda is described by Friedman, Laurison and Miles (2015, p.259) as standing at the "very nexus of the British political agenda", the previous Prime Minister Theresa May (2016, p.3) defined the aim of this agenda as, "where we help the

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[31] For the established middle-classes, the 'glass floor' (Waller, 2011, p.9) is an "invisible barrier stopping people falling down the social hierarchy is as impenetrable as the more familiar 'glass ceiling' preventing others rising higher".

[32] The concept of 'doxa' is defined as the "uncontested acceptance of the daily lifeworld" (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992, p.73). In other words, doxa are the "seemingly self-evident" rules for 'the game' that agents (to a certain extent) agree upon, though some rules are written, others are not (Bourdieu, 1996, p.402). That which is considered 'doxic' tends to be unreflectively held by agents as the 'truth' or the guidebook on the 'way to play' in order to establish or reproduce social standing.

brightest among the poor". This is one example of how Prime Ministers since Tony Blair have spoken about social mobility: in purely upward terms, neglecting the much-needed discussion of downward mobility (Payne, 2017). Due to the lack of growth in jobs and opportunities, the 'best' among the working-classes cannot 'rise' without some of the middle-classes moving down the social ladder in order to make room because "we cannot all be middle-class" (Payne, 2017, p.50), nor, I should add, do we all want to be.

Under Alan Milburn, the previous Chair of the Social Mobility and Child Poverty Commission (SMCPC) (2012-2017), the commission worked to analyse the rates of social mobility in the UK, focussing particularly on uncovering how those from the most privileged backgrounds make it into traditionally high-status occupations such as journalism, law and politics (SMCPC, 2013; Milburn, 2012; 2009). While this work has been important, it does little to criticise the tenets of individualism within a social mobility discourse which is embroiled in a "neoliberal vocabulary of aspiration, ambition, choice and self-efficacy" (Reay, 2017, p.112). Through this, the narrative that "individual talent and effort, rather than ascriptive traits, determine individuals' placements in a social hierarchy" is perpetuated (Alon and Tienda, 2007, p.489). As well as in political discourse, the social mobility debate in British sociology in recent decades has been said to have:

> "become fixated on either the measurement of mobility – with economists focusing on income and sociologists favouring occupational class – or, flowing from this, heated disagreement over generalized rates of mobility and how best to interpret them."
> (Friedman, Laurison and Miles, 2015, p.260).

A sociologist of this kind was Goldthorpe who, among other things, developed tools which sought to understand and distinguish absolute and relative mobility rates and, with Erikson and Portocarero, he formed the theoretical basis for the ONS's Socio-Economic Classification. Goldthorpe's work with Jackson (2007), which analysed the 1958 National Child Development Study, showed that by the age of thirty-three women were more likely than men to be downwardly mobile (37 per cent of women had moved down, 27 per cent of men moved down). Also, these women were less likely than men to be upwardly mobile (39 per cent of women were upwardly mobile, 45 per cent of men were by the age of 33) (Goldthorpe and Jackson, 2007). While the percentage point difference between men and women in the 1970 British Cohort Study was smaller by

the age of 30, still, women were more likely to be downwardly mobile than men and still less likely to be upwardly mobile (Goldthorpe and Jackson, 2007).

In this research, Goldthorpe and Jackson (2007) uncovered high levels of social mobility (both upward and downward), a common finding at this time because "the occupational structure was shifting quite dramatically throughout the twentieth century" (Saunders, 2010, p.17). After the Second World War until the 1980s there was an increase in opportunity for those at the 'bottom' to move up, as Goldthorpe (2013, p.432) stated there was "more room at the top" at this time. However, since the 1990s professional and managerial job growth has slowed and thus, Goldthorpe reported "what can be achieved through education, whether in regard to absolute or relative mobility, appears limited" (2013, p.431).

While women's rates of social mobility have changed over the previous one hundred years in line with more women entering HE and the workforce, Payne (2017) believes that public and academic discourses of social mobility have been gender-blind. One example which would support Payne's (2017) argument is the work of Saunders (2010). Saunders (2010, p.25), who has worked since the mid-90s on analysing rates of social mobility, "excluded" women altogether from his data analysis "for the sake of simplicity". Where Saunders (2012, slide 30) does mention women in subsequent work, he is prejudicial in saying that "1 in 5 of the poorest kids are being born to teenage mothers", summarising that there is a mobility problem among children of the "underclass [sic]" and "bad parenting is the key issue for these children". Saunders (2012, slide 36) concluded that "underclass [sic] children are damaged by poor parenting. But for most UK children, if you are bright and work hard, you will almost certainly succeed".

Overall, the debate on the 'rates' of social mobility varies widely. Some have reported that up to 75 per cent of all adults move between the seven SEC categories (Labour Force Survey (2014), cited by Payne (2017)), and that "high ability children rarely fail irrespective of their class origin" (Saunders, 2012, slide 22). This is while others have argued that a person's class origin is "one of the most significant predictors – if not the single most significant predictor – of their educational success" (Garcia and Weiss, 2017, p.2). This is a significant issue as "low educational achievement leads to lowered economic prospects later in life, perpetuating a lack of social mobility across generations" (Garcia and Weiss, 2017, p.2). This connotes that children of high-class

origins rarely face ‘failure’ irrespective of their ‘ability’ (if such a thing can be measured).

To add to this, Ainley and Allen (2013, p.2) reported that since the social class structure has become more “pear-shaped”, there is less social mobility, particularly for university young people who are most often situated in the mid to bottom range, and a select few are situated at the top. In order for those at the bottom to move up, the privileged need to move down but the movement of those within this structure has been found to be “unchanging” due to the “inherent stickiness” of class (Goldthorpe, 2016, p.97). These rates are considered to be so sticky that Milburn (2011, p.3) said “we still live in a country where, invariably, if you’re born poor, you die poor”, and the Social Mobility Commission (2019, p.8) reported that social mobility has “stagnated at all life stages” since 2013. However, the ‘stickiness’ has been found to be more evident for men, with men born in the ‘salariat’ (SEC classes 1 and 2) six times more likely to remain there than to enter the wage-earning working-class (SEC classes 6 and 7), while women are five times more likely to do so (Goldthorpe, 2016).

Though conventional, objective and ‘measurable’ approaches towards the topic of social mobility are important, it is the subjective, narrative accounts that have been explored relatively less in academic literature which I am also concerned with. I now turn to explore the literature which has sought to uncover the ‘hidden injuries of class’ (Sennett and Cobb, 1977) in the discourse of social mobility and working-class women.

The dominant narrative of social mobility which presents upward mobility as a success to be desired, the answer to those who seek to ‘escape’ from structural, and one which promotes “freeing” themselves (Reay, 2017, p.114) from working-class “baggage” (Friedman, 2016a, no page number), is one which feminist sociologists have taken a stand against. Reay (2017), Ingram and Abrahams (2016; 2013), Reed-Danahay (2002), Walkerdine, Lucey and Melody (2001), Lawler (1999), Skeggs (1997), Walkerdine and Lucey (1989) as well as myself (Bentley, 2018a; 2018b; 2018c; 2017b) and most of those who contributed to Mahony and Zmroczek’s (1997) *Class Matters, ‘Working-Class’ Women’s Perspective on Social Class*, have all worked to muddy this discourse. Among this work, there are points which question and contradict the unequivocal good that upward social mobility is presented as bestowing on those individuals who ‘achieve’ it and explores the emotional dimensions to ‘success’ and upward social mobility. Through drawing on their research and personal reflections, and the work of Bourdieu, they have not only demonstrated the ‘hidden injuries of class’ (Sennett and

Cobb, 1977) but also how socio-expectations of womanhood also play a role in inflicting these injuries.

Reed-Danahay (2002, p.103) examined the narratives of working-class women who grew up in farming households in France in the first half of the twentieth century. She found that the women desired upward social mobility, but their desires were confined within the limits of the cultural norm that: "a woman can pursue her desires so long as these do not conflict with her duty to the family". In Reed-Danahay's (2002) analysis, though some of the women 'achieved' a degree of upward social mobility and became teachers, they achieved only what was commensurate with the family structure (so as to keep with their 'duties' in the household) and what would allow them to remain in the geographical locations they were raised. Likewise, Jackson and Marsden (1966) also found that women were more likely than men to remain in their hometown of Huddersfield after experiencing upward social mobility and cited the mother-daughter bond as the prominent reason why.

Further, Reed-Danahay (2002) found that education, social and geographic mobility were rejected outright by some of the women, though they desired this, in order to continue in their traditional 'female' role within their homes. Though these narratives were shared around one hundred years ago, the stories told in Reed-Danahay's (2002) findings reflect that in Reay's (2017, p.116) work: that upward social mobility stories are "stories of dissatisfaction, guilt and internal strife". As Lucey, Melody and Walkerdine (2003, p.297) put it, "there are no easy hybrids" in achieving 'success' as a working-class woman and crossing or straddling class categories.

The need to upkeep 'traditional' roles and retain the emotional connection to the family was felt too by the working-class women interviewed by Walkerdine and Lucey (1989) as both a burden but also key to psychic survival on the upward mobility trajectory. Likewise, Archer and Leathwood (2003, p.189) found within the narratives of working-class women who aspired for a university education that they faced negotiating a multiplicity of roles. Though they had desires to 'escape' their working-class identities, many had to reassure their families that they would "maintain family relationships and hold onto their identities as a 'good' (and still feminine) daughters" (Archer and Leathwood, 2003, p.189). The contradiction between preserving and moving away from their working-class identities was also found in Lawler's (1999) work.

In *'Getting Out and Getting Away': Women's Narratives of Class Mobility*, Lawler (1999, p.3) noted that entry to the middle-class for working-class women is a difficult

task due to class being formed in cultural and symbolic terms, “and it is this cultural configuration of class which can enable middle-class observers to despise and to ridicule the aspirations of working-class people” (Lawler, 1999, p.19). Even where social mobility is ‘achieved’, moving up from working-class to middle-class, entails engaging with a different set of social relations which shame and ‘other’ those from working-class origins. Due to this, most of the women Lawler (1999) interviewed, who considered themselves middle-class (from working-class origins), harboured a double-edged anxiety, which Jackson and Marsden (1966) also found among their cohort of ‘new’ middle-class interviewees who were raised in working-class households. First, they were anxious at the prospect of being associated with a working-class existence, and by the possibility of returning to it. The second anxiety arose out of ‘getting it right’, they wanted to be seen as ‘authentic’, rather than ‘pretentious’, and were anxious about being considered ‘imposters’ by their middle-class peers (Lawler, 1999).

Contrastingly, I have written and spoken about how resisting social and cultural assimilation into the academy in the aim to ‘make it’ in a predominantly middle-class world, while also holding onto a working-class identity, is a tumultuous task (Bentley, 2018a; 2018b; 2018c; 2017b). Explored in the previous chapter, I reflect on what I refer to as a ‘habitus war’, reflecting also on how my gender compounds class ‘injuries’. Like Abrahams and Ingram’s (2013) concept of the ‘chameleon habitus’[33], the ‘habitus war’ demonstrates a habitus in a more complex state than “a habitus divided against itself” (Bourdieu, 1999, p.511). Instead, it is a habitus afflicted by a ‘war’ which drags those affected in multiple directions based on a variety of gender and class-based socio-expectations of themselves within different social fields.

Discomfort, shame and pain are felt by the upwardly mobile woman, which Lawler (1999) argues is a product of political inequalities, even if it is rarely considered as such. This is thought to be, at least in part, due to the notion that while these women become more equal to their more privileged peers, they become less equal to their families and:

> Striving for success for a working-class young person is about wanting something different, something more than your parents had, and that implies that there is something intrinsically wrong with them. […] There’s an emptiness to become somebody if your parents remain nobodies. I want to argue that a

[33] Though working-class students were often found to resist the “middle-class ideology of university as an all-encompassing experience” (Abrahams and Ingram, 2013, p.11), through modifying cultural signifiers of class such as behaviour, appearance and accent they were able to acquire a “chameleon habitus” which allowed them to adapt to, and find a sense of belonging, in both social fields of ‘university’ and ‘home’.

> tension between success for the individual at the expense of the failure of the many is a key motif in the narratives of many of the socially mobile.
> (Reay, 2017, p.115)

There are those who explore the subjective experiences graduates who are socially immobile and downwardly mobile. I do not have the space to discuss these within this thesis, however, see Finn (2015) and Burke (2017; 2016) for comprehensive analyses of the topic.

3.4 Conclusion

Throughout this literature review, graduate career identities, the development patterns and experiences of these, have been found to be distinctly socially shaped. Though social origins and identities are not deterministic in the construction of 'graduate' identities and the 'successes' of such in the labour market, these characteristics play a leading role in moulding such identities, aspirations and opportunities. This chapter has examined the literature on which undergraduates are best positioned upon entering and graduating from university to acquire 'top' graduate jobs and thus acquire the 'successful graduate' identity. The research discussed in this chapter has questioned the notion that if male, middle-class and elite undergraduate students align with the "dominant constructions of the 'normal' student" (Archer and Leathwood, 2003, p.191), are they also the 'normal' and 'successful' graduate?

I sympathise with the calls of academics to return to the 'student identity', rather than the 'graduate identity'/'developing graduate attributes' discussion, because the latter offers "a simplistic, and – for some – troubling, view of the purpose of universities" (Daniels and Brooker, 2013, p.65). However, in my view, this would be a negligent move for academics. On behalf of those who 'fail' to attain the 'success', we must continue to uncover the invisible structures and practices which work to reinforce the 'glass floor' (Waller, 2011) and the 'class ceiling' (Friedman and Laurison, 2019) in order to be able to eradicate them.

In this review, until the work of feminists and those who engage in Bourdieusian analyses are encountered, time and time again, the narratives of working-class women are absent from sociological analyses. Further, while it is acknowledged that transitions out of HE are gendered and classed, consistently working-class women's voices have been absent from academic research in this field. However, there are a few recent exceptions (as examined above), but some of this literature requires an update as the data collected was some time ago (Kelsall *et al.,* 1972; Jackson and Marsden, 1966).

This PhD work was conducted in the aim to bridge this gap in the literature and to attend to a review of the Paired Peers material which called for “more on the intersection of gender and class” (Case, 2017, p.559). I have worked too to de-mystify the period directly after university of which Finn (2015, p.103) says “very little is known about how and in what ways recent graduates negotiate (this) period”. Hypothesising, Morrison (2015, p.650) says that this “may be a point where forms of social inequality are reproduced”, a query which my research is in a good position to respond to. I do this while viewing the power structures of class and gender, and their effects, as working in tandem with one another, as Burke says (2016a, p.129, citing Reay, David and Ball, 2005) “not as independent variables but intertwined facets of identity when discussing educational trajectories and employment”.

Next, I turn to outline the Bourdieusian theoretical framework employed in this research.

Chapter four: Employing Bourdieu

In this chapter, I outline the theoretical framework employed in this thesis. First, I justify choosing the Bourdieusian theoretical framework and outline its appropriateness to this research. Then I turn to outline Bourdieu's (1977) 'theory of practice', the key concepts within this and the role these play in distributing agents into the social universe. Throughout this, I make clear how each of his 'thinking tools' are relevant to my research by drawing on empirical examples and how I use them to excavate the hidden routes through which social reproduction occurs. Finally, I outline how social class is conceptualised in this thesis and how the participants are relationally categorised as 'working-class' and as either 'firmly-working-class' or 'upper-working-class'.

4.1 Choosing a theoretical 'toolbox'

Taylor (2016, no page number), reflecting on a recent academic conference he attended, said that the work of French sociologist, anthropologist and philosopher Pierre Bourdieu was referenced so frequently that, "you could almost hear his name rumbling through the air conditioning". This too has been noticed by academics; on the popularity of his concepts, Reay critiques:

> "the contemporary fashion of overlaying research analyses with Bourdieu's concepts, including habitus, rather than making the concepts work in the context of the data and the research settings."
> (2010, p.431)

Bourdieu himself was known to be concerned with the misappropriation and misuse of his work (Navarro, 2010). Thus, upon employing his 'thinking tools', I had to be sure of having a robust justification for such a decision.

First, I knew his work was appropriate as our approach to social research was similar: to make visible the invisible structures and routes through which social order and the reproduction of privilege and disadvantage are continually (re)established in different social fields. At that, his 'theory of practice' can be used to examine both macro and micro, subjective and objective structures, and the influencing connections between the two, a goal which I have sought to fulfil in this project. Though Bourdieu's work was mostly concerned with the French education system, most of what he wrote is considered by Webb, Schirato and Danaher (2002) to be applicable to the British education system. This is demonstrated by the wealth of scholars who have employed his work to do research in the context of the British Higher Education (HE) system

(Bathmaker *et al.,* 2016; Bowers-Brown, 2016; Morley, 1997; Morrison, 2015; 2014; Reay, 2017; 2003; 1998; Reay, Crozier and Clayton, 2010; 2009). Bourdieu's 'thinking tools' have also been used to analyse post-educational graduate trajectories (Burke, 2017; 2016a; 2016b; Burke *et al.,* 2017; Finn, 2015; Ingram and Allen, 2018; Tomlinson, 2007) and social (im)mobility (Burke, 2016a; 2016b; Finn, 2015; Friedman, 2016b; 2014; Friedman and Laurison, 2019; Friedman, Laurison and Miles, 2015; Ingram and Abrahams, 2016; McKenzie, 2015a; Morrin, 2016; Payne, 2017; Savage *et al.,* 2015). Thus, I felt reassured that I too could employ Bourdieu to conduct research in these areas.

4.2 Bourdieu's theory of practice

In 1994, Bourdieu wrote:

> "all of my thinking started from this point: How can behaviour be regulated without being the product of obedience to rules?"
> (p.65)

Here he wondered how individual agency and social structure are reconciled, how, as agents, we are both 'free' but constrained by the rules of the social universe. Empirical research into class, education and employment has long sought to examine this through questioning:

(i) Why do young working-class boys who access a grammar school education experience social and cultural discomfort? (Ingram, 2018; Reay, 2017);
(ii) Why do middle-class undergraduates experience a greater sense of 'ease' at navigating elite universities than working-class students? (Reay, 2017; 1998; Bathmaker *et al.*, 2016; Khan, 2011; Reay, Crozier and Clayton, 2010; 2009; Archer and Leathwood, 2003);
(iii) Why do "working-class kids get working-class jobs"? (Willis, 1977, p.1).

A conceptual tool employed to overcome the 'false dichotomy' of the agency and structure debate which too often "provides agency with too much influence over structure or provides each element with equal presence creating a zero-sum effect" (Burke, 2015, p.56), is that of the 'habitus'. This is one of three main 'thinking tools' in Bourdieu's (1977) 'theory of practice', a formula which explains social practice usually expressed as:

> [(habitus) (capital)] + field = practice
> (Bourdieu, 1984, p.101)

‘Practice’, for Bourdieu, is a result of an agent’s dispositions and experiences (which reside in the habitus), their position in the field (dictated according to their capital) and the state of the social field at that time, i.e. who else is in the field, their composition of capital, dispositions and power at that time. Below I explore these terms further and explain their ‘place’ in this research process. First, the ‘habitus’.

4.2.1 Habitus

For Bourdieu, a habitus resides within all social agents (whether that be individuals, groups or institutions) and is also a tool for analysis in empirical investigations through which the social universe can be understood. The concept of ‘habitus’ transcends the view that structure and agency are incongruent as it can be employed to analyse how objective social structures and subjective experiences have a cyclical, relational affiliation.

Bourdieu defines the habitus as a “structured and structuring structure” (1994, p.170). That is, the habitus is ‘structured’ by an agent’s history and present conditions, it is ‘structuring’ present and imagined future actions and it a ‘structure’ which is “systematically ordered rather than random or unpatterned” (Maton, 2008, p.50). Within this structure is “a system of dispositions” developed from an agent’s history which generates tastes and aspirations, as well as a predisposition towards certain practices, inclinations and tendencies of ‘choice’ (Bourdieu, 1984, p.6).

Thus, the habitus ‘holds’ the agent’s understanding of the world: their perceptions of the patterns and rules of the social universe. As Moore notes, while habitus is considered:

> “insubstantial in the sense that the rules of chess or grammar cannot be found anywhere in the world in a material form” it is understood through “*realizations* in practice- in actual games of chess or speech acts.”
> (2008, p.105, italics in original)

That is, in the context of this work (drawing on a brief example from chapter seven), as an undergraduate, a working-class woman’s habitus structures what she views as ‘aspirational’ among the ‘field of possibilities’ which positions careers are “for the likes of” her or not (Bourdieu, 1984, p.110). These aspirations are based on structures consciously and unconsciously emplaced throughout her upbringing via the familial habitus (the primary site of the socialisation of agents) and her educational experiences. The familial habitus is a collective habitus through which the impact of the family (their social class, cultural practices, etc.) has a role in forming an individual’s dispositions, aspirations and practices (Burke, Emmerich and Ingram, 2013). For example, a

working-class woman may aspire to become a teacher because she enjoyed a great relationship with her teachers at school, achieved good GCSE grades, and her mum had long aspired to become a teacher and so spoke about it favourably. While her aspirations, like her habitus, are physically insubstantial, they can be realised in practice via the 'structuring' elements of the habitus (which directly informs practice) through, for example, doing voluntary work in a classroom.

However, aspirations are formed by more than this as "the level of aspiration of individuals is essentially determined by the probability" (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1990, p.111). Thus, to continue the example, if her habitus is 'structured' to see the institutionalised habitus of a university as incongruent with her habitus (and forms of capital), the 'structuring' elements of her habitus will most likely position this trajectory as incompatible with herself. Like the 'familial habitus', the 'institutional habitus' is a collective habitus which acts through and on individuals. The concept "attempts to theorise the collective practices of groups of individuals rather than individuals *per se*" (Burke, Emmerich and Ingram, 2013, p.166, italics in the original). Thus, the individual is interwoven with the institutions through which they are a member of.

Further, the habitus informs conscious and unconscious strategies and practice and "to a certain extent, predetermines that individuals' potential courses of action" (Bourdieu, 1992, p.53). While agents inherit "procedures to follow, paths to take" (Bourdieu, 1992, p.53) through the habitus, like her mother before her, the working-class woman may feel better socially-suited to becoming a teaching assistant. While these inherited 'paths' are profoundly influential, they are not wholly deterministic. However, there are those who see Bourdieu's 'theory of practice' as more of a "theory of reproduction" (Giroux, 1983, p.95, cited by McKenzie, 2016) as their view is that Bourdieu's theorisations are too restrictive and deterministic.

As alluded to above, the habitus has an "unconscious relationship" (Bourdieu, 1993, p.76) with 'field', is only active in relation to, and is reactive to, the field. For Bourdieu, agents enter the 'field' with their habitus (and the capitals within it), and this informs their practices and them of their social 'fit' or disjunction in the social field. However, it is more complicated than this as the circumstances of the agent at that time, the composition of other agents in that field (and their volume of capital, dispositions and power) are all key to understanding the characteristics of 'practice'. As Reay (2010, p.432) notes, "the same habitus can lead to very different practices and stances depending on the state of the field".

If the habitus (and capitals) are congruent with the field and those with power in the field at the time of entry, then this agent will feel like "a fish in water" (Bourdieu, 1992, p.127). In the context of this thesis and other work of Bourdieusians, undergraduates from working-class origins are more likely than middle-class counterparts to feel 'out of place' in the field of HE, and thus experience hysteresis (Bathmaker *et al.*, 2016; Reay, 2017; 1998; Abrahams and Ingram, 2013; Khan, 2011; Reay, Crozier and Clayton, 2010, 2009). For Bourdieu, hysteresis is a temporal 'lag' or lack of congruence between habitus and the 'new' or 'altered' field or position in the field which leaves agents feeling like a "fish out of water" (1992, p.127). Thus, working-class undergraduate students realise their sense of 'ill-fit' with the field of HE through their interactions with it.

However, to add to this explanation, the habitus is considered permeable (Reay, 2004). For example, when the habitus encounters the field of education, and the acquisition of cultural capital occurs, the newly increased volume of this capital affects the conditions of the habitus. While this is often an expected occurrence for middle-class students, (i.e. they expect to achieve 'success' in their education and go on to university), the working-class student (who has less confidence in 'achieving' in their education and is less likely to be raised with the expectation of HE attendance) experiences a disjunct between the habitus and the field. Empirical research on this matter was discussed in chapter three. This disjunct causes what Bourdieu (2007; 2000) called a cleft habitus or habitus clivé, which was defined in chapter two.

However, there are disagreements on what constitutes a 'cleft habitus'. Desmarchelier (1999, p.282), for example, described owning such a habitus as having "developed new facets of self, a new habitus where the individual sparkles more brilliantly and reflects different 'aspects of themselves". On the other hand, the 'new habitus' concept is not one which Bourdieu himself would ascribe to as he saw the cleft habitus "divided against itself" (1999, p.511). Ingram (2018; 2011) subscribes to neither as she sees the cleft habitus as defined by being affected by processes of 'habitus tugs'. Based on the findings in this thesis and my personal experiences, I am more inclined to align myself to Ingram's view and, through considering the gendered expectations of working-class women, I see that the fractures within the cleft habitus are not only by class inequalities but compounded by gendered ones too (Bentley, 2018a; 2018b; 2017b).

As outlined above, habitus and capital have a close relationship in that they, plus 'field', constitute practice (Bourdieu, 1977). Next, I turn to outline Bourdieu's forms of capital.

4.2.2 Forms of capital

Bourdieu saw it as "impossible to account for the structure and functioning of the social world unless one reintroduces capital in all its forms" (1986, p.15). Thus, Bourdieu's concept of 'capital' goes beyond the one recognised in economic theory to understand "wider systems of exchanges whereby assets of different kinds are transformed and exchanged within complex networks or circuits within and across different fields" (Moore, 2008, p.102). For Bourdieu, possession of different types and volumes of capital plays a significant role in defining an agent's class membership. That is, he saw the distribution of such capitals:

> "determines position in the power relations constituting the field of power and also determines the strategies available for use in these struggles- 'birth', 'fortune' and 'talent' in a past age, now economic capital and educational capital- are simultaneously instruments of power and stakes in the struggle for power."
> (Bourdieu, 1984, p.315-316)

For Bourdieu (1986), capital takes various forms. First, capital can be 'objectified', that is, it is materially represented in the form of clothes, books and artwork. The second expression is an 'embodied' version, that is, through physical and audible features such as stance, accent and dialect. The third form of capital is a non-material one which includes dispositions and attitudes, all of which are held in the habitus.

In their specific forms, there are various 'types' of capital, which are objectified, embodied and have a relational connection with the habitus. These are economic capital, cultural capital, social capital, symbolic capital, scientific capital, linguistic capital, educational (otherwise referred to as 'scholastic') capital, and the list goes on. More recently academics have sought to extend this conceptual list by conceiving other capitals, particularly 'gendered' forms of capital such as emotional capital[34] and erotic capital[35]. I do not have the space to touch on all relevant capitals here; thus, I explore the ones most appropriate to this study, which are the first four in the list above. First, I explore 'economic capital'.

[34] Reay (2005, p.57) contributed to the development of the concept of 'emotional capital', a relational concept which works in conjunction with Bourdieu's other forms of capital which focusses on the "intense emotional engagement" of mothers in their child's education. Reay's (2005) journal article showed that emotional capital can be understood as gendered capital to which social class also plays a role.

[35] 'Erotic capital' is defined by Hakim (2011) through seven elements which she postulates that women in particular are best positioned to capitalise on: sex appeal, social skills, beauty, 'liveliness and vitality', fertility, sexuality and 'social presentation'.

Economic capital

For Bourdieu, the 'economic capital' an agent has consists of more than their wages or salary; it also includes income from stocks, shares and assets. Economic capital is wealth which has either been "inherited or generated from interactions between the individual and the economy" (Reay, 2005, p.57) and women are more likely to have less of it than men (Green, 2015).

Of all the capitals, economic capital is considered to be 'relatively stable', especially in comparison with 'symbolic capital' which is markedly more precarious (Bourdieu, 1990; 1977), as discussed below. Economic capital creates objective differences between social classes and these objective differences then find expression in symbolic space, which creates added visible distinctions between groups and agents. For Bourdieu (1987, p.12), these distinctions are objectively at their most potent and clear-cut "between agents situated at extreme ends of the distributions, they are evidently less effective in the intermediate zones of the space in question" where a "fuzziness" of relationship between economic practices and positions are at their most pronounced.

Though Bourdieu noted in 1996 that the relative weight of cultural capital had been growing exponentially, this, he states, "in no way effaces the ability of economic capital to propagate itself autonomically" (Bourdieu, 1996, p.xiii) as it feeds directly into educational and occupational opportunities, cultural practices and embodied forms of capital. Due to this, economic capital is considered to be the "root of all other types of capital" (Bourdieu, 1986, p.24) which can then be 'transubstantiated'. That is, it can present itself in "the immaterial form of cultural or social capital" (Bourdieu, 2006, p.106) and denial of such is what Bourdieu refers to as a process of 'misrecognition'. At that:

> "these transformed, disguised forms of economic capital, never entirely reducible to that definition, produce their most specific effects only to the extent that they conceal (not least from their possessors) the fact that economic capital is at their root."
> (Bourdieu, 1986, p.24)

That is, the capital which is produced from economic capital is most efficient when its route tread from economic capital is masked.

Recent work from Ingram and Allen (2018) demonstrated on way in which this works in the graduate labour market. They found that through attempts to access high-status occupations, graduates' cultural forms of capital (which at their root is economic capital) go through a conversion process in the interview setting. Through this process,

though they appear to be engaging in "seemingly objective assessments", graduate employers assess the composition of a graduate's capital via subjective value judgements (Ingram and Allen, 2018, p.737). Socially structured capital is read and valued as congruent or not with 'objective' criteria, as having the 'right' or 'wrong' skills, knowledge and personal traits for the job. For example, those who have the scholastic capital of a degree from an elite university could be viewed as providing "strong educational credentials" (Ingram and Allen, 2018, p.736). It is at these points that class, gender and racialised bias towards the privileged "is naturalised through processes of social magic" (Ingram and Allen, 2018, p.736).

Bourdieu (1984) himself found that having significant economic capital allowed agents greater access to 'higher level' work in certain fields. He found that the reproduction of social standing for "industrial and commercial employers at the higher level, craftsmen and shopkeepers at the intermediate level" depended on economic capital which was usually inherited (Bourdieu, 1984, p.115). Whereas reproduction of social standing for "higher-education and secondary teachers at the higher level, primary teachers at the intermediate level" most often depended on intergenerational transmission and development of cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1984, p.115).

However, while economic capital contributes to the distribution of agents and groups in the social universe, reproducing social inequalities, it does not act alone. For Bourdieu, and other class analysists who are privy to cultural analysis, cultural and social capital are paramount to distribution patterns (Bradley *et al.,* 2017; Reay, 2018; 2017; 1998; Bathmaker *et al.,* 2016; Burke, 2016a; Savage, 2007; McKenzie, 2015a; Lawler, 1999; Skeggs, 1997). Beyond economic indicators, agents occupy different positions in different fields, and engage in different trajectories, develop alternate aspirations, 'achieve' their perceptions of 'success' or 'failure' based on forms of social and cultural capital too. I now turn to discuss 'cultural capital', which is argued to be one of Bourdieu's best-known concepts (Reay, 2005) and is frequently employed in education research.

Cultural capital

For Bourdieu (1986), cultural capital exists in three forms which works to codify agents and groups. The first is an 'objectified' state in the form of cultural items (classic cars, clothing, books, etc.) and the second is in the 'embodied' state "in the form of long-lasting dispositions of the mind and body" (such as knowing how to read music or having a particular accent and dialect, etc.) (Bourdieu, 1986, p.17). The third form is

'institutionalised' cultural capital. This is acquired most often through gaining the recognition of educational institutions and their decreeing of credentials and awards to agents. For Bourdieu (1977, p.187), "academic qualifications are to cultural capital what money is to economic capital". At that, different institutions which bestow qualifications hold different cachets and thus are valued differently in the labour market.

For example, broadly speaking, in the UK a degree from a 'post-1992' university such as the University of the West of England (UWE) has, relative to a degree from an 'elite' university such as University of Bristol (UoB), less prestige in the social universe.[36] Though the symbolic and material profits of academic qualifications depend on the scarcity of such qualifications, as outlined in chapter three, generally such a credential (or 'scholastic capital') from an 'elite' university is valued higher in the labour market and is more likely to provide access to 'high' wages and 'high' status occupations than those acquired from post-1992 universities.

As economic capital sits at the root of cultural capital, through economic capital, agents and groups can purchase resources and 'time', which is key to the accumulation of cultural capital. For Bourdieu (1996), these two forms of capital are fundamental to structuring, and distributing agents into, social space. Particularly through "the educational institution, which plays a critical role in the reproduction of the distribution of cultural capital and thus in the reproduction of the structure of social space, which has become a central stake in the struggle for the monopoly on dominant positions" (Bourdieu, 1996, p.5).

Education

Cultural capital first presented itself in theoretical form to Bourdieu (1986) as he sought to explain how children from different social class origins attained unequal scholastic achievements. He found that academic 'success' was 'achieved' along class lines with the privileged most often obtaining higher qualifications in the academic market (Bourdieu, 1986).

Not only did Bourdieu find that children who receive 'high' economic investment do better than those whose families cannot afford such an input (i.e. through private schooling and personal tutoring), those who receive 'high' cultural investment do better too. This for Bourdieu (1986, p.17) implied a "break with the presuppositions inherent both in the common sense view, which sees academic success or failure as an effect of

[36] I define 'elite' and 'post-1992' Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) in chapter two and provide characterising information on UWE and UoB in chapter six.

natural aptitudes, and in human capital theories". Further, he said that these theories had "let slip the best hidden and socially most determinant educational investment, namely, the domestic transmission of cultural capital" (Bourdieu, 1986, p.17).

These scholastic investment strategies and acts of cultural transmission are, for Bourdieu, key to social reproduction. Essentially, this is because those raised in 'high' cultural capital families find it is easier to acquire further capital because they are socialised to embody the behaviours, 'knowledge' and values that the social universe (i.e. education and the workplace) rewards. Like economic capital, cultural capital is simultaneously an "instrument of power" (through which those from 'dominant class backgrounds' can maintain their dominance) and a "stake in the struggle for power" (to maintain and reproduce such dominance) (Bourdieu, 1984, p.316).

As the family is considered a key site for cultural capital transmission and women tend to bear a greater responsibility for raising children, it is unsurprising that Bourdieu (1986) saw the labour of transmission of capital as unequally distributed to mothers. As Lovell (2004, p.50) put it, for Bourdieu, women are "key functionaries and agents in the capital holding strategies of families as regards cultural, social and symbolic capital".

Social capital

There are various theorisations on what constitutes social capital. Putnam (2000, p.35) defines it as a "feature of social organisations, such as networks, norms and trust, that facilitate action and co-operation for mutual benefit".[37] Putnam's (2000) concept of social capital has relatively little to do with the family compared to Bourdieu's where the family is one of the most important social processes through which social capital is developed (Reay, 2005).

For Bourdieu (1986, p.21), social capital is both the "actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalised relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition". In other words, social capital is the "connections and group memberships" (Bourdieu, 1987, p.4) of an agent. These may exist in practical and material senses, in symbolic exchanges, and maybe socially instituted (Bourdieu, 1987). They may be developed consciously or unconsciously, on a formal or informal basis, via an individual agent or a collective/group/family, for the

[37] Putnam sees two types of social capital: the first is 'bonding' social capital, this takes place in "inward looking" groups which "reinforces exclusive identities", for example, a "church-based women's reading group" (2000, p.22). The second, 'bridging' social capital networks which are "outward looking and encompass people across diverse social cleavages", for this Putnam (2000, p.22) gives the example of youth service groups.

purposes of investment in the aim to establish or reproduce social relationships (Bourdieu, 1987; 1986). While social capital can be inherited through the family, an agent can also develop their social capital from economic capital. This process for Bourdieu:

> "presupposes a specific labour, i.e., an apparently gratuitous expenditure of time, attention, care, concern, which, as is seen in the endeavour to personalise a gift, has the effect of transfiguring the purely monetary import of the exchange and by the same token, the very meaning of the exchange. From a narrowly economic standpoint, this effort is bound to be seen as pure wastage, but in the terms of the logic of social exchanges, it is a solid investment, the profits of which will appear, in the long run, in monetary or other form."
> (1986, p.25)

Simply put, social capital is who an agent knows, who owes them a favour, as well as how they use their network of social contacts to reproduce social standing or gain a positional advantage. It is inherited, but it can be accrued, though this often requires economic capital. All agents have social capital though it manifests in 'classed' forms and as a consequence also has different value in different fields at different times.

In his work on graduate employment trajectories in the Northern Irish context, Burke (2016b, p.13) defined having 'high' social capital as when an agent can operationalise their social contacts "to progress in a particular field and increase or reproduce their life chances". On the other hand, while those with 'low' social capital may have many contacts, these only led to low-status jobs in Burke's (2016b) research. That is, Burke (2016b) found that upward social mobility is not usually experienced through operationalising 'low' social capital. Thus, when engaging with the concept of social capital in this work, it was vital for me to think beyond the *quantity* of social capital and consider the *processes* of mobilising, and the *outcome* of social capital drawing on.

Symbolic capital

Upon entering a field, all forms of capital held by an agent are automatically transformed into 'symbolic capital', such capital is the symbolic form the "different types of capital take once they are perceived and recognized as legitimate" (Bourdieu, 1987, p.4). Thus, through the process of transformation 'misrecognition' can occur, for example, an agent's capital can be misrecognised as their 'reputation'. For Bourdieu (1990; 1977), this form of capital is, relative to the other forms of capital, the most 'powerful' but also the most 'precarious'.

In the context of this PhD research, institutionalised cultural capital in the form of an undergraduate degree from an ‘elite’ university (UoB), compared to the same credential from a post-1992 university (UWE), is generally recognised as ‘better’ because the reputation of the university is synonymous with prestige, selectivity and distinction, as found in research discussed in chapter three. Those with credentials from UoB are bestowed with ‘high’ symbolic capital and thus are considered as among the most-favoured candidates in the employment market.

For Bourdieu, mobilising economic, cultural and social capital to attain symbolic capital is a ‘game’ played by all agents and groups in the social universe in the aim to attain or reproduce social advantage. However, this is a highly complex process. Converting one capital into symbolic capital in order to climb up the “social ladder”, as Bourdieu (1984, p.125) refers to it, is not a “continuous, linear, homogeneous, one-dimensional” move. This would imply that capital can be reduced to a single standard, when in actuality “the exchange rates vary in accordance with the power relation between the holders of the different forms of capital” (Bourdieu, 1984, p.125). Further,

> “the exchange rate of the different kinds of capital is one of the fundamental stakes in the struggles between class fractions whose power and privileges are linked to one or the other of these types. In particular, this exchange rate is a stake in the struggle over the dominant principle of domination (economic capital, cultural capital or social capital), which goes on at all times between the different fractions of the dominant class”.
> (Bourdieu, 1984, p.125)

Finally, in Bourdieu’s (1977) formula for the ‘theory of practice’, ‘field’ is the final element which, when considered alongside the sum of habitus and capital, informs practice.

4.2.3 Field

Bourdieu’s field theory conceives of the social universe as divided into multiple distinct but overlapping and interrelated social fields of practice. For example, one macro social field referred to in this study is the University of the West of England, within this there are meso social fields, such as subject departments, and micro social fields, such as seminar groups. These fields are separate but never completely autonomous from one another and are structured by their relationships with one another and other fields, particularly with the “field of power” (Bourdieu, 1996, p.261).

The concept of field allows for space to explore both structure and agency. Thus, social fields are not neutral and are inseparable from larger social structures and the habituses

of those who operate within it. As Burke (2016b, p.16) puts it, “the field is not disconnected but, rather, an active site where both structure and agency play a role”. For Bourdieu (1995, p.39),

> “a field is a field of forces within which the agents occupy positions that statistically determine the positions they will take with respect to the field, these position-takings being aimed either at conserving or transforming the structure of relations of forces that is constitutive of the field.”

In Bourdieu’s view, most agents ‘play’ subscribing to the ‘rules of the game’ with the conscious or unconscious intention to ‘conserve’ the structures and practices of the field. Particularly in these cases, the field is referred to as a ‘battlefield’ by Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992, p.17) as most agents operate in the aim to establish more power. Usually, those who operate in this manner are socially dominant and view ‘the game’ as functional to perpetuating their domination and thus want to retain its operations. In the context of this thesis, this could be explained as: the majority of privately educated students and their families vying for a place at the UoB would not want the institution to restrict their intake of privately educated students from 33 per cent (as it was in 2018/19, Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) (2019)) to the national average of 7 per cent (Sutton Trust, 2019). This is because this would restrict the family’s chances of reproducing their advantageous social standing via this route by three-quarters. Nevertheless, there are other agents and groups who aim to ‘transform’ such structures and the ‘doxa’ of the field.

However, actions within the field are more complex than this as within each field there are agents who have more power than others (this is based on the ‘matching’ of capital and habitus to those dominant in the field in question) and thus have more power in sustaining or re-forming the doxa (Bourdieu, 1996; Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992). As well as this, agents demonstrate different competitive strategies, or levels of “practical mastery”, through which they strive to reproduce or obtain more power (Bourdieu, 1996, p.39). Those with the capital and habitus most congruent to the field are in a better position to establish this power.

In summary, while the power within and between fields structure agents’ and groups’ behaviours, their courses of action and strategies of ‘play’ are based on a number of factors such as: their dispositions, aspirations and experiences (their habitus), their volume and composition of capital, their current position and their interactions and relationships with other agents in the field. The vast majority of agents compete to maintain, acquire or reproduce their power. In order to remain in the field, the ‘rules of

the game' (the 'doxa') need to be followed, otherwise social exclusion and loss of power occur.

The two macro social fields included in this thesis are the (i) English higher education system (meso fields of the University of the West of England and the University of Bristol) and (ii) the UK graduate employment market. As explained by Burke, within these two macro fields:

> "there is both struggle and competition over resources and positions; however, the dominant members of these fields are in an advantageous position, via habitus and capital, making it more likely they will be able to reproduce their own privilege and influential positions".
> (2016b, p.16)

4.2.4 Capital and distribution of agents

Agent distribution into social 'categories' occurs via a three-step process. First, they are distributed "according to the global *volume* of capital they possess" (Bourdieu, 1987, p.4, italics in original) and second, "according to the *composition* of their capital" (Bourdieu, 1987, p.4, italics in original). That is, the volume of capital held by an agent is comprised of different 'types' of capital which have a role in the distribution of agents, economic and cultural capital play a significant role at this point. Third, "according to the evolution in time of the volume and composition of their capital, that is, according to their *trajectory* in social space" (Bourdieu, 1987, p.4, italics in original). Thus, agents and groups of agents are assigned "a position, a location or a precise class of neighbouring positions" within social spaces and are defined by their relative positions to one another (Bourdieu, 1987, p.4, italics in original). The differences between groups of agents, or rather, social classes, for Bourdieu:

> "derive from the overall volume of capital, understood as a set of actually usable resources and powers- economic capital, cultural capital and also social capital. The distribution of the different classes (and class fractions) thus runs from those who are best provided with both economic and cultural capital to those who are most deprived in both respects."
> (1984, p.114)

These various forms of capital are held and mobilised differently by different groups to establish and reproduce social standing. For example, Bourdieu remarked on those who were employed in 'professional', high-income occupations as tending to originate from what he referred to as the "dominant class" (1984, p.114). Access to these occupations tended to require a person to have high qualifications (scholastic capital/credentials), to

know the ‘right people’ (social capital), to consume high-value, high-brow cultural and material goods and display an embodied confidence (cultural capital) (Bourdieu, 1984). The volume and composition of the ‘professional’s’ capital were found to be “opposed in almost all respects to the office workers” from working- and middle-class origins who had lower qualifications and consumed relatively much less and different types of culture and material goods (Bourdieu, 1984, p.114). At that, the unskilled workers who originated “almost exclusively” from ‘unskilled’ and working-class backgrounds, consumed very little and had few qualifications, if any at all and had the lowest incomes (Bourdieu, 1984, p.114). However, it is essential to note that, “social ‘reality’ presents itself neither as completely determined, nor as completely indeterminate”, but it is strongly structured because it presents itself as via “agents and institutions endowed with different properties which have very unequal probabilities of appearing in combinations” (Bourdieu, 1987, p.11). Simply put, young people from a ‘dominant class’ background, who are more likely to consume high-value, high-brow cultural and material goods, more likely to be codified for, and achieve, success in education and are more likely to be then found in ‘professional’ occupations. For Bourdieu, this trajectory is not determined, but it is likely. However, culture consumption practices are more complex than this, as Savage *et al.* (2013) found. They argue that the middle and upper-classes have become more “liberal”, “tolerant” and “omnivorous” in that they are more likely to be “keen to partake of both highbrow and popular cultural forms” (Savage *et al.*, 2013, p.226).

Upon analysis of the research data, an agent’s habitus, forms of capital and the various fields in which they operate need to be simultaneously and consistently considered in light of one another. This approach is key to doing social research as a Bourdieusian.

4.3 Social class and this thesis

For Bourdieu, class ‘categories’ change over time. While there is such change, the habitus of different social groups are consistently ordered hierarchically, understood relationally and marked unequally. Thus, class remains central to the lived experiences of agents. However, due to the changing nature of class categories, they need to be continually re-established/re-considered over time as parameters and identities of class shift constantly, despite their “identity of names” (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1990, p.232).

As this is the case, upon beginning this research I did not blindly accept that the fifteen participants were ‘working-class’ based on the assessment of researchers working on the first phase of the ‘original project’ (PP1). I embarked on my own assessment

process based on the insight I was able to gain to their habitus, their forms of capital and how they mobilised such capital through analysing their family background, economic resources, educational experiences and trajectories and their aspirations for, and dispositions towards, the future. I found these women to be 'working-class' because they:

- were the first in their immediate family to attend university, and most often they were the first in their extended family too;
- All but one participant had one or both parent(s) who worked in positions which fell into National Statistics Socio-economic Classification (NS-SEC) classes 4-8 (Office for National Statistics (ONS), 2018a);[38]
- Their transitions into university caused a level of anxiety for most of their parents, most often based on financial concern;
- Some of the women experienced significant economic struggle in their childhood;
- Most received no financial support from their families while they studied at university as they were not in a position to provide such support;
- All took out a Student Finance England (SFE) loan to cover the cost of their tuition fees, and most received a maintenance grant and/or a university bursary, all of which were means-tested;[39]
- Most attended a state school, and the two who attended grammar school felt they were 'outsiders' in these institutions, a common experience among the few working-class students that access a grammar school (Ingram, 2018; 2011; Reay, 2017);
- University was not considered the 'next natural step', which is often the case among the middle-classes (Bathmaker *et al.,* 2016; Burke, 2016a; Reay, David and Ball, 2005);
- While most held 'high aspirations' for their education (in that they wanted to achieve a 2:1 or a first at undergraduate level), these 'levels of aspiration' did not transcend into work-based discussions where they spoke with relatively less

[38] See appendix six (p.259) for more details on the employment patterns of the parents.
[39] This gives some insight into the economic income of the family household as the women were entitled to a SFE grant of £2,906 if their parents earned less than £25,000 and a partial grant if their parents earned up to £50,020 (Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, 2010). A policy which was scrapped in 2015, for more information see Osborne (2015).

confidence in achieving 'high status' and/or their aspired careers, unlike the middle-class graduates in Burke's (2016a) work.

In summary, these points, as well as ones explored in analytic chapters 7 to 9, led me to position all fifteen women as 'working-class', just as those working on the first phase of the 'original project' (PP1) had. However, despite a sense of unity among the group, there were visible fractions within it. I knew that I would not find overwhelming homogeneity among the group, as class identities are fractured (Bradley, 2015). However, as Bourdieu (1993, p.46) notes, while "no two individual *habitus* are identical, there are classes of experience, and therefore classes of *habitus*". Thinking along these lines, I found two 'working-class habituses' among the group of participants where there was a clear split in the economic, social and cultural capital held and mobilised by the women. Thus, I was able to go further in identifying them into two different groups and positioned each of the women as either 'firmly-working-class' (FWC) or 'upper-working-class' (UWC), the characteristics of which are as follows:

- On average, the firmly-working-class women (n=11) were raised in the 30 per cent most deprived areas in the UK (Department for Communities and Local Government, 2011). On the other hand, the upper-working-class women (n=4) were, on average, raised in the 20 per cent least deprived areas in the UK (Department for Communities and Local Government, 2011).
- On average, the mothers and fathers of the firmly-working-class women worked in analytic class 5: Lower technical and/or supervisory occupations, whereas the parents of the upper-working-class women most often worked in jobs analytic class 2: Lower professional and higher technical occupation (ONS, 2018a).
- Most of the firmly-working-class women self-identified at the beginning of university as 'working-class'. However, two out of eleven saw themselves as having 'some middle-class attributes' too. On the other hand, two of the upper-working-class women saw themselves as 'working/lower-middle-class'. The other two saw themselves as 'middle-class' though, after accessing UoB they reflected and came to view themselves as coming from a working-class/upper-working-class backgrounds.
- The only women to discuss their parents struggle to access suitable housing, benefits and employment were the firmly-working-class women.

Further distinctions between the two subsets of 'working-class' women are established in the analytic chapters as I consider their: motivations to go to university, processes of

career identity development, post-graduation 'choices' and work practices, how they are used or are able to use precarious employment, their patterns of geographical mobility and their social mobility.

4.4 Conclusion

The theoretical tools which I have outlined here and theories around the distribution of agents/groups into the social universe comprise my theoretical framework. This is employed as I move forward to excavate the hidden routes through which social reproduction occurs and privilege and disadvantage are bestowed on social agents. Next, I outline the methodology and methods employed in this PhD research.

Chapter five: Methodology & Methods

Here I outline the methodology and methods which sit at the core of this research project. Through doing this, I critically consider the effects of my choices, assumptions, theories and ideas on the women whom took part in this research. In addition, I take particular concern with the ethics of this project and the implications of my actions on the participants and the research process. After reading three key publications which formed my ethical approach (British Sociological Association (BSA), 2017; British Education Research Association (BERA), 2011; American Sociological Association (ASA), 2008), I chose to take a holistic approach to the ethical considerations present at all stages of the research process. This choice is reflected in how I have written this chapter as while there are specific sections which are concerned with the ethical considerations and implications of this research, these are also interwoven into the remaining sections of this chapter. These sections are: locating, recruiting and 'class'ifying the working-class women, the research design process, my approach and the techniques employed in the interviewing, analysis and dissemination processes.

First, as the construction of a methodology is known to be a personal one (Creswell, 2003; Goulding, 1998; Stern, 1994), it is essential to outline which philosophical positions I align with and critically consider what I view as the effects of these in practice.

5.1 Philosophical positions

While it is said that there is a level of difficulty in identifying one's self within a philosophical position, to reconstruct a Wittgensteinian phrase (1921, cited by Perloff, 1999): I found that I did not have to climb up many ladders to locate philosophical positions which describe my ways of knowing and being.

From an early point in this process, I knew I was approaching this research process with a critical worldview and with the intention to *do* what I view as socially-just work, to uncover how social structures work to (re)produce power and privilege. Due to this, I quickly discovered my alliance with the critical theory research paradigm. While there are those who take the position that sociology ought not to make a judgement over what is 'just' because, as it trades on its status as a science, the primary output should be *factual*, not *evaluative* knowledge (Hammersley, 2017; White, 2013), I do not agree. Along with Troyna and Carrington (1989, p.219), I believe that sociological research should commit to "fostering change" and as a sociologist, like Bourdieu, I hope I am in:

> "good fortune to be able to devote (my) life to the study of the social word, (I) cannot stand aside, neutral and indifferent from the struggles in the world."
> (Bourdieu, 2003, p.11)

This, the 'social justice' approach, is common among the work of others situated within the critical paradigm (Fenwick, 2003; Fournier and Grey, 2000; Barnett, 1997; Kincheloe and McLaren, 1994), and like these academics throughout my work I have:

- Included sociological theories and literature which also desired progressive social change, I:
  - aimed to 'de-naturalise' conversations around social inequalities and disrupted mechanisms which desire social order maintenance by critically considering positions which were considered 'natural' and queried how these came to be perceived as such;
  - recognised and challenged power through unpicking the structures which have silenced working-class women in particular social fields;
- Rejected developing "spectator knowledge" (Maslow, 1966, p.50), instead I adopted the "conscious partiality" (Mies, 1983, p.122) approach. More than a subjective approach, conscious partiality is achieved through identification, familiarisation and meaningful interest in the lives of research participants. In order to fulfil this, I have acknowledged my changing social position and the effects of this on the research process;
- Fostered in-depth conversations and reflective dialogue with each interviewee;
- Developed critical insights into the themes which were present in this work and analysed the working-class women's narratives from a multitude of perspectives while striving for independent thinking and judgement.

5.1.1 Doing feminist research

Within my critical worldview stands the feminist epistemological position. The definition of a 'feminist' which I align with is that of Adichie's:

> "A person who believes in the social, political and economic equality of the sexes, […] a man or a woman who says, 'Yes, there is a problem with gender as it is today and we must fix it."
> (2014, pp.47-48)

The fundamental aim of feminism is to unpick and alleviate the oppressions distributed by the system of 'patriarchy', a concept which explains the systemic arrangements which maintain the social dominance of men (Bradley, 2015). Patriarchy is generally understood to be a:

> "set of personal, social and economic relationships that enable men to have power over women and the services they provide."
> (Strober, 1984, p.147)

However, departing from this 'stable' concept, I, like Walby (1990, p.20), see patriarchy as a more fluid and complex structural system through which *some* men "dominate, oppress and exploit" *some* women, rather than simply perceiving all men to have power over all women. This approach sees patriarchy as a system through which all genders experience a degree of hurt when one cannot pass as ascribing to hegemonic masculinity, a system of power which works in tandem with others, such as class. Also, like Walby (1986, p.51), I see patriarchy as both a "system of interrelated social structures" (such as domestic labour, paid work, the state, culture, sexuality and violence). To go further, I also see that the degree of hurt (or violence) enacted on the individual is not only affected by their gender and social position but also, in line with Bourdieusian thinking, is dependent on the field and 'relationships' between agents in that field at that time. So, while I see 'patriarchy' as having a somewhat 'fixed' structure, it is a concept which can be used in its adjectival form for there are patriarchal ideologies and practices which are "active" (Bradley, 1996, p.94).

Additionally, my feminist position includes the values of socialism, and so consequently, I stand alongside those who work to eradicate capitalism, the policies and social discourse of neoliberalism[40] and the social dominance of the bourgeois and elite over the working-classes. This aligns me with the dual systems feminist theory paradigm which sees that there is more than a singular experience lived by 'women' (Doucet and Mauthner, 2006) and explores the classed experiences of women, observing and questioning how the coexisting, autonomous vectors of domination of patriarchy and capitalism interact to produce the disadvantage working-class women face (Fraser, 2013; Walby, 1986; Hartmann, 1979, 1976). Like myself, Walby is most inclined to identify with this position as she sees that "patriarchy is never the only mode in a society but always exists in articulation with another" (1986, p.50). I go one step further and am of the position that patriarchy works in tandem with multiple social systems, not just 'another'.

[40] As it is viewed as a slippery, unstable concept (Venugopal, 2015), the definition of 'neoliberalism' which I endorse is Larner's (2000): Neoliberalism is first a capitalist, free-market economy policy framework, which purports deregulation and privatisation, and which transfers market values into all aspects of life. Second, it is an ideological framework which promotes individualism, competition, consumerism, commodification and a freedom of 'choice'.

As well as this, the 'dual systems' approach sees that women are disadvantaged as a consequence of their roles in the household and the workplace (Hartmann, 1979, 1976). This form of feminism does not award prominence to research which considers the public over the private lives, or visa-versa, of working-class women. Instead, this feminism sees this approach would be negligent in the endeavour to fully understand both the paid and unpaid, recognised and unrecognised labour exploitation of these women.

Feminism in practice

In practice, while there is no such thing as a 'feminist method', there are multiple feminist approaches, positions, frameworks and lines of enquiry. In order to investigate my research topic from a dual systems feminist standpoint, I had to "understand how and why gender makes a difference to knowing" (Grasswick and Webb, 2002, p.186) and consider how the power system of social class interacted and affected this. To achieve this, I had to be in keeping with to those who conduct research from a feminist epistemological position (Letherby, 2003; Oakley, 1998; Skeggs, 1997; Calás and Smircich 1996; Harding, 1991; Mies, 1983) while also considering the place of social class, and so through my work I have:

- 'Studied up' not 'down', viewing the participant as the 'knower' and the most integral part of the process;
- Rejected approaches and methods which position working-class women as objects to be controlled by the procedures of research;
- Centralised working-class women's voices throughout the process by prioritising the collection of qualitative data;
- Avoided the use of inflexible pre-set categories in my methods as this emphasises already accepted knowledge which consequently silences working-class women;
- Made a conscious effort to reduce the feeling of exploitation, e.g. by giving as well as receiving throughout the research process;
- Considered the effects of myself as the researcher;
- Desired for the emancipatory goals of feminism to be actualised and contribute to the progression of the movement by providing evidence into how social realities and agents are gendered and classed.

5.1.2 Post-positivism ontological position

Along with much contemporary scholarship in the fields of Sociology of Education and Sociology of Employment, this work is situated in one of the realist ontological positions. Loosely, realism sees that there is an external reality which exists independent of an individual's beliefs and understandings of the social world (Ritchie *et al.,* 2014; Gordon, 2009). While those who perhaps ordinarily identify as a realist do so from a positivist's position, I moved beyond this to take a post-positivist stance. As with other researchers who are in the critical research paradigm, throughout the research process I faced the line of tension between ontological realism and relativism, usually perceived to be two mutually exclusive categories (Burr, 2003). I understand this 'paradigm war' to be a socially constructed dualism. Consequently, rather than embarking on the task of identifying with one of these binary positions, as a critical realist, I took a position which works to address the theoretical and methodological gaps between the two.

In opposition to the idealist ontological position, which holds that reality is multiple and entirely socially constructed, both the realist and critical realist's ontological position is that there is one reality, though the two differ in their positions on how reality can be obtained (Gordon, 2009). The realist sees this one reality as that which is observable, to realists anything outside of detectable phenomena cannot be considered 'factual'. While I, along with other critical realists, accept there is one reality, we perceive this reality to be stratified through multiple layers and interpretations (Scott, 2005; Bhaskar, 1975). Critical realism sees that while reality is available for discovery, it is "emergent, transformational, systematically open, becoming, processual, and often relational" (Fleetwood, 2013, p.11) and, therefore, difficult to grasp.

Bhaskar's (1975) seminal work in the field theorised that there are three primary ontological layers to critical realism which he referred to as 'Transcendental Realism Theory'. These were (i) the Real, (ii) the Actual and (iii) the Empirical:

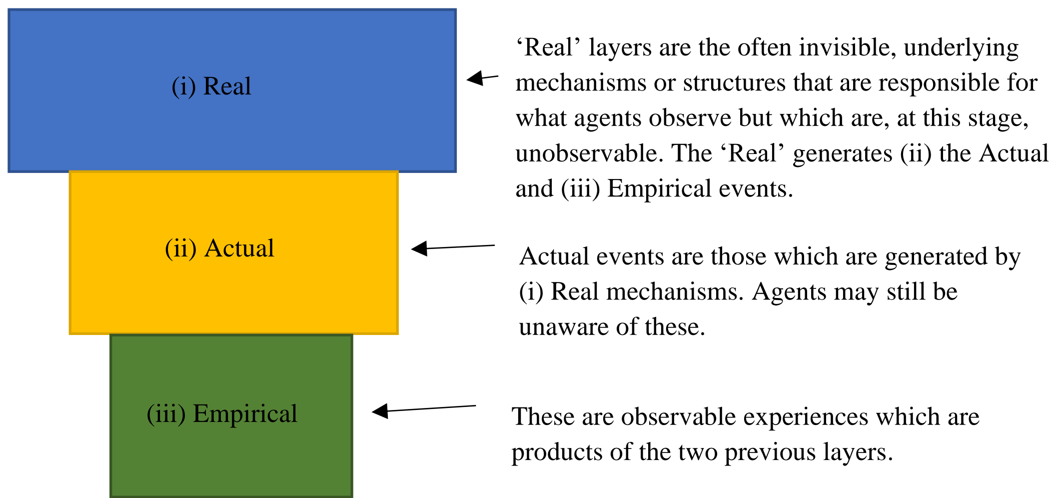

Figure three: Bhaskar's (1975) three primary layers of Transcendental Realism Theory recreated from Mingers and Willcocks (2004)

Bhaskar (1975) sees that in order to conduct social research, researchers must disambiguate the layers of the (iii) Empirical, the (ii) Actual and the (i) Real. In practice, this format is of use to a Bourdieusian such as myself who within this work has searched for the links between objective mechanisms and structures and subjective experiences to conceptualise phenomena, utilising theories of doxa, habitus, field, and capital. An example of this from within this study would be: Austerity is a Real social structure. Although 'austerity' is formless, its products (the Actual) are observable but not in a manner visible to all agents; an example of an Actual event, in this case, are the spending cuts made by the Conservative government to the welfare budget since 2010 (H M Treasury, 2010). Consequently, there are the Empirical experiences of the working-class women graduates in this study navigating an austerity-ridden employment market; these are consequences of the Real and the Actual.

As with other Bourdieusian and critical realist scholars, I see agents and structures as distinct but related (Archer *et al.,* 2016; Fleetwood, 2013; Bourdieu, 2000, 1990; Bhaskar, 1975). I have not separated the research participants from the social mechanisms they encounter as I do not see them as individualised agents, unlike a standard 'realist'. However, at the same time, I do not see the paths of agents/social groups as emphatically determined, culturally or 'naturally', but instead are interconnected in their effects on one another, fluid and "socially constructed and constructing" (Sayer, 1997, p.454). I have concerned myself with drawing out causation through unpicking the interrelationships between structure, agency, with an overall aim of charting the ontological character of social reality (Archer *et al*., 2016) and documenting the empirical effects of these.

5.1.3 Epistemological position: Knowledge is relational

To this, as with other critical realists, while I see reality as existing independent of those who are observing it, what and how we 'know' is relative to the histories, cultures and dispositions we encounter (Archer *et al.,* 2016; Bhaskar, 1975). Further, like critical realists, I also see that this knowledge is only attained through the interpretations and perceptions held by individuals (Archer *et al.,* 2016; Bhaskar, 1975). And so, I gathered the "portrayal of reality as it is experienced and expressed by those whom" took part in the research (Shaffir, 1999, p.684) with the understanding that I was unlikely to discover one absolute 'truth' as 'the truth' is epistemologically fragile (Fleetwood, 2013; Scott, 2005).

Consequently, as recommended by Cohen and Crabtree (2006), any knowledge claims that have been made in this thesis have been critically considered from multiple of sources (i.e. reflexively, by my colleagues and peers, and others in the research community) in order to for me to have reached the 'best' and most refined understanding of reality.

While primacy is awarded to ontological considerations in the work of critical realists who work to uncover what is contained with the layers of the Real, Actual and Empirical (Bhaskar, 1975), epistemological considerations are also fundamental. This is because Bhaskar's (1975) framework works only when subjective accounts are gathered, analysed and considered in relation to the three layers. On top of the subjective experiences gathered from interview participants are the subjective experiences and systems of beliefs of the researcher (Blaikie, 2007) and so I have had to account for the impact of my position as the researcher in this study, a consequence which I am unlikely ever to be fully aware of (Bourdieu, 1999). This is because I, an agent who can never be wholly autonomous, am involved in the process of understanding and producing this work, which is inextricably woven into my experiences, dispositions and culture, which then modulates the outcomes of this research and what is thus then accepted as 'knowledge' (Scott, 2005). I truly am a part of what I 'discovered' throughout this research process, where:

> "the voice and position of the researcher as the writer not only (became) a major ingredient of the written study but have to be evident for the meaning to become clear."
> (Holliday, 2007, p.122)

My position, which was outlined in chapter two, has not only influenced my philosophical positions but has also played a role in how I designed this research and the techniques I used, which I outline now.

5.2 Locating working-class women

As this PhD research sits in the foreground of the original research project (Paired Peers), it is important to outline where the two projects overlap and disconnect methodologically in order to demonstrate how this, the secondary study, has the capacity to stand on its own as a unique, ethically sound project.

I sourced the fifteen working-class women who took part in this research project from the original project via a gatekeeper (explored below). These women had already contributed to six interviews to the first phase of the original project (PP1). As the first phase finished, they all signalled their interest in taking part in further similar research if funding could be secured. Once funding from the Leverhulme Trust had been secured for the second phase of the original project (PP2) and a PhD scholarship, I joined the team as a research assistant and I enrolled onto the PhD course.

5.2.1 Gatekeeper

Harriet Bradley (my previous Director of Studies and the Principal Investigator on the original project) acted as gatekeeper and contacted all PP1 interviewees via email. In this, Harriet introduced me as (i) a research assistant on the second phase of the Paired Peers project (PP2) and (ii) a PhD student who wishes to research the effects of gender and class on education and employment. Attached to the emails was an information sheet (appendix two, p.253) and a consent form (appendix three, p.255). In these documents, the ‘original’ Paired Peers project and the ‘secondary’ PhD project were presented as separate, and the prospective participants were provided multiple options: to take part in one, both or neither of the projects. Additionally, in line with ‘good’ ethical practice, these documents:

- Informed them that future interviews would be audio-recorded and transcribed;
- Assured them of their anonymity and that their contributions would remain confidential;
- Asked for their consent to allow me to analyse their contributions to PP1;
- Asked whether they gave their consent for myself and other PP2 researchers to disseminate their contributions anonymously;
- Provided my email address and those of my supervisors, so they had a point of contact if they had any questions.

5.2.2 Recruitment

Soon after this email, I contacted the twenty-seven working-class women whom Harriet had already emailed, I introduced myself, my PhD project and asked them to consider participating. To the twenty-three who were due to be interviewed by other researchers on PP2, I told them they would be contacted by their previous interviewer but to direct their completed consent forms and questions towards me regarding their participation in my PhD project.

I gained fourteen signed consent forms and later gained consent from an additional participant over the phone. I did not see these initial gains of voluntary consent as the end of this process as consent is not a "once-and-for-all prior event, but as a process, subject to negotiation over time" (BSA, 2017, p.6). So, I took steps over subsequent years to ensure I was updating their informed consent through:

- Speaking with the women whom I interviewed at the beginning or end of each interview about my PhD project, re-signalling it was separate to the original, Paired Peers project;
- Emailing all participants at the end of each academic year to update them on developments from my PhD project and inviting them to ask questions.

In so far as I could, through taking these steps, I believe I retained their informed consent.

5.2.3 'Class'ification process

Upon recruitment to this PhD project, the fifteen women had already been placed into the 'working-class' by the researchers on the first phase of the Paired Peers project (PP1). However, class is a fluid, processual, and fractured system of power (Bradley, 2015; Savage, 2007; Clark and Lipset, 1991) and markers of class are viewed both objectively and subjectively. Thus, I did not want to rely on the 'class' analysis of other researchers and so I conducted my own class analysis. First, I revisited the approach taken by researchers on the original project which went beyond collecting economic measures. In 2010, at the start of their university education, seven questions were asked in the initial recruitment questionnaire (see appendix four, p.256):

1. What is your pre-University UK home postcode?
2. The name of the school or college attended immediately prior to university?
3. What is your Mothers' and/or Fathers' occupation?
4. Has your Mother and/or Father attended university?

5. Apart from family support and/or student loan, are you receiving additional financial support, for example: a university bursary or some other form of grant?
6. How many of your school or college peers went to university?
7. How do you define your social class?

Questions 1, 3 and 5 were designed to gather data on objective economic measures and geographic indicators, similar to those questions asked by UCAS to identify students from Widening Participation (WP) backgrounds. While these were important markers, these variants are known to be unreliable in uncovering a student's social class (Bathmaker *et al*., 2016). Thus, the four additional questions were designed to elicit insight into subjective signifiers of class: the students' family and educational histories, the forms of capital that they held and the students' self-class identification. The responses to these provided rich social and cultural details which were used to contextualise the answers collected from the UCAS-styled questions. For example, their responses to question 7 provided details on their self-perception of their class positions at the start of their university expeirence (appendix five, p.258). This helped me in allocating them as either firmly-working-class or upper-working-class, i.e. all the women who I categorised as upper-working-class saw themselves as having some or many middle-class attributes.

Students' educational levels and parents' occupations were the two main indicators used by PP1 researchers (and later myself) to stratify the students into social classes. While there are many scales used to measure social class within the sociological community, PP1 researchers and I chose the most commonly used one which classifies social groups by occupation. This was the National Statistics Socio-economic Classification (NS-SEC) based on SOC2010 (Office of National Statistics (ONS), 2018a). This tool enabled the stratification of students' parental occupations into eight categories. Students' whose parents' occupations sat within NS-SEC classes 1-3 were classified as middle-class, and those in classes 4-8 were classified as working-class. The results from this stratification process were then considered in the context of the responses to the five remaining questions. Loosely, the participants fell into one of two class categories based on the following variables:

Social class	Variables
Working-class	• Had parent(s) who fell into NS-SEC classes 4-8; • Parents had no university education; • Most often received a maintenance grant or a bursary.
Middle-class +	• Had parent(s) who fell into NS-SEC classes 1-3; • One or more parent had completed an undergraduate degree; • Most often did not receive a maintenance grant or a bursary.

Table two: How the survey responses were stratified

In addition to having the data outlined above, I was privileged in that I had access to the interviews from PP1 to further contextualise my analysis of the information given in the survey. This data helped me to better place their parents' occupations in the NS-SEC (based on SOC2010) (ONS, 2018a) and fill in answers which had been missed from the initial survey. Though the NS-SEC was not faultless,[41] using it as part of a multi-factorial approach which looked at other economic, cultural and social characteristics, helped me gain a good understanding of the women's class positions. Overall, I found that all fifteen working-class women who responded positively to my email sat clearly within one of the following class fractions:

1. Firmly-working-class (11)
2. Upper-working-class (4)

The demarcation of the working-class fractions and the variants between these were introduced in chapter four and will be further elucidated in chapter six to ten.

5.3 Research design processes

When I secured the funding for this PhD study as I knew I would be working on the original project as a research assistant and thus would be familiar with the data, so I chose to draw on the data from the original study which I had consent to access. Due to the symbiotic relationship between the projects, there were pre-determined elements that I had to account for when I designed my PhD research:

[41] I found it lacking in its capacity to highlight those in precarious employment, it could only go so far to highlight class distinctions within the same occupational categories and anaytlical classes. For example, two of the participant's mothers were 'long-term unemployed' (analytic class 8) but their experiences of being in this position were contrastive. One was unable to work due to mental health issues, the other chose not to work as their husband had an income which could sustain the household.

- My original sampling frame contained all twenty-seven working-class women who had participated in PP1. After gaining consent from fifteen of these women using the stratified purposive sampling technique (Patton, 2002), I recruited fifteen to this study.
- I required the working-class women's consent to gain access to their qualitative data from PP1, as explained above. This data, which I refer to as 'secondary data' collected between 2010 and 2013, accumulated to:
    - Fifteen unstructured interviews which helped build a biographical account of each interviewee through, as Parson (1984, p.81, cited by Wellington, 2015) sees it, using "probing techniques adopted by the psychoanalyst". These were around one hour each and collected in autumn 2010.
    - Sixty semi-structured interviews which, similar to the unstructured interviews, permitted interviewer participation so, the fluidity of an everyday conversation could be retained (Flick, 2014). These lasted between one hour and one and a half hours' each and were collected between spring 2011 and spring 2013.

A further four semi-structured interviews with each of the women had been planned to take place throughout the second phase of the Paired Peers project (PP2) (2014-2017). Though this was pre-determined, as a research assistant on PP2, I had a role in constructing the interview schedules. Additionally, as well as interviewing five other PP2 interviewees, I interviewed Jasmine (FWC, UWE, Sociology), Sariah (FWC, UWE, Sociology), Bianca (FWC, UoB, History) and Jackie (FWC, UoB, Sociology) up to four times each. I did not interview the subsequent eleven working-class women who took part in this PhD study because the Paired Peers team saw it necessary to retain as many of the previous interviewer/interviewee alliances developed throughout PP1, as explained above. All interviews that I did not conduct but which I had consent to analyse I consider to be 'secondary data', all interview data I personally collected I refer to as 'primary data'. The total of this data are outlined here:

		Secondary data	**Primary data**
PP1	Unstructured interviews	15	0
	Semi-structured interviews	60	0
PP2	Semi-structured interviews	38	11
		Total:	124

Table three: Primary and secondary data

Though some may consider these pre-determined elements to be detrimental to my PhD study, I did not. I viewed the wealth of in-depth longitudinal data which I had within my remit as overwhelmingly positive. I would not have been able to collect this volume of data on my own due to time and financial restrictions. Also, due to my research intentions and my desire to meet the standards of conducting feminist social research (Oakley, 1998), any research project I would have constructed would have had a strong allegiance to the qualitative paradigm regardless.

While this is a qualitative study, this, along with most social research, sits on the continuum between the qualitative and quantitative approaches (Onwuegbuzie and Leech, 2005; Newman and Benz, 1998). Thus, quantitative data in the form of graduate earnings are analysed in chapter eight in order to provide context and depth to the qualitative material.

5.3.1 A case study of case studies

Based on my reading of Denscombe (1997), I found the case study approach to be the most suitable meta-approach to this research. I drew this conclusion because my work focussed on one phenomenon: the experiences of fifteen working-class women who graduated from one of two universities in Bristol in 2013 or 2014. Each interview was conducted in a 'natural' setting with no artificial controls, a quality of the case study approach (Denscombe, 1997). At that, there were multiple sources of data which enabled me to discover the depth rather than breadth of the phenomena, to explore accounts of events, relationships, and experiences which occurred and undo the complexities of these (Denscombe, 1997).

As illustrated in the figure to the right, I took the case study approach (the blue ring) which, within it, contained fifteen case studies (yellow rings). For each participant to be considered a 'case' there had to be a substantial data set, collected over a prolonged period (Yin, 2003). I met this standard as each interviewee had participated in up to ten in-depth interviews over a seven-year basis.

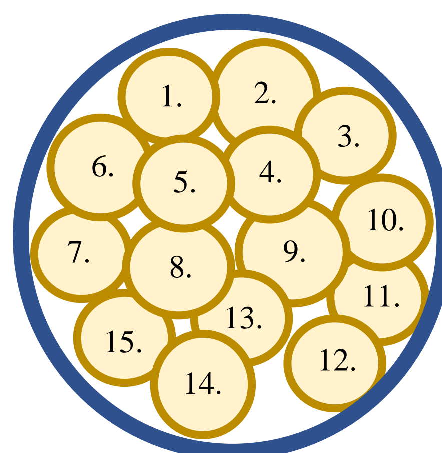

Figure four: Visualising the case study approach taken

While there were points of pronounced overlapping in the narratives of the women, unlike in the original study, I did not 'pair' two cases up to draw comparisons. Instead, I approached the analysis of the findings using a case by case approach which, in sum, allowed me to

create a snapshot of the phenomena. Though this approach was time-consuming, it allowed me to access the subtleties and complexities of the phenomena and its 'embeddedness' within the context it sits, restricting me from over-theorising the narratives. Opting for this approach, which is known to "begin in a world of action and contribute to it" (Bassey, 1999, p.23), fulfilled a political choice of mine, to make this work as accessible as possible to the general reader.

5.4 Interviewing

When arranging to meet with interviewees, I asked them to choose the interview setting. I did this in order to give them some control over the process which, I hoped, made them feel at ease. They often chose a café or restaurant, usually on a busy dinner or teatime. I would always purchase coffees and cakes in the hope that they saw this as a small repayment for their contributions. I never spent enough for these to be considered an incentive to meet with me, nor do I perceive it as coercion. At the start of the interview, I would remind them that:

- they have given their consent for their data to be used by two separate projects but that they could withdraw from one or both at any point;
- that they do not have to share anything that they do not wish to;
- that we could end the interview whenever they want;
- that the interview is being recorded by Dictaphone, but they and their contributions will be anonymised.

Upon beginning the interview, my approach was to uncover the subjective, the emotional, and what some may consider 'the mundane'. To achieve this, the interview schedules consisted mostly of open-ended questions which allowed a two-way interchange. I wanted them to have a role in forming the interview trajectory and so, as long as the questions/topics were addressed at some point, I was keen to foster space for the interviewees to go off-piste. This is compatible with the feminist participatory interview technique, a model devised by Oakley (1981), which works to restrict the research process from inhibiting or silencing women's voices.

In addition, my interviewing style was 'active' in that I was not a passive observer with a list of set questions intending to take a detached and objective position (Holstein and Gubrium, 1995). Instead, I was an 'active' listener, responding to their contributions 'care-fully' (Emejulu and Bassel, 2018) in a way which I hope made them feel heard and supported. This is imperative because "listening and hearing others is important for the production of accountable and responsible knowledge" (Skeggs, 1997, p.67). Next, I

turn to consider how my (changing) position as a young, 'working-class' woman affected the research process.

5.4.1 Classed femininity: The researcher and the participant

As class is understood to be a multi-factorial, subjective and ongoing process in the interview setting (Mellor *et al.,* 2013), with the perception of femininity working in a comparable manner, I cannot know for sure how the interviewees viewed me. Though their views of me will be different to those I have of myself (Chunnu Brayada and Boyce, 2014), it is important to demonstrate my place in relation to the participants, how I managed this and how this changed over the research period.

Overall, I refrain from retreating to a binary identification process in which I see myself as either an 'insider' or 'outsider' in relation to the young women. Rather, I see myself as occupying space on a continuum between being somewhat of an insider and an outsider. Below is a representation of this, with 'time' being a prevalent factor to my positioning on this model:

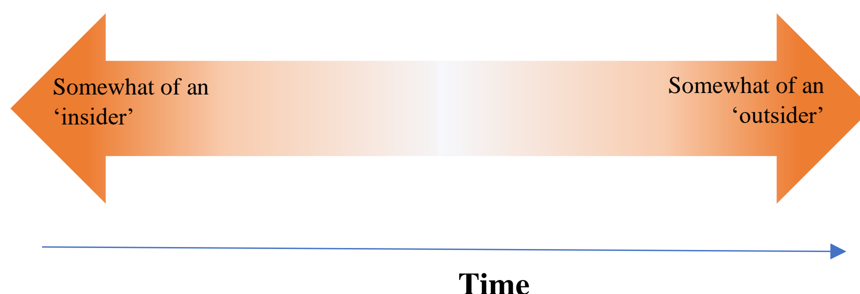

Figure five: My position on a continuum

At the earliest point in this research process, I saw myself as occupying space towards the furthest point on the left of the figure. I was firmly-working-class in the way I dressed, spoke, and the economic and social capital I had access to which made me similar to most of the women. However, I felt my class position had fractured due to my encountering of middle-class cultural capital (I had moved from Barnsley to Bristol, began working on a university-based research project and had started this PhD). Even though this set me apart from most of the women, I still felt I 'passed' as firmly-working-class as most of this cultural capital was yet to be embodied. However, as time passed, I moved towards the right of the continuum and in some ways moved closer to those whom I consider upper-working-class.

Though none of the firmly-working-class women mentioned any growing points of difference between us, as the study progressed, I perceived myself as becoming more of

a class outsider. This was even the case when some of the women were experiencing upward social mobility at the same time as I. This affected my confidence and how I managed my verbal and non-verbal cues.

<u>(Non-)management of visual cues</u>

In the first year of data collection, I was particularly hyper-aware of my appearance as I understood that research is an embodied and performative process and the body acts as a site for cultural representation and reproduction (Ezzy, 2010; Coffey, 1999). Initially, without much thought, I muted representations and signifiers of my working-class culture in the research setting. Though I did not have the insight at the time, now I can see that I was muting these because I knew that signifiers of my working-class culture (my gold hoop earrings in particular) were not only 'valueless' outside of the working-class community (McKenzie, 2015a), but subconsciously I viewed them as having a detrimental impact on how I would be perceived in the interview setting. So, at first, I dressed conservatively, with little makeup and no jewellery. However, my meeting with some of the interviewees still caused some initial confusion. This, I believe, was due to my age (I was 21 upon beginning this research) and led some to politely question how I came to do a PhD and work as a research assistant for the Paired Peers project. This fed my personal anxieties and imposter syndrome (explored in chapter two).

After critically reflecting on my presentation of self, I realised I was striving to attain hegemonic 'acceptable' femininity, a resource more accessible to middle-class women (Skeggs, 1997). I was doing this in the hope that I would be perceived as 'acceptable' in relation to other people's perceptions of what a PhD student and research assistant should look/be like. Consequently, I dropped my 'academic drag act' and I wore my own sense of style which included tea dresses and pumps from Primark/H&M, noticeable makeup and my gold hoop earrings. This helped build my confidence and helped (re-)establish rapport upon meeting with the working-class women or when we saw one another again for the first time in some months as we quickly found something to complement one another on.

<u>(Non-)management of audible and cultural notes</u>

Further, I understand that my class is embedded in the way I speak and signifies (to most) the voice of a working-class woman from Barnsley. Though I do not hold this opinion, I understand that in general my 'non-standard' accent is "much less likely to make a positive first impression when compared with standard speakers" and "represents nothing less than a considerable handicap" (Fuertes *et al.,* 2011, p.128).

However, I view this as field-dependent because when I interviewed those who also had ‘non-standard’ accents, I believe my accent and dialect was a form of capital which allowed me to more-easily build rapport. For example, some of the working-class women would often repeat words that I had said in my accent in a jokey way.

While I viewed my accent and dialect as a positive when in conversation with other working-class women, I did monitor the ‘academic’ language that I used as I understood that language could be a tool for establishing power and dominance through interactions.

In terms of building rapport, unlike others who have interviewed working-class people, I did not view our interactions as “impoverished” and “graceless” (Charlesworth, 2000, p.283) and I did not see “good conversation” as “hard to come by” (Charlesworth, 2000, p.227). Instead, I valued our conversations and would reciprocate in telling similar stories to those that the women shared. However, rather than viewing this as women speaking ‘naturally’, in addition to there being specific questions about marriage and having children within the interview schedules, I believe that my class and gender position may have promoted and regulated this line of ‘feminine’ talk via socio-cultural expectations of the lived experiences we shared as young working-class women living in Britain.

While there were many positives to the cultural matching between myself and the interviewees, there were shortfalls. I have questioned the ethical implications of whether my presentation of class and our shared socio-cultural sharing of experiences elicited more information than they wished to give. While I cannot be sure of whether this is the case, all I can say is that I was sincere in my actions and these women understood that they could revoke their contributions if they wanted to.

An additional shortfall that I noticed upon re-reading interviews was that there were occasionally times where I agreed to a shared understanding of what the women were speaking about. This was because I had built an understanding of what the women were speaking about based on my own experiences. In hindsight, I know I should have asked them to clarify what they were saying so I had their understanding of the matter in the data.

While there are positives to a working-class woman researching the lives of working-class women in that I will have seen things that those who have not lived this life would not be able to see, mine and the working-class women’s lives are not homogenous. I

accept that during the interviews I may have unknowingly probed for data which reflected my own experiences which differed to theirs. Though I am a partial 'insider', I am not an insider in terms of everything these women represent, and this changed over the years as I moved towards the right of the continuum (figure five). Just as Reay (2003, p.303) notes, "there are strengths and weaknesses in developing a sense of empathy and identification with research participants".

The Parasite Researcher

I understand that through conducting this research, I entered into personal and moral relationships with the participants (BSA, 2017; ASA, 2008) which may promote the development of a shared sense of 'friendship'. Though, I did not enter the interview setting with the motivation to develop a friendship with them, mutual *friendships,* or rather momentary 'fake friendships' (Duncombe and Jessop, 2012) developed. As the research process is "interpersonal and intimate" (Coffey, 1999, p.56), the interviewees and I would share stories of similar experiences and, as I showed genuine interest in their lives, they often demonstrated a relational interest in me and my work. They would often ask questions after the interviews such as "so how are you really?" and say goodbye with a hug.

However, the sense of 'having a friendship' with these women was regularly tested, particularly when I listened to/read these women's stories of immense struggle. I found myself at these points feeling as though I was "holidaying on people's misery" (McRobbie, 1982, p.5) in a purely joyless and guilt ladened manner. While I had every intention to be non-exploitative, I could not help but feel 'wrong' that I was one of few people that some of these women could speak to in an open and frank manner and that it was being recorded. I face the uncomfortable fact that their struggle has benefitted my PhD research, a fact that does not sit well with me but which I must face if I am to do research such as this.

Conducting these interviews also raised questions for me regarding who should be considered 'vulnerable'. Though at the time of interview none of the women were legally considered 'vulnerable', in my view, some were relatively vulnerable because of their mental health issues, their social isolation and their precarious living and work arrangements. However, all I could do was support them by taking a care-full, not care-less solidarity approach (Emejulu and Bassel, 2018) which involved emotional support and, in some case, providing advice in gaining access to mental health services. Consequently, there were times where I knew I had done much emotional labour.

However, I saw this as an expected product of our meeting as the interview schedules were designed in a way to elicit this depth and 'type' of data. Thus, I was eager to provide support where I could and engage with the women in a committed, conscientious manner because, as Coffey (1999: p.158) argues, the "emotionality of field-work should be seen as strengths, rather than burdens to be endured".

5.4.2 Post-interview and data protection

Post-interview I would offer to walk the participant to their bus stop or the train station to ensure I had helped them on their way home and to take the opportunity to talk 'off the record'. These conversations were not included as data to be analysed in this thesis as I did not gain consent for this.

In terms of securing their contributions, I ensured the Dictaphone was placed in a small carry case and kept securely in my bag as soon as the interview was done. Upon arriving back at the university, the raw data would be transferred to the main Paired Peers computer and moved to a secure file, both of which were password protected. A copy of this file was then sent to the transcriber employed by the Paired Peers team. The file would not be shared with anyone else, and upon completion of the transcription process, the recording was permanently deleted by all.

The transcriptionist then sent the raw transcribed data back to the main Paired Peers computer. The names of participants, their friends, family, workplace and work colleagues were anonymised with phrases or pseudonyms chosen by myself or another research assistant. A database of participant's pseudonyms was kept in password-protected files, separate to the anonymised data.

5.5 Analysis

As is common in most social research, my approach to data analysis was multi-layered (Spencer, Ritchie and O'Connor, 2003). These processes required an ongoing keen eye for detail, anticipation for inspiration and a specific, formal time for systematic analysis of the raw, verbatim interview transcripts.

The initial analysis process happened in my first year of study as I prepared to interview four of the fifteen women. I read a selection of their PP1 interview transcripts and began to build a biographical document for each of the women. These included key characteristic information and what I saw as their most relevant quotes in relation to this study. Soon after, I did this too for the remaining eleven women who I did not interview. This approach fell within the tradition of 'life histories' as I analysed single

narratives to help me build biographies which shared common themes (Thompson, 2000).

This formative analysis assisted me in familiarising myself with the data. After this process, I had a thorough understanding of the women's personal, educational and family histories, and an open-ended list of the prominent themes that had occurred repeatedly. This enabled me to begin building a draft thematic analysis framework. I was conscious throughout subsequent analysis steps to keep amending this framework and viewed it as an open-ended document which would be used as an analytic tool at the formal stages of data analysis.

Upon reaching this formal stage, I had one hundred and twenty-four data sources. Though I had already analysed a proportion of these to build a biographical document for each of the women, I uploaded all data sources to NVivo. I opted to employ this software as it appeared most suitable at handling large qualitative data sets and facilitating my second analysis approach: the content analysis technique. Engaging in this approach, I focussed on the content and the context of the data, drawing out the most prominent themes and most relevant data (Robson, 2002). At this point, my analysis approach overcame the inductive/deductive dichotomy. There was one deductive element: I had my theoretical framework in mind throughout the analysis process, but my analysis approach was overwhelmingly inductive in the sense that this framework was open-ended and I worked from "bottom up, using the participants' views to build broader themes and generate theory on interconnecting the themes" (Creswell and Plano Clark, 2007, p.23).

Based on these themes, I amended the developing thematic analysis framework and transferred these themes to NVivo, where from that point they were referred to as 'nodes'. Upon reading the data, I was then able to code instances where the themes arose and create a thematically analysed database of interviews.

From this database, I was able to write the remaining chapters of this thesis. In summarising the data, due to the word limit restrictions in place, I was aware that voices were being, in part, omitted. This was an uncomfortable truth that I had to navigate. To counter this, I have utilised data unused in this document in other dissemination practices. Further, I worked to make little-to-no amendments to the participant's own phrases and expressions as they appeared in the transcripts and have resisted over-theorising the women's narratives. I did not want to limit 'knowledge translation', as

many other academics do (Ahmed, 2009), and so, I hope these steps I have taken mean that this work is accessible beyond the academic community.

Although “all research involves secrets and silences of various kinds” (Ryan-Flood and Gill, 2009, p.1) due to imposed time, financial and word limit restrictions I believe the choices I have made above have enabled me to share the views, thoughts, and experiences provided by the working-class women as wholly, accurately and ethically as possible. Next, these voices will be introduced to you in the context of their class positions and the universities through which they studied.

Chapter six: Characterising the Participants & the Universities

This chapter delves into the lives of the fifteen young working-class women mentioned thus far. Here each young woman is placed into one of three groups based on fractions in their social class identities as observed through a Bourdieusian lens. A selection of biographies are presented which provide details on the women's social histories, positions and dispositions towards the future, as told by them. Through these biographies, the defining classed elements of each of the three groups are elucidated. Each biography is then explored and 'understood' in light of academic literature and my Bourdieusian theoretical framework.

Differentiations between the groups become clearer as I move on to provide contextual information and data on the two universities through which these women studied: the University of the West of England (UWE) and the University of Bristol (UoB).

6.1 Participants

First, there are many notions of objective similarity that the fifteen working-class women share. All started their full-time undergraduate degrees in autumn 2010, two years before the upper limit of tuition fees increased from £3,290 to £9,000.[42] At this time, all identified as 'women' when asked on the Paired Peers phase one recruitment survey (see appendix four, p.256), all accessed university age twenty or before, and all but one (Lizzie, UoB, Engineering) graduated in summer 2013.

Further, I noted many elements of similarity when I came to 'classify' the women into a social class position. To do this, I analysed data on the following key themes: family background and economic resources, culture consumption practices, educational trajectories and aspirations for, and dispositions towards, the future. My analysis led me to position them all within the broad category of 'working-class', and then within this as either firmly-working-class or upper-working-class, the characteristics of which were outlined in chapter four.

Further, I noticed differences, particularly in relation to the cultural capital held, between those that had studied at UWE and those that had studied at UoB and so the groups are also differentiated on this basis. As a result, I placed each of the fifteen working-class women into one of three groups:

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[42] Policy details on this can be found at Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (2011).

Group one: firmly-working-class UWE graduates

Group two: firmly-working-class UoB graduates

Group three: upper-working-class UoB graduates

Below, the characteristics of these groups and the women in each of them are outlined. Through these introductions, the groups distinguishing demographics are explored, and comparisons are drawn between them. Three biographies are provided to 'bring to life' each group. I have chosen to highlight these three biographies in particular because (i) I see them as having emblematic traces of the group they are in as a whole and (ii) I personally interviewed or met them and so I felt I understood them on a deeper level than some of the other women.

To produce the biographies, I relied heavily on the narratives produced by the women. Below, direct quotations from the women's interviews precede my interpretations and theoretical understanding of them. Editing of these narratives is kept to a minimum and only done so to provide anonymity or extra clarification. This was crucial to me actualising my aim to *do* feminist research. All data in the following biographies are from interview one of the first phase of the Paired Peers project unless indicated otherwise.

6.1.1 Group one

Group one comprises of five firmly-working-class graduates of the University of the West of England (UWE):

		Studied	**Previous education**
1.	Adele	History and International Relations	State
2.	Jasmine	Sociology	State
3.	Sariah	Sociology	State
4.	Ruby	English	State
5.	Sophie	Politics	Grammar

Table four: Firmly-working-class participants of group one

Women in group one were from the 20-40 per cent most deprived areas in the UK (Department for Communities and Local Government, 2011) and all had parents who worked in occupations within analytical classes 4-8, most often they occupied analytical class 7: routine occupations (Office for National Statistics (ONS), 2018a).[43] All the

[43] For more details on these see appendix six (p.259).

women in this group received a maintenance grant from SFE and those who were state school educated received a university bursary. Upon accessing university, all self-identified as "working-class", but Jasmine and Sophie saw themselves as having 'some middle-class attributes' too.

The women in group one were more likely than those in group three (the upper-working-class women) to report that their transitions into university study were met with anxiety-filled discussions between themselves and their families. These students' families were more likely to express concern over their daughter's incurring student debt and their possible social trajectories away from the family.

It was not uncommon for the women in group one to report not having applied to a Russell Group (RG) or 'elite' university (though they had the grades to) in order to avoid perceived social isolation. This was also found in Archer and Leathwood's (2003) work on working-class women as possible HE entrants.

Below, the biography for Adele elucidates the defining elements of group one well.

Adele (FWC, UWE, History and International Relations): "I never think I'm doing enough. I always think I could do more"

Born and raised in South Wales, Adele moved to Bristol to study History and International Relations at the age of twenty. Adele was raised alongside her older sister in a council house in "not the nicest of areas" by her mother. Growing up, Adele had little contact with her father and his Jamaican family and described her mother (who is white) as raising her "like I was white" but currently self-defines as a "black working-class woman". Reflecting on her mother's efforts working as a dinner lady and cleaner, Adele said, "she was just getting by day-to-day trying to get money in".

As a child, Adele attended her local primary and comprehensive secondary school which she described as having "bad reputations". Here she said she "never felt like I was really pushed" and at secondary school she was more "interested in going out with my friends than actually knuckling down". Though this was the case, she said she did "okay" in the eleven GCSEs she took.

After much persuasion from her sister, who Adele described as "acting in a mum role", she went on to attend a college that was outside of her local area. This college had higher entry requirements, was "more strict, more regimented" and "better" than other colleges closer to home. She left after a few months because she felt as though she:

> didn't quite fit in, […] like a lot of people had money and they were just from a different social background to me, and I felt really uncomfortable and awkward.

After moving to her local college and completing her A-Levels, Adele said that going to university "just wasn't done" and the expectation for 'people like her' was to:

> get a job, boring, manual 9 to 5 job and that was it, and you maybe have a relationship, you settle down and you earn.

Prescribing to this route, Adele spent two years in and out of low-paid employment and got engaged to her long-term boyfriend. As she watched her sister marry a "white middle-class man who went to boarding school" who she had met at university, Adele decided to take her sister's advice: to leave Wales and go to university. This was in opposition to her mother's wishes, who was incredibly anxious about the debt Adele would get into. Her sister argued with her mother about this:

> She said, "you're holding her back, she needs to go, she needs to do something. You're not broadening her horizon, she needs to get out there".

Soon after, Adele broke off her engagement because she "did not want to end up in a council house with a child and married by the time I'm 21", describing this life as synonymous with "living in a prison", and with help from her sister she began considering different universities. At this point, Adele was disappointed to realise her three A levels (grade C) were not sufficient to access "a more prestigious university, a better university".

She chose to study History and International Relations at UWE because (i) it was "close but not too close" to home and (ii) it allowed her to study a subject that she loved while also learning about current social and political issues, an interest of hers which she felt had always set her apart from her friends at home. With intentions to enter journalism upon graduation, Adele arrived at UWE already having developed ideas of which businesses she would like to contact regarding internships, as advised by her sister, and had her sister (who worked in recruitment) to look over her job applications and C.V.

Understanding Adele

Mothers' childrearing practices and the relative successes of this involvement are widely acknowledged to be classed activities (Lawler, 1999; Reay, 1998; Walkerdine and Lucey, 1989) where white, middle-class, heterosexual, married mothers are seen as implicitly and 'naturally' right, and consequently those that are 'other' are pathologized as 'lacking' (Walkerdine and Lucey, 1989). Due to Adele's mother's position as a lone, working-class mother who "didn't like school, she left without many qualifications in

anything", she most likely had a habitus shaped by educational 'failure' which, in turn, would have made her feel "out of place in educational contexts" (Reay, 1999, p.166). Due to this, she may have felt "inadequate to help her child" as "most working-class parents whose own experiences of schooling were characterised by failure" and "shame" do (Lucey, Melody and Walkerdine, 2010, p.290). On top of this, Adele's mother had to work two jobs in order to survive. Due to these reasons, it is perhaps unsurprising that Adele saw her mother as "more focussed on working" than being 'active, participating and pushing' her through her education.

When Adele spoke of the instrumental points which led her to study at UWE, they all had their basis in her sister's advice or actions. As the social distance between her and her sister grew, Adele recalled growing more restless with her situation. For example, the day her sister got married Adele lamented on her own position:

> I was so proud of her, like the way she like developed and she had a lovely husband, she'd finished uni by that time, she'd got a job, she was set up, and I thought "I can't just keep moaning about my situation".

Though she experienced imposter syndrome, "it's always in the back of my head 'it's [university] not for you'", Adele began following in her sister's social-footsteps. Her aspirations and actions began to mirror those which her sister had recently attained, and which were culturally, socially and economically the opposite to those which she experienced in her childhood. Adele aspired to get married, have children who "might be middle-class", work a professional job in order to earn enough money to send her children to private school, while also wanting to play an "active" role in her children's education. Adele's aspirations were to fit with what Jacques and Radtke (2012, p.454) call the "superwoman ideal". This discourse presents women as 'successful' on the terms that they "glamorously, effortlessly, happily, and perfectly" have financial and material independence, juggle multiple roles (mother, employee, etc.) and climb a career ladder (Shaevitz, 1984, p.2).

The rejection of her childhood and her mother's practices when envisioning herself as a mother is one of the many starting points of Adele becoming upwardly socially mobile. This type of rejection is common in mothers who have been socially mobile, who considered themselves as middle-class but from working-class origins (Lawler, 1999).

Like many of the other working-class women in this thesis, Adele speaks of her mother as facing a number of interconnecting issues: (i) having caring responsibilities, and (ii) lack of confidence, and though, like Adele, these women accept there was a lack of

opportunities available to their mothers, they saw their positions as possible to navigate 'escape' from:

> I always get the sense that… I don't know if she wanted more for herself, I think she felt... I think her personality held her back, she's quite quiet, quite timid, and I think she was scared of maybe going out and trying to do something. And it was hard with a baby, but I think if she'd had a stronger personality, more strong-willed, she might have pushed herself out of her comfort zone. […] It would have taken a lot for her to say "right I'm going to do this, I'm going to go to uni" but I don't think it really registered with her.
> (I2)

When Adele reflected with her sister on their mother's position, they thought: ""God, we don't want to be like this" we want to get out of here. To me it would be like a living hell". Adele's 'choice' in accessing university was laden with this one major fear: reproducing and living out her mother's life, the life of a struggling working-class woman and mother in poverty. Overall, my understanding of Adele consistently drew me back to Lawler's (1999) work on new-found middle-classness and dreams of 'escape' from working-class origins. Adele, like her sister before her, embodied "the fantasy of getting out and getting away" (Lawler, 1999, p.19) which in turn pathologised the working-class women they had 'left behind'.

6.1.2 Group two

The second group comprises of six firmly-working-class graduates of the UoB, all of whom were state-educated and self-defined as "working-class":

		Studied	**Previous education**
6.	Jackie	Sociology	State
7.	Zoe	Law	State
8.	Anna	Politics and Economics	State
9.	Bianca	History	State
10.	Jade	Psychology	State
11.	Lizzie	Engineering	State

Table five: Firmly-working-class participants of group two

Like all those in group one, Jackie, Zoe and Anna were from relatively deprived areas of Britain (among the 10-30 per cent most deprived areas), but the second half of group two were from areas which were among the 30-40 per cent least deprived in the country (Department for Communities and Local Government, 2011). Bianca, Jade and Lizzie

were less likely to report economic struggle within the family and did not speak of their families needing state support, unlike Jackie, Zoe and Anna.

The women in this group were more likely than those in group one to have travelled further away from home to access 'better schools with better reputations'. This is a more common finding among middle-class young people because these routes are more likely to lead to entry to a RG university (Leathwood and Hutchings, 2003).

In comparison to those who studied at UWE, the ten UoB graduates in this research had parents who were employed in occupations which spread across a wider range of occupational categories (2-8) (see appendix six, p.259, for more information). However, a clear distinction can be drawn between those in group two (who had parents who were employed in positions in National Statistics Socio-economic Classification (NS-SEC) classes 4-8) and those in group three (who had parents who were employed in positions considered 'high' (classes 2 or 3, operational categories L7.3 and above)) (ONS, 2018a). This provides some indication as to the different levels of intergenerational economic capital possibly available to these young women. Here, Zoe's biography demonstrates those in group two well:

Zoe (FWC, UoB, Law): "I should be a politician"

Born in South Wales, Zoe is a self-defined white working-class young woman who saw herself as part of "the lower class and the minority". She was raised alongside her younger brother by her mother and father in a two-bed "tiny little grotty council flat on a high rise". She described her parents' efforts to find and stay in social housing as "always being a struggle". She defined her parents as "wonderful, moral, good people" who had:

> worked all their lives but they struggled, they were never given everything, their parents had never put anything in place for them to have a solid foundation so they started at the very bottom.

Zoe's mother worked as a full-time chairperson of a local authority club while also doing a master's degree part-time; consequently, Zoe described her mother as "literally non-stop and she has nothing for herself because everything that she earns goes towards providing for me and my brother". Zoe's father left school at fifteen with no qualifications and became a "manual labourer" doing "really long hours in really hard work, just to try and keep us going".

Zoe described the schools and college she attended as "very good". However, these were not the closest options which meant she had to travel a considerable distance every

day out of her local area. She achieved good results in English Language and Literature (A), Religious Studies (A) and Chemistry (B). Like a few of her friends, Zoe applied only to RG universities.[44] Zoe took what most would consider as a 'non-traditional' gap year in the aim to work and save up money for her transition into university. She knew that her parents could not financially support her while she was in Bristol. However, her plans to 'save up' in order to study were scuppered when she got a boyfriend who:

> completely oppressed me, I wasn't allowed any male friends, had to delete anyone I'd ever had any history with out of my life, I didn't work, I couldn't go out.

After ending the relationship, she managed to save a little money to take with her to Bristol but faced much financial struggle as her £4,000 Student Finance England (SFE) loan barely covered her "economical option", shared-room accommodation. Zoe faced taking "crazy job with crazy hours" in a bar to support herself which she did until she was laid-off.

From being young, Zoe's aspirations were to become a singer or actress. However, she understood these industries were competitive. Thus, she chose to hedge her bets when choosing a degree subject: "there's just no chance of that happening (being in the entertainment industry) and that's why I feel I'm going to need to have my degree and then hate the rest of my life".

<u>Understanding Zoe</u>

Zoe arrived at university driven by the aim to 'put right' the issues her parents have faced as working-class people and 'repay' them for the labour they engaged in when raising her:

> My long term goal is to be able to provide for them and to give back to them what they gave to me and, you know, I want to be able in 10 years' time to pay off their mortgage and go "here you go, retire 20 years early" or whatever stupid, because they're going to be working for the rest of their lives, paying off a small house in a small village, and it's just sad for me to see that they've worked so, so, so, so hard and then people with like Ferrari's and big houses criticise and I'm just like "how dare you like criticise when you haven't experienced that". It's a very difficult thing to take – and that's probably why I'm so bitter. I'm trying not to be but it's very difficult. But I've just got to channel that positively and make sure that I do at one point give them everything they deserve.

[44] University of Bristol, Kings College London, University College London, University of Newcastle, University of Cambridge.

On top of this, she desired to help those with less than her after completing her degree, but as she went through university, she began to perceive this as inconceivable:

> I don't want to be a puppet for a big corporation or work for a powerful criminal who has got money and who can get themselves off. Because it's always the most oppressed people who end up being even more oppressed, and I think even being part of that cycle would just make me really sad, just perpetuating all these existing structures and inequality. And like I spoke to my personal tutor and he was like "you could be like one of these like equality lawyers" but I'll never get anywhere, I know that. And I know it's a defeatist attitude but like the system's way too entrenched, it's just too prevalent. Me, I will never change anything, being someone who goes in and says, "this is so wrong, you are all so wrong". I'll never get anywhere, I'll just be a poor lawyer and I'll defend poor people for no money, spend all my time trying to make a difference in the world but it will never make a difference.
> (I4)

Her desire to 'give back' to her parents, as well as fight the social ills she and her family have faced, is common among working-class and female students (Archer, 2003) and resonates with the story of a young working-class man named Akim in Reay's work (2017). Like Zoe, Akim too had accessed university with desires to be the one who could "help" his family and to give back to those who have little resources by being "one of the good guys" practising law (Reay, 2017, p.111).

Zoe arrived at UoB having a good understanding of how 'the game' is played (research and theories of which were discussed in chapters three and four). She had until that point 'played along' via applying only to the 'best universities' to study a degree that she was told by a middle-class boyfriend was held in high esteem. As she began her university education, her understanding of 'the game' grew, and so did her anger towards it. She railed against the affluence among her 'public school, wealthy, upper class' peers who had "no idea about the real world" (I2). Relatively soon after starting her degree her approach to the doxa of the field of HE changed from 'conserving' the rules of 'the game' to wanting to 'transform' them. Due to this, she experienced social exclusion in the field of UoB. This is a common finding in working-class students' narratives of engaging with HE (particularly at RG and elite universities) (Reay, 2017; 1998; Bathmaker *et al.*, 2016; Reay, Crozier and Clayton, 2010; 2009). Or as Bourdieu (1992) would describe those unfamiliar underrepresented in universities (the working-classes), who were not raised to understand the 'rules of the game' in the social institution of HE, 'fish out of water'.

While some of those in group two, and all of those in group three made attempts to assimilate to the culture of UoB, Zoe's interviews were most often sites of resistance. She spoke on how she kept social distance from the other students and did not engage in extra-curricular activities with them. She was vocal about her disdain towards most of her peers:

> I will spite the people who I've had to like work a million times harder than just to even be here.

In response to 'not fitting in' with her peers, and academic culture at large, she openly mocked UoB, its students and their privilege:

> I'm very open and opinionated about these things, so I'll just be like "you paid 100 grand for your education and we're at the same university doing the same course, ouch!"

As she observed her peers playing 'the game' and openly railed against such actions, she often (i) made clear her inability to 'play along' because of her lack of economic capital and occasionally (ii) lamented this fact. She was frustrated that she could not engage in practices which would have ascribed her the social, educational and cultural capital desired by many in the graduate labour market:

> Law is a very centred on like… every night there's like different meals, different like firms and mooting, debating, all that, and I'd love to get involved in it but I physically can't. Which is another frustrating thing then because I feel like I'm not making the most out of my time here. But at the same time I don't have the… I can't do it.
> (I4)

In terms of her orientations towards a future career, while the upper-working-class women in group three (see below) had accessed university in the hope that it would steer them towards a career, as a result of her requiring employment and her position as an 'outsider' at UoB, Zoe was steered:

> in the opposite direction. Now I know… I don't know exactly what I want to do but I know what I don't want to do. I know that I don't want to do anything academic in life, I don't want to be a puppet for a big corporation or for the powerful.
> (I4)

6.1.3 Group three

The third group comprises of the final four working-class women in this study. All of these women studied at UoB and accessed university from what I perceive to be upper-working-class origins. I see these women as occupying such a category based on their narratives of social, cultural and economic capital:

		Studied	Previous education
12.	Megan	English	State
13.	Melissa	English	State
14.	Samantha	Geography	State
15.	Amelia	Biology	Grammar

Table six: Upper-working-class participants of group three

On meeting these women and/or reading their interviews, I found that they straddled class boundaries in more complex ways than the women in groups one and two. Compared to most of the other women, none of these women considered themselves to be 'just' working-class, they saw themselves as either middle-class or 'a bit' middle-class. Perhaps this could be due to the notion that they were from neighbourhoods which were among 0-30 per cent least deprived in the country (Department for Communities and Local Government, 2011) and were more likely to receive financial support from their families while they studied.

Those in this group were more likely to have been positioned by their colleges and sixth forms as 'very good' candidates for university, and thus consideration lay not 'if' they would apply but lay in 'which' RG institution they would apply to. Like most of their friends, they either accessed an RG university straight after college/sixth form or after their gap years travelling Asia. The women in this group were also more likely to have accessed university in order to develop "a much broader, like more advanced, understanding of" their subject (Megan, I2), as opposed to the firmly-working-class women who were more likely to report that they had accessed university to be able to access the 'professional' employment market and gain confidence.

Based on some of these notions, the women in group three could be mistakenly perceived as middle-class, but I positioned these women as 'upper-working-class' for the following reasons:

- Most were state school educated;
- None of their parents studied at university (though they were more likely than the firmly-working-class women to have older siblings who had recently graduated from university);

- They did not report having received private tuition throughout their previous schooling, a common practice in middle-class families (Lareau, 2003);
- While some did have a ‘traditional gap year’, i.e. travelling, they did not report using intergenerational economic capital to fund these, as is more common with middle-class young people (Vigurs, Jones, and Harris, 2016; Lucey, Melody and Walkerdine, 2010). Instead, they funded these trips by working in routine occupations;
- Those who attended interviews at Oxford and Cambridge experienced being positioned as “the obvious state school girl” (Melissa, I1) and left feeling as though the institution ‘wasn’t for the likes of them’;
- They all received a maintenance grant and university bursary which is a reflection on their household income;[45]
- They experienced a degree of social rejection at UoB due to being state school educated and not “posh” (Megan, English, I6). Some experienced this due to different “codes of social conduct” (Samantha, Geography, I2) between themselves and the wealthier students. They were not ‘like fish in water’ (Bourdieu, 1992) in the social and academic field of UoB, but were more so than the firmly-working-class at UoB;
- In relation to their future career trajectories, they did not speak of their lives as “full of certainties”, unlike the prospects held by the privileged middle- and upper-classes (Reay, 2017, p.134).

Megan demonstrates the social class complexities of this group well:

Megan (UWC, UoB, English): “I’ve never felt like I really belong anywhere”

A self-described “country bumpkin at heart” (I2), Megan was raised in a neighbourhood among the 0-10 per cent of least deprived areas in England (Department for Communities and Local Government, 2011), but relative to her peers she said that her family was “by far the poorest out of all my friends’ families”. She describes her hometown in the South of England as “not the nicest place in the world, it’s not known for culture or anything like that”.

[45] This provides some insight into the economic income of the family household as the women were entitled to partial SFE grant if their parents earned up to £50,020 (Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, 2010).

Megan's father, a quality assurance manager, was from "very working-class" origins, her mother came from a "traditional, quite middle-class" background and was downwardly mobile, to much dismay of her parents who were both doctors. Perhaps as a reaction to his daughter's downward mobility, Megan's grandfather, a Doctor of Chemistry, actively worked to instil middle-class cultural capital into his grandchildren. He paid for Megan to have violin and horse-riding lessons from an early age and continued to fund this while she made her way through university. These complex and contrasting social class factors played out as she considered university, describing herself as:

> definitely not from a traditional like university background but I definitely had educated people around me that as I've gotten older have shown me that this is the way to go.

Perhaps these are factors which led her to view herself as "working-class but a bit middle-class". Throughout her time in her "really rural, quite good" schools and college, she describes herself as:

> always been at the top end of the year so I've always had to sit through really annoying, for me, like really frustrating, like regurgitations of everything we've already done.

Megan achieved five A's at A-Level in English Literature, Classical Civilisation, Psychology, Art and General Studies. Like the rest of her friendship group, who she described as being among the "top 20" students who "achieved highly" in the college, Megan accessed university after taking a gap year abroad. When she came to 'choose' university, she said that she had not grown up assuming she would go as it "wasn't really talked about at home". Different to her peers at UoB, Megan's mother and father didn't "push" her, stating:

> my mum has always said… because my mum suffers depression and things, and she has always said like the most important thing in life is being happy. So my parents didn't pick my career, like a lot of my best friends at [HALLS] had that sort of situation from home.

Instead, as she was doing her A-Levels, it was her grandfather who "was very set on me going to uni. He was a big influence". Due to this, Megan only applied to 'elite

universities'[46]. She "had a horrible time and really, really didn't enjoy" her interview at the University of Oxford. She said she was "the obvious state school girl" and faced answering questions such as "why do you have to work?" and "I bet you know loads of pregnant people, don't you?". This was a "really big barrier" which led her to believe that the University of Oxford "wasn't for" her "in any way, shape or form". Like the rest of the women in group three, Megan arrived at UoB having already considered many career possibilities based on subjects she "loved" (writing, publishing, advertising and teaching) and already considering doing postgraduate study as she was "toying with doing a master's in either Creative Writing or History of Art".

Understanding Megan

Megan's complex social class background was perhaps the reason why she said she "never felt like I really belong anywhere". Throughout interviews she regularly demonstrated what Bourdieu (1999) called a 'habitus clivé'. However, as Friedman (2016b, p.132) would describe, there did not appear to be a "traumatic break from the primary habitus", which is so often the case for those with a habitus clivé. Instead, for Megan, the combat was not one filled with hysteresis as the process of reconciliation (which had been ongoing for years) had become arduous to her. For the most part, her parents were culturally, socially and economically working-class, they did not "understand the process of applying for uni" and had "no notion of what's a good uni". They both left education after completing their O Levels, something which Megan lamented:

> They didn't have any sort of idea of what I should be reading, so I sort of felt like... oh just... if my parents had just been university educated I felt like when I was 11, 12 when I had time and I was reading so much they could have maybe directed me into what I should have been reading rather than just anything I picked off the shelves.

Megan often spoke about the ratio of private and state school students at UoB. As there was a disproportionate number of those who had been privately educated studying at UoB (as I outline below), this left her feeling "really intimidated by people like that and feeling "oh I'm just a common state school girl, I don't know anything"". Just as there is an apparent "intrinsic superiority" (Reay, 2017, p.134) among privately school educated university students, Megan demonstrated a self-perception of intrinsic

[46] She applied to "Oxford, Bristol, Warwick, Durham and Exeter".

inferiority due to her previous experience of a state education. She found the process "quite daunting" particularly in comparison with the majority of other students who were "just so blasé, and it really shocks me how confident a lot of people are" (I2).

However, after spending some time at UoB, she reflected on how she and her parents viewed her as having "evolved" (I2). Soon after moving to Bristol, she started going to the gym due to "a bit of peer pressure", lost weight, began appreciating 'older' literature, joined the horse riding society and started eating new 'types' of food:

> I've completely changed from when I came to uni, I'm completely, completely different, my parents didn't recognise me when they came, they're like "what's happened to you?".
> (I2)

This evolution appeared to happen with little-to-no discomfort, perhaps due in part to her already fractured habitus which already held some middle-class cultural capital. When she returned home during the summer holidays she found it "strange" because she "found that I slipped back into the sort of person that I play at home", insinuating that the longer she spent at UoB the further away she was moving from her social origins. When she was not spending time with her "painfully middle-class" boyfriend and friends at UoB, she was partaking in middle-class cultural activities which her "stuck up, quite unpleasant, posh" grandfather funded (I4). Due to his investments and interventions, she began to embody middle-class cultural capital in a more obvious manner than before. It appeared that, driven by his anxiety caused by his downwardly mobile daughter, Megan's grandfather hyper-mobilised his capital throughout his family to 'repair' the 'social damage' made.

Megan's biography outlines well how the upper-working-class women's class dispositions are more complex and how group three can be distinguished from the first two groups on this basis. Next, as I provide the context of the two universities these women studied at, it will become clearer why I also distinguished these women based on the university through which they studied. While these two universities are close in geographical proximity, they have different histories, reputations, student populations, approaches to teaching and research and labour market cachets, all of which I outline here:

6.2 A tale of two universities

All fifteen women studied for their undergraduate degrees in Bristol, a city and county situated in the South West of England, highlighted below:

Figure six: Locating Bristol on a map of southern Britain

As previously outlined, all graduated from either UWE, the main campus of which is situated 4.5 miles north of Bristol city centre, or UoB, the campuses of which are in central Bristol. Both institutions can be found by their markers below in figure seven:

Figure seven: UWE and UoB on a map of Bristol

6.2.1 University of Bristol

UoB is considered an 'elite' research-focused Higher Education Institution (HEI). When ten of the working-class women who took part in this research began their university education in 2010 UoB was one of twenty RG universities (now one of twenty-four (Russell Group, 2012b)) and was, and still is, one of nineteen redbrick universities[47] in the UK.

UoB is considered to be one of the UK's most prestigious and selective universities (Social Mobility and Child Poverty Commission, 2014) and in 2010, The Complete University Guide named it as 16th best university in the UK (TCUG, 2011) and the Times Higher Education placed it as 68th in its World University Rankings (THE, 2011). UoB is known as the "partial exception" to the rule as it joins the "London vortex" of universities[48] to be amongst those most strongly associated with entry to elite occupations (Wakeling and Savage, 2015, p.316). In fact, while Savage *et al.,* (2015) found that 6 per cent of the UK population is part of the 'elite', 36 per cent of UoB graduates were among the 'elite', this is an overrepresentation of 600 per cent. Additionally, in terms of household income after tax, UoB graduates were found by Savage *et al.,* (2015) to have the sixth-highest salaries at an average of £67,000.

Some of the upper-working-class women cited its "prestigious" (Amelia, Biology, I1) association as one of the reasons why they applied to UoB, foreseeing this cachet as one which would transpire positively in the graduate labour market:

> It does have a good reputation. And I know people say it doesn't matter anymore, but I think if you are competing... when I've got my degree, if I'm competing against someone else for the same job and [...] their degree's the same as mine but from a university that's not as well known, I think it does give you a little advantage.
> (Samantha, UWC, UoB, Geography, I1)

The perception that UoB has a particular distinction was shared by all the working-class women in this project. This eminence was perceived as being reflected in the 'type' of student there:

[47] otherwise known as 'civic' universities, which were founded between 1800 and 1960 under the guise of expanding social opportunity and mobility to a higher volume of the middle-class but, as Whyte notes, they failed in their attempts to narrow "the gap between rich and poor" (2015, p.332).
[48] Others are the University of Oxford, University of Cambridge, London School of Economics, University College London, Imperial College London, and King's College London (Wakeling and Savage, 2015).

> We call them "the rahs" which means "oh darling". They're all a bit stereotypical upper-middle-class, speak good Queen's English and they wear Jack Wills or Hollister.
> (Adele, FWC, UWE, History and Int Relations, I2)

The statistics show that only 14 per cent of those accessing UoB in 2010 had parents who worked in NS-SEC classes 4-7.[49] Further, at that time, only 5 per 10,000 young people from the poorest one-fifth of areas in the UK were accepted to study at UoB, compared to almost 76 people from the wealthiest one-fifth of areas (University and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS), 2016). This made those from the wealthiest of areas fifteen times more likely to access UoB than the poorest in that year (UCAS, 2016). Thus, it was not surprising that the working-class women in this study often commented that UoB's student cohort was dominated by the middle-classes and elites, or as Jasmine (FWC, UWE, Sociology, I6) saw it: "everyone was called Claudia and they had daddies and ponies". Due to this, class barriers were regularly spoken about by the UoB students in this study:

> I don't fit in with everyone on my course... There's a lot of people who are very different. A lot of people are what I would class as a higher class than me. Like they're all posh... I don't know why but naturally I separate myself from them.
> (Bianca, FWC, UoB, History, I2)

Class-based segregation is common on the campuses of the most selective universities (Reay, 2016; Bamber and Tett, 2000) which inhibits wider social cohesion and integration (Rubin, 2012). Further, there was evidence that lecturers at UoB created or exacerbated social class barriers. Staff would regularly use language that was incomprehensible to the firmly-working-class women and would assume previous experience of middle-class cultural practices:

> (Lecturer) was talking about children's experiences at school, and he was saying that some children don't have the cultural capital to access uni and stuff like that. And then he made the assumption, and he said, 'oh but all of us at Bristol here must have been taken to art galleries and gone on holidays to France and skiing abroad' and I thought 'I've never been abroad for a holiday in my life'.
> (Jackie, FWC, UoB, Sociology, I6)

This is not uncommon, Webb, Schirato and Danaher (2002, p.130) reported that in order to ensure the continued distinction between lecturer and student, "the 'good' university

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[49] In order to place each student in an NS-SEC class, each student was asked to "state the occupation of the highest-earning family member of the household in which you live. If he or she is retired or unemployed, give their most recent occupation" (Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA), 2018c, p.1).

lecturer is expected to deliver an elegant and erudite oratory, full of flowery metaphors and obscure allusions".

The lack of social diversity among the student cohort was clear to the women and almost all mentioned the different 'types' of education their peers had previously accessed. Analysis of UoB's student population in 2010 shows that 40 per cent came from outside of the state education system, and so, compared to the 7 per cent national average (Department for Education, 2010), these students were overrepresented by 570 per cent. Out of all one hundred and sixty-four Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) in the UK, this made UoB the seventh least socio-economically diverse undergraduate cohort in 2010/11 (HESA, 2012a). These cultural distinctions were clear in the firmly-working-class women's narratives:

> I'm the only person in [HALLS] from a state school... I know no-one from my background, that's why I find it so difficult to adjust, when no-one can relate to me. Like there's 10 people on my course of 250 who have been to a state school and the majority of them are like "oh I could have gone to boarding school, but my parents thought it was a waste of money" and that straightaway separated me from them... They say there isn't a class barrier, but there is.
> (Zoe, FWC, UoB, Law, I2)

In response to these experiences, often there was a 'cooling down' of the women's working-class culture, these women would either become subdued within the university field or adapt to accommodate middle-class values in an attempt to assimilate. Anna described this as "a big struggle for a lot of people coming to university and aiming to fit in in some way with people" (Politics and Economics, I6). Though this struggle was still present in the narratives of the women who went to UWE, the effects of such were relatively much less than those who studied at UoB.

6.2.2 University of the West of England

Previously known as Bristol Polytechnic, UWE received university status through the Further and Higher Education Act 1992 and thus is known interchangeably as a 'modern', 'new' and 'post-92' university. Based on figures gathered in 2010, The Complete University Guide (TCUG, 2011) placed it as the 61st best university in the UK and it was not placed in the THE (2011a) World University Rankings.

UWE has a much larger student body than that at UoB (HESA, 2012a) and is most often referred to as a 'teaching-focused' university. In 2010, the average entry tariff was 270, much lower than UoB's 447 (The Guardian, 2010) and the application rate was 4.8

applicants per available place, compared to UoB where there were 10.2 applications per place (UCAS, 2018b; UCAS, 2018c).

The five working-class women in this study who accessed UWE in 2010 did so alongside almost one thousand other students from NS-SEC classes 4-7 (a number three times greater than that at UoB), and these students accounted for 29 per cent of the student body (HESA, 2012a).

While those from the wealthiest one-fifth of areas were still 8.5 times more likely than the poorest one-fifth to access UWE in 2010 (UCAS, 2016), this number was not as great as that at UoB, where the most advantaged were 15 times more likely than the least advantaged to access the university (UCAS, 2016). This social distinction was observed by the students:

> You're more likely to be working-class and go to UWE than working-class and go to Bristol (University).
> (Adele, FWC, UWE, History and Int Relations, I2)

In 2010, UWE admitted twice as many part-time students and nine times more mature students than UoB (HESA, 2012a). Further, in the same year, only 10 UoB mature students were from low participation neighbourhoods and had no previous HE experience, UWE's rate was 18 times greater than this (HESA, 2012a). These findings are common in 'newer' universities as mature working-class students, along with working-class students in general, often face feelings social and cultural intimidation when approaching prestigious universities (Reay, David and Ball, 2005). Evidence of this was found within my data: when asked about why she had applied to UWE and not an RG university, as advised by the Head of her grammar school sixth form, Sophie said:

> I wanted to come like within my level, I didn't want to aim above my station, so I only applied for three [post 92] places.
> (I1)

Upon considering UWE, the firmly-working-class women remarked that they experienced social and cultural recognition with the institution: "it felt right" (Jasmine, Sociology, I1). Often, they also 'chose' UWE because it was "far enough away from home but it's not too far away" (Adele, History and Int Relations, I1), a common consideration for working-class students who are more likely to study within their geographical region and are three times more likely to commute from home to university to study rather than live in student accommodation (Donnelly and Gamsu,

2018). Data from Bristol City Council (2017) reflected this and showed that 83 per cent of those studying at UoB (who are more likely to come from ‘higher’ class backgrounds, as explored above) live in the Bristol Local Authority, compared to 42 per cent of UWE students. In addition, working-class women are more likely than their male counterparts to live in the parental home while they studied (Purcell *et al.,* 2013).

Though all the women began their university education having moved out of their ‘homes’ to Bristol, the UWE students came from homes which were closer to Bristol, UoB students came from further afield:

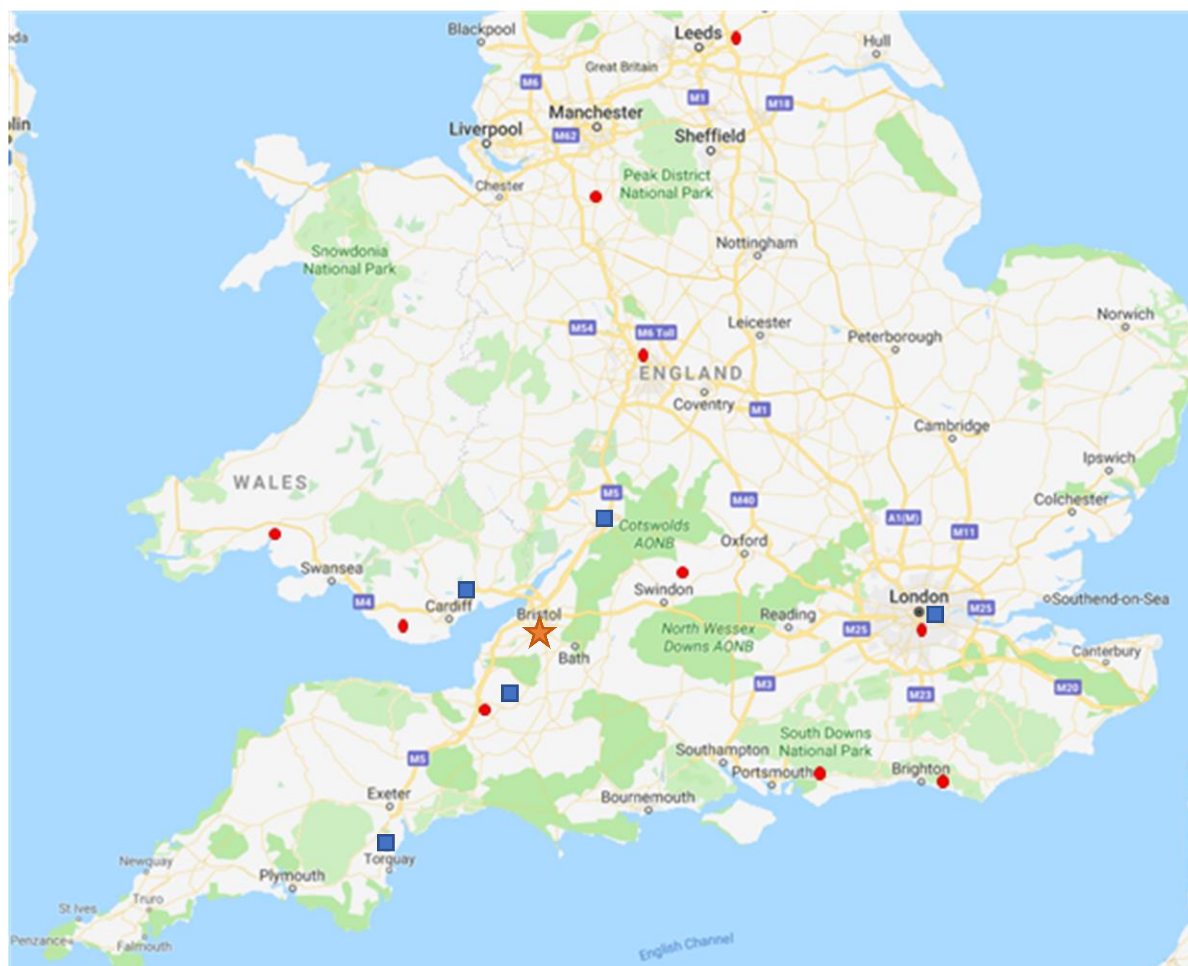

Figure eight: Spatial distribution of the women’s homes
UWE UoB

Due to the factors mentioned above, the cohort of five working-class women who studied at UWE were less likely to report feeling uncomfortable at their institution, compared to those at UoB. Though rates of social isolation at UoB were greater than that at UWE for the students, many of those who studied at UWE still graduated with a

sense of “never felt like completely at home” (Jasmine, Sociology, I5) at UWE. These women were still, as Reay (2017) would put it, ‘outsiders on the inside’ and had to negotiate a cleft habitus (Bourdieu, 2007; 2000):

> So I weren’t tryna act posh or anything like that, but yeah I’d tone down the accent (when in university), look a bit more up right, look a bit more intelligent and all of that. Whereas when I’m at home... my whole body language and the way I talk, everything would change you know. Especially at home I’m really loud and I’d be giving it all that “ma, ma” so yeah I’m very different depending on where I am and who I’m with.
> (Ruby, FWC, UWE, English, I5)

The context of the two institutions and how the women position and are positioned in relation to these institutions are important contextual notes to remember as I now turn to explore the working-class women’s narratives in more depth. Below I have collated the key data on the working-class women for the reader to refer back to as I move through the data analysis and conclusion chapters:

University		**Pseudonym**	**Subject**	**Class position**
UWE	Group 1	Adele	History and International Relations	FWC
		Jasmine	Sociology	
		Sariah	Sociology	
		Ruby	English	
		Sophie	Politics	
UoB	Group 2	Jackie	Sociology	
		Zoe	Law	
		Anna	Politics and Economics	
		Bianca	History	
		Jade	Psychology	
		Lizzie	Engineering (integrated MA)	
	Group 3	Melissa	English	UWC
		Megan	English	
		Samantha	Geography	
		Amelia	Biology	

Table seven: The working-class women and their characteristics

In the next chapter, I examine the working-class women’s aspirations and preparations for their graduate identities.

Chapter seven: Aspirations & Preparations for Graduate Life

To address my first research question:

1. What are the constructions of a graduate identity framed by, for young working-class women?

This chapter explores (i) what frames the career decision 'choices' of young working-class women, (ii) how these women began constructing their graduate identities while at university and (iii) what these development processes were structured and/or restricted by. These are considered within a context of a pervasive public discourse which persists that "ever-increasing levels of formal education are considered the necessary foundation for career and life course success" (Lehmann, 2009, p.142). This context situates university as an institution which has "never been so central in the lives of young adults" (Antonucci, 2016, p.162) which is now considered "a normal and expected part of the life course for many young people" (Savage *et al.,* 2015, p.256).

7.1 Motivations to (re)produce

At the start of their university education, all the firmly-working-class women and half of the upper-working-class women in this study believed that once they had acquired the credentials (or 'scholastic capital' (Bourdieu, 1984, p.127)) of an undergraduate degree, they would have access to employment opportunities which were previously unattainable. This was also found in Pasero's (2016) research with first-generation undergraduate students. In this PhD research, though the majority shared this as one of the reasons why they were motivated to go to university, the upper-working-class women were more likely to state there was "an expectation" (Samantha, UoB, Geography, I2) that they would attend, though some of the firmly-working-class women who accessed UoB also experienced this. This expectation most often came from outside of the family, usually from schoolteachers or Further Education (FE) lecturers in response to their high attainment levels and so were actively encouraged by these agents to apply for redbrick and ancient universities, also found in Reay, Crozier and Clayton's (2009) work on working-class students who access elite universities.

While the firmly-working-class women were more likely to question *if* they should attend university (due to economic and perceived social restrictions), the upper-working-class women were more likely to question *where* they should attend. At this point, the upper-working-class women had already developed some understanding of

‘the game’[50] from those encouraging their participation and only submitted applications to Russell Group (RG) universities.

Though most of their parents encouraged this, as many working-class parents without a university education now do (Bradley, 2015), they did not have the cultural capital required to help their daughters negotiate access. Theirs was unlike the *volume* of cultural capital and *composition* of subsequent capital required to access such universities, capital which is more likely to be found in middle-class families (Reay, David and Ball, 2005).

However, not all fifteen women received positive feedback upon speaking with their parents about the prospect of going to university. Some of the women faced navigating significant anxiety, outright disapproval and, in Jasmine’s case, a degree of envy, from their parents:

> They’re sort of scared that I would be judging them in a sort of sociological stance, but I’m not, I’m just being their daughter. […] Since I did Psychology at college actually, they were sort of… you know, they thought I was looking at them from a sort of psychological stance, you know, “she’s judging me, what’s she thinking about me doing this” sort of thing. They’re just sort of like “oh [JASMINE] will understand this more than me.”
> (FWC, UWE, Sociology, I1)

Working-class family resistance and displays of jealousy (particularly mother to daughter) is not uncommon in this context (Walkerdine and Lucey, 1989). Archer and Leathwood (2003, p.189) found that those working-class families ‘left behind’ saw their daughter’s HE experience as “posing a threat” to their lifestyle and values. For many working-class families, they may never have imagined their daughters going to university, as it is not usually considered the ‘destiny’ of educationally successful working-class girls (Lucey, Melody and Walkerdine, 2003; Lucey and Reay, 2002). Thus, these parents are likely to be less emotionally prepared for this prospect than middle-class parents who are more likely to have long-held ‘taken for granted’ assumptions that their child will make the transition into university (Bathmaker *et al.,* 2016; Burke, 2016a; Reay, David and Ball, 2005).

Due to these factors, the firmly-working-class women in this study did not define their transitions into university as a longstanding inevitability:

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[50] Research and theories of which were discussed in chapters three and four.

> It sounds so cheesy but like I didn't think I'd ever go to university when I was like younger. And when I was at school I didn't even think about college let alone university, and the fact that I sort of pursued it and went through with it and… yeah. I'm proud.
> (Jasmine, FWC, UWE, Sociology, I1)

Stepping out of the perceived socially prescribed route into adulthood, to go to university as a working-class woman, was seen as synonymous with 'doing something *better* than what was expected'. This was a great source of pride for many of the women. Most of the firmly-working-class women cited their school teachers and college lecturers as the people to introduce them to the idea of a university education. These agents were the ones to provide practical support, showing the women how to successfully deploy middle-class cultural capital in their UCAS applications. While most parents provided much in the way of emotional support, they were unable to contribute much to the planning and application process:

> (Mum) read through my personal statement to make sure it sounded OK and things like that, but I don't think she could have done anything more.
> (Amelia, UWC, UoB, Biology, I1)

The motivations of the upper-working-class to access Higher Education (HE) were largely based on a desire to continue their education and engage in 'self-improvement' (e.g. becoming more confident, experiencing 'university-life', meeting "some good friends and have a good time" (Amelia, UWC, UoB, Biology, I1)). They chose what could be considered 'traditionally academic' subjects (Biology, Geography and English) based on their enjoyment of, and their previous success in, the subject. These women are likely to have been among the few working-class students in their cohorts, not only because they studied at UoB, but because those from "relatively deprived backgrounds" are disproportionately less likely to study Biology and Geography (Mcmaster, 2017, p.549). Working-class students are more likely to enrol in "less advanced and prestigious courses" not just because of financial barriers, but social ones too (Callender and Jackson, 2008, p.409). Due to this, those from working-class backgrounds, and particularly working-class women, are overrepresented in Social Science subjects, Law and Business and Administrative studies because they are perceived as financially "less risky", "high-return subjects" (Callender and Jackson, 2008, p.549).

Within this study, though some of the firmly-working-class women also chose their subjects because they enjoyed them, their primary aim was more likely to be financially instrumental. Rather than 'choosing' university, many of these women felt they had to

attend due to the lack of accessible employment opportunities in their hometowns and cities:

> I had to get out. I just knew in my heart that there was nothing for me there at all. I tried to get some work experience somewhere based on like what I feel for sociology, like working with the courts, a youth protection program. It was either that or work for a charity, but I don't know, I just couldn't really get a job. There's no prospects for young people in [HOMETOWN] at all, literally you have to get away, there's nothing for anyone there. My friends are doing basically nothing, working in supermarkets. You literally either have to have someone who can get you into a very good job or you have nothing, you can't even work your way up, there's just no jobs. And [HOMETOWN] (pays) one of the lowest like pay things as well, lowest wages as well. […] I had to go.
> (Jasmine, FWC, UWE, Sociology, I1)

To find 'better' employment opportunities is a common reason cited by those who move away from where they were raised (Social Mobility Commission (SMC), 2018). The SMC (2018, p.4) found that 44 per cent of people in the UK reported that if they had stayed in their hometown, "they would not have got the best opportunities in life". Though this is the case for both sexes, Silva (2015) found that when working-class women face such a decision, they tend to display more anxiety about leaving their hometowns than their male counterparts. These anxieties were most often tied to the prospect of not being able to maintain their roles in the family household (Silva, 2015).

In this study, the firmly-working-class women were more likely than the upper-working-class to cite that they were motivated to become graduates by a desire to find financial security through being able to access 'better' employment prospects. The decision to attend university was often driven by a fear of having to negotiate the same social ills faced by their families and, in particular, those faced by their mothers:

> My mum has struggled to provide for us and she has gone without everything, she never had nights out, she never did anything for herself, she worked, worked, worked, and I don't want that for me and my kids.
> (Anna, FWC, UoB, Politics and Economics, I1)

Discussing this led some to outline an additional motivation to become a graduate: to support their families financially, as first outlined in Zoe's quote above (p.105). The perceived opportunity to earn 'adequate' levels of economic capital post-graduation was often used to cushion the effects of the economic hardship they faced as undergraduate students:

> I just really want to get through it, get good grades, go and get a good job […] It's a struggle now with the money and that kind of thing but I'll be able to enjoy it once I've got a good job.
> (Sophie, FWC, UWE, Politics, I4)

As well as being motivated to be financially secure and to provide for their families, the firmly-working-class women were more likely than the upper-working-class to say that they were motivated to be financially independent. This is not an uncommon motivator in the narratives of working-class women undergraduate students (Fuller, 2016) and, in this study, I found this came in two forms. First, they held a desire for financial independence from their current and future partners, a common desire for young women who are transitioning into adulthood while "living feminism" (Aronson, 2008, p.56). The second was a desire to be financially independent from the state. For example, one of Adele's main motivators to become a graduate was to avoid the "stigma" that she and her mother had faced in requiring state support:

> I was unemployed for... God, it must have been about 6 or 7 months and I'd no money come through. My mum was like "why don't you just go on it (Job Seekers Allowance) for a little bit, you are actively looking for work" and I was like "no, there's no way in hell I am going on benefits". There's such a stigma around it. When I finally did sign on he was like "why didn't you come earlier?", I said "I just didn't want to" the social aspect… I hated it, I hated it being... you didn't get a lot of money anyway and I thought "well why should I get that?", you know, I just felt... I don't know, guilty and like the stigma attached to it. After I thought to myself "I don't want to go back there" […] "I don't want to be like my mum". So, I was like "OK I really want to go to uni".
> (FWC, UWE, History and Int Relations, I1)

As Adele continued to speak about this, it grew clearer that she was engaged in processes of disassociating herself from her mother in the aim to avoid the reproduction of social inequities that she had watched her struggle to negotiate. This is emblematic of Freie's (2010, p.229) findings which showed that working-class women discuss "their future plans as stemming from, and informed by, life lessons they have learned from witnessing their mothers' struggles with family, employment and education". Adele's motivation to graduate from university, to become a "professional" who engaged in "well-paid work" and raise "middle-class children" (I6), was rooted in a process of purposeful fracturing to what Burke, Emmerich and Ingram (2013) and (Bourdieu, 1984) describe as the 'familial habitus'[51]. This process was driven by what Bradley and

[51] This is a collective, relational habitus which acts "through and on individuals" where "an individual's dispositions are mediated" through the family (Burke, Emmerich and Ingram, 2013, p.165).

Ingram (2012) refer to as 'experiential capital'. That is, Adele, based on her 'experiential capital' of living a working-class life with much struggle, was driven by this to try and attain upward social mobility.

Like many of the other firmly-working-class women in this study who reported experiencing financial hardship in their youth, Adele was among those with the most pronounced aspirations for upward social mobility. While this is a common finding in the narratives of working-class undergraduate students (Lehmann, 2009), there were exceptions to this within this work. Zoe (FWC, UoB, Law) and Jackie (FWC, UoB, Sociology) grew up with little disposable economic income in the family but due to experiencing symbolic violence ("the gentle, disguised form which violence takes when overt violence is impossible" (Bourdieu, 1990, p.133)) in the form of 'class snobbery' from their middle-class peers at UoB,[52] they were motivated to remain working-class.

While a small number of the firmly-working-class women perceived becoming a graduate as automatically giving them access to an upwardly mobile social trajectory:

> Once you're a graduate… yeah, it does change your class once you graduate. You're a holder of a degree so you have gone up in the rankings.
> (Sariah, FWC, UWE, Sociology, I6)

Most believed that gaining access to upward social mobility *should* happen as a result of them acquiring the scholastic capital of an undergraduate degree:

> If you get a degree then in theory you should be getting a better-paid job, which then in theory you should be moving up the class. But you could get a well-paid job without a degree. Obviously, a lot of the big people don't have degrees, but I suppose if you're lucky in getting a job and you're good, then you can do it without a degree.
> (Sophie, FWC, UWE, Politics, I2)

The discourse of 'luck' was evident in earlier interviews with many of the firmly-working-class women regularly referring to their more privileged peers as being 'lucky' to have, for example, secured a prestigious internship. This discourse has been found to carpet over how different graduate employers attribute unequal value to different forms of capital in the labour market (Ingram and Allen, 2018). To explain this, Ingram and Allen (2018, p.723) employ Bourdieu's concept of "social magic". That is, a process through which "the cultural arbitrary becomes disguised, and cultural forms of capital are endowed with symbolic recognition. This conversion allows (and is necessary for)

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[52] A common finding in working-class student's narratives of accessing and navigating elite HE institutions, also found in McKenzie's (2015a) work on the stigma faced by working-classes.

the legitimation of privilege" (Ingram and Allen, 2018, p.723). They found that this reproduces "persistent inequalities related to social class, as well as gender, ethnicity and institution" (Ingram and Allen, 2018, p.723).

As time passed, the women in this study referred to 'luck' less, particularly those who studied at UoB. This was because they had developed a good understanding of 'the game' through observing other student's practices and strategies to get ahead (or as Bourdieu (1992, p.122) would call it "practical mastery"). Their understandings of 'the game' and their practices within it were multiple and are explored below.

7.2 Career identity development

As is evidenced in the aspiration tracker (appendix seven, p.262) the most popular 'choice' for future employment for the working-class women was teaching. This is perhaps unsurprising as historically women have been encouraged to become teachers as it is considered a respectable career, viewed as a way through which less privileged women could earn a 'good' wage, it is view as compatible with motherhood and, particularly in the case of primary school teaching, it is viewed as an extension of the maternal role (Bathmaker *et al.,* 2016; Morrison, 2014; Bradley, 1989; Kelsall *et al.,* 1972).[53] This is reflected in quantitative data which showed that in 2016, for every man on an Initial Teacher Training (ITT) course there were two women (Scott, 2016). On top of this, the less economically affluent a graduate's background the more likely they are to apply to become teachers, and graduates whose parents are teachers, teaching assistants and electricians are more likely to apply for Initial Teacher Training (ITT) courses than those whose parents are doctors, lawyers and judges (Scott, 2016).

The number of women in this study who orientated their career identity development towards teaching only grew the longer they were in university. As they began their studies, three were considering or working towards securing a job in teaching, by the end of their third academic year nine were either working towards this goal or considered it an option. For many of these women, their HE experiences had facilitated processes of socialisation away from male-dominated, and middle-class dominated occupations such as journalism, civil service, museum curating and doing research, as demonstrated in the aspiration tracker (appendix seven, p.262).

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[53] All of the working-class women viewed teaching as compatible with future motherhood. This was a contributing factor to why many of these women, particularly the firmly-working-class women, chose teaching.

The second most popular choices for future employment, where two of the women considered these a career possibility, were: working in local government, the civil service, the diplomatic service, journalism, research, historian and HR. These were outlined as aspirations in their first year of study, but as the young women spent more time in university, they were restricted from developing their career identities in these fields due to a lack of 'high' social, economic and cultural capital, as explored below. All of the women who had accessed university with these aspirations, over the course of their time in HE, re-orientated their goals towards becoming a teacher or working in the third sector.

A great number of these women spoke about their aspirations to "work with people" (Jasmine, FWC, UWE, Sociology, I2) and to "change something in a positive way" (Jackie, FWC, UoB, Sociology, I2). These women spoke about their career goals in-depth and with reference to their experiences of navigating the effects of social inequalities:

> I think growing up in my position and seeing kind of… like at the moment we live on a council estate so it's usually kind of people that have actually got no hope of getting anywhere. It's made me really kind of want to change it, and I feel like with Economics at least like I get in that position maybe where I can sort of say "well this is how we can change it for these people and this is how we can make it better". […] I don't want to be like an investment banker, or like someone... just any kind of job in London that pays you a lot of money. I think all of those jobs are a bit, for me, like "what are you really doing to help the world, what are you really making a difference to, what kind of a contribution are you making apart from making yourself big, big bonuses and making the banks' profit margins go up". I mean to me that just seems like a complete utter waste of life, and I want to make sure that whatever I do I've known that I'm making a difference.
> (Anna, FWC, UoB, Economics, I1)

Though there are students and graduates from all social class backgrounds who pursue career paths in line with their moral and ethical beliefs, not centred purely on economic return (Leonard *et al.,* 2015), in this study the desire to do progressive work, to 'give back' to those who have less, was most common in the narratives of the firmly-working-class women. This aspiration has been found before to play a leading role in the career decision processes of working-class women (Silva, 2015; Davidson, 2011). Most of the women in this study perceived teaching in particular as a route towards being in a position to do this. Many specified that they wanted to work in the 'most disadvantaged' schools as they perceived themselves as having more of an opportunity to have the most impact in these institutions:

> (Teach First) wasn't just being a teacher, it was being a teacher helping disadvantaged students in disadvantaged areas and that's the kind of thing, the reason why I want to go into teaching is because I'd want to change that, I'd want education to be a lot more beneficial to those people who are in the worst areas. Whereas doing teaching in general, you know, you could go to a private school and teach, or you know, I wouldn't see that as the same teaching in any shape or form, like I would never even consider going to a private school, or even you know, I'd feel a bit of a cop-out.
> (Ruby, FWC, UoB, English, I4).

This socially progressive moral drive was also evident in Zoe's interviews as she spoke about wanting to become a lawyer. She aspired to specialise in Equality Law to help the "most oppressed people who end up being even more oppressed" due to "existing structures and inequality" (FWC, UoB, Law, I4). Also, those who desired to work in the charity sector did so as they too wanted to make a positive social impact. Although Adele, like most of the firmly-working-class women, outlined she had to be driven to earn "money to survive", she wanted to work somewhere where her "heart is in it", and she can "make a difference" (FWC, UWE, History and International Relations, I5). Likewise, aspirational social worker Jasmine was influenced at a young age by the stories her friend's mother (a social worker) told her of helping:

> so many people and I just want to like feel that I can do that for someone as well. I think it's always been like a part of me, and I've always wanted to do that […] I'd quite like to work with teenagers because I think I can relate to them, the ones from broken homes.
> (FWC, UWE, Sociology, I5)

The women whose career identity development was driven by the possibility of doing social good fell in one of two career-orientations. I categorised the formation of their career identities as either 'driven by long-term aspiration' or 'reactive to university experience'. For these women, studying at university had either helped them to continue to form their career identities in a linear and culminating fashion or their career identities were fractured by the experiences of navigating social disadvantage at university.

I include the typographies below to move the conversation beyond considering class as solely material disadvantage or advantage. Just as Hebson (2009) does in her work on working-class women's employment aspirations, I consider how class and gender shape women's perceptions of what is possible and the emotional dimensions of these. I gain an understanding of these by exploring the women's pre-university and in-university paid and unpaid employment experiences, the capital they draw on in order to get

advice, their orientations towards postgraduate (PG) study and their pre-graduation constructions of their graduate identity. However, first I introduce the four different typologies and the characteristics which shape them.

7.2.1 Career identity development typologies

1. Driven by a long-term desire

The driving characteristic of the career identity development of the women in this typology was spearheaded by a long-term desire to do socially progressive work. For some, their career ambitions were fixed:

> I really really want to be a teacher. So I'm going to go for it until I am one. (Jackie, FWC, UoB, Sociology, I5)

Others did not necessarily always have ambitions to work in one profession in particular, but the motif of 'making a difference' was at the core of their career-decision making processes. Often, their career identity development started at a young age (from secondary school in most cases). For these women, experiencing 'university life' was not a driving force for their HE participation. Rather, they saw their university education as a necessity they must engage with in order to achieve their career aspirations and, most often, if they could have achieved their aspirations via an alternate route (for example, by doing an apprenticeship), they would have opted for this instead of accessing HE. All the women in this typology were firmly-working-class and studied in the humanities and social sciences:

Pseudonym	Class	University	Subject
Jasmine	FWC	UWE	Sociology
Ruby	FWC	UWE	English
Jackie	FWC	UoB	Sociology
Anna	FWC	UoB	Politics and Economics

Table eight: Career identity development one: Driven by a long-term desire

2. Gradual development of one idea

The women in this typology arrived at university with an idea of which careers they aspired to access after university, and these were all directly linked to the subjects they were studying.

Compared to those in typology one, these women's career identity development manifested relatively slower throughout their studies but still did so in a relatively linear

fashion. They presented no immediate rush to begin working towards their career via taking on volunteer work or internships as they either perceived the demand to be high in their aspirational roles or they perceived that they would be 'overqualified' after graduation and thus would be able to access the roles with relative ease. The four women in this group are:

Pseudonym	Class	University	Subject
Sophie	FWC	UWE	Politics
Lizzie	FWC	UoB	Engineering
Megan	UWC	UoB	English
Samantha	UWC	UoB	Geography

Table nine: Career identity development two: Gradual development of one idea

3. Reactive to the university experience

As the women in typology three began developing their career identities, they found accessing such careers required economic, social and cultural capital they did not have. These three women required paid employment throughout the whole academic year while they studied and thus did not have the time or resources to develop the volume of social and cultural capital required to access such careers. Their career identity development went through marked reactive phases which re-orientated them away from their initial aspirations which were based on the subjects they studied and towards employment roles which they gained experience in previously/while at university. Relative to the rest of the women in this study, these demonstrated profoundly little agency in their ability to develop their career identities due to their restricted levels of capital. These three women are:

Pseudonym	Class	University	Subject
Adele	FWC	UWE	History and International Relations
Zoe	FWC	UoB	Law
Bianca	FWC	UoB	History

Table ten: Career identity development three: Reactive to the university experience

4. Education focussed

For the most part, the women in typology four embarked on their HE experience with the intention to allow their university experiences to guide them towards a career. Their primary focus was on achieving good grades in their studies. Some had loose career

aspirations which changed often, and others (the upper-working-class) were more likely to report:

> I don't really know what I want to do.
> (Amelia, UWC, UoB, Biology, I6)

Overall, in their first two academic years some of these women perceived the scholastic capital of having a degree as 'enough' to achieve their career aspirations after graduation. Due to this, their career identity development remained minimal until their final year of study when panic ensued, particularly for the firmly-working-class women. These four women are:

Pseudonym	Class	University	Subject
Sariah	FWC	UWE	Sociology
Jade	FWC	UoB	Psychology
Melissa	UWC	UoB	English
Amelia	UWC	UoB	Biology

Table eleven: Career identity development four: Education focussed

7.2.2 Processes of career identity development

It has long been established that women are more likely to be in "weaker economic positions" than men due to the pay gap (currently 17.9 per cent for all employees in the UK (Office for National Statistics (ONS), 2018b)), and institutions, which are known to be instrumental in the shaping of career development, are known to propagate gendered structural inequalities (Green, 2015, p.22). Due to this, it is important to consider the pre-university and in-university employment experiences to consider how advantage/disadvantage is reproduced by the institutional structures of employment. I also consider here how these structures interact with the structures of HE.

Referring to the typologies and class positions, I also examine the working-class women's approaches towards getting advice, accessing PG study and applying for their post-graduation moves. As will be evident, some of the typologies were overridden due to areas of homogeneity in the participants' class (and class fractions) and their gender.

<u>Pre-university preparations for employment</u>

All of the women arrived at university having already worked in what the National Statistics Socio-economic Classification (NS-SEC) considers to be 'routine occupations', as barmaids, or in waitressing or retail sales staff. Though all worked in these roles at some point, the upper-working-class women were the only ones to have also worked in 'clerical and intermediate occupations'. This work was in educational

settings and administrative roles and often alongside family members. These were considered by the women to be "well-paying" roles (Amelia, FWC, UoB, Biology, I1) that they could return to if necessary post-graduation, though they wanted to avoid this.

For all the working-class women, their aims in engaging in these employment positions before university differed. For most of the firmly-working-class women, they worked in minimum wage jobs in order to save up money before embarking on their undergraduate studies as they knew their families could not financially support them once they were in Bristol. This was not a necessary forethought for all the upper-working-class women as some knew they would receive some financial support from their families while they studied. Thus, instead, the paid work that these women engaged in before university was done with the aim to fund their plans to travel around Asia which they embarked on during their pre-university gap year.

For all working-class women, the paid work that they engaged in did little to develop their career identities beyond showing them that they did not want to return to that 'type' of work. Instead, it was the unpaid work and the cultural activities that some of these women were able to participate in which kick-started the formation of their career identities before university.

For example, Melissa and Megan (both UWC, UoB, English), plus all the aspirational teachers in group one (FWC), had done voluntary experience working in education settings before accessing university. The firmly-working-class women, due to being 'driven by a long-term desire', began developing their career identities at a young age (as early as sixteen years old). Many had purposefully kept in contact with their previous teachers in the aim to do voluntary experience with them and drew on this social capital when they were in a position to do so. This finding sits in opposition to Abrahams (2017, p.637) work which found that working-class undergraduate students tend to be committed to a "sense of honour which rules out using social capital [...] preferring to make it themselves". The working-class women previously mentioned in this PhD study were proactive in accumulating 'hot' and 'cold' knowledge[54], via their social capital, to draw on when embarking on processes of career identity development. Two of the firmly-working-class women arrived at university having already gained work experience in primary and secondary schools in the aim to refine their career

[54] Ball and Vincent (2005, p.378, cited by Bowers-Brown, 2016) refer to 'hot-knowledge' as information gathered in the private realm through social contacts, "from the grapevine" so to speak. 'Cold-knowledge' on the other hand, is "official and constructed specifically for public dissemination" through targeted careers advice, for example (Ball and Vincent, 2005, p.380, cited by Bowers-Brown, 2016).

aspirations through considering how they would specialise at Postgraduate Certificate in Education (PGCE) level.

In a different manner, Megan and Melissa (both UWC, UoB, English), who volunteered in educational settings in the summertime before university, did so as a project to fulfil part of their travelling plans, rather than in the aim to gain experience to then develop their career identities. While travelling around Asia, these women volunteered to teach English to young people for a few weeks. Snee (2014) notes that these 'cosmopolitan' experiences (largely unavailable to most working-class students due to the cost) are growing more popular as they demonstrate good 'global citizenship', a form of cultural capital which is valued by graduate employers (Ingram and Allen, 2018; Snee, 2014). Additionally, unlike the firmly-working-class women, for the upper-working-class women, becoming a teacher was not their main aspiration but they perceived teaching as more easily-accessible than their main aspirations: to write, publish and do work which would allow them to travel abroad. Gradually, they developed their aspirations to become a teacher because they considered this a viable route through which they could begin working towards their main aspirations:

> I'd really like to do writing. So, I'm kind of thinking about Screen Writing master's. But it all depends on… because I want to travel again when I finish uni. My plan is to train for a PGCE, do the PGCE then work for a year, like earn money, and then travel a bit more. And then I'm going to try and use the travelling to write and things like that. Because when I apply for a Creative Writing or a Screen Writing master's I'll need to have a portfolio of stuff to submit to them. Then I'll need to teach again to save up the money to pay for the master's because my parents won't support any further like kind of studies. (Megan, UWC, UoB, English, I4)

Like Megan and Melissa, the rest of those in group two, who gradually developed their career aspirations, were also influenced by the cultural capital they had developed before university. However, in the case of the firmly-working-class women, these influential experiences were set as activities set by their schools (school trips or Y11 work experience). Similarly, the women in typology three ('reactive to the university experience') arrived at university with an idea of what careers they aspired to achieve post-graduation, and these were orientated around the subjects that they had chosen to study:

	Degree subject	Aspirations in interview one
Adele (FWC, UWE)	History and International Relations	Journalist or Historian.
Zoe (FWC, UoB)	Law	an "ethical Lawyer" (I2).
Bianca (FWC, UoB)	History	Researcher and museum work.

Table twelve: Typology three's aspirations in interview one

Though this was the case, like most of the other firmly-working-class women interviewed, these women required paid work while they studied. Though, they had 'low' social capital[55], often misrecognised cultural capital, experiential capital in routine and manual roles (or 'working-class jobs' as the SMC (2019) describe them), and so were only able to find work in these types of roles again. They could not access 'professional' entry-level experience in the areas they wished to work, and as they required paid work, they could not take part in unpaid work practices in these areas due to time restrictions, even if they had the opportunity to do so.

<u>Employment experiences at university</u>

There were varied work-based practices among the group of fifteen working-class women while they studied. All the aspirational teachers in typology one ('driven by a long-term desire) engaged in paid employment throughout the summertime of each academic year, saving up money for their return to university. The wages from this work, plus a university bursary, the Student Finance England (SFE) maintenance loan and grant (the latter was removed in 2016 (Hubble and Bolton, 2017)) gave them the space to continue engaging in work-based experiences in schools during term-time while they also studied. As they were able to do this, they further developed their career identities by considering which areas of education they wished to specialise in. For example, Ruby decided to specialise in Special Education Needs (SEN) education after volunteering in a SEN secondary school in her second year of study. Though the women in group one had prepared financially in this way and lived on very little throughout term time, often they found themselves "begging" their parents for money:

[55] For Burke (2016a, p.28), once operationalised, 'low' levels of social capital only provides access to 'low' status jobs, on the other hand, agents who are able to access and progress in 'professional' fields, where they "increase or reproduce their life chances", are seen as operationalising 'high' social capital.

> I've got into a rut and I had to borrow some money from my family, which I'm still paying back in instalments. Because I completely ran out because my accommodation is so expensive, it's absolutely absurd, it's like £5,500 for the year, and it's not even the whole year. Yeah that's got me into trouble a few times when it comes out every month, it just sort of wipes away all my money and I've got nothing. It leaves me with £50 a week for food and books. Sometimes I have to go begging from my parents.
> (Jasmine, FWC, UWE, Sociology, I2)

Among the upper-working-class women, most did not do paid work throughout term-time as they received financial support from their families. Megan's grandfather paid her accommodation fees as he did not want her to work while she studied:

> He's never liked the idea of me working, again because he is quite traditional with his like odd views and he's quite stuck up. Like when I was in college, he sort of insinuated that I was into prostitution because I worked at [PIZZA RESTAURANT]. He's always hated the idea that I'd have to work, that my parents could not possibly afford for me not to. […] Obviously, now I got a student loan, got the maintenance grant, and a small £300 Bristol bursary, and then my grandad like helping now I'm at university so that I don't have to have a job - which is the biggest help.
> (UWC, UoB, English, I1)

For eight of the firmly-working-class women, they required paid employment in the term time in order to survive. This disparity between the class fractions in the necessity of paid employment is reflected in Orr, Gwosc and Netz's (2011) work. Analysing data from 2010, they found that while twenty-nine per cent of students from "high education backgrounds" regularly worked more than five hours per week, this percentage rose to forty-four per cent of students from "low and intermediate education backgrounds" (Orr, Gwosc and Netz, 2011, p.42). Additionally, research from upReach (commission by and cited by SMC (2019)) found that 80 per cent of their participants from household incomes of £26,000 or less required term-time employment to cover living costs and almost 30 per cent were working more than sixteen hours a week during term time.

The eight firmly-working-class women worked all year round in retail, supermarkets and bars. Unlike many of their peers who they studied alongside, these women are less likely to have developed the same depth of 'scholastic point of view' (otherwise referred to as 'skholé' by Bourdieu (2000)) as those who were able to concentrate all their time on their academic studies. These eight women did not 'choose' to work, rather there was a lack of agency in their choice as their paid work practices were essential because state support and loans (SFE) was insufficient to cover their accommodation bills, never mind the cost of living. For example, Sophie (FWC, UWE,

Politics, I2) said that retaining her weekend job in her hometown meant that she had "enough money for food" and after losing her job at a bar, Zoe (FWC, UoB, Law, I5) was faced with "considering being a webcam girl for money". An increasing number of students face doing adult work to be able to support themselves while they study. The Student Money Survey (2018) found that 3 per cent of UK students finance their studies with some form of adult work, rising to 4 per cent when in a financial crisis. In 2017, one company which works as a platform for 'sugar daddies' to meet 'sugar babies' noted a 30 per cent increase on the previous year of UK students registering to become 'sugar babies' (Seeking Arrangement, 2018). This increase was disproportionately made up of students at redbrick universities (Student Money Survey, 2018).

Most of the women in employment were engaged in precarious forms of work with low pay and insecure hours, a common finding in the narratives of working-class undergraduate students (Antonucci, 2016). This left these women vulnerable to exploitation and high levels of anxiety:

> I need that job otherwise I can't really survive, I can't really function. […] It's so crucial to me being at uni, that part-time job, I'm constantly worrying "am I doing OK in it? Does [MANAGER] like me?" because if she doesn't and she gets rid of me what am I going to do? Without (work) I literally don't know how I would cope. But still, you know, when I'm in the supermarket and, you know, you're buying 17p tins of beans. Everything is like Tesco Value, everything is like the cheapest you can get.
> (Adele, FWC, UWE, History and Int Relations, I5)

Those in typology three ('reactive to the university experience') were among those whose need to do paid work was the most pronounced. It was not uncommon for them to work a twenty-hour week during term-time. This was perhaps why the development of their career identities had disruptive, reactive points which re-orientated them away from their original aspirations and towards the paid work they did, all of which were in feminised sectors. For example, within the first year and a half of her studies Zoe came to see her identity as being partly formed by the paid work she did:

> (The job is) kind of part of my identity as well. It sounds silly, but like from October 2010 that's been who I am. And I refer to myself, they say "what do you do", "I'm a law student and I'm a [WAITRESS]", do you know what I mean? It's a massive part.
> (FWC, UoB, Law, I4)

Over the three academic years, her aspirations changed from wanting to be a lawyer (I1) to being an "ethical lawyer" but not a "stuffy academic lawyer" (I2), to wanting to

become a model and 'calendar girl' at the bar she works at (I3+). While her paid work experiences played a role in re-orientating her career identity development in that direction, what appeared to compound this was the isolating culture that many of the other working-class women who studied at UoB faced. Soon after starting her undergraduate degree, Zoe demonstrated a dawning psychological awareness of her class position and came to view herself, as Reay, Crozier and Clayton (2009) put it, as a 'stranger in paradise' in relation to the elite culture at UoB, the privately educated students on her course and the wealthy students in her accommodation. Due to this, Zoe's career development was re-orientated towards that which she saw herself most reflected in: the bar in which she worked alongside other young working-class women. While requiring paid work had its many setbacks, it also provided these young women with a sense of being 'at home at work' as many of their colleagues were also young working-class students. This brought a sense of relief which also compounded already-present feelings of 'being a fish out of water' (Bourdieu, 1990) when in the university field:

> I got a job in the summer, this is a minimum wage job [WAITRESSING], I got on with those people (UWE students) so well, I had such, such a good time with them. Like at (UoB) I went out with people I had a good time once I got drunk or something, but before that it was always a bit awkward and I felt like the conversation was never that flowing. Like I don't fit into the majority like (UoB) stereotype I guess, I don't fit in with those people a lot. I've felt like so uncomfortable and intimidated. Whereas with the people at work I always had such a good time, we always used to talk about like…it didn't matter what we were talking about, I felt so comfortable. I just found it a lot easier to get on with. So, I imagine yeah, I probably would have felt like I had a lot more friends that I could get on with and rely on (if I'd have studied at UWE) maybe more than I do here because of that. Especially thinking about my summer experience, and actually I think that's what made me feel so good about this year, is that it made me realise actually maybe the reason you didn't have loads of friends at the beginning (at UoB) is because you weren't surrounded by the kind of people that you wouldn't necessarily be friends with. Because I feel like I've got loads of friends now.
> (Anna, FWC, UoB, Politics, I6)

Zoe and many of the other firmly-working-class women who required paid work remarked that they wanted to engage in internships[56] and experience more of a "university life" (Bianca, FWC, UoB, History, I4), which would have included doing extra-curricular activities (ECAs), taking part in social events and joining societies. However, they did not have the capacity and the capital to do so. Many reported

[56] Only two firmly-working-class women had the capacity to do internships as these were inbuilt into their courses.

struggling to keep up with university work because engaging in paid work often left them feeling “completely incapacitated” (Zoe, FWC, UoB, Law, I5). This is a common finding in the experiences of those who are juggling other demands, such as doing paid work while studying (Burke *et al.,* 2017). The necessity of having to do paid work restrained their opportunities to “do better” in their degrees and “get more involved in university life”, as Bianca explained:

> I get very stressed about my financial situation, and sometimes I think about that more than I do about my uni studies. I get so stressed about where rent’s going to come from and how I’m going to buy food and stuff, that it completely overshadows anything else that you’re doing. […] How do you cope with it? How do you deal with that balance, an act of working and trying to do your finances out and do your work at the same time? You need to be focussed but I’m distracted. […] If I’d been given a loan on top of my loan I wouldn’t have to do this, I wouldn’t be doing this job, I would just be happier, I could do better in my degree, I could get more involved in university life, I wouldn’t be so bitter. I’m working 20 hours a week and it cripples me.
> (FWC, UoB, History, I4)

These women were not able to develop their ‘scholastic dispositions’ (Bourdieu, 2000) to the same extent that their wealthier counterparts were able to as they still had to engage in the world of work. Similar notions of resentment were not evident in the narratives of the upper-working-class women as they were able to engage with their studies full-time, have the time to negotiate access to graduate style internships (to start after graduation) and take part in ECAs:

> I play violin so I’m in the [ORCHESTRA]. And that’s good, we’re going on tour at Easter to Berlin. […] I do Capoeira which is a Brazilian dance martial art thing and I’ve been like writing for the university newspaper.
> (Melissa, UWC, UoB, English, I4)

These practices are known to reap comparatively higher salaries and lead graduates to feel more positive about their future career prospects (Purcell *et al.,* 2013). Extra-curricular activities and internships are known to be entry points for many high-status, high paid careers (Friedman and Laurison, 2019). However, access to these most often requires “high value” social, cultural and economic capital (Bathmaker, Ingram and Waller, 2013, p.738), often passed on by parents. As extensive research shows, through accessing family economic and social capital to enable them to do internships and ECAs, middle-class students are able to maintain their advantaged social position due to their value in the graduate labour market (Ingram and Allen, 2018; Allen *et al.,* 2013; Bathmaker *et al.,* 2013; Burke, 2016a; Purcell *et al.,* 2012). However, considering the

class fractions in this work, these patterns of practice and strategy were evident in the upper-working-class women's university experiences as they accumulated some forms of valuable cultural and social capital. The firmly-working-class women, through viewing such practices of their wealthier counterparts, developed their understanding of 'the game'. Often, they too wanted to participate in these strategies for distinction but did not have the required capital to do so:

> I'd love to go into journalism and I know that people are "oh God that's so hard to get into, you need to know people in the right area". I spoke to like my sister about it and she was like "if you want to go into it, do your best, like try and get an internship" which I'm looking into trying to get an internship now somewhere. My flatmate, she's actually doing English and Journalism at UoB and she's just got an internship at a magazine, so I'm looking to do that. But I also work part-time, so it's trying to juggle doing my studies, working part-time and then doing an internship. I'd like to do one at the Evening Post, but they don't pay students.
> (Adele, FWC, UWE, History and Int Relations, I2)

Working-class students and graduates are understood to lack valuable networks which present routes of access to informal and unadvertised employment opportunities, a barrier which more advantaged young people are less likely to encounter (Donnell, Baratta and Gamsu, 2019).

While Zoe initially had a positive conceptualisation of how her work experience in a bar would be received in the graduate labour market:

> I think what looks great is saying "I financed a Law degree with working in a high energy environment which took a lot from me", because I think that's very valuable to say, "actually I did a lot of work, I had to balance two very dominating things". So, I'm not too worried about (doing an) extra-curricular (activity) because I think a job is the most extra-curricular thing of all.
> (FWC, UoB, Law, I1)

Having watched 'the game' being played by the strategic middle-classes around her, as graduation drew closer, Zoe grew to view her work experience as having little value compared to those who had done an internship. Just as privileged students perceive their successes as due to "what they have done", having "reached the higher levels of the hierarchy through their own merit" (Khan, 2011, p.76), Zoe came to view her 'failures' as those which she deservedly reaped. The work which she once drew codes of hard work and resilience from, she grew to view in a regretful and blameful manner:

> We were doing this Guardian student survey and it was like "what graduate of employers have you like applied to", I was like "I can't name you one graduate employer", and all these questions I was like "I don't know". And I just walked away and I just said "it's the worst day of my life", it was basically like "you've got no prospects". […] And it said "what graduate employers are you looking to apply for" and so I was like [BAR ONE- ABROAD] and [BAR TWO-BRISTOL] because I had nothing else to say, like it was awful. And the saddest and most tragic question was "which of these do you see yourself having fulfilled by the time you're 30?" and it was like having children, having a husband, owning a house, earning over £100,000 a year, and the only one that I could tick was living and working abroad because I've already done it – and that was so tragic.
> (FWC, UoB, Law, I6)

Her experience of having worked as a barmaid abroad was one that she had previously been proud of, but after going through the HE system she considered this "tragic". This demonstrates the symbolic power of the HE system and the graduate labour market and how it can enact symbolic violence on the working-classes and their cultural and social practices. The more these women learnt about 'the game' and saw it being played, the angrier some of them grew at their inability to participate:

> If you have somebody in your family that knows somebody else, so if your dad's a businessman and you know that he has links with other people. And I've seen it happen. Like second year, [HOUSEMATE] her grandfather and her dad, they started this company, she's quite wealthy. And when she was looking for a placement, I think she left hers to the last minute, but her dad pulled a few strings and she got like a marketing position at [SUPERMARKET] in their offices and stuff in London. We all knew there was no way in hell she would have got that if her dad didn't have that contact, because you just wouldn't know those people, why would you kind of thing. But because her dad owns his own supermarket chain he knew them. […] It's all about who you know.
> (Adele, FWC, UWE, History and Int Relations, I6)

This contradicts Bathmaker, Ingram and Waller's (2013, p.740) analysis that working-class students do not have "a 'feel for the game'" when engaging in practices of constructing "employable selves". While this was the case for some of the women in this study, it was not the case for the majority. Though none could be considered "good players" as they did not 'embody' the game or "continually do what needs to be done, what the game demands and requires" (Lamaison, 1986, p.112) due to their lack of valuable capital. However, most developed a 'good' 'feel for the game' through observing their more privileged counterparts participating and through their frustrations

of not being able to. In fact, for the firmly-working-class women who required paid employment during term-time, their developed understanding of 'the game' (and how a disparity in wealth contributed to this) was the most pronounced because their ability to participate was the most restricted.

Getting advice

In terms of getting careers advice, all the firmly-working-class women and some of the upper-working-class women sought some form of formal careers advice from their universities. The women in typology one ('driven by a long-term desire') actively sought advice from multiple sources (careers fairs, careers advice services at their universities) to develop both 'cold' and 'hot-knowledge'[57] (Ball and Vincent, 2005, cited by Bowers-Brown, 2016). The advice which had the most impact was that which they received via drawing on their social capital (their former teachers whom they did volunteer work with), that is, their 'hot-knowledge'. This provided them with the cultural capital essential to navigate their post-graduation steps, such as applying for PGCEs and writing job applications. Similarly, those in group three ('reactive to the university experience') accessed some form of careers advice from the university, but the 'hot-knowledge' received from their work colleagues appeared to have more of an effect on orientating their career identity development.

Overall, while the vast majority of the working-class women were open to speaking with contacts who could help them find a job post-graduation, a finding different to that of Abraham's (2017), the value of their social capital differed among the class fractions. For example, the firmly-working-class women spoke of their family as having little-to-no valuable social capital to mobilise to gain access to graduate-level employment:

> No… no. No, I don't think they can help. It's all down to me really.
> (Sariah, FWC, UWE, Sociology, I4)

This was also found in the narratives of the working-class students in the wider Paired Peers cohort (Bathmaker *et al.,* 2016) and was found to be the case for working-class graduates in Burke's work (2016a). Though the women in this study did not have the capital to gain access to graduate-level employment, their families provided support in searching for jobs, drawing on their working-class social and cultural capital:

[57] Defined above on p.131.

> My mum always does that with my sister, looks in the paper for a job for me and asks around.
> (Jade, FWC, UoB, Psychology, I4)

This was different from how some of the upper-working-class women spoke about the value of their social capital and their readiness in their ability to draw on it to find work:

> Like if I really needed a job I can just kind of yeah talk to extended family.
> (Melissa, UWC, UoB, English, I4)

<u>Postgraduate study</u>

The development of career identities for some of the women were inexplicably tied to postgraduate (PG) study. All the women considered studying at PG level though the extent to which their career identity had developed, as well as their class position and gender, constrained what they viewed as possible.

The upper-working-class women were the only ones to apply for a full-time 'traditional' master's courses (a face-to-face, mostly teacher-led "programme which exists to extend subject knowledge" (Wakeling and Laurison, 2017, p.537)). This reflects findings from Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) which showed that those from POLAR group 5 (the top one-fifth high-income background) were more like than their less privileged counterparts to access 'taught master's' in 2013. For all PG routes, Wakeling and Hampden-Thompson's (2013) found that students aged 25-32 from routine and semi-routine backgrounds were one-third less likely than those from intermediate and lower-managerial backgrounds to access any form of PG study (12 per cent of the former accessed PG study, while 18 per cent of the latter accessed).

All the firmly-working-class women who wanted to do PG study aspired to take a 'less traditional' route outlined by Wakeling and Laurison (2017, p.537) as "intended to qualify a graduate for a particular profession". Though there were some taught elements, the courses they embarked on were significantly 'work-based' and were predominantly routes into teaching:

1. Teach First
2. PGCEs
3. ITT courses
4. Part-time postgraduate diplomas

The firmly-working-class either had PG study inbuilt in their courses or they applied to various teaching courses in order to fulfil their desires to teach. Unlike traditional

master's courses at the time, Student Finance would offer additional loans to cover the cost of doing a PGCE. Those who secured places on traditional master's (MA) courses (Melissa: MA in English at UoB; Samantha: MA in Geography at UoB), at the time of interview 6, were going to self-fund, something which none of the firmly-working-class women could do. Jasmine, for example, when discussing doing PG study in social work said:

> It's like a postgraduate diploma but it gives you like the same at the end of it (as an MA) and it's over 2 years part-time, in the second year of that course you get put on a placement, so I've only got to worry about (finding work in) the first year part-time, like that could be literally anything just to make ends meet. So yeah, probably just, I don't know, maybe work in Greggs you know, a bit of a bakery theme going on (she had previously worked in five different bakeries).
> (FWC, UWE, Sociology, I5)

The three who wanted to become teachers in group one began looking at PG routes in their second year of university. Ruby and Jackie's aspirations were to return home immediately after their last exam and so began considering options closer to home. These women were also eager to re-establish their former roles in the family (i.e. picking up siblings from school, providing emotional support), to physically engage again in the familial habitus (Bourdieu, 1984). After considering and/or applying for three different routes: Teach First, Schools Direct and PGCE, they were rejected from the first two and accepted onto PGCE courses before they submitted their third-year dissertations.

Teach First is a prestigious graduate scheme (fourth in The Times 'Top 100 Graduate Employers' (2018)) with a high rejection rate (50,000 applications were submitted in 2017, and only 1,396 places were offered (Ward, 2018; Teach First, 2017). The charity takes:

> "high-calibre graduates who otherwise might not have considered teaching […] from 'top' universities (in England, predominantly from Russell Group universities) and training them intensively for a short period, before placing them in schools in areas of disadvantage, where they work on a salaried full-time basis, whilst being prepared for 'leadership'."
> (Elliot, 2018, p.264)

As an organisation, Teach First constructs their graduates "as elites who are other and better than teachers, doing heroic, philanthropic, life-changing work. They are leaders and they are looking for the next challenge, which may or may not be in teaching" (Elliot, 2018, p.272). Out of the four working-class women who applied for Teach First (3 FWC in typology one, 1 UWC in typology two), only Megan (UWC, UoB, English)

was offered a place. Megan had done relatively much less volunteer work than the firmly-working-class women and was not driven by the same passion: to alleviate social inequalities. This motif among Teach First graduates was noted by Jackie:

> Teach First isn't it, like all the top recruits, they like all the top graduates, but they don't want to go into teaching, they want to do teaching for 2 years and they want the management and the extra (money) that the Teach First is going to give them.
> (FWC, UoB, Sociology, I10)

This reflects Rice, Volkoff and Dulfer's (2015, p.497) findings which showed that those who enter teaching via Teach First "place relatively little importance on improving school resourcing or addressing systemic and structural contributions to educational disadvantage".

All of those in typology four ('education focussed') considered an MA, but it was only the upper-working-class who applied for this PG route as they had the capital to do so. Their aims in doing this were to bide further time before having to choose a career direction:

> I'm not sure whether I'll do it straight after graduating, or kind of try and get a job for a bit or go travelling or something and then come back and do it. But, yeah, it's (doing an MA) definitely something that I'm thinking about, partly also because I don't really know what I want to do as a career, so… delay that for a bit longer.
> (Melissa, UWC, UoB, English, I6)

Outside of typology one, most of the women said they wanted to 'delay'/ 'have a break' before starting their careers, but only some of these women were able to do this via studying an MA, and these were from upper-working-class backgrounds. This finding is supported by Wakeling and Laurison (2017, p.552) who found that "class effects are strongest among the newest graduates […] so, close to the point of first-degree graduation those from the most advantaged class backgrounds may be able to draw on parental support, especially financial, which is not available to their graduate peers from disadvantaged social classes". The lack of available resources caused much anxiety for some of the women and while there is a "tendency to consider psychological problems as individual issues" (Antonucci, 2016, p.83) this anxiety was most evident in the narratives of the firmly-working-class women rather than the group of fifteen as a whole.

Applying for a post-graduation moves

Returning to the parental home after graduation due to an increasingly unpredictable, austerity-ridden employment market is now "becoming normative" for graduates in their 20s (Stone, Berrington, Falkingham, 2014, p.258). This is reflected in my data with most of the women having already made plans to return home after their final exams. For some, this was not only out of foreseeable financial necessity but also to re-establish social bonds with relatives, particularly with their mothers.

Those in typology one who had done voluntary experience had refined their post-graduation moves to suit their desires to return home. Though they wished to do so, to re-establish social roles in the familial habitus, this was also necessary as the bursaries they received to do their PGCEs from SFE did not cover rental costs.

Others, who were in a relatively more economically secure position, were the upper-working-class women in typology two ('gradual development') and typology four ('education focussed'). These women knew towards the end of their degrees that they were either going on to do an MA, an internship or engage in work at a 'top' forty graduate recruiter (The Times, 2018), had been accepted to do a prestigious graduate scheme or had plans to go travelling. However, in a different manner to the firmly-working-class women in group one, these women secured these with confidence, perhaps due in part to a relatively higher level of embodied cultural capital: "I just knew it was going to happen" (Megan, UWC, UoB, English, I5).

Within the narratives of the upper-working-class women, there was a distinct lack of immediacy in regards to securing their post-graduation moves. When Melissa was asked about her next moves in the final interview, she said:

> I still haven't actually got round to doing the application process (for the MA in English at UoB) but it's on my list of things to do.
> (UWC, UoB, English, I6)

After spending the three years being "not very career-orientated" and "focussing on (her) degree", Melissa secured:

> work experience over the summer cos I haven't really had any proper work experience. So, I'm doing a two-week placement with [A TOP TEN GRADUATE EMPLOYER IN THE MEDIA] and a four-week placement with a company called [PUBLISHING HOUSE] who publish like journals and stuff, so that should be good. […] The first one was because the editor came and did a talk at the postgrad open day and I just kind of emailed her afterwards like asking her if she had any advice because she was talking about work experience

> and I kind of told her I'd done some student media stuff and she emailed me back telling me to send my C.V. So that was quite easy.
> (UWC, UoB, English, I6)

While nearly all fifteen of the women said they needed a break after graduation due to the stress of completing their degrees, only a select few were able to go travelling or take a yearlong break before making career decisions. Megan, who had a gap year before accessing university and travelled around Asia, opted to postpone her Teach First course for twelve months:

> I need to think after all this craziness is over if I do want to do that (go straight into Teach First), because a part of me really wants another year out. Like I really want to travel again and I really, I just think I could really use the recuperation. […] I'm aiming to have the year out to do a Work Away placement where I would work with training young horses on a ranch. It's my dream.
> (UWC, UoB, English, I6)

These experiences were markedly different from most of the firmly-working-class women's as they encountered much anxiety.

> I don't even want to talk about it. I've had a mental breakdown. I find this environment so oppressive, I find it very much like a cattle market and everyone's expected to go de-de-de, university and then you're applying for a graduate job in the second year and third year and all this big experience la-la-la….and networking and internships and I haven't done any of that.
> (Zoe, FWC, UoB, Law, I6)

Many contemplated what they would do, where they would work, and if they would/could return home. This was an especially difficult time for Sariah as family ties had broken down while she studied, and she was struggling with her mental health. Due to a necessity of having to do paid work, and their current roles being insecure, some faced contemplating having to work somewhere where they would be unhappy and unfulfilled, but would pay the bills:

> I know for a fact if I don't find a job that I really want within… say by about September, I'm going to have to do a bar job, I'm going to have to do something so I can afford to pay my rent and things. Whereas some other people might be given a bit of time to maybe go travelling and to maybe think really what they want to do, what sort of action, and have a few trial and error kind of things, but I kind of can't, I haven't got that safety net, I haven't got the opportunity to muck up on too many occasions.
> (Adele, FWC, UWE, History and Int Relations, I6)

This was markedly different to the confidence that some of the upper-working-class women had in their future employment:

> I'm quite confident at some point I'll probably have a job that I enjoy. (Amelia, UWC, UoB, Biology, I6)

7.3 Conclusion

Though university is "thought to be a key element in reducing inequalities in society" (Antonucci, 2016, p.159) this chapter evidences some ways in which advantage and disadvantage are reproduced through HE institutions. Through considering what the constructions of a graduate identity framed by for young working-class women, this work has found that habitus, capitals and field play interconnecting roles in forming such identities.

Though it could be said that as these young women entered university they set out on a route away from their social backgrounds, this chapter has shown how their aspirations, 'choices' and practices of constructing their graduate identities are heavily framed and conditioned by the habitus and restricted by available capitals. These were particularly key in relation to the field(s) in which they occupied (HE) and the one they were about to enter (the graduate labour market) which sets a standard of success via a middle-class bias.

First, their choice to access university differed along class lines with the upper-working-class women expressing there had always been an expectation from teachers that they would attend. The firmly-working-class were more likely to attend out of necessity and their choices were firmly rooted in their habitus. Thus, while the 'choice' to access HE was more likely to be made out of struggle and endowed with anxiety for the firmly-working-class, relative to the upper-working-class, university was still relatively a 'non-choice' for these women. This was because there was little opportunity for them in their hometowns and cities to achieve their goals of doing work which would allow them to live a financially secure and independent life and (for most) work which would fulfil their drive to do socially progressive work.

The development approaches to their graduate identities were multiple and were restricted by the value and volume of capital within their remit. While the development of some career identities were relatively static, slowly developed, others (such as those in typology three) were reactive to their university experiences. Rather than them lacking aspiration or "struggling to develop a career vision towards their professional

future" (Pasero, 2016, p.7), this work found that their 'choices' to move away from doing 'professional' work (becoming a lawyer, a journalist and a researcher) were consequential to their lack of valuable social and cultural capital and their need for economic capital to sustain themselves while they studied. This was also compounded by the notion that they felt socially isolated in the university field and 'at home' in their work environments with other working-class students.

While the strategies of the fifteen working-class women employed to develop a career identity could be characterised into typologies, their class position most often superseded these. That is, the stratification of the graduates into class-based groups was more impactful on their graduate construction practices than the 'career identity development' typologies outlined in this chapter.

Having 'low', 'misrecognised', 'undervalued', 'working-class' volumes and compositions of capital was most often synonymous with the struggle to develop graduate identities and increasing levels of anxiety over the university period. For example, towards the end of their final year at university, the upper-working-class in typologies two ('gradual development') and four ('education focussed') felt safe in the knowledge that they were going on to do PG study, do (unpaid) summer internships and/or go travelling. On the other hand, the firmly-working-class in these typologies demonstrated great levels of anxiety over their next steps and could not 'afford' the same depth of space and time available to the upper-working-class women to develop a graduate career.

Though all considered PG study, the only ones among the firmly-working-class who did so were able to do so because SFE funded PGCEs. The upper-working-class were able to draw on economic capital from elsewhere to facilitate their PG studies and opted to study more 'traditionally' academic courses as a way to further explore a subject they loved and/or delay key career-making decisions. These women were also more likely to do a graduate-style internship post-graduation, something which the firmly-working-class would have "loved" (Zoe, FWC, UoB, Law, I7) to have done but did not have the resources to do so.

Overall, their 'choices' and constructions of their graduate identities were constricted along class lines with the firmly-working-class navigating the middle-class field of the university with a lack of economic capital, (in most cases) a lack of valuable social and cultural capital so as to navigate entry to desired professional employment. As well as this, they had within them a habitus endowed with experiential capital and dispositions

which led them to work to avoid the conditions of existence that they and their families had lived through or to work to help fix social inequalities for those less advantaged than themselves.

The next chapter continues to demonstrate the complexity of ‘working-classness’ through exploring how the career development strategies of working-class women are played out in the labour market by examining their initial transitions out of university. Though the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) collects quantitative data of graduates six months post-graduation, the initial transitions of graduates in qualitative terms are under-researched, according to Finn (2015). Throughout the next chapter, I bridge this research gap.

Chapter eight: Establishing Distinction? The Initial Transitions out of University

This chapter builds on a paper I gave at an academic conference I co-organised[58] and addresses my second research question:

2. What do young working-class women's transitions from 'undergraduate' to 'graduate' comprise of?

It has been established that graduates from routine and manual ('working-class') backgrounds are less likely to access graduate-level jobs, more likely to be unemployed and under-employed, and be earning lower than average wages than their more privileged counterparts (Friedman and Laurison, 2019; Social Mobility Commission (SMC), 2019). Further, women from these backgrounds face a double disadvantage in these regards, at that, if these women are from minority ethnic groups and have disabilities, they face more complex disadvantages in occupational outcomes (Friedman and Laurison, 2019; SMC, 2019). Though this has been found to be the case, until now qualitative data has not explored how young working-class women navigate and reflect on such experiences as new graduates.

In this chapter, I explore the initial transitions of working-class women out of university and into (un)employment. I examine the narratives of those who graduated to 'non-graduate jobs', 'traditional graduate jobs' and 'new graduate jobs', and consider their experiences of these. I examine young working-class women's engagement with precarious employment structures, how these practices can both exploit the labour of these women and be used to benefit them. However, first to provide some brief context, I outline the young working-class women's initial outcomes from university in terms of their grades, progression rates onto postgraduate (PG) study, geographical mobility and graduate wages.

8.1 Outcomes

While research shows that the more 'deprived' a student's background is considered, the more likely they are to drop out of their degrees in two years and the less likely they are to complete within five years (SMC, 2019; Crawford *et al.,* 2017), all but one of the

[58] Bentley, L. (2017b) *"I'm scared if I make the wrong move then I'm going to be worse off than I am now": Working-class women's trajectories out of Higher Education.* At: The Precarious Lives of Women, a British Sociological Association (BSA) Regional Early Career Event. Sheffield Hallam University, Sheffield, 30th June.

women in this study graduated from their undergraduate degrees in summer 2013. Lizzie (FWC, UoB) graduated a year later after completing her four-year Engineering degree with integrated master's.

As shown in the table below, all but one of the working-class women were among the 75 per cent of all women graduating from a full-time undergraduate degree in England with a 2:1 or a First in 2013/14 (Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA), 2018d). Melissa (UWC, UoB, English) was among the 21 per cent who graduated with First class honours degree that year, and Lizzie was among the 23 per cent who graduated with a First a year later (HESA, 2018d). Post-graduation, one-third of the women in this study went on to access and graduate from PG level study:

		Subject	Achieved	
UWE	Adele	History and Int Relations	2:1	FWC
	Jasmine	Sociology	2:1 (68 per cent)	
	Sariah	Sociology	2:1	
	Ruby	English	2:1	
		PGCE at Bath Spa University	√	
	Sophie	Politics	2:1 (65 per cent)	
UoB	Jackie	Sociology	2:1	
		PGCE at Goldsmiths, University of London	√	
	Zoe	Law	2:1 ("almost a First")	
	Anna	Politics and Economics	2:1 (68 per cent)	
		PGCE at UoB	Distinction	
	Bianca	History	2:1 (65 per cent)	
	Jade	Psychology	2:1 (67 per cent)	
	Lizzie	Engineering (integrated MA)	First	
	Melissa	English	First	UWC
		MA in European Literature at UoB	√	
	Megan	English	2:1 (69.9 per cent)	
	Samantha	Geography	2:1	
		MA in Geography at UoB	√	
		PhD at UWE	Submitted	
	Amelia	Biology	2:2	

Table thirteen: Higher education qualifications attained

Most achieved what are commonly referred to as 'good' degrees (i.e. a 2:1 or First) (UCL, 2019; Institute for Fiscal Studies (IFS), 2018) which statistically they were less likely to achieve compared to their more privileged counterparts (Crawford *et al.,* 2017).

Generally, graduates need a 'good' degree result to apply for a graduate scheme. This is particularly the case for graduate schemes offered by the 'top' employers (Higginbotham, 2019). Due to this, in conjunction with the number of graduates with 'good' degrees increasing from just over two-thirds of graduates in 2012/13 to three in four in 2016/17 (Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA), 2018e), the women in this study faced navigating an increasingly oversaturated market of 'good' applicants. In turn, they found the value of their undergraduate degrees to be less than what they had imagined upon accessing HE:

> I — What's a good degree to you?
>
> Adele — 2:1 or above. Actually no it's a First as I'm finding out as I'm doing (job) applications and things like that. It's not even a 2:1 anymore. It's a First. Like, damn it.
>
> (FWC, UWE, History and Int Relations, I8)

In order to continue competing, some returned to university to study at PG level to have the credentials (also referred to as 'scholastic capital' by Bourdieu (1984)) which would provide them with a positional advantage in the crowded employment market. As Purcell *et al.* (2013) and Brown, Lauder and Ashton (2011) discuss, there is a growing awareness of credential inflation among young people which is reflected in the increasing rates of those opting to study at PG level.

Since the women in this study graduated in 2013, there has been a 5 per cent increase in the number of those going on to PG study (HESA, 2018a). This trend was noted by a number of women:

> I do know a lot of people that have had to go on and do master's and things like that because they just couldn't get the jobs.
> (Zoe, FWC, UoB, Law, I7)

As demonstrated above, one-third of the working-class women in this work studied at PG level and passed. Though most had taken this step as it was necessary in order to negotiate their way into teaching, Melissa (UWC) did so in order to postpone the career decision making process until she felt "ready":

Interviewer: After university what do you expect your situation to be in terms of your job and your career development?

Melissa I try not to think too far in the future. […] I think if I wasn't doing a master's and going straight into work I wouldn't feel ready but that's basically the reason that I'm doing a master's. (UoB, English, I6)

The implications of this are that, as privileged students are more likely to get a 'good' degree (Crawford *et al.,* 2017), more likely to go onto PG study as they have the resources to do so (Wakeling and Laurison, 2017), and their capital (particularly their 'soft skills', a form of cultural capital) are perceived as more valuable in the graduate labour market field (Ingram and Allen, 2018; Morrison, 2014), the privileged are repeatedly best positioned to compete for professional employment post-graduation. Without disruption to this, the cyclical (re)production of privilege will continue to position the socially privileged as the 'best' candidates for graduate schemes, particularly the 'top', 'elite' and most-selective schemes which stream graduates into some of the most powerful employment positions in British society.

8.1.1 Geographical mobility

In this study, after the working-class women had completed their undergraduate degrees, most of their spatial mobility was away from Bristol and towards their hometowns and cities. As shown below, while their movements were widespread, they remained mostly in the South of England:

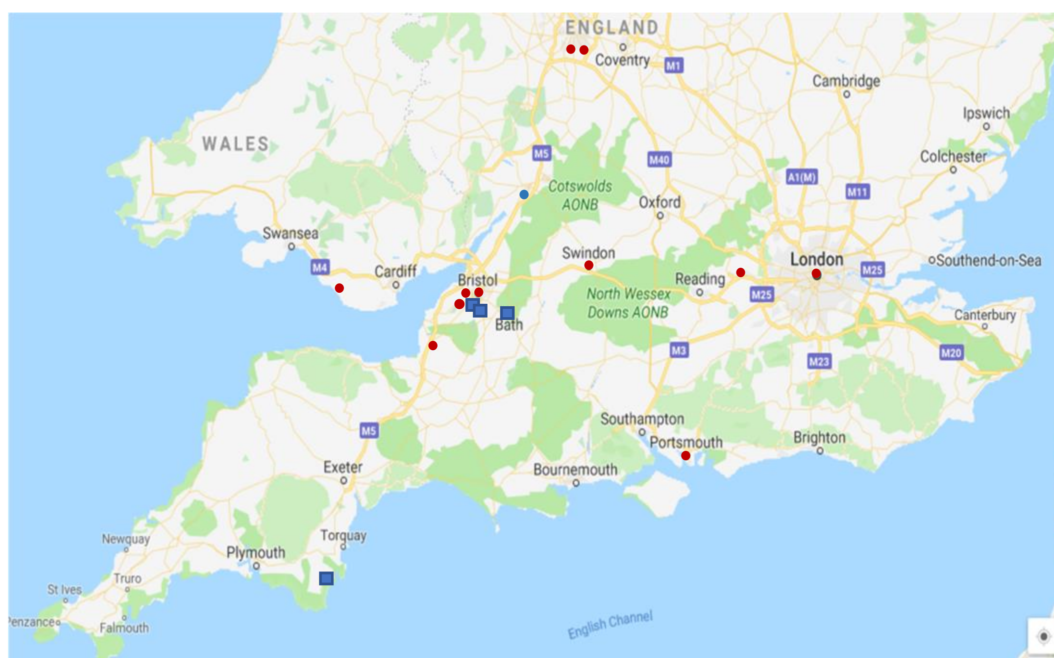

Figure nine: Post-undergraduate movements

●: UoB graduates

■: UWE graduates

While there were those who stayed in Bristol to do master's (Melissa and Samantha, both UWC and Lizzie, FWC) and to work (Adele, FWC, UWE, History and Int Relations), the majority returned 'home' to live with parents immediately post-graduation. When they considered their options for geographical mobility, initially many of the women spoke of themselves as "free" to be mobile:

> I'm not engaged, married and have children, I don't have a mortgage, I could go anywhere. If there was a job in Leeds, if there was a job in Scotland, if there was a job in Ireland, if I thought I'd like it I'd go for it.
> (Adele, FWC, UWE, History and Int Relations, I7)

However, this view did not last long as within a short space of time they grew to consider their movements as restricted in various ways. One of the overriding limitations was the cost of living in Bristol (which was among the ten most unaffordable areas to live in the UK in 2014 (Carter, 2014)) and the lack of economic capital available to them. Their understandings of their restrictions developed as they spent longer in conversation with interviewers and as they made more attempts to find graduate-level work.

Moving home

Most were part of what is often referred to as the 'boomerang generation': young adults who return to the parental home after completing their education, a trend which has increased in prominence over the past twenty years (Berngruber, 2015; Goldfarb, 2014; Standing, 2011). In 1997, around 25 per cent of 18-34-year-olds were living at home with their parents, this had increased to 32 per cent by 2017 (Office for National Statistics (ONS), 2019c). As Standing (2011a, p.65) describes it, many youths are now "trickling back to the parental home, their own precariousness often adding to that of their parents".

Like Finn (2015), I found that most of the female graduates in this study returned home post-graduation. Ten returned home for a considerable period of time, while some 'chose' this, for reasons I outline below, most made this move out of financial necessity:

> I had nowhere else to go, I had no money and I was fully overdrawn, and I was like 'shit what am I going to do?'
> (Sophie, FWC, UWE, Politics, I7)

Two did not return to the parental home at all. The first of these was Adele (FWC, UWE, History and Int Relations) who was offered full-time hours at a charity where she had spent most of her third academic year working. The second was Sariah who made attempts to return home, a common compromise of independence that a disproportionate number of women face negotiating post-graduation (Roberts *et al.,* 2016; Finn, 2015; Stone, Berrington and Falkingham, 2014). However, Sariah, like hundreds of thousands of other people in Britain, was unable to enact the demand of ex-prime minister David Cameron (2012b, p.5): “Can’t afford a home of your own? Tough, live with your parents” as family ties had severed since moving to Bristol. Sariah spent two years homeless travelling the country trying to find somewhere to live:

> I became homeless and I was like sofa surfing and sleeping in hostels, in shelters, so I was just basically for like…it was like basically for like 2 years just moving from place to place. I moved to Portsmouth, I moved to Kent, I moved to Nottingham, to all these places and just staying in women’s refuges, in hostels, and just looking for somewhere to live. Because they couldn’t keep me, it was short term temporary accommodation, they couldn’t keep me there for over like not more than a month so it was just moving on from place to place. I couldn’t work at the time either because it was so unstable, I didn’t know if I’d be moving to Manchester next or wherever, it was all over the place.
> (FWC, UWE, Sociology, I10)

Throughout her interviews as an undergraduate, Sariah demonstrated a great deal of resilience and a significant drive to do well in her education. As the young black women in Mirza’s (1992) research, Sariah viewed ‘success’ in education, work and wider life as based on a meritocracy:

> Nothing in life is easy, you just have to make sure that you’re always ready to exceed whatever challenge you’re faced with, you know. So it’s just a matter of me getting prepared for it.
> (FWC, UWE, Sociology, I4)

Her understanding and approach to ‘the game’ while she was at university was based on meritocratic principles, that is, if a graduate wished to play, engaged with ‘the game’ and worked hard in doing so, then such graduate would reap the rewards:

> You need to be eager to work, willing to learn new skills, meet new people, take on different challenges that the job has to offer. It’s more than just the degree.
> (FWC, UWE, Sociology, I4)

She was, like other working-class undergraduate students, “trying to play a meritocratic game fairly, putting extra effort into securing a higher class of degree rather than securing an internship for instance” (Bathmaker, Ingram and Waller, 2013, p.741).

Though she had graduated with a ‘good’ degree (2:1), demonstrated much resilience throughout her studies, developed an understanding of ‘the game’ and had gained some work experience, this was not sufficient to provide her with a safe transition out of university. Like other black working-class women who experienced mental health issues, compared to her male and white counterparts, Sariah was disproportionately more likely to face “multiple disadvantages in occupational outcomes” and be downwardly mobile (SMC, 2019, p.10). However, while speaking with me about her post-graduation experiences, she refracted the onus onto herself:

> I didn’t save any money and I wasn’t working a lot while I was studying, which I really wish I had done more of because I would have had some savings from working and used that towards getting a place after university, you know after I’d stopped receiving my money from the university and stuff like for accommodation. I didn’t plan that well so I became homeless.
> (FWC, UWE, Sociology, I10)

Sariah’s is a story which demonstrates how being faced with multiple disadvantages on a structural level, as well as lacking governmental, family and mental health support, can have a disastrous effect on young graduates at the precarious and liminal time post-graduation.

Regaining identity

Though most were able to return to the family home and did so out of financial necessity, some also made the decision to move home in order to regain a sense of ‘fit’ within the familial habitus (Bourdieu, 1984). Those who had been in regular contact with those from home, had boyfriends in their hometowns/cities and who travelled home to work on weekends, experienced a relative sense of ease when slipping back into this habitus. Upon returning home, Jackie described her break from this habitus as intentionally ‘temporary’:

> It was like I’d never been away, coming back home. […] I think that maybe yes, I’ve moved away and been independent, but I’ve always known that I’d be coming back home, so it (being at university) just felt like temporary independence.
> (FWC, UoB, Sociology, I7)

Though the women who desired the uptake of ‘old self’ and social roles in the familial habitus were happy with their post-graduation move, those who moved back into their family homes, who did so out of necessity rather than ‘choice’, experienced what they viewed as an ‘identity regression’. These women intimated that their habitus had gone through processes of evolution while they had been away at university, a finding which

supports Reay's (2004) 'permeable habitus' model, which they struggled to realign upon moving home:

> I am now living at home feeling like I'm 16 again […] though it sort of seems to myself maybe a bit, sort of in a paranoid way that I've gone backwards sort of in my life.
> (Jasmine, FWC, UWE, Sociology, I9)

When faced with amalgamating their habitus which had experienced university life, with their hometowns/cities, the familial habitus and those who operated within it, these women struggled with the process:

> I have very brief contact if any (with friends from college and school). It's really sad. Everyone has just got their own lives now. My friends from home are very settled, they're very much, a lot of them either they're engaged, or they live with their boyfriends or they've got kids. Everyone's leading different lives now.
> (Sophie, FWC, UWE, Politics, I7)

As they attempted to re-root into their familial habitus, they faced navigating a process of (re)configuring their current social selves. This was because they had experienced varying degrees of change to the composition of their overall capital and volume of social and cultural capital over the three-year period they were away studying for their degrees:

> (Moving home) was really difficult. It was really demoralising as well I think, because you just spend 3 years out of the family equation and you get your own independence. [HOMETOWN], it's a really depressing place, there's a lot of like deprivation and poverty in my area. And coming from that, you know, obviously you know what Bristol uni is like, all that wealth, and coming from all that and then coming back from that pretentious environment which is sort of really the opposite end of the spectrum, it was quite a culture shock.
> (Zoe, FWC, UoB, Law, I7)

This is discussed in more detail in the next chapter.

Rurality

There were additional disadvantages for those whose 'home' was situated in rural areas of the UK as they had to navigate a particularly restricted labour market. The lack of opportunities in these labour markets was cited as a driving force behind their decision to access university, as discussed in the previous chapter. They either opted for university study in order to leave their hometowns permanently and to find work elsewhere, or they had chosen to leave, to gain the scholastic capital of a degree and then return home to be better positioned to apply for work in the area.

However, upon arriving home with their 'good' degrees in 2013/14, there had been significant structural change in the labour market as the effects of austerity had begun to show. While unemployment statistics had reduced, there had been an increase in insecure work, underemployment, temporary and part-time work, zero-hours contracts and agency work, all of which are predominantly considered low-waged (TUC, 2015). As working-class women are disproportionately more likely to be found in these types of employment and have a relatively high rate of unemployment (12 per cent), compared to their male and more privileged counterparts (SMC, 2019), it was unsurprising that some of these women struggled to find not just 'graduate-level employment', but any employment. This struggle was particularly pronounced for the women who returned home to rural and ex-mining areas of the UK:

> I — And what's the graduate job market like down there?
>
> Jasmine — There isn't one. You'd have to go to a city for that […] there's no graduate schemes anywhere. So no, there's literally nothing. There is nothing.
>
> (FWC, UWE, Sociology, I10)

> The thing is there's not many jobs in [HOMECITY], that's the bottom line. I'm just putting my C.V out there for everything that I can find and just not getting any response. […] I'm trying as hard as I can and I'm not getting anywhere and it's like exacerbating.
> (Zoe, FWC, UoB, Law, I7)

Like other young working-class women in rural areas, these women faced a number of unique barriers. These were a lack of secure, full-time and skilled job opportunities and a relatively low demand for qualified workers (Association of Chief Executives of Voluntary Organisations, 2012; Commission for Rural Communities, 2012). Further, due to their rurality and the high levels of deprivation in their areas, these women, like other young women in these areas, were more likely to suffer from social isolation, were less likely to report feeling happy, more likely to be anxious and have overall lower levels of wellbeing (SMC, 2019; Cartmel and Furlong, 2000). Geographical differences in wages and availability of secure work has been explored by the Resolution Foundation who estimated that by 2020, 24 per cent of those in work in Greater Lincolnshire, for example, will be paid below the National Living Wage (NLM)[59] or National Minimum Wage (NMW)[60] a figure 2.5 times greater than it was in 2015

[59] £8.21 per hour for over 25s (GOV, 2019c), as of April 2019.
[60] £7.70 per hour for 21-24s (GOV, 2019c), as of April 2019.

(Clarke and D'Arcy, 2016). Whereas in London, 10 per cent of workers will be paid below the NLW or NMW in 2020, up from 3.5 per cent in 2015 (Clarke and D'Arcy, 2016).

London

It has been found that 45 per cent of the growth in professional and managerial employment since 2012 has taken place in one UK city: London (SMC, 2019). London is referred to as the "dominant winner region" and "escalator region" as it recruits a disproportionately higher number of high-class first-degree graduates compared to other regions in the UK (Hoare and Corver, 2010, p.490). Unfortunately, for too many people "moving out is too often necessary to move up" and moving to London rather than elsewhere in the country increases a graduate's chances of engaging in such employment from just under half to over three quarters (SMC, 2019, p.7). However, being able to move is dependent on background, those from professional backgrounds are three times more likely to move "using their resources to stay ahead" in this way (SMC, 2019, p.105). Thus, those working-class graduates raised outside of London are less likely than their more privileged counterparts to take advantage of the growth in professional and managerial employment as it is disproportionately based in London.

A significant 'pull' towards London, to engage in graduate employment was evident in two-thirds of the interview transcripts in this study. While the majority desired this move, it was only a viable option for two women. The first was Melissa (UWC, UoB, English) who drew on her social capital in order to join the graduate population in London, which sits at 50 per cent (ONS, 2017). Melissa moved in with her friend's parents who she had only met once before in order to do her internship which paid her £250 per week:

> I was going to like stay with different friends (around London) for a few weeks each just to kind of save a bit of money and not have to pay rent straightaway, and then they kind of haven't said anything about me leaving, and they're really lovely, so I'm just staying there for as long as I can because I'm not paying any rent.
> (UWC, UoB, English, I7)

Displaying no anxiety, Melissa faced regular job and house hopping in order to access work which she perceived as 'for her'. She had one self-imposed criterion which restricted her view of which jobs she should do: the job had to be London-based:

Interviewer: Why choose London?

Melissa: All the jobs are in London.
(UWC, UoB, English, I7)

While many of the other women desired similar opportunities, they lacked the social and economic capital to materialise such goals:

> I didn't have the money to move to London in the first place to go and chase a job. […] Without working for a long time in a job for crap money in [HOMECITY], I can't even generate enough money to save for a deposit on a flat, let alone anything else in London for crazy prices.
> (Zoe, FWC, UoB, Law, I7)

Jackie (FWC, UoB, Sociology) was the second working-class woman to access London-based jobs. The only way in which she was able to do so was through returning to her parent's council house in South-East London to once again share a bedroom with her younger sister. She moved back immediately after submitting her dissertation where she re-established her position in the household: helping with the chores and caring responsibilities which required significant levels of what Reay (2005) refers to as 'emotional capital'. Though Jackie was able to achieve her goal to return home to teach in her local area, her wages were still not sufficient to allow her to continue achieving markers of adulthood which she desired (moving out with her partner, getting married and having children). This caused her much frustration, particularly when comparisons were drawn between hers and her mother's achieved milestones at Jackie's age:

> It makes me really cross. I've worked really hard every day, I paid money to train to be a teacher and I can't even afford to live in the city that I teach in. It's ridiculous. Teaching is meant to be like one of the…it's meant to be a well-paid profession, and if you compare it to some of the other professions it is well paid, I earn more money than my sister, I earn more money than [BOYFRIEND], like I get paid a decent wage. But where I live, I can't afford to move out at the minute. […] Then mum doesn't help, she's like 'oh yeah by your age I had two children'. I'm like 'thanks mum, you really know how to wind me up'.
> (FWC, UoB, Sociology, I10)

As the average 20 per cent deposit in London is currently £80,000 and rising (Peachey and Palumbo, 2018), Jackie sees that she may have to leave London all together in order to achieve the significant markers of adulthood that she desires. This was despite her graduating to, and continuing to earn, among the highest wages of all the women in this study (starting on £27,000, increased to £31,000 three years post-graduation). Her aspirations to 'give back' to working-class children in her community as well as to own

a home and have children were incongruent, thus, she faced with being 'class cleansed' out of London (McKenzie, 2017).

8.1.2 Graduate wages

Research by Feng and Graetz (2017) showed that there are variations of pay and status among those who graduated with a First and a 2:1. Graduates have been found to experience an increased probability of working in a high-wage industry by 14 per cent if they achieved a First over those with a 2:1, and similarly these graduates are also on average receiving 3 per cent higher wages (Feng and Graetz, 2017). Further, the disparity in pay was found to be highly gendered, particularly in male-dominated employment spheres. For example, among graduates of mathematics, males who graduated with a First as opposed to a 2:1 had a higher probability of working in high-wage employment by 26 per cent, whereas women with Firsts only experienced a 6 per cent increased probability (Feng and Graetz, 2017).

However, similar comparisons cannot be drawn in this study as there were only two young women who graduated with a First (Lizzie, FWC, UoB, Engineering, and Megan, UWC, UoB, English). Nevertheless, what is evident is that, unlike most of the other women, both gained access to highly-selective post-graduation trajectories which may have been only within their scope due to their First class degrees. One did an internship and graduate scheme which led to a professional job as an engineer, the other accessed the Teach First program and went on to find work as a teacher. Due to having accessed these routes, they are more likely than those without these experiences to establish careers which are high status and high paid (Friedman and Laurison, 2019).

As is understood, qualitative data cannot tell the whole story (Reay, 2018) and so here I analyse the graduate-pay data of the young working-class women. This data can be found in appendix eight: graduate jobs and pay (p.265).

After rounding all the women's self-reported wages to the nearest £100, only three of the fifteen working-class women graduated into work which paid within the new-graduate salary bracket (estimated between £20,000 (Ball, 2013) and £26,000 (Association of Graduate Recruiters, 2013; High fliers, 2013)). All three of these firmly-working-class women entered teaching post-PGCE. Ruby (UWE, English) and Anna (UoB, Politics and Economics) graduated to a £22,000 wage and Jackie (UoB, Sociology) to a £27,000 wage. Jackie's higher wage was in line with the National Education Union's (2015) recommended pay scale for those teaching in an inner-city London primary school.

On average, the fifteen working-class women graduated to a £13,400 wage.[61] One-year post-graduation this average wage increased to £17,400, two years post-graduation this increased to £20,500 and three-years post-graduation they earnt £21,600 on average.[62] Thus, it took two years post-graduation before these women, on average, began earning wages which were at the lowest end of what is considered 'entry-level graduate salaries'.

While Walker and Zhu (2013, p.26) found the differences between pay of RG and non-RG graduates to be "statistically insignificant", I found this not to be the case. However, it must be kept in mind that there was a small sample in this study (five graduates of UWE and ten of UoB). Though graduates of UWE and UoB graduated to a similar average wage of over £13,000, when further post-graduation pay data were compared, considerable difference was found:

	Immediately PG	**One-year PG**	**Two-years PG**	**Three-years PG**
UWE (n=5)	£13,100	£15,100	£14,800	£18,900
UoB (n=10)	£13,500	£17,700	£23,700	£24,500

Table fourteen: Comparison of UWE and UoB graduate wages

The average wages of those who graduated from UWE increased by 44 per cent (£5,800 per annum) over the three-year, post-graduation period. Throughout the same period, those who graduated from UoB saw, on average, an 80 per cent wage increase of £11,000 per annum. While on average neither group of graduates graduated to earning 'new-graduate wages' (between £20,000 (Ball, 2013) and £26,000 (Association of Graduate Recruiters, 2013; High fliers, 2013)), on average, graduates of UoB were receiving the upper end of this scale by three-years post-graduation. This was while graduates of UWE had, on average, not even began earning the lowest wages on this scale by this time.

[61] Those who did not disclose their earnings but said they received minimum wage, I calculated them as earning £11,055 which at the time was the average income of a person on minimum wage working eight hours a day, five days a week (ONS, 2013a). However, some of the roles they were employed in were temporary and part-time, but I did not have the exact hours worked in order to calculate accurately. Thus, the averages outlined here may have been lower in reality.

[62] Years two and three figures were based on the income of thirteen working-class women, Melissa (UWC, UoB, English) and Bianca (FWC, UoB, History) had left the study by these points.

The significant increase in wages for the UoB graduates in this study could be due to half of them having studied at PG level, while only one UWE graduate did. However, the ways in which graduate employers value a Russell Group education over a non-RG education appear to be at play, as also found by other research (Friedman and Laurison, 2019; IFS, 2018; Wakeling and Savage, 2015; ONS, 2013b). Quantitative data published in the same year the women in this study graduated from university showed that those who graduated from RG universities earned an average of £3.60 more per hour, were more likely to be in a 'high skill role' than those from non-RG universities (ONS, 2013b) and were more likely to enter 'professional' occupations (NS-SEC 1) (Wakeling and Savage, 2015). The implications of this are, as Bourdieu and Passeron (1990) also theorise, that universities (particularly those considered among the elite) are institutions which act as sites for the reproduction of class inequality and privilege and the labour market facilitated this. In particular, UoB accepts a student population which is disproportionately privileged (as outlined in chapter six) and, due to the cachet which a UoB graduate holds, they are more likely to be positioned as graduates to enter 'professional' and 'elite' forms of employment (Savage *et al.,* 2015). Through facilitating this pipeline of to social advantage and reproduction, 'elite' Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) are sites of misrecognition, de-valuation, exclusion and symbolic violence on the working-classes (which I have spoken about elsewhere[63]).

This small quantitative data set demonstrated evidence of a cachet accredited to UoB graduates which holds an economic benefit. This had a profound effect on the wages of the firmly-working-class women who studied at UoB, compared to those who studied at UWE. While their wages were initially similar, the relative increase grew exponentially over time:

		Immediately PG	**One-year PG**	**Two-years PG**	**Three-years PG**
FWC	**UWE** (n=5)	£13,100	£15,100	£14,700	£18,900
	UoB (n=6)	£13,600	£20,000	£28,300	£29,300

Table fifteen: Firmly-working-class women's pay by university

[63] Bentley, L. (2018a) *'Class work' in the Elite Institutions of Higher Education*. Cambridge, University of Cambridge, Faculty of Education. 21st February and, Bentley, L. (2018c) *Fragmented and Convoluted: Working-class experiences of Navigating Higher Education.* At: Think Human, Festival of Humanities and Social Sciences. Oxford Brookes University, Oxford. 23rd May.

Three years post-graduation, the firmly-working-class women who graduated from UoB were earning £10,400 per annum more on average than those who graduated from UWE. For these women, the cachet of having graduated from UoB was evident throughout the interviews. Jade (Psychology, I7) found that having studied at UoB was perceived among her employers as synonymous with having the "brain power to learn" a new role in an area unfamiliar to her degree. Likewise, Jade found that:

> the company use the fact 'oh yeah we've got a Psychology graduate or something from Bristol' and they like to use this as their sales sort of thing, […] sometimes I wonder if I would have got offered the job if my degree was from not a Russell Group university.
> (Psychology, I8)

Further analysis of their earnings showed that the firmly-working-class women consistently earned more than the upper-working-class women:

	Immediately PG	**One-year PG**	**Two-years PG**	**Three-years PG**
FWC (n=11)	£13,400	£17,700	£21,000	£23,200
UWC (n=4)	£13,400	£13,900	£15,900	£18,900[64]

Table sixteen: Pay by class background

These findings contradict those published by Crawford and Vignoles (2014) who found that six months after graduation those whose parents occupied higher occupational classes, on average, were earning more than those from lower occupational class backgrounds. In this study, the upper-working-class women, whose parents had higher occupational class positions than the firmly-working-class women[65], were among those with the lowest initial incomes and this continued to be the case over the following two years.

At this point in my analysis, it was necessary to draw on the qualitative data to further explore this phenomenon. This data showed that one of the women was receiving a stipend to do a PhD, and others were doing low-paid internships or low-paid work with

[64] This figure is based only on two participants as Amelia and Melissa had dropped out by this point of the study.
[65] Using data from appendix six (p.259), on average the upper-working-class women had father's in National Statistics Socio-economic Classification (NS-SEC) classes 3 and mother's in class 6, whereas both the parents of firmly-working-class women averaged to be in NS-SEC classes 5.

the aim to either defer career-making decisions or to refine their career aspirations further. As outlined in the literature review, opting for a part-time job (in SEC classes 6 and 7) on first entry to the labour market has been found to loosen the 'stickiness' of class and increase social fluidity for women over time (Goldthorpe, 2016).

While I understand that quantitative data explored in this study cannot be generalised to the wider population of young female working-class graduates, they do create a snapshot of how the graduate labour market 'values' the different credentials (scholastic capital) and cultural capital typically by these women. These are findings which I hope to further explore with a larger, more representative sample in future research.

8.2 Graduating to graduate jobs

The only women to graduate to 'graduate jobs' were those who went into teaching: Ruby (FWC, UWE, English), Jackie (FWC, UoB, Sociology) and Anna (FWC, UoB, Politics and Economics). All three found a job soon after completing their PGCEs, and all completed their Newly Qualified Teacher (NQT) year. Though there are areas of high demand for teachers, particularly in STEM subjects (Education Policy Institute, 2018), in this study there were reports of overcrowding and hyper-competitivity in the teacher labour market:

> We had a lecture about writing C.Vs and one of the blokes come in and he was a Headteacher and he said 'I go through them and I look at them and if one word is spelt wrong I just rip it up and chuck it in the bin'. So it is that competitive that if you can't, like he said if you can't spell right, then I'm sorry I haven't got time.'
> (Ruby, FWC, UWE, English, I7)

These women cited their successes in teaching, at least in part, to the voluntary work they did in schools while they were at university:

> The volunteering that I did at uni has definitely been a big help, it's given me the confidence to talk to people. Like I've always been confident with children and talking to them and that's never been a problem, but when you're teaching you've got to talk to parents, you've got to talk to other teachers and stuff and I think if I hadn't have done some of the volunteering that I've done then… it's those kind of experience where after them I've felt more… I felt different… I felt more confident after them. So then taking that on forward, like that's a skill that has definitely impacted my work.
> (Jackie, FWC, UoB, Sociology, I7)

Through doing their voluntary work they were able to begin developing their career identities at an earlier stage than the other women in this study. Their transitions into their graduate careers were smoother than the rest of the women's in the sense that these

employment roles built on their previous experiences and their budding confidence. However, the implications of doing voluntary work during the term-time meant that these women had to do full-time paid work throughout the summer and live on relatively little while they studied and gained work experience. While this provided them with *just* enough economic capital, policy funding from Student Finance England (SFE) has changed since and the maintenance grant available to the women in this study (up to £3,390 (GOV, 2019a)) was scrapped in September 2016. In place of this, the maximum threshold of the maintenance loan was increased by £4,810 (to £8,200 for those living away from home outside of London for those applying to university in the 2016/17 academic year (GOV, 2019b)). This means current undergraduate students graduate to higher levels of debt which is a deterrent to those from 'non-university backgrounds' (Lewis, 2019).

Thus, if the women in this study had started their degrees two years later, the aspirational teachers would most likely have had to engage in paid term-time employment. This would have meant that they had less capacity to do voluntary and unpaid work experience, meaning their career identities would be relatively under-developed.

8.2.1 The private experiences of being a public sector teacher

As these three firmly-working-class women experienced a linear trajectory from undergraduate to graduate there was little shift in their employment positions, relative to those who graduated to non-graduate work, as discussed below. Though working in the teaching sector meant that they experienced an initial sense of career and financial security, they still faced considerable issues. All three experienced little work/life balance and felt that their efforts often went unnoticed by management. This left them feeling "overworked, undervalued" (Anna, UoB, Politics and Economics, I8) and "physically and emotionally exhausted" (Jackie, UoB, Sociology, I8). Megan noted:

> I have no quality of life – and I think that is the problem, that is the problem with the job. Because the job itself is enjoyable and rewarding and I like teaching, but the quality of life I have is just not worth anything really.
> (UWC, UoB, English, I8)

This influenced the development of their career identity growth as from an early point they outlined they could not envision being in managerial roles such as heads of departments. This was because (i) they could not imagine being able to manage the increased pressure that this would bring, particularly if they were "thinking about

having a baby" (Jackie, FWC, UoB, Sociology, I10) and (ii) it would take them away from that which has driven their efforts thus far: teaching young people.

In addition, though they took home the highest wages in this study, they would often remark that, compared to other professions, teaching was relatively low paid due to the number of hours required of them:

> Low paid, well not really low paid but for how much you work it's really low paid because you just work so many hours. I'd get into school at about 7.30 and then I wouldn't leave 'til about 6.30 or 7 o'clock, so it's almost like a 12-hour day, and it was just exhausting.
> (Anna, FWC, UoB, Politics and Economics, I10).

Anna, like 82 per cent of other new teaching recruits (Guardian, 2016) left teaching soon after entering. The reason she gave for this was that she "had no life" (I9). She found work as a data coder in a bank but soon found that this work was "not very rewarding", and she did not "feel proud of it" (I9). In turn, she did some volunteering with vulnerable women at her mother's place of work in the aim to discover her next career move, stating that she feels she has not "had the chance to think about that since I left uni" (I9). Anna returned to teaching within two years of leaving, taking a £7,000 pay cut. In order to gain a healthy work/life balance, she made the decision to return on 0.8, 'part-time' basis. However, she still worked five days a week but having this contract allowed her to eat lunch and have her evenings and weekends free. At this point, she:

> Liked having a purpose again, I liked being…in teaching you're very in control of your own thing, like you make a difference because of what you do, whereas in [BANK] you sort of get assigned a task and you just do it and you've got no real true impact on something.
> (FWC, UoB, Politics and Economics, I10).

An additional issue faced by two of these women was sexist comments from male teaching staff. Ruby spoke about how a male member of staff:

> would always make comments like 'women aren't strong enough' or 'we need a male Headteacher'. He said, 'I love women but…we need a man Headteacher because the school needs a strong hand'.
> (FWC, UWE, English, I10)

Though these women faced such prejudice, were overworked and felt undervalued, they stayed (and returned) because they considered teaching as compatible with their morals and motherhood, which they all aspired for. Additionally, historically, teaching has been considered a 'secure' and 'respectable' occupation for working-class women (Morrison,

2014) which they remarked upon, as well as it fitting with an inner ethical drive to 'do good':

> But it is a vocation and you have to just love it, and that's why we do it really. (Jackie, FWC, UoB, Sociology, I8)

While primary and secondary teachers are "knowledge workers" and thus are in "graduate roles" (Brown *et al*., 2011, p.81) which require mid- to high-levels of "HE knowledge and expertise" according to SOC2010 (see Elias and Purcell (2013) for further information), other work acquired by most women in this study was difficult to classify as either 'graduate' or 'non-graduate'. This is due to increasing levels of 'job upgrading' (where a job role has long been considered 'non-graduate' but becomes 'graduate-level') in the graduate labour market which has increasingly been the case since the depletion of semi-skilled work and the growth of lower-level service work (Ball, 2016).

8.3 Graduating to non-graduate jobs: Reactive career identity development

Eight of the women in this study entered roles which have recently been taken up by a growing number of graduates, which are not typically (or at all) considered 'graduate jobs':

- Fundraising officer: Adele
- Care worker: Jasmine, Bianca and Jade
- Retail: Jasmine, Jade
- Administrators: Amelia (UWC), Sophie, Jade, and Bianca
- Bar worker: Zoe
- Mortgage case officer: Zoe
- Learning mentor/teaching assistant: Amelia and Megan (both UWC)

Using SOC2010 as an analytical tool, these roles were in NS-SEC classes 6 and 7 (ONS, 2018a), and so considered 'non-graduate'[66], 'working-class' jobs.

Though this was the case, in order to apply for some of these roles, the young women reported that they had to hold the scholastic capital of an undergraduate degree. However, when they began work, they reported not requiring the skills developed throughout their degrees, and they worked alongside others who had not studied at undergraduate level. The latter was particularly the case when the age of their colleagues was considered, with many of "the younger ones have gone to uni, and the

[66] While the 78 per cent of respondents to the ONS (2016a, p.2) consultation on revising the SOC2010 reported that "the current SOC does not reflect some occupations where a degree is now a compulsory requirement or where a university qualification is now a common requirement" it is the only tool of its kind which can be used in this scenario for this analysis. It is due to be updated in 2020.

older ones haven't" (Sophie, FWC, UWE, Politics, I10). This was a source of friction for some of the women, particularly Adele who left her place of work because of issues relating to this:

> Adele: You have to have a degree, like you can't get through the…like you really can't. And I think certain people don't understand that, they just think 'oh it's the charity sector' kind of, it's fine. It's like 'no, you have a degree. […] They wouldn't have taken…they basically look for people that have got a degree.
>
> I: So was everyone like…your colleagues all have degrees and stuff?
>
> Adele: Apart from the older ladies. They had the experience and we had degrees. It was me, [COLLEAGUE 1] – my friend, and then [COLLEAGUE 2] and [COLLEAGUE 3] were the two older ladies. […] Our Head of Fundraising went on maternity leave and she basically handed over the reins, like Fundraising Manager, to [COLLEAGUE 1], the one who's got like the master's and the degree and stuff. […] Everyone was just arguing. So I'd go in and be like…you'd have a day off or something for annual leave and you'd come back, something would have happened, everyone's getting really annoyed you know, big arguments had happened. I was just like….I know obviously working in an office environment with mostly women, because it's fundraising, it's a charity, it's mostly women, is so…you know it can be quite bitchy and quite like….oh it was just a nightmare. So I just started looking for something else. That's part of the reason why I left to be honest.
> (FWC, UWE, History and Int Relations, I8),

Others who did not require a degree to apply for their jobs saw this change in the short time that they have been in their roles. Jade, who works in the public sector as an administrator, was aware of talks of "changing it so that you have to have a degree" to apply for a job such as hers, even though:

> one of the girls went to college and did like an admin course and started as a typist and now she's doing what I'm doing. So, she hasn't got much education really behind her. Like, a lot of people I work with haven't been to uni and it does kind of make me feel a little bit like I've wasted a little bit of my education. I almost feel like some of them don't even know I've been to uni. Unless I specifically talk about it I don't…like the job that I do doesn't require it I feel like it's not acknowledged at all.
> (FWC, UoB, Psychology, I10)

Jade, like Sophie, Bianca and Amelia were part of the 4.7 per cent of underemployed graduates working in administrative occupations in 2013/14 (Green and Henseke,

2016). Though Bianca moved on to do Teach First, a prestigious graduate scheme, Jade, Sophie and Amelia were unable to move on to find work which would be considered 'graduate-level', though they tried. Jade and Sophie stayed in administrative roles, and Megan moved on to be a teaching assistant, which was the fourth most frequent occupations among underemployed graduates that year (Green and Henseke, 2016). Behle (2016) found that these trajectories are common as there are limited routes from non-graduate jobs to graduate jobs.

8.3.1 Precarity

The women in this study spanned all three 'types' of people typically found in precarious employment according to Standing (2011a): (i) Migrant, (in the case of Amelia (UWC, UoB, Biology) who worked abroad post-graduation), (ii) those from working-class communities and traditions and, (iii) young, university-educated people. As this is the case, it was unsurprising that precarious work was found to be a prominent 'type' of work engaged in by these women post-graduation. As discussed in chapter three, precarity is more than *just* low-waged work, while earnings on average are much lower in this type of employment, this is one of the loosest determinants of precarity. The main characteristics of this work are that it fosters structural insecurity through temporary or fixed-term contracts, underemployment, and flexploitation and blackmailability due to low-hour or zero-hour contracts (Bradley, 2015; Standing, 2011). However, while most are vulnerable to, and experience exploitation due to these structures others use this to their advantage, as I now turn to explore.

<u>Using precarity</u>

For most of the firmly-working-class women engaging in precarious work was detrimental to their career identity development and wellbeing. On the other hand, others used this work as a way of either 'biding time' before starting a career and/or as time to refine their career goals and develop the valuable cultural capital required for entry to such roles. These women were able to mitigate the low pay with economic capital within their remit, such as living at home or with friends and were not required to contribute to rent/bills. For example, Melissa took on a structurally precarious position in the form of a temporary six-month internship in London which paid her £250 per week. She was able to mitigate the low pay by temporarily living with her friend's parents who did not ask her to contribute to the household expenses. She was able to navigate the temporary nature of her living situation by drawing on further London-based social capital when she required it.

The value of having done an extra-curricular activity (ECA), working at a student newspaper while she was doing her MA, gave her a set of soft skills considered desirable by those on the hiring committee at the low-paid internship she engaged in. This ECA, like that of the teachers who had done volunteer work while studying, was noted as a leading factor as to why she secured the place out of "130/140 other applicants":

> Because the assistant editor used to be the editor of [UNIVERSITY] student paper, and I'd done the social media thing. And like the intern before me had been into student media I think they were quite keen on that and kind of appreciated that experience. And because it's the blogger's network it's quite a small team and I think as much as anything it was like whether they thought I'd fit in. And yeah the interview was just kind of like quite chatty and stuff, so it went quite well.
> (UWC, UoB, English, I7)

Like the other upper-working-class women, Melissa demonstrated a lack of concern over current salary, and she demonstrated no sense of immediacy over earning a higher wage any time soon. Opting for these types of precarious situations allows those who engage with it the opportunity to develop a portfolio career which is considered desirable by graduate employers (Barton, 2016; Hawkins and Winter, 1996). However, only those with the resources to participate are able to do so and these tend to be the wealthier young people (Friedman and Laurison, 2019). While taking part in an internship made these graduates technically precarious, they demonstrated relatively less anxiety in their interviews compared to the firmly-working-class women in precarious positions:

> I'm in a bit of a panic at the moment about life. Like I think I want Bristol but I don't know. I think I want a completely different type of job but I don't know. And I'm scared like if I make the wrong move then I'm going to be worse off than I am now. It's just a weird time in my life really. I haven't been that happy since I left uni. […] I'm really scared of making the wrong move.
> (Jasmine, FWC, UWE, Sociology, I8)

<u>Being used by precarity</u>

While there were those who were seemingly uninhibited by precarity and used this time as an opportunity to have a partial 'cooling-off' period post-university, the firmly-working-class who entered precarious employment had little option but to do so due to financial reasons:

> I didn't really kind of have time to have a break, go travelling, really kind of discover what I wanted to do. I still think because I didn't have that break after uni and wasn't really sure what I was doing, I still don't know if it's the right route. […] This job is a stop-gap, for now I'm able to pay my rent, I'm able to pay my way.
> (Jade, FWC, UoB, Psychology, I7)

In this work, seven out of the eight women asked attempted to draw on social capital to get a job. For the firmly-working-class women this capital proved valuable on only a few occasions, leading only employment roles in NS-SEC 5-7 (otherwise referred to as 'working-class jobs' by the SMC (2019)), which were low waged and sometimes precarious in structure. Though most (eleven) of the working-class women applied for what they considered to be graduate-level, 'professional' jobs, seven secured roles that could be considered within this category (as is discussed in the next chapter in relation to social mobility). The women found that their experiences of employment while at university was not valued in the graduate labour market:

> If you're sending it off for an office job they're not going to look at it twice, even if you have got a Law degree from Bristol they're just going to see, 'worked in [BAR IN GREECE], worked in [BAR IN BRISTOL]', there's nothing tangible for them to say 'she's going to be good in an office job' […]. People, they look at that (her C.V) and they say 'you haven't got any experience', which is just bizarre because you can read between the lines. Then, I had a phone call from a recruitment consultant who was like 'I really think you would be good for this job' and I just thought 'I'll take anything'.
> (Zoe, FWC, UoB, Law, I7)

They understood that their work experiences were not valued by graduate employers and thus tried to 'package' their experiences as well as they could but, "that still didn't work" (Zoe, I7). Thus, many entered the precarious labour market, which is regionalised throughout the UK (UK Commission for Employment and Skills, 2014) and tends to be in feminised work sectors (Standing, 2011). Though they had graduated with 'good' degrees and attempted to find graduate-level work, four of the women graduated and joined the 82 per cent of other women doing professional care work (ONS, 2016b) and the 4 per cent of other underemployed graduates doing care work that year (Green and Henseke, 2016). These positions have long been disproportionately held by women from "elementary occupational" backgrounds (CarersUK, 2014) and are systemically low waged and precarious (Corlett and Whittaker, 2014). In Jade's case, she was paid the NMW, but she was not paid for training and was not reimbursed for her travel expenses:

> The company was awful, we didn't get paid for all our training sessions and there was loads of them. It was a full week I think and I was driving up from home which was costing me loads in petrol. […] It wasn't guaranteed hours, it was a zero-hour contract. They kept saying 'oh no you'll get full-time hours', but it wasn't in written form.
> (FWC, UoB, Psychology, I7)

In terms of being able to plan for the future, most felt that while they were still in this type of work that their career development would be restrained as well as their ability to make plans for other areas of their lives:

> There was just like no trajectory for any kind of progression, and I stopped learning and it was just a dead end.
> (Zoe, FWC, UoB, Law, I8)

> I: If I could give you a crystal ball and let's say in ten years, what, where do you want to be? What will you be doing?
>
> Jasmine: I, it's like I can't really think like to next week let alone 10 years' time.
> (FWC, UWE, Sociology, I7)

Of all the participants, it was the firmly-working-class women engaged in this type of work who struggled the most to conceptualise themselves as mothers and wives, though they desired to experience these. This is common among those in precarious working conditions, as Standing (2011a) found, this type of work discourages marriage and leads to childbearing at an older age.

As most had returned home, their employment options were restricted to their hometowns as social structure conditions the distribution of occupational opportunities. These were the same hometowns which they 'chose' to leave due to a lack of opportunities, to gain the scholastic capital of an undergraduate degree in order to return and be in a better position to find secure employment. At this point they, particularly those in rural areas, experienced an inability to access the job market. Often these women faced an impasse between being overqualified for most roles and underqualified for high-paid professional roles:

> I was just putting my C.V out there for everything that I could find and just not getting any response […] just random casual work where I could find it, alongside trying to think, like get my head in gear, 'what am I going to do'. […] My degree is closing all the doors for me and then the ones that were open I was not quite good enough for.
> (Zoe, FWC, UoB, Law, I7)

Jasmine (FWC, UWE, Sociology) and Zoe (FWC, UoB, Law) were particularly affected by their rurality and the disproportionate effects of austerity in their areas. While Duta and Iannelli (2018, p.14) found that in “escalator areas” (i.e. areas where opportunities to enter professional jobs are considered high) there are more “equal opportunities” for working-class graduates to secure professional employment, this “pattern only apply to graduates who were geographically mobile”, which those from working-class backgrounds are less likely to be (SMC, 2019). In areas with relatively fewer opportunities, like where Zoe and Jasmine originate from, there are “wider social inequalities by parental social class” (Duta and Iannelli, 2018, p.1), with those from working-class backgrounds more likely to remain working-class. After a period of unemployment, both women faced having to navigate the benefits system:

> She (job centre worker) sent me an email once and it was like for a cleaner for a bar or something. I was like ‘well thanks but, you know I’ve got a degree and I want to be in like health and social care’, basically I was told if you didn’t apply for every job you could do you would be fined, like you would have sanctions on your payment every month.
> (Jasmine, FWC, UWE, Sociology, I10)

> It was a terrible system. It was degrading. It was humiliating. They treated me like a miscreant. They spoke me to like I was a child and like I was incompetent. I understand the purpose of the system is to drive people into work but they were driving me to depression, because I was saying ‘look I’ve got this qualification that I was told ‘you get this degree and the world opens up for you’. And if anything, it is closing doors.
> (Zoe, FWC, UoB, Law, I7)

These institutions viewed these women as overqualified and thus, they were asked to embark on NVQ training (levels 2 and 3) in Communications or Customer Services. These scholastic capital were considered more valuable than their degrees in their geographically restricted employment fields:

> I’ve got 8 A* at GCSE, I’ve got the A’s at A-Level and I’ve got as 2:1 Law degree and I’m doing customer service course at the local youth club.
> (Zoe, FWC, UoB, Law, I7)

Brown’s (2013) concept of the ‘opportunity trap’ can be amended to explore this phenomenon. As discussed in the literature review, for Brown (2013), the ‘opportunity trap’ occurs in a socially congested labour market where graduate-level occupational ‘opportunities’ are increasingly harder to access as the number of ‘good’ applicants outstrip demand. As a result, the standard increases and agents are caught in the trap of

having to gain higher and more specialised education qualifications. Thus, the candidate, in theory, is more valuable and better positioned to compete in the labour market. However, in the context of this study, as Jasmine and Zoe do not have the resources to continue participating in the linear, traditional opportunity trap (i.e. continue on to PG study). As they move fields to a predominantly non-graduate employment market, they are forced to continue gaining qualifications but ones which are at a lower level than their HE qualifications. This shows how the 'opportunity trap' is field-dependent and not always dependent on gaining credentials with increasingly higher recognised prestige. The psychological consequences of this were profound, and these women experienced a deterioration in their mental health:

> It's a really frustrating situation to be in and it is massive feelings of inadequacy, especially when I'm seeing people around me with degrees similar to mine, so many people, they're just starting on £40,000 a year grad schemes and I'm thinking 'how on earth, like what have you got that I haven't?' like. I don't think….I've never thought of myself in like, you know I was inadequate in any way and all of a sudden I am thinking 'why have you got that and I can't achieve that' when I am trying just as hard or maybe even harder? So that's really tough and it gets really upsetting when I think about it.
> (Zoe, FWC, UoB, Law, I7)

Even upon finding work, their mental health struggles did not subside as they entered precarious and low-paid employment. This was particularly the case for Jasmine, whose job was dependent on local authority funding which changed yearly and was heavily affected by austerity measures:

> We're underpaid, understaffed, overworked, and we're getting loads of verbal abuse off the women. And no consequences put in place, no support with the staff. I need a break. I just want a break from everything, that's how I feel right now. I'd need to go away, very far away on a very long and expensive holiday which I just can't afford because the pay is shit at work. I don't feel…to cut a long story short I've got anxiety and depression at the moment, I'm going to counselling, and I swear it's down to this job, I just need like a break.
> (FWC, UWE, Sociology, I8)

Like the majority of women in this study, these women demonstrated high levels of grit and resilience, as found by other researchers of first-generation university students (Pasero, 2016; Bradley, 2017), and so, it meant that they carried on even in the face of such adversity. However, this does not mean that they were able to overcome or mitigate the structures of the social field and the doxa which they saw their more privileged counterparts benefitting from:

> I try so hard not to measure myself against somebody else, but when people from uni who didn't even have a job, ever, who came from private schools, went straight into training contracts… the end of it, it's a £100,000 job. They were getting £40,000 a year, they'd go straight into a training contract having never worked a day in their life. And whereas I'd worked since I was 16… I worked throughout university for 3 years, I worked every weekend in university and weekdays and I did my best to try and do well in my degree – and I almost got a first. And I just felt like that was never acknowledged. Because I didn't go to the right school or because I wasn't the right sort of person, the right sort of fit, I didn't have a look in. […] You need to have the money to do the work experience to get the experience to get the job that you want or need some sort of financial input or someone giving you a good chance in a job, and if no one is willing to do that, it's like…you know there's only so much you can do to try and better yourself.
> (Zoe, FWC, UoB, Law, I7)

8.4 Conclusion

To 'successfully transition' out of education, as Jindal-Snape (2017) defines it, means: (i) good attainment, (ii) positive emotional adjustment and (iii) having a sense of belonging. Unfortunately, few of the women in this work experienced all three of these. While their pathways were variable and their stories in some ways individualised, there were many points of similarity which characterised the transitions of these young working-class women from undergraduate to graduate.

In terms of (i) attainment, most achieved 'good' degree classifications and one-third passed PG level study. Next, (ii) all the upper-working-class women and some of the firmly-working-class women experienced a positive social adjustment. Those who spent three (or more) years without such adjustment were those whose post-graduation experiences were marked by a lack of agency due to: a lack of economic capital, little 'valuable' social and cultural capital (in relation to the field), geographical restrictions (particularly to rural areas), a disconnect from the familial habitus and mental health struggles. Finally, (iii) due to fracturing to their habitus, most felt a sense of being socially and culturally displaced as a result of their HE experiences, as is discussed further in the next chapter.

This chapter has demonstrated how the upper-working-class women were more likely to experience more 'successful' transitions out of HE. Due at least in part to their higher volumes of capital which had more congruence with the fields of HE and employment. These women were:

(i) more likely to engage in ‘traditional’ PG study, and so attained higher scholastic capital than the firmly-working-class women;
(ii) more likely to have social capital which provided access to London, where a disproportionate number of graduate jobs are, at no cost;
(iii) more likely to have developed the ‘soft skills’ valued by graduate employers: the cultural capital of having done internships, ECAs and travelling, because they did not require paid work during university;
(iv) were less likely to return home immediately post-undergraduate degree and less likely to stay at home out of financial necessity.

Though the firmly-working-class women were more likely to return home due to a lack of economic capital, they were also the only ones to do so with the aim to regain a sense of fit with their pre-university state of habitus and the familial habitus. This move particularly restricted those from rural areas of the UK because these the employment markets in these regions had disproportionately been affected by austerity and had become structurally more precarious than before they left for university. In these areas, there was a distinct lack of opportunity to access the relatively small graduate labour markets/professional employment markets, as they were underqualified. In addition, they also found that they were overqualified for non-professional, ‘working-class’ jobs in their local area. Thus, for these women, their transitions from undergraduate to graduate comprised of navigating the benefits system, retraining at a lower level and, in Sariah’s case, homelessness.

Overall, in this chapter I analysed a small sample of quantitative data, and so I cannot make any wider generalisations about young working-class women graduates and their pay. However, this data was worth examining as it (i) provides additional insight into the qualitative data and (ii) *could* be illustrative of wider phenomena.

On average, the women in this study graduated to wages significantly lower than the general new-graduate population, and it took two to three years for these women to be earning wages at the minimum end of this scale. While having studied at UoB appeared to provide no initial benefits to the wages of UoB graduates in this study, over the three-year post-graduation period wages increased by 80 per cent (compared to 44 per cent increase seen by UWE graduates over the same period). When examining pay along class lines, the firmly-working-class were consecutively on higher average wages than the upper-working-class over the three-year period post-graduation. This is a new finding as Crawford and Vignoles (2014) discovered quite the opposite.

The qualitative data elucidates this phenomenon. The upper-working-class women were on low pay as they either chose to engage in precarious work to:

(i) ‘buy time’ before having to decide on their career moves;
(ii) to take a post-graduation break (similar to a gap year);
(iii) to do internship work, which is known to benefit careers long term.

While this was the case for most of the upper-working-class women, some of the firmly-working-class women were forced to engage in precarious employment as they had little other option. These women were less likely to be able to make long-term plans, and their narratives were more likely to demonstrate significant levels of anxiety over their current situation and future prospects.

Though eleven applied for what they considered to be graduate-level, ‘professional’ jobs, only seven secured roles that could be considered as such. Most of the women in this study were in non-graduate or ‘new’ graduate employment (employment traditionally considered non-graduate, but due to influx of graduates they have begun working in these roles) by three-years post-graduation.

Those who entered roles which are considered ‘traditional’ graduate employment were reaping the economic rewards of being in ‘middle-class employment’ but were not necessarily enjoying a ‘middle-class lifestyle’. At that, though two-thirds of the women came to earn ‘graduate wages’ (above £20,000, Ball (2013)), the majority struggled to imagine themselves achieving key milestones they wished to achieve within the next five years (to get married, buy a house and start having children) due to the cost of attaining these.

In the next chapter, I turn to examine how the working-class women have been socially (im)mobile and consider their experiences of this. To do this, I analyse the effects of this mobility on their orientations towards the future, their relationships and their ability to regain a sense of social fit in the familial habitus post-graduation. This addresses my third and final research question.

Chapter nine: Social Mobility & Future-Gazing

According to the Social Mobility Commission (SMC) (2019, p.86), Higher Education (HE):

> "can act as an engine for social mobility if disadvantaged students win places, participate fully during the course of their degrees (in both the academic and extra-curricular life of the university), and receive the teaching and advice required to transition into a career."

However, as demonstrated in the previous two chapters, most of the young working-class women in this study faced considerable financial, social and cultural barriers to 'fully participate' in their academic studies and the extra-curricular activities now required for access to most 'professional', graduate-level careers. Thus, the effects of these conditions are considered here in relation to the women's social (im)mobility in the aim to address my third and final research question:

3. Do young working-class women experience social (im)mobility as a result of their university experience?
    i. If so, what are the characteristics of this (im)mobility?

The objective rate to which the UK is a socially mobile nation is a contentious issue among sociologists, politicians and economists, as discussed in the literature review. While most acknowledge there is *some* upward social mobility, this tends to be on an individual level, and unlike current government social policy which frames it as "unequivocal progressive force" (Friedman, 2014, p.352), there are multiple negative consequences, which I explore below.

Overall, while more young 'non-traditional' students are graduating with undergraduate degrees "to an extent almost unimaginable a century ago" (Savage *et al.*, 2015, p.256) this has done little to unsettle social hierarchies in the UK according to the SMC (2019). The SMC (2019) reported that social mobility has "stagnated at all life stages" and has been this way since 2013, the same year in which all but one of the women in this study graduated from their undergraduate studies.

To address my research question, first I analyse data on pay and occupational positions in relation to their parents' using the relatively objective analytic tool of the National Statistics Socio-economic Classification (NS-SEC) (rebased on SOC2010 (Office for National Statistics (ONS), 2018a)). Then, I explore their subjective reflections on their social (im)mobility and how this has impacted their ability to re-establish their social

connections upon moving home. Likewise, then I turn to consider how their (new) social positions affect their work-based interactions (in graduate and non-graduate employment) and their orientations towards future work. I understand, particularly as a Bourdieusian, that culture consumption practices play a significant role in differentiating agents on the basis of social class. Unfortunately, I did not have the space within this thesis to examine these practices at length.

This chapter does not contribute to the discussion on the large-scale rates of social mobility and which strategies are best implemented to interpret them, as so many sociologists' discussions are dominated with (Friedman, Laurison and Miles, 2015). Instead, I contribute to the discussion on the social, emotional and cultural consequences of being socially (im)mobile, that is, the lived experiences of social (im)mobility post-graduation for young working-class women.

Now I turn to examine the relative mobility experienced by the working-class women, that is, I draw comparisons between the women's occupations and their parents' using the NS-SEC. The employment data in the table below were gathered in mid-2017 (in interview 10) unless stated otherwise. At this point in the data collection process, Bianca (FWC, UoB, History), Megan and Melissa (both UWC, UoB, English) had dropped out of this and the original study, so I only had the data of twelve working-class women for analysis:

			Mother NS-SEC analytic class & occupation	Father NS-SEC analytic class & occupation	Graduate NS-SEC analytic class & occupation	
UWE	Adele	History and Int Relations (2:1)	5: Sales supervisor	-	3: Charity account manager	FWC
	Jasmine	Sociology (2:1)	4: Running holiday home, seasonal work.	4: Running holiday home, seasonal work.	7: Care worker	
	Ruby	English (2:1) PGCE (Pass)	4: Childminder	Retired (ill health). Previously: 7: Van driver.	2: Primary school teacher	
	Sariah	Sociology (2:1)	7: Hairdresser (Interview 1, Autumn 2010)	-	8: Not classifiable	
	Sophie	Politics (2:1)	5: Sales supervisor	6: Storekeeper	6: Administrator	
UoB	Jackie	Sociology (2:1) PGCE (Pass)	6: Administrative assistant	3: Engineer	2: Primary school teacher	
	Zoe	Law (2:1)	2: Low management position in a large company	5: Foreman	3: Legal Taxonomist	
	Anna	Politics and Economics (2:1) PGCE (Distinction)	5: Lead support worker, third sector	-	2: Secondary school teacher	
	Jade	Psychology (2:1)	Retired. Previously: 3: Council worker	7: various part-time routine operative work	6: Administrator	
	Lizzie	Engineering, with integrated MA (First)	6: teaching assistant	7: chauffeur	2: Engineering (graduate scheme)	
	Samantha	Geography (2:1) MA (Pass) PhD (about to submit)	Semi-retired. Previously: 7: Bank cashier	Semi-retired. Previously: 2: Compliance consultant	8: PhD student & 2: has also done some lecturing	UWC
	Amelia	Biology (2:2)	Retired (ill health). Previously: 6: Supermarket worker (PT)	Retired (ill health). Previously: 5: Foreman (0.8)	6: Teaching assistant	

Table seventeen: Occupational data of graduates and their parents

Here, the occupations of both parents, rather than just their father's (which was historically considered to be the best way to determine a child's class origin (Saunders,

2010)) was important to my analysis due to the disproportionate number of their mothers' doing work in higher NS-SEC categories than the participants' fathers.

Almost seventy per cent of the parents of the working-class women worked in occupations in NS-SEC 5-7, otherwise referred to as 'working-class jobs' (SMC, 2019). Out of the twelve women included in table seventeen, four years post-graduation, five were working in occupations in higher NS-SEC classes than their parents, a further two were upwardly mobile relative to their father's occupations. All these women accessed HE in 2010 as firmly-working-class and in 2017 most worked in jobs considered 'professional' (NS-SEC 1 and 2) or 'intermediate' (NS-SEC 3) occupations by the NS-SEC (ONS*,* 2018a). Being employed in such roles, under the occupational approach to class analysis designed by members of the original project (PP1), these women would have been considered as working in 'middle-class jobs'.[67]

It is also key to note that having graduated from UoB appeared to have a significant impact on the chances of these working-class women being upwardly socially mobile on occupational bases relative to their parents, compared to graduates of UWE.

While using the NS-SEC as an analytical tool to measure relative mobility is a relatively straight-forward process, it only measures one dimension of social class. While this is an important aspect of class, as it is closely tied with the economic capital a person has within their remit, social and cultural capital, which I now turn to explore, also play a significant role in aggregating agents into social class groups.

9.1 Self-perception of social class

The ways in which the participants understood and viewed social class differed among the group. When in conversation, some would refer to literature they had read during their time studying, but most often, their views were based on their experiences of education and employment and their families'. When they outlined their self-perceptions of their class positions/mobility in interview 10, some referred only to economic capital to position themselves while others spoke about their cultural, social and scholastic capital, without using these terms. Thus, some of their views on the demarcation of class categories varied between each other and between starting university in 2010 and four years post-graduation in 2017. For example, in interview 10 (2017) Amelia self-defined as "upper-working-class, the same as before", but before (2010) she had reported being "middle-class". Though their understandings of class

[67] Revisit Chapter five: Methodology and Methods for further detail on this process.

were varied, this data is still of considerable importance as it provides insight into the position and power they perceive themselves to hold, and their understandings of how their education and work affects their class mobility and position.

9.2 Upward mobility

First, I consider the narratives of the seven women who believed that they had experienced a degree of upward mobility as a result of their university experience. Apart from Samantha (UWC), I considered all these women to be firmly-working-class at the start of their university education. Data below outlines the women's self-class perception at the start of university (2010) and their self-class perception four years post-graduation and their jobs (2017):

			Self-class perception at the start of university	Self-class perception four years post-graduation	NS-SEC analytic class & occupation
UWE	Adele	History and International Relations (2:1)	"Working-class"	"Aspirational working-class."	3: Charity account manager
	Ruby	English (2:1) PGCE (pass)	"Working-class"	"I possibly am a bit middle-class because I've got a degree. But I'd like to think I was still working-class."	2: Primary school teacher
UoB	Zoe	Law (2:1)	"Working-class"	"I don't feel like I'm middle-class, but I do feel like I'm different to other people in my family who haven't had the same experiences and opportunities that I've been given."	3: Legal Taxonomist
	Anna	Politics and Economics (2:1) PGCE (pass)	"Working-class"	"Probably middle-class. It's weird to say that because I've always… my whole life it's always been working-class, but now I don't know how I could say I'm not (middle-class), because I'm a teacher. Now I feel like I couldn't justify saying I was working-class."	2: Secondary school teacher
	Jackie	Sociology (2:1) PGCE (pass)	"Working-class"	"I think I'm working-class, but I think teaching is a middle-class job typically. But I still… I would say working-class."	2: Primary school teacher
	Lizzie	Engineering with integrated MA (First)	"Working-class"	"The lifestyle I live and can live if I wanted to would kind of be like between like working and middle-class."	2: Engineering (graduate scheme)
	Samantha (UWC)	Geography (2:1) MA (pass) PhD (about to submit)	"Middle-class"	"I'd probably think I was more middle-class in terms of financially, having a house, owning it, my outlook is probably more middle-class than it used to be. Living in Bristol having gone to UoB I definitely think (I am), as much as I wouldn't admit it probably to my family."	8: PhD student & 2: has also done some lecturing

Table eighteen: Self-perceptions of upward social mobility

These women, referring to their cultural and social, but particularly their economic and scholastic capital, had at this point began to view their positions in the social universe as relatively higher than those in their families. In particular, the two who considered themselves to be 'more middle- than working-class' (Samantha and Anna) did so on the basis that they were "not struggling to pay the bills at the end of the week" (Anna, UoB, Teacher, I10), they remained "living down south" (Samantha, UoB, PhD student & lecturer, I10) post-graduation, were graduates of UoB and due to this had "experienced a different lifestyle" (Anna, UoB, Teacher, I10) to the one in which they were raised.

Additionally, their perceptions of themselves as being 'more middle- than working-class' were based on the notion that they worked in a graduate job or had employment prospects which are "probably more middle-class than they used to be" (Samantha, UoB, PhD student & lecturer, I10). As both had successfully navigated their undergraduate and postgraduate (PG) studies, they had the credentials and had developed cultural capital found most often among the middle-classes. However, the structures between the different types and volume of capital they held were relatively asymmetrical. That is, though they had high levels of cultural capital, relative to this, they had lower levels of economic and social capital. Bourdieu (1984, p.115) notes this is often the case for "higher education and secondary teachers at the higher level, primary teachers at the intermediate level". This may also explain the distinction in the data between the HE and secondary school teachers, and the primary teachers with the former more inclined to identify as middle-class and the latter remaining more ambivalent about this.

Though Samantha and Anna had developed a relatively 'high' volume of cultural capital, this had yet to permeate their habitus in a profound way as they did not "feel particularly middle-class" (Anna, UoB, Teacher, I10). This "lag", as Friedman (2016b, p.138) describes it, left these women with a cleft habitus, that is, a habitus which is "torn by contradiction and internal division" (Bourdieu, 2000, p.16), as explored in chapter four. Though Bourdieu considered the cleft habitus "as a very rare occurrence" (Friedman, 2016b, p.130), this dislocation of ontological coherence of the self was expressed by most of the other women who experienced a degree of upward mobility as a result of their education.

As working-class women are considered to be more likely to experience upward absolute mobility than men, with Saunders (2010, p.107) reporting "there is still more 'room at the top' for women of this generation than there was for their mothers", it

could be argued that women are more likely to experience a cleft habitus or enter what Bradley (2015, p.81) refers to as “contradictory class locations”.

There are significant psychological consequences to having a cleft habitus, such as anxiety, pain and isolation due to social fracturing, with feelings of being ‘misplaced’ and ‘haunted’ often being reported (Reay, 2017; Ingram and Abrahams, 2016; Morrin, 2016; Bradley, 2015; Friedman, 2016b; 2014; Bourdieu, 2007; 2000; Sennett and Cobb, 1977). In turn, much guilt and shame are experienced over ‘abandoning’ one’s class origins. As Lucey, Melody and Walkerdine (2003, p.297) put it, “there are no easy hybrids” in ‘achieving’ upward social mobility as a working-class woman. In fact, Lawler (1999) and Reed-Danahay (2002) argue that this type of mobility is more painful for women than men, as women most often raised to hold a central role of responsibility in the family household and within the familial habitus that they are explicitly and implicitly expected to maintain.

Due to some of the notions just mentioned, the five remaining women in table eighteen did not identify with being middle-class. However, they also believed they were no longer solely working-class. For all seven of the women who experienced a degree of upward mobility, characteristics of their cleft habitus, and the points in which materialised, were evident in various fields of their social and occupational lives, among family, friends and colleagues, which I outline below.

9.2.1 Family and friends

All of those who experienced a degree of upward social mobility noted marked differences in their opportunities for employment and/or culture consumption compared to those of their family members who had not been to university:

> The kind of, the lifestyle that I’m living is totally different to theirs (parents), because they’ve always just worked in industries almost and just kind of been almost like the labourers and just doing general like kind of working-class roles because that’s what the opportunities they’re provided. Whereas they always wanted me to kind of do the best I can and get out of [HOME CITY] and do something different to what they’re doing.
> (Lizzie, UoB, Graduate Engineer, I10)

Like the women in Lawler’s (1999) work, the notion of having to ‘get out’ in order to ‘do something different’ was evident in the wider cohort of women. The phenomena that “moving out is too often necessary to move up” (SMC, 2019, p.7) is common not only in this study but within the literature of social mobility, as outlined in chapter three. Due to this, over the last forty years there have been reports of ‘left behind areas’,

particularly in cities and towns in Northern England and the Midlands where there are relatively lower wages, lower employment rates and lower job rate growth than in London and many of the 'newer' towns in the South of England (Centre for Cities, 2019; Elledge, 2015). Swinney and Williams's (2016) research found a considerable 'brain-drain' to the South of England. This demonstrates how individualistic the social mobility phenomenon is and how, overall, social mobility has little positive impact on the working-classes and their communities and, in fact, can be detrimental.

For those working-class women in 'non-traditional' or 'new' graduate occupations, some of their family members did not view them as working in 'proper' jobs:

> If I was like a doctor then she'd get it and she'd be 'oh my granddaughter's a doctor', but she doesn't like…get it. To her it's like it's not a traditionally, solid…you know it's not a solid job to do, it's not kind of…it's not traditionally like well-paid or anything like that.
> (Adele, UWE, Charity Account Manager, I10)

These family members tended to view the women as only treading a little social distance while having studied at university. In these cases, these women were more likely than those in 'traditional' graduate jobs to express frustration at their post-graduation moves (as they felt the work they did was misrecognised or undervalued by their families) and were more likely to report that the felt as though they had "failed" (Jasmine, UWE, Carer, I8). On the other hand, some of the working-class women themselves felt there had been little social distance tread between them and their families while they had been away at university, this was particularly the case for Jackie:

> I think because I live at home I think in my mind I still feel…because I live at home I still feel (1) not grown up, but (2) I feel like my family background has more of an influence because I'm still part of the family, I'm in the family home, so I think as a family we are working-class. I don't really think I'm middle-class.
> (UoB, Teacher, I10).

Reporting this was common for those who had retained contact their family and returned home regularly throughout their time in university, experienced social isolation from 'university life' and were most-ready to return home after university. Jackie, for example, like many of the working-class women in Archer and Leathwood's (2003) study, felt as though she did not fit in with the academic culture of the university and did not see herself as having assimilated to UoB social nexus. First, she noted that she did not fit in with her peers who were also studying sociology as they "didn't get" and

"had no empathy" for working-class lives (I10). Second, the lecturers regularly used language which worked as a barrier to her participation:

> Sometimes they use a lot of words that I just don't understand. And I'm not sure if that's like because typically from a middle-class background people would have heard these words at home… Yeah that's had an impact… it just feels like that's a class thing sometimes and I've not had the experiences or that knowledge maybe.
> (UoB, Teacher, I10)

In addition, the lecturers would assume previous experience of middle-class cultural practices which, again, acted as a barrier to participation and as a form of symbolic violence. This violence positioned Jackie as originating from a deficit position. This left her feeling as though she had to justify her mother's intergenerational transmission of cultural capital, particularly highlighting how she has engaged in 'high value' cultural capital practices (museum and library trips):

> He (lecturer) was talking about children's experiences at school, and he was saying that some children don't have the cultural capital to access uni and stuff like that. And then he made the assumption, and he said, 'oh but all of us at Bristol here must have been taken to art galleries and gone on holidays to France and skiing abroad' and I thought 'I've never been abroad for a holiday in my life'. I didn't say anything at the time because I don't ever say anything, but I was just like… crazy assumptions that you make. […] My mum took us all the museums in London, we've been to the park, we've been to the beach, we've been on days out to the library. Like we've been out… she took us where she could, and we had as rich an education as we could.
> (Teacher, I10)

As her peers and lecturers misrecognised the value of Jackie's cultural capital, she often found herself on the outside looking in, in this field:

> I think that it's harder to get in, not necessarily as in admissions staff would say "oh no you can't come" but I think the mentality is difficult for some people from working-class backgrounds and I think once you're there you can feel the difference.
> (Teacher, I10)

Jackie (I9), struggled to make friends and uncharacteristically became "quite shy, not very talkative" because she did not feel like she "fit in seminars, just because of (my) background". This is a common finding in working-class students' experiences of navigating the HE system, and these are exacerbated in the field of RG, elite Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) (Reay, 2017; Bathmaker *et al.,* 2016; Reay, Crozier and Clayton, 2010; 2009).

Before graduating Jackie cited her mother as her most influential role model throughout her time in HE. Jackie spoke with her mum "so much, probably out of everyone she knows most about what's going on in my life – if not everything that's going on in my life" (I7). The almost-daily contact they had helped maintain their mother-daughter relationship which was key to Jackie's psychic survival as she became upwardly socially mobile (as also found by the upwardly mobile women in Walkerdine and Lucey's work (1989)).

Jackie's mother was a working-class helicopter parent who worked in a different manner to middle-class helicopter parents who are hyper-present and characterised as working to instil behaviours in their children to avoid their possible 'failures' (particularly in their education) (Rousseau and Sharf, 2017). In a contrasting manner, Jackie's hyper-present mother worked to reassure her daughter that there was an 'opt-out' option, that she could always quit university and return home.

Due to all these factors, though Jackie was upwardly mobile on occupational bases and thus in economic terms, she remained culturally and socially "working-class, completely" (I10). Thus, she found that re-rooting into the familial habitus post-graduation was "quite an easy transition. It doesn't really now feel like I went away, I feel like I've always lived here" (I7). On the other hand, those who experienced a degree of upward social mobility and who did not move home post-graduation or did so, but only out of financial necessity rather than 'choice', acknowledged significant differences in cultural practices between themselves and their families:

> My brother takes the mick out of me and says, 'oh you only shop at Waitrose' and calls me pretentious. […] There's a massive, a stark difference between me and my other family members. I'm the second oldest grandchild on my dad's side, there's a load, there's so many of them, and all the girls are younger than me and they all have children and they're all claiming benefits and they don't work. And they all have flats that are provided by the state. And none of them have like GCSEs or anything like that. And do you know what, it's difficult to say it because they're fantastic people, they're fantastic mothers, everything that they have they give to their children and they're brilliant. So, I can't criticise from that kind of perspective. But there's this massive bridge between me, you know, and them, and even though they're immediate family members and just everything, our outlooks, the way we think about things, our life experiences. (Zoe, UoB, Legal Taxonomist, I10).

In some cases, their experiences of gaining a degree of upward mobility dissolved significant kinship ties (a known potential cost of being upwardly socially mobile

(Friedman, 2016b)) and, in the case of Sariah's experiences of homelessness, this had distressing consequences.

In a similar manner to that of the family, some of the women in this study noted notions of difference in cultural and social practices between themselves and their friends at home who had not experienced HE. Adele reported that her friends from her hometown were:

> Like 'oh you're middle-class', I'm like 'I'm not middle-class', I have this thing all the time. I say aspirational working-class.
> (UWE, Charity Account Manager, I10)

Though their mobility meant social distancing from their friends at home, there remained social distance between the women and their friends they had met at university. Engaging in cultural activities with these friends often reminded the women in this study that they are still, at least in part, working-class:

> I went to the theatre a few weeks ago and I was like, I almost text my sister 'oh this is so middle-class, what the fuck am I doing at the theatre?' […] My flatmate works at the National Theatre and she's an artist, so she got tickets. I just sat there with my Fair Trade chocolates, because that's what they sell at the till, I was just like…and it was like…I like things, I like activities that are what people would class as like 'middle-class activities' but I'm very aware of the fact that I am working-class.
> (Lizzie, UoB, Graduate Engineer, I9)

Like many of the women who experienced a degree of upward social mobility, here Lizzie's cleft habitus, a habitus with "a kind of double perception of self, to successive allegiances and multiple identities" (Bourdieu, 1999, p.511), is exposed. Like that found in Friedman's (2016b) work, this is illustrative of how these women, as a consequence of having experienced HE, are 'culturally homeless', no longer singularly working-class, nor are they middle-class:

> I don't feel like I'm middle-class, but I do feel like I'm different to other people in my family who haven't had the same experiences and opportunities that I've been given. So, no. Because I think that to say, 'oh I feel middle-class' is almost like really like arrogant – do you know what I mean – 'oh I feel like I'm a middle-class person'. I don't ever want to distance myself like that from like just people who are fantastic and nice and…you know just because they haven't got any like money and just because they haven't got a degree doesn't mean they're any like devalued as a person.
> (Zoe, UoB, Legal Taxonomist, I10)

Zoe understood what it would mean for those 'left behind' if she were to identify as 'middle-class', as was also found in the work of Friedman (2016b, p.141): that "abandoning one's origins" in this way would involve a betrayal of those who played a role in her primary socialisation as her family would then be viewed as 'less than' her in the wider social universe. Like those in Lawler's (1999) work, Zoe understood that if she were to enter the middle-class, she would enter a set of social relations which would pathologise her family and history as 'choosers' of the political inequalities they have experienced.

9.2.2 Work

Like in Friedman's (2016b, p.136) work, most of the women in this study who experienced a degree of upward mobility spoke of their working-class identity with "a clear source of pride, a badge of honour". Despite their newfound 'middle-class' occupational positions, there were reoccurring talks of an allegiance to their working-class identity, as Ruby explains:

> I probably am classed as middle-class in terms of profession. But in my heart, I'm like a working-class person, I feel like I am a working-class person. (Ruby, UWE, Teacher, I10)

This allegiance was most often endowed with affection and spoken of from a position of nostalgia, also found in Friedman's (2016b; 2014) work on those who experience upward social mobility away from their working-class origins. Like Friedman's (2016b; 2014) work, the strength of the primary socialisation of the young working-class women in this study was consistently evident throughout all their narratives. This demonstrates the need for multifaceted methodological and theoretical approaches to understanding the relationship between employment and social class as occupational position and pay only illustrates one dimension of this.

While in their occupational fields, some of these women were able to draw on elements of their fragmented habitus to assist them in their jobs. Some report that their experiences of having lived a working-class life helps them 'better' navigate particular work scenarios. This was especially true of the teachers who found that they drew on their working-class cultural and emotional capital when working alongside working-class students:

> I've been around it (working-class struggle) and I understand why people don't have jobs and the struggles that come with that. And in my other school people would make comments like 'yeah but they (students) just need to manage their own behaviour, it doesn't matter where they're from, that's not an excuse'. And oh, I used to hate hearing that because it's so… I think it's so… but these are middle-class people saying it, so I think 'well you've never had disadvantage so you don't even know'.
> (Anna, UoB, Teacher, I10)

Similarly, Adele (UWE, Charity Account Manager, I10) "played" on her working-classness "quite a bit as well sometimes in my job, which bodes quite well because I think people feel more comfortable". She consciously does this when:

> I'm around people who I know are like working-class or from that kind of background, I flip back to like my language and my behaviour being more kind of perhaps… and I feel like sometimes my Welsh accent comes out a bit more.
> (UWE, Charity Account Manager, I10)

These women were able to use their cleft habitus, or as my colleagues called it: "chameleon habitus" (Abrahams and Ingram, 2013, p.1), as a tool to better navigate new fields.

Through conscious impression management, these women understood that fore fronting capital which presents them as 'working-class' allowed them to interact with some agents successfully, but they acknowledged this is field-dependent and dependent on the agents occupying that field at that time. As they worked in 'professional' and 'intermediate' occupations, this meant that they will have likely worked with a disproportionate number of those from privileged backgrounds (SMC, 2019), or as Adele puts it:

> I can have conversations with people and I'm like 'you're in a different world to me' or 'you grew up in a different world to me'.
> (UWE, Charity Account Manager, I10)

These women were selective in presenting as 'working-class' as they viewed it to be detrimental in some social fields. In fact, the women in professional and intermediate employment were the only ones to report that they felt they had to withhold cultural capital synonymous with being 'working-class' when on the 'front stage' (Goffman, 1956) in-field with middle-class agents:

> If I'm in a meeting, and I'm in a meeting with quite senior people who are quite middle-class in their background and how they talk and how they have conversations, then I'll change and I'll make sure that my tone of voice and my language is more appropriate for that setting.
> (Adele, UWE, Charity Account Manager, I10)

Though there were not any explicit examples of accentism (linguistic discrimination), some reported that the way in which they spoke affected their ability to enter professional occupation immediately post-graduation:

> I think that did affect it in ways, just because I don't speak like everybody else who goes in there.
> (Zoe, UoB, Legal Taxonomist, I10)

This, as well as their other forms of capital, such as their social capital, set them apart from their counterparts from 'professional' backgrounds and played a role in moulding their opportunities to develop further social capital. When Anna worked in a bank, she said:

> I got on with people who haven't got a degree almost easier than lots of people who have in a way. I find that my friends that I made were the ones that didn't have degrees and things. I just found it easier to fit in. So, in a way I don't feel different – even though I'd probably say I'm middle-class I don't feel particularly different because of that.
> (UoB, Teacher, I10)

Though most of these women were in 'middle-class jobs' and presented this as the reason why she "couldn't justify saying I was working-class" (Anna, UoB, Teacher, I10), they were not able to fully assimilate their whole selves with their 'professional' workplaces which are typically structurally comprised of and by those from 'professional backgrounds' (SMC, 2019).

Though these women, like the working-class people in Exley's (2019) work and the working-class women in Morrison (2015; 2014) and Lawler's (1999) work, were able to gain access to middle-class social spaces, they often felt they had to leave parts of their working-class identity (their tastes, pronunciations and other embodied cultural notes) at the door or 'appropriate' these. It appeared that, in order to be viewed as 'professional' and 'respectable' in predominantly middle-class fields, they believed they had to cast-aside their 'working-classness', something which most held dear. With this comes consequences, 'achieving' upward social mobility and thus dissociating from 'working-classness' has been found to result in higher rates of social and psychological problems, leaving people in a state of disequilibrium (Friedman, 2014).

However, even when upward social mobility is 'achieved', and working-class people enter professional employment, they face an invisible barrier which their wealthier peers benefit from due to the 'stickiness' of class. This barrier, referred to as the 'class ceiling' by Friedman and Laurison (2019; 2015), restricts working-class people from accumulating the same volume and composition of cultural, social and economic capital as their more privileged counterparts, restricting further upward mobility. For the established middle-classes, this is their 'glass floor' (Waller, 2011, p.9), which is an "invisible barrier stopping people falling down the social hierarchy". This is considered to be "as impenetrable as the more familiar 'glass ceiling' preventing others rising higher" (Waller, 2011, p.9).

However, as opposed to those who experienced downward mobility or immobility, which I explore below, the seven women who experienced a degree of upward mobility were more likely to report that they had opportunities for career development within their sight. Though the teachers struggled to envision this, overall these women were also more likely to envision themselves being promoted or working in a role which held more responsibility:

> There's a bigger corporate team and I'm a corporate fundraiser and that's actually the bottom of the ladder, there's like Corporate Fundraising Managers, Senior Corporate Partnerships Manager. […] I look at people and I think 'I could do what you do' […] I want to move up in my job, in my career and eventually perhaps be on [MANAGER'S] level, or try and get to that level where you're managing a number of people and heading up a massive team.
> (Adele, UWE, Charity Account Manager, I10)

They were aware of the further skills they needed to acquire in order to be promoted, and they viewed these as attainable. In addition, compared to those who were downwardly mobile or immobile, the seven upwardly mobile women were also more likely to say that they had achieved what they expected to achieve in terms of career development since graduating from university.

> I've started a career, I'm on the start of it.
> (Jackie, UoB, Teacher, I10)

> I think that I have become very successful as a teacher.
> (Anna, UoB, Teacher, I10)

Similarly, these seven women were more likely to view their current job role as conducive to their career plan(s). Even those who were not completely satisfied with their occupational roles felt positive about their career progress since leaving university as they had developed an understanding of their possible moves forward:

> Career-wise I think I'm now finally working out what I want to do.
> (Zoe, UoB, Legal Taxonomist, I10)

Though these women had experienced a degree of upward social mobility as a result of their education:

> There is definitely social mobility there, absolutely, yeah. And that is as a direct result of my education.
> (Lizzie, UoB, Graduate Engineer, I10)

Their habitus had fractured due to this, and upon entering the workforce these were exacerbated further. At these points, just like when they were at university, most reported being unable to assimilate their whole-selves into the 'professional', middle-class dominated work culture. These women faced additional struggles of (re)rooting their habitus back into the 'home' environment post-graduation. Straddling various social fields while not fitting in fully anywhere meant actively choosing to refrain from demonstrating different forms of capitals in different fields. Just as some held back 'working-class' cultural capital from work colleagues, some also worked to hold back their capital which would present them as 'middle-class' from their families:

> As much as I wouldn't admit it probably to my family, I'm probably middle-class now.
> (Samantha, UoB, PhD student & lecturer, I10)

This led to several being unable to "feel any class" (Zoe, UoB, Legal Taxonomist, I10) when, at the start of their university experience, they were all clearly able to place themselves in a social class position (as shown in table eighteen). In response, Jackie called for:

> An extra class in between. You know what I mean, like Ofsted when you're good with outstanding features, I guess you're like working-class with middle-class features!
> (UoB, Teacher, I10)

Though there was less fracturing among those who were downwardly mobile, their social mobility trajectories were not any less complex and important.

9.3 Immobility and downward mobility

The remaining five women in table seventeen, compared to the occupational positions of their parents, experienced a degree of relative downward mobility or immobility (otherwise referred to as horizontal mobility) four years post-graduation. Four of these women were in roles considered 'routine and manual' (NS-SEC 5-7), otherwise referred to as "working-class jobs" (SMC, 2019). Post-graduation, Sophie (FWC, UWE,

Politics), Jade (FWC, UoB, Psychology) and Amelia (UWC, UoB, Biology) worked in what Burke (2016a) considered 'non-graduate' work: office administration.

All three drew on family-based social capital in attempts to find work, to which they experienced varying degrees of success. Sophie and Jade (both originally considered FWC), and their parents, were unsuccessful in their attempts to find employment via their social capital. On the other hand, Amelia (UWC) spoke with her sister, who was a manager at a company recorded as a 'top 40' graduate recruiter (The Times, 2018), and was offered administrative work. Upon starting work, the two firmly-working-class women received lower pay (£14,000 and £14,600) than Amelia (£17,000), as evidenced in appendix eight: graduate jobs and pay (p.265).

Amelia engaged in administrative work in the aim to develop sufficient economic capital to move abroad and become a teaching assistant. This was an opportunity Sophie (I9) would have liked to have engaged in too but lacked the resources to facilitate this, reporting: "I can't afford to go". In a contrasting manner to Amelia, Sophie and Jade engaged in administrative work as it was the only route they could find which would allow them to move away from retail and care work.

Overall, these three women believed that they had not experienced any social mobility as a consequence of their university experiences, they were part of the static working-class (a working-class graduate 'type' also explored by Burke (2016a)). These three women were unlike Jasmine and Sariah who experienced downward mobility relative to their parents' social positions. The five women's views on their social class position and mobility are outlined below:

			Self-class perception at the start of university	Self-class perception four years post-graduation	NS-SEC analytic class & occupation four years post-graduation
UWE	Jasmine	Sociology (2:1)	"Working-class with some middle-class attributes."	"Absolutely working-class."	7: Care worker
	Sariah	Sociology (2:1)	"Working-class."	-	8: Not classifiable
	Sophie	Politics (2:1)	"In the middle of working-class and middle-class."	"I'm just continuing what they (her parents) are": She did not feel as though she had been upwardly or downwardly mobile."	6: Administrator
UoB	Jade	Psychology (2:1)	"Working-class."	"I still feel like my parents are very working-class and in the jobs that I'm doing I do feel quite working-class really because my education isn't really helping."	6: Administrator
	Amelia	Biology (2:2)	"Middle-class."	"upper-working-class, the same as before."	6: Teaching assistant

Table nineteen: Self-perceptions of downward social mobility and immobility

Most often, the latter three women in table nineteen spoke of their experiences of immobility in relation to their parents' social class positions, and as a consequence of not using the knowledge they had acquired at university in their employment roles. Jasmine explored similar points when speaking about her downward mobility and cited the conditions of her work compared to that of her parents (who see themselves as middle-class) as the reasons for why she considered herself downwardly mobile:

> We've now agreed that we are three people in different social classes living under one roof but the same lifestyle. […] I work for a living and I go to the pub at the weekends and I do very sort of normal day to day things. Mum and dad, obviously they run the holiday cottage business and, you know they both used to work full-time (but now their work is seasonal).
> (UWE, Carer, I10)

Upon graduating from university, Jasmine worked in several care and retail roles which were most often structurally precarious: temporary, shift work, zero-hour contracts and minimum waged. Unlike her parents who opted for their precarity (working seasonally and working odd jobs through off-season months), Jasmine was bound to precarious work due to a lack of opportunities in her area as well as what she refers to as her intrinsic desire to work with vulnerable people (which too often does not pay well). As

also first shown in the previous chapter, a person's orientations and experiences of precarious employment appears to be symptomatic of their class position.

For Jasmine, her downward mobility was not an expected consequence of her university experience:

> Before I went to uni I was like, 'right well I'm going to get a degree and I'm going to get this like really amazing job and I'm going to be middle-class then because I'll have like a great amount of money coming in and I've got like a nice suburban house and I drive like a jeep'. That's what I thought. So yeah, I thought early on before I actually went there that my life was going to be really different and that my social class could change, it had a potential to.
> (UWE, Carer, I10)

Here Jasmine elucidates how aspirations are formed by hegemonic neoliberal discourse through which the standard of 'success' is set by a middle-class bias. The implications of this are that working-class students/graduates have to work harder and for longer, in a 'game' which the odds are stacked against them, in order to meet such a standard of 'success'. After being unable to attain such a standard, Jasmine was left "disappointed" and "depressed" but was able to re-orientate her aspirations to find herself "not particularly bothered about changing" her social class (I10).

Apart from in Sariah's case, the downward mobility and immobility of the women helped them to re-root back into the familial habitus (Bourdieu, 1984) relatively easier than most of those who 'achieved' some upward social mobility. Due to this, they were also able to reconnect with friends from pre-university with relatively more ease. Though they experienced more ease in re-engaging with previous sets of social capital, they experienced relative disadvantage in their attempts to find work. This is because they had returned to hometowns which heavily restricted their employment prospects and most saw little in the way of career opportunities:

> I left uni I didn't know what to do with my life – still don't to be honest. […] I expect more from the world, but I've also moved to a place where I can't really get much from the world. So at the moment it's a very much, it's a very backward place here, it's very seasonal, you know I'd absolutely love tomorrow just jack everything in and go travelling, that's what I want to do now, that's what I want to do. And I want to like meet new people and work really random jobs and help some kids from an orphanage and shit like that, I want to do all that. But it's just not achievable.
> (Jasmine, UWE, Sociology, Carer, I10)

Jasmine's aspirations to go travelling in this capacity resembled that of a middle-class graduates' (Vigurs, Jones, and Harris, 2016; Lucey, Melody and Walkerdine, 2010).

However, the structures within which she lives, particularly the employment sphere in her hometown and her lack of economic capital, restricted her ability to do so.

9.3.1 Career development

Relative to those who have experienced a degree of upward social mobility, those who were immobile or downwardly mobile experienced little career identity development post-university:

> I'm kind of just working to make sure I don't die. I don't think anything's changed because I don't know what I want yet. […] I think whatever it is I'm supposed to do it's to help vulnerable people, but I don't know in what capacity yet. So yeah that's the only bit I know really.
> (Jasmine, UWE, Sociology, Carer, I10)

Jasmine struggled to develop her career identity as a social worker due to the cost of embarking on such a process and her need for economic capital to survive. Though she had begun working in care with the aim to gain the experience to be able to apply for an MA in Social Work, she soon realised that leaving work in order to do PG study was not financially viable. At that, she struggled to imagine being able to facilitate the further precarity that PG study would bring as she cites the instability of her current work situation (due to austerity) as contributing to her mental health issues and her inability to move towards achieving her aspirations:

> I don't know what's going to happen. At the moment, I'm sort of facing a job that's probably not going to be with me next year. […] Last week we had like two sort of high up sort of office mumbo jumbo people who came down. You know they're from head office and they were like using all these fucking phrases like 'oh going forward…' you know, all that shit you hear. And I was literally vomiting in my entire mouth. They were like 'what's your biggest threat as a staff team?' And I just belted out 'oh being shut down'. They said, 'well we haven't heard anything about that yet, but you are going to have to change the way you work'.
>
> […] It's all so depressing. I feel like I'm staring down the barrel of working until I die at work, and probably not going to have children because it's not worth it.
> (UWE, Sociology, Carer, I10)

Likewise, Jade was unable to "see a future there (at work), I don't know how I'm going to build a career" (I10). In Sophie's case, she was encouraged to take on a promotion, but soon felt a sense of unease around occupying a managerial role and stepped down because she believed she was "not that kind of person" to do such a role (I10). This is a common finding among working-class people who enter managerial roles (Friedman

and Laurison, 2019), and I would argue this is particularly the case for working-class women.

For the other women, they reported no room for progression within the companies they were employed in. Though this was the case, all demonstrated great resilience. Jade put the onus on herself and her level of determination for why she had not been promoted yet, "I just need to not give up and just keep trying, like pushing for something a bit more" (I10).

Rather than a lack of character, aspiration or resilience, these women struggled to develop their career identities due to a lack of valued capital, employment stability, opportunity and incongruence between the job roles that 'people like them' do and management roles. While these women were adaptable, recovered from adversity and re-set their goals according to their resources, all of which defines a resilient graduate (Burke and Scurry, 2019), their agency was restricted by structures.[68]

Overall, post-graduation, none of these women spoke specifically about wanting to be upwardly socially mobile. Instead, they desired to earn "a bit more money" (Sophie, UWE, Politics, Administrator, I10) and work in secure employment positions which were rewarding and had longevity to them. Due to their post-graduation experiences, they were less likely than those who had been somewhat upwardly mobile to report feeling optimistic about the future. Instead, they were "nervous about the future" (Jasmine, I10), their income and ability to move forward with partners, to get married, buy a house and have children.

However, even in these cases, as graduates they did not report desiring to become middle-class. Instead they wanted to remain working-class but have economic stability. They generally understood that being upwardly socially mobile came with additional factors which they did not desire:

> there's more to like middle-class than like having a bit more money. […] Obviously, you know there's like starting sort of like airs and graces you know, where you're well-respected by like so and so who runs this business and whatever. Like I'm not really arsed, I just want a basic happy life where I'm not completely working my arse off for peanuts and can't do anything that I want to do. I want to just have a really simply happy life.
> (Jasmine, UWE, Sociology, Carer, I10)

[68] For a comprehensive review of the literature on graduate resilience and a consideration of a future research agenda, see Burke and Scurry (2019).

The perceived complexity that being upwardly socially mobile would bring potential psychological dislocation is one which they wanted to avoid, such dislocations were discussed in the literature review. The requirement of having to engage in a middle-class set of social relations, a process through which would pathologise their own histories as working-class women (Lawler, 1999), was one which they aimed to avoid. Instead, they aspired for what the working-class women aspired for in Walkerdine, Lucey and Helen's (2001, p.136) work, to have 'enough' to live and be happy. This is different from the aspirations they found among the middle-class women in their study, who felt it "imperative to maintain and reproduce bourgeois profession status".

9.4 Conclusion

To address my research question, upward and downward social mobility, as well as immobility, was evident in the narratives of the working-class women as a consequence of their education and of their employment trajectories. As is evident, there are two new categories introduced here in my analysis of their social class positions four years post-graduation (below in the column furthest to the right hand side): the precariat (defined in chapter three) and the lower-working-class (a position in which agents are at high risk of falling into the precariat). The women are positioned as such based on the relation between one another's capital, habitus and the fields they predominantly enter:

		Beginning of university (2010)		Four years post-graduation (2017)		
		Their analysis	**My analysis**	**NS-SEC analytic class & occupation**	**Their analysis**	**My analysis**
UWE	Adele	"Working-class."	FWC	3: Charity account manager	"Aspirational working-class."	UWC
	Jasmine	"Working-class with some middle-class attributes."	FWC	7: Care worker	"Absolutely working-class."	Lower-WC
	Ruby	"Working-class."	FWC	2: Primary school teacher	"I probably am middle-class because I've got a degree. But I'd like to think I was working-class."	UWC
	Sariah	"working-class"	FWC	8: Not classifiable	-	Precariat
	Sophie	"In the middle of working-class and middle-class."	FWC	6: Administrator	"I'm just continuing what they (parents) are."	FWC
UoB	Jackie	"Working-class."	FWC	2: Primary school teacher	"working-class."	UWC
	Zoe	"Working-class."	FWC	3: Legal Taxonomist	"I don't feel like I'm middle-class, but I do feel like I'm different to other people in my family."	UWC
	Anna	"Working-class."	FWC	2: Secondary school teacher	"probably middle-class."	MC
	Jade	"Working-class."	FWC	6: Administrator	"very working-class."	FWC
	Lizzie	"Working-class."	FWC	2: Engineering (graduate scheme)	"between like working and middle-class."	UWC
	Samantha	"Middle-class" but later said she believed she and her family were "working-class".	UWC	8: PhD student & has also done some lecturing	"more middle-class."	MC
	Amelia	"Middle-class."	UWC	6: Teaching assistant	"upper-working-class, the same as before."	UWC

Table twenty: Overall class analysis

This chapter has dealt with my third and final research question:

3. Do young working-class women experience social (im)mobility as a result of their university experience?
    i. If so, what are the characteristics of this (im)mobility?

I have discovered that young working-class women experience individual social mobility and immobility as a consequence of HE experiences, geographical mobilities and employment positions. However, it is complex, fractured and, I argue, can only be wholly understood through a relational approach and employing theoretical concepts such as Bourdieu's forms of capital, habitus and field. That is, economic capital is only one element of the fractured picture of social class.

Relative to their social class origins and one another, seven of the women experienced varying degrees of upward social mobility, two experienced downward social mobility, and three were immobile.

I found that having acquired a degree from UoB provided these working-class women with a higher possibility of being upwardly socially mobile. Not only on occupational bases relative to their parents' but socially and culturally too.

Those who were upwardly mobile and considered themselves 'more middle- than working-class' did so on the basis that their current economic, social and cultural conditions were different to their pre-university ones, their parents' and their friends at 'home' who had not gone to university. While they experienced this change in conditions and prospects, this had yet to permeate the habitus in a profound way as they did not 'feel' middle-class. This could be due to the perceived restrictions for further mobility (based on class and gender outlined above) and the implications of this mobility on the relationships they have with those at home: "I definitely think (I am middle-class), as much as I wouldn't admit it probably to my family" (Samantha, I10).

While being in a place of such cultural and social limbo has psychological implications, mobilising and embodying 'working-class' cultural capital was beneficial to those who worked with other working-class people and working-class students. However, these women understood that displaying such capital was field and agent dependent. That is, through impression management, they felt they believed they had to hide capital which was synonymous with a working-class life in front of their managers and others who were from more affluent backgrounds, a practice which many may have developed throughout their time in HE.

Thus, while having a cleft habitus which held working-class capital was beneficial in some fields (i.e. in teaching), overall such a habitus refrained these women from fully entering middle-class and working-class fields. That is, to employ Friedman and Laurison (2019; 2015) and Waller's (2011) concepts, as a consequence of their HE and social mobility there were 'class ceilings' which kept them from progressing at work, as well as 'glass floors' which restrained them from full assimilating back into their 'home' environments.

On the other hand, the characteristics of immobility and downward mobility were markedly different. These five women faced relatively more, but still varying degrees, of economic, social and cultural struggle. Besides Sariah, all experienced re-connecting with pre-university social contacts with relative ease. All attempted to draw on their social capital, but this only proved valuable in Amelia's case, the only upper-working-class woman in this category.

All those who were immobile engaged in some form of administrative work, but this differed along class lines. While Amelia engaged with this work with the aim to save up to move abroad to become a teaching assistant, Sophie and Jade (FWC) engaged in this work as it was their only available route out of care and retail work.

Overall, all those who experienced immobility or downward mobility experienced a higher degree of struggle to realise and continue developing their career identities, relative to the upwardly mobile women. Among the firmly-working-class, there was a specific struggle to imagine a future self as achieving what they characterised as 'success' in the workplace. However, they continued to demonstrate high levels of resilience.

Though I have to conclude my class analysis here, their positions are by no means immovable as they have a number of years before changes to their social mobility are likely to plateau (Goldthorpe (2016) estimates that this is around age 33). Though they *possibly* have further 'opportunity' for social mobility, the women perceive significant limits to this:

> I don't think I'll get any higher. I mean I would always see myself as being like working-class, and perhaps like my children might – if I do have children – might be classed as middle-class. I can never… you can't… you can't really rise any more. I'd never be more than that, I will never… that just could never happen. I think you… yeah, it's not… yeah that's like too far removed, that's like a fantasy and, yeah, too different.
> (Adele, UWE, Charity Account Manager, I10)

As alluded to in Adele's quote, most of the participants spoke of future social mobility in relation to motherhood. Those who were graduates of UWE spoke of their aspirations for their future children to be middle-class, to have 'more' than they had when they were young. However, graduates of UoB spoke of their future children as 'working-class' in, at times, profound resistance to raising middle-class young people like those they studied alongside. Unfortunately, I do not have the space to go into such data here but plan to write a paper on this.

Chapter ten: Conclusion

In this chapter, I first provide an overview of this research. I draw out the main findings and arguments from the analytical chapters, which are central to answering my research questions and reintroduce the literature reviewed in chapter three. Within this, I outline how this research has addressed the gaps in the literature and thus, how it contributes to current discourse on how working-class women prepare for, and experience, the 'undergraduate' to 'graduate' transition in the fields of HE and graduate employment, and the characteristics, aspirations and negotiations of their social (im)mobility.

I then outline the limitations of this study, particularly the methodological ones, and critically consider the extent to which the findings of this project are 'trustworthy'. I follow this with a discussion of the implications of this work and my recommendations for policy and practice while setting a research agenda which responds to the findings of this research.

10.1 Overview of findings

Within this research, I have addressed three research questions, one in each analytical chapter, all of which are set out in chronological order to tell a linear story of how these women experienced and negotiated HE and the graduate employment market. As I outline below, I have bridged several research gaps, none more so than the one outlined by Case (2017, p.559) who said there needed to be "more on the intersection of gender and class" on this research topic.

10.1.1 Aspirations and preparations for graduate life

To address my first research question: 'What are the constructions of a graduate identity framed by, for young working-class women?' I analysed the women's (i) pre-university and in-university employment and volunteering practices, (ii) their approaches to drawing on and mobilising advice and social capital, (iii) the route they applied to access for after graduation (i.e. postgraduate (PG) study, employment, internships) and their orientations towards these. Upon considering these key areas I was able to place each of the women into one of four different career identity development typologies: (i) driven by a long-term desire, (ii) gradual development of one idea, (iii) reactive to the university experience, (iv) education focussed.

While I was able to do this, I found these typologies only went *some* way to explain how the participants began constructing their graduate identities while at university. Overriding the influence of the career identity development typologies were the

implications of their class origins. That is, the synergy within the two class-based groups (firmly-working-class and upper-working-class) had an overwhelming impact on their experiences of and capacities to develop their graduate identities. For example, most of the firmly-working-class held an intrinsic goal to engage in employment which "makes a difference" (e.g. Adele, I5) and which they felt "proud" of (e.g. Anna, I9), and viewed their aspirations to work in female-dominated sectors, such as teaching, as potentially facilitating such goals. Their reasons for aspiring to such a goal were rooted in their 'experiential capital' (Bradley and Ingram, 2012). That is, they reflected on experiences of economic struggle, symbolic violence and the lack of opportunities for working-class people they know (especially their mothers) and provided these as reasons for why they aspired to do work which had a positive impact on other social lives and their communities. This demonstrates how these women did not 'leave behind' their backgrounds upon accessing university and how Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) are not melting pots through which the effects of social class origins are tempered away. Instead, their habitus accompanied them and informed their dispositions and orientations towards education and employment. On the other hand, the upper-working-class women were less likely to report being driven to do work which fulfilled such a desire.

The aspiration to engage in socially progressive employment has been found before to play a leading role in the processes of career decision making for working-class women (Bradley, 2015; Silva, 2015; Davidson, 2011), but only in this study have intra-class differences within this group been identified. These findings not only provide empirical evidence of how the habitus is class-based and how there are differences on intra-class bases, but they also contribute to answering my first research question.

Chapter seven also demonstrates how the working-class women's aspirations were 'facilitated' or 're-orientated' by the structures of the field of HE, providing empirical evidence on how the habitus is reactive to the field. Most of those who accessed university intending to work in male-dominated and middle-class dominated fields soon found their career identity development re-orientated away from such employment spheres (i.e. Zoe, Adele and Bianca). The longer they studied, the more likely they were to re-orientate their goals away from engaging in this type of work towards work which would be typically considered suitable "for the likes of" (Bourdieu, 1984, p.110) them on the basis of class, but also on the basis of gender. On the other hand, the University

of Bristol (UoB) appeared to facilitate the career desires of the upper-working-class women to become writers, work in publishing, to become a HE lecturer and to do research, all of which are typically middle-class routes.

These findings demonstrate how HEIs not only reproduce class-based social standings but gendered ones too and provides some evidence for how working-class women can be 'doubly' isolated from developing career identities which are outside of classed and gendered 'norms'.

Graduate identity construction patterns were also linked to the different levels of capital held and mobilised by each class group. Their development of 'strategies' to 'play the game' and their capacities to 'play' differed along these lines too.

The longer all fifteen working-class women spent in the field of HE, the more developed their awareness was of overcrowding in the graduate labour market and of strategies used by other students to 'play' for positional advantage. However, disparities amongst the groups were found. The firmly-working-class women and upper-working-class women who accessed UoB (groups two and three outlined in chapter six) arrived at university with an awareness of 'the game', which had led many of them to apply for UoB and other elite universities in the first place. These women had some understanding of the various moves which are made in order to achieve positional advantage. On the other hand, the firmly-working-class women who studied at the University of the West of England (UWE) (group one outlined in chapter six) only came to view the scholastic capital of an undergraduate degree as 'no longer enough' after starting university.

While I acknowledge that the working-class women do not have the same tacit knowledge of the rules of 'the game' in the same way that the middle-classes do, I argue that the women in this study developed a 'good' understanding of 'the game' by watching more privileged students, with higher volumes and higher valued compositions of capital, 'play'. These findings are unlike those found by Bathmaker, Ingram and Waller (2013, p.740) who argue that most working-class students do not have "a 'feel for the game'" when "constructing employable selves". These findings are also unlike Abrahams' (2017, p.632) who reported that many working-class students hold a "commitment to a 'sense of honour' which rules out using social capital", that is "they reject the available". Instead, I found that these young working-class women 'played' and drew on social capital where they could. However, this capital had little value beyond providing access to working-class jobs which were contractually insecure.

Due to this, these women displayed much frustration over being unable to play in the same manner and to the same extent as their more privileged counterparts.

As their ability to play was based on the various forms of capital within their remit, their 'moves' played out on classed lines. For example, all the upper-working-class in this study reported having some form of a financial safety net, thus they did not need to engage in paid work during their studies. This allowed them the space to develop 'high valued' cultural and social capital as their capacities to engage in their HE studies and 'university life' were not restricted. They engaged in extra-curricular activities (ECAs) and spent time with new friends and partners who were described as "painfully middle-class" (Megan, I4). At the same time, three-quarters of the firmly-working-class women had to work during term time in order to survive and so struggled to participate in social and cultural activities.

Not only were the capital held by the two groups of women different in volume and value, but these women also mobilised their capital in different ways. Upon graduation, all four of the upper-working-class women had drawn on their various forms of capital to secure selective and prestigious post-graduation steps. They were able to do so without having engaged in relevant paid employment and little relevant volunteer work. However, they had accrued 'high value' social and cultural capital while they studied which they were able to mobilise in order to secure such transitions. On the other hand, the firmly-working-class women had little-to-no economic capital to mobilise in their aim to develop 'successful' graduate identities. At that, most had to engage in paid work all year round (i.e. in Bristol whilst studying, and when back with their families during the academic holidays) in order to survive. This left them vulnerable to exploitation and impacted on their abilities to study, their mental health and their capacity to develop their career identities. This was a struggle which could not be overcome by sheer resilience alone.

While most of the firmly-working-class women had relatively less capacity to develop their graduate identities, there were exceptions to this. Those who arrived at university with aspirations to enter teaching were able to develop and mobilise capital which was 'high' valued in some routes into teacher employment. Through drawing on social capital (ex-teachers, the teachers of their siblings), they did volunteer work and developed the cultural capital considered valuable in the employment fields they aspired

to enter. However, they had to do this volunteer work during term-time alongside their studies. They were only able to afford to do this as they worked full-time during the summer holidays in preparation for their return to university.

The cultural capital developed when volunteering directly affected the pace at which they were able to develop their graduate identities. Their graduate identities were among the most developed as they entered their final year of undergraduate study with all applying to specific routes into teaching before submitting their dissertations. However, they were still restricted from elite routes into teaching (e.g. Teach First).

Overall, most often the constructions of a graduate identity for the firmly-working-class were framed by a lack of economic capital, a lack of 'high' social capital and the misrecognition of their cultural capital. Their habituses, along with the social isolation facilitated and perpetuated by symbolic violence of the fields, played a significant role in forming their graduate identities which continuously aligned them to work which was 'for the likes of them' on classed and gendered bases. This meant they most often engaged in 'non-professional' work (NS-SEC classes 3 and below), however 'teaching' was the exception to this rule as the young women experienced congruence between their habitus (and capital) and most routes/fields of teacher employment.

10.1.2 The initial transitions out of university

When addressing my second research question: 'What do young working-class women's transitions from 'undergraduate' to 'graduate' comprise of?' I found that while all but one woman in this study achieved 'good' degree outcomes (i.e. 2:1 or First), this on its own did not secure them 'successful' or 'safe' transitions out of university. At that, their transitions were differentiated based on their class origins and the university through which they obtained their degrees.

While most aspired to study at PG level most did not have the economic capital to do so. The three firmly-working-class women who accessed PG study did so as it was a requirement to access teaching and were only able to do so because Student Finance England funded loans which covered Postgraduate Certificate in Education (PGCE) course fees. The upper-working-class women, on the other hand, were more likely to study 'traditional' master's courses in the aim to (i) develop their passion for their subject of study and (ii) to postpone the 'undergraduate' to 'graduate' transition. Using their relatively higher levels of economic capital, these women were able to 'buy' more time before facing important career decisions that the firmly-working-class had to face soon after finishing university. The transitions of these women were marked by

significant levels of anxiety over the need for an income and thus there was an immediacy around finding paid employment. This highlights one way in which having and mobilising different levels of economic capital can characterise the transitions of working-class women out of university.

Like the women in Finn's (2015) work, most of the working-class women in this study 'boomeranged' home to different towns and cities in the south of England/Wales. Thus, their transitions out of university were not unconnected the familial habitus as many returned home and re-established roles which they held before, looking after siblings and caring for grandparents. As Finn (2015) outlined, this, the transition from university to home is less researched than the university to work transition but is of equal importance, and I feel merits further examination beyond the space I was able to give it here.

While most had the option to re-root into the familial habitus, this was not the case for all. Sariah's story is one which demonstrates how, even those who play 'the game' can struggle to access secure transitions out of HE if they face multiple disadvantages, have a 'lack' of 'high' value capital, and state support is restricted such as in times of austerity.

Overall, 'home' or the absence of such a necessity, and geographical location was key to characterising their transitions into graduate life. Those who were restricted to rural areas struggled to access the employment market. Over the period in which they studied, austerity had affected their communities, and thus on their return, public sector cuts and wage cuts had been rolled out, and there were increased levels of precarious working conditions, all of which disproportionately affect young people and women (Council of Europe, 2013). Due to this, some of the women were forced to negotiate the benefits system and retrain at NVQ level which often had detrimental effects on their mental health.

To consider this theoretically, I appropriated Brown's (2013) concept of the 'opportunity trap', where agents are trapped in a cycle of attaining credentials with increasingly higher prestige in order to be best positioned to find professional work, to work in the context of this thesis. That is, when a graduate is not in a position to continue participating in a traditionally linear fashion (i.e. to go onto PG study), and they face navigating a predominantly non-graduate employment market, they are forced to continue gaining qualifications but ones which are at a lower level than their HE qualifications. In this thesis, this was only experienced by those from firmly-working-

class origins who returned to their hometowns post-graduation. This demonstrates how the 'opportunity trap' is field-dependent and gaining employment post-graduation is not always dependent on gaining credentials with increasingly higher recognised prestige.

These findings contradict the human capital theory which outlines that as agents accrue more credentials, they are better positioned to find work. It also provides critical contradictory evidence to Barton (2016, no page number) that not all young graduates can "make a job" through "taking control of your destiny and making your own opportunities" through "going mobile" "and having gusto". These were unexpected findings and were firm characterising elements in the 'undergraduate' to 'graduate' accounts of those who experienced these issues.

Most mentioned aspirations to move out of their hometowns and cities, with London being the most popular destination. While it is widely acknowledged that those who want to find work in London require significant economic capital and thus those from working-class origins are often locked out (Social Mobility Commission (SMC), 2019), this study also found the working-class women also required the social capital of having friends of family already living there in order to make such a move.

Overall, over half the working-class women in this study graduated to 'non-graduate' jobs in NS-SEC classes 6 and 7 (Office for National Statistics (ONS), 2018a). Only three out of fifteen graduated to a 'graduate job' and began earning within the 'new-graduate wages' scale (over £20,000 (Ball, 2013) and these were the teachers. As called for by Finn (2015, p.118), through analysing the narratives of those who entered teaching, I have worked to "rebalance" the graduate transitions debate to focus not only on "individuated notions of career pathways and experiences of underemployment" but collective ones and including those of 'success'. Though these women experienced this 'success', entering the teaching profession brought with it several issues. These women reported feeling overworked and undervalued, and their envisioned prospects for promotion were inhibited by their aspirations for motherhood and/or sexism from male colleagues. However, teaching provided them with a linear and relatively secure undergraduate' to 'graduate' transition post-graduation which they found fulfilling and felt 'proud' of.

In terms of their graduate wages, there were two striking findings. First, while UWE and UoB graduates graduated to around the same wage (just over £13,000) over the following three years, the pay of UoB graduates increased by 80 per cent while the pay

of UWE graduates increased by 44 per cent. While some of this difference in the increase could be accounted for by the differential rates of PG study (five at UoB, one at UWE), this could also be due to longstanding differences in pay between RG universities and post-1992 institutions found by other researchers, outlined in chapter three. This institutional-based pay gap was still evident when I controlled for class origin.

Second, I expected to find data such as Crawford and Vignoles' (2014) which showed that six months after graduation those whose parents occupied higher occupational classes, on average, were earning more than those from lower occupational class backgrounds. However, I found the opposite to be the case, and I believe this is the first study to find such a contradiction in graduate pay data. After turning to the qualitative data to elucidate this finding, I found the upper-working-class women were opting to engage in low-paid internships or low-paid work as a way to take a break post-university, to further 'bide time' before starting a career or to refine their career goals and develop the cultural capital required for entry to such 'graduate' roles. They were able to mitigate the low pay and insecurity of pay by living at home or with friends for 'free'. On the other hand, the firmly-working-class were forced to find what full-time work they could get out of financial necessity. While this meant that some were earning higher salaries than the upper-working-class, others were struggling to find secure work and depended on precarious forms of employment. The ways in which their labour was exploited was detrimental to their career identity development, their wellbeing and their ability to plan for the future: "I can't really think like to next week let alone 10 years' time" (Jasmine, UWE, I7). These were key class-based differences in how different working-class women experience precarious employment as they transition out of university.

Through answering my second research question I have bridged a research gap identified by Finn (2015, p.103), as before my study there was "very little known about how and in what ways recent graduates negotiate (this) period". My work has found much evidence to support Morrison's (2015, p.650) suggestion that the initial transitions out of university "may be a point where forms of social inequality are reproduced". The data in this study has demonstrated how various forms, volumes and compositions of capital are required in the transition from 'undergraduate' to 'graduate' in order to attain a 'successful' transition and further actualise their graduate identities.

Just as the decision to access HE and the experiences and choices made as undergraduate students are, as Baker (2019, p.1) puts it, "unequal and socially patterned", so are the transitions out of university, this study has found. Not only can a lack of economic capital at this transitionary time leave working-class women vulnerable to various forms of exploitation, health issues and homelessness, but also the 'value' of their social capital can do too. This is not to negate the importance of cultural capital, as congruence between this and their aspired fields of employment were important. For example, high levels of congruence between habitus (and capitals) and the field of teacher education for working-class women allowed them to negotiate 'successful' transitions into 'graduate employment', where there was incongruence this was more difficult or impossible.

10.1.3 Social mobility and future-gazing

In working to address my third research question: 'Do young working-class women experience social (im)mobility as a result of their university experience? If so, what are the characteristics of this (im)mobility?' I found a broad range of mobility. First, relative to one or both parents' NS-SEC class positions, eight of the women were upwardly socially mobile on an occupational basis, and four were downwardly mobile. Though the patterns of mobility were wide-ranging, it was clear that graduates of UoB were most likely to be upwardly socially mobile on an occupational basis relative to their parents, compared to graduates of UWE.

Those who identified as 'more middle- than working-class' (n=2) did so based on their current conditions and prospects: they were not struggling financially, they lived in the South of England, they believed UoB had instilled a cultural capital which was different to that which they had grown up with, and they viewed their jobs and prospects of future work as 'middle-class'. While they acknowledged this shift in their conditions and prospects, this was kept from their families: "I wouldn't admit it probably to my family" (Samantha, I10). Though, while they acknowledged this shift, it had yet to permeate their psyche profoundly. That is, a "lag" (Friedman, 2016b, p.138) between conditions and prospects, and their habitus, was evident as they did not 'feel' middle-class. This created further fractures in an already cleft habitus.

Some of the upwardly mobile women had retained and developed the cultural capital synonymous with a 'working-class' life while studying at university. This was particularly the case for those who retained regular contact with those at 'home' and

experienced social exclusion at UoB. Upon graduation, this capital helped facilitate a smoother process of re-rooting back into the familial habitus. On the other hand, those who had accessed HE in the aim of 'getting out and getting away' (Lawler, 1999) and had less contact with those at 'home' while they studied, struggled to re-root when they faced the necessity of returning home.

Their cleft habituses presented the women with bittersweet symptoms in that they could use the 'working-class' aspects of their cleft habitus to engage with some agents in their social fields (at 'home', in the classroom, with some colleagues) and the middle-class aspects of their habitus enabled them to access and, to a certain extent, navigate 'professional' work environments. However, they were, in more social fields than before, outsiders looking in. Just as many had reported experiencing as undergraduate students in the university field. While they were able to access 'professional', graduate-level employment, at times they felt they had to 'hide' their 'working-class' forms of capital from most of their colleagues, and at 'home' they felt they had to hide the 'middle-class' forms of capital that they had acquired in university and the workplace, from their families.

To employ Friedman and Laurison's (2019; 2015) concept, as most of the women broke through one 'class ceiling' via having achieved success at university and acquired 'professional' work, they discovered others which restricted further progression. These ceilings were classed as well as gendered and thus, I believe, are more challenging to break through for working-class women. In addition, there were 'glass floors' which restrained them from fully assimilating back into their 'home' environments (Waller, 2011). They were in a state of cultural and social limbo, which can be a psychologically demanding place to be, as discussed in chapter three.

On the other hand, five of the women were immobile (n=3) or experienced downward social mobility (n=2). Of these women all but Sariah experienced a sense of ease in re-connecting with previous sets of social capital upon moving home, perhaps due to the 'nature' of their (im)mobility. All engaged in 'working-class' (SMC, 2019), 'routine and manual' (NS-SEC 5-7) jobs but aspired to work in roles in NS-SEC classes 3 and above.

All five of these women struggled to develop their career identities post-graduation. Those who were immobile struggled to find work which they found fulfilling and felt as though the skills they had developed at university were being underutilised. The immobile firmly-working-class women struggled to imagine future progression in their

employment roles or where they were promoted there was unease around being “the kind of person” (Sophie, I10) to work in such a role. However, those who faced the most significant struggle were those who were downwardly mobile. Sariah and Jasmine (UWE) were unable to develop their graduate career identities as, at times, they struggled to find any form of work and to access government help for housing and benefits.

Due to these reasons, the downwardly or immobile women were less likely than the upwardly mobile women to report feeling optimistic about the future, were more likely to report experiencing anxiety and depression, and were less likely to be able to imagine getting married and having children (though they all aspired for this). This provides evidence for the claim that universities do not ‘level the playing field’ for all those who enter.

10.2 Originality

Throughout this research, I have demonstrated how I have bridged research gaps identified by Case (2017), Finn (2015) and Morrison (2015) and have contributed to the theoretical thinking around the concepts of the ‘opportunity trap’ and the ‘cleft habitus’. On top of this, I have identified and ‘bridged’ a significant gap identified in the literature review. I discovered that while researchers had considered how social class plays a role in how working-class students experience university, their transitions out of HE, how they engage with the structures of employment and experience social (im)mobility, until now no one had researched how working-class women experience such things. Their voices had been “excluded” “for the sake of simplicity” (Saunders, 2010, p.25), rendered mute, or given little space in too many cases. Thus, the state of knowledge following my research is, through taking a ‘gendered’ and ‘classed’ approach, working-class women are ‘doubly’ disadvantaged in particular fields of education and employment (in ways outlined above).

To add to these original contributions, I have made visible the invisible intra-class differences instead of relying on the usual binary demarcation of class categories. Through unpicking the granular differences in habitus and capital composition between upper-working- and firmly-working-class women, I have shown how women who originate from these two ‘working-class’ origins navigated university and the employment market, developed and mobilised capital and experienced social mobility in markedly different ways.

10.3 Limitations

While all PhD projects have their limitations, the relationship between this project and the 'original project' (Paired Peers) meant that I faced a few additional restrictions in planning and conducting my research.

Upon beginning my PhD in 2014, I hoped to draw on the data already collected in the first phase of the original project (2010-2013) and the data to be collected in the second phase (2014-2017). As I chose to draw on the longitudinal 'nature' of the original project, the pool of prospective participants I had the possibility of drawing on was pre-determined. As this was the case, there was only the capacity to seek ethical approval from twenty-seven working-class women who had already contributed to the first phase of the original project and who said they would be open to taking part in similar research in the future.

Opting for such an approach meant that my sample was 'small' and thus, the findings cannot be widely generalisable. However, I did not set out to conduct a piece of research which could be considered generalisable. Instead, I was interested in providing a snapshot of the working-class women's experiences of preparing for graduation, their transitions out of university, how they navigated the employment market and experienced social (im)mobility in a particular social and political context. Though I faced limitations, and location and time restrictions (i.e. they were students of UWE and UoB, who graduated in 2013/14), I was able to gather such a snapshot.

Further limitations of the sample lay in the characteristics of the women. First, 93 per cent of my sample achieved a 2:1 or First in 2013, whereas only 75 per cent of all students graduating in the same year achieved the same grades (Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA), 2018d). Thus, the sample is skewed in favour of those who 'achieved success' at university. At that, there is also an imbalance between those who graduated from UWE (n=5) and those who graduated from UoB (n=10). Again, this skews the findings as I found that the UoB graduates are more likely to experience upward social mobility. Accordingly, my sample only included two downwardly mobile women, one of whom I consider to be part of the 'precariat', a group who are least likely of all to take part in social research (McKenzie, 2015b). On top of this, I had little scope to say much on how ethnicity played a role in these women's experiences as only two women were from an ethnic minority background and one (Sariah) was only available for one interview between 2014 and 2017 due to her precarious living arrangement.

While the sample size was small and ‘skewed’, the data set was large and collected over seven years. This provided benefits in that I had much data collected over a significant period; thus, for example, I was able to study the development of career aspirations over time. However, due to the restricted space provided in this thesis, I was not able to include all the findings.

Another limitation was that I was unable to interview all the working-class women who participated in this research as some had already built significant rapport with other interviewers on the original project. It made sense to prioritise re-establishing rapport where we could in order to retain as many of the participants as possible. While there were drawbacks to this, i.e. interviewing styles varied across the interviewers on the Paired Peers project and, at times, I saw missed opportunities for further probing, I would not have been able to gather the volume of data that I had access to without my colleagues. For this, I am incredibly grateful to them.

Many of the methods through which the data were collected were also pre-determined as the interviews for the first phase of the original project (PP1) had already taken place (one unstructured interview and five semi-structured) and a further four semi-structured interviews were planned to take place over the course of the second phase of the project (PP2). Although this meant that my project faced these methodological limitations, I had a role in creating the interview schedules for the interviews in PP2 and so was able to include direct questions pertaining to my thesis.

Overall, due to the limitations mentioned here, there are further research questions raised and interest for further research. I have considerable interest in how ethnicity plays a role in working-class women’s experiences of, and their transitions out of, university into the employment market. Unfortunately, I had little data to contribute much to this discussion, particularly from Sariah. Here there is much potential for further research as there is currently a significant research gap in the literature.

Due to reasons just mentioned, though it may be considered appropriate to some, I have not included intersectionality theory in this thesis. This was a political choice; I could not employ this theory without being in a position to contribute significantly to uncovering how experiences and outcomes are differentiated by ethnicity in this research context. The reader may also question why I do not provide comparisons between the working-class women and other groups on class and gendered bases. While this may be considered a ‘missed opportunity’ in the eyes of some, I take the view that the *dominant* have been researched in this context before now and thus I wanted to

dedicate the whole of this thesis to the narratives of the working-class women, as this *dominated* group had not been considered previously in this context. In addition, I made such a decision as I had to adopt a specific focus in order to go into the necessary level of detail required for PhD study.

If I were able to reproduce the research without the restrictions emplaced by my relationship with the original project, I would have recruited more women from ethnic minority backgrounds, an equal number of those from firmly- and upper-working-class backgrounds and an equal number of those studying at both institutions. I would consider restricting the participants to those who studied one subject with the aim to access one profession. At that, I would have probed much further on the mother-daughter relationships, which were briefly discussed in the data. Based on the little data I have, this was an insightful theme for which I see there is scope for future research.

With this data set, perhaps more comparisons could have been drawn between graduates across the two HEIs and the two class positions, and perhaps there would have been *more* synergy uncovered in their post-graduation trajectories. However, under these conditions, I would not have benefitted from the longitudinal nature of the original project and I may not have found the same 'scope' in findings, both of which I view as strengths of this PhD.

10.4 Establishing trustworthiness and acknowledging bias

In the aim to establish 'trustworthiness' in line with Lincoln and Guba's (1985) criteria I have critically considered the (i) credibility, (ii) dependability, (iii) confirmability and (iv) transferability of my research below.

The quest for 'confirmability' and 'transferability' is reflected in Shipman's (1988) question: 'If the investigation had been carried out again by different researchers using the same methods, would the same results have been obtained?'. In the case of this research, to this question, I would tentatively answer 'yes'. The hesitance in my response lays in the notion that as a critical realist while I have worked to ascertain *the* reality of that which I have researched, I understand that my knowledge of this reality is stratified through interpretations made based on my experiences and dispositions. Thus, in my view, the 'findings' of this research are not absolute as there is a possibility that others could draw different conclusions. However, in line with Lincoln and Guba's (1985) recommendations, I have strived to support the 'confirmability' and 'transferability' of this work through clearly outlining in the procedures I have embarked on and the contexts within which I have conducted this work. At that, I have

also clearly defined the characteristics of important properties of the research which can be replicated and transferred into different contexts, such as the characteristics of the 'firmly-working-class' and 'upper-working-class' or the sampling technique which was purposive and so can be reproduced.

At that, I believe I have attained a level of credibility by taking several routes. First, I had prolonged engagement with the participants, and so over time, I was able to gather a good understanding of them. This also meant that when I had queries over their responses to interview questions, I was able to ask them for clarification in the next interview. Moreover, though I did not interview all the women personally, I worked alongside those who did. This allowed me to speak with the interviewers about my interpretations of the interview transcripts and share my analysis with them. This gave me confidence that my analysis was credible. Also, I was able to increase the credibility of my research through engaging in data triangulation: I used the qualitative data to contextualise quantitative data. This provided strength to my analysis in the second (chapter eight) and third (chapter nine) analytical chapters.

Finally, in order to ensure the dependability of my work, I have been careful not to overclaim when discussing the findings. As outlined above, the aim of this work was to gather a snapshot of the context I have studied. At that, I feel confident in that this work is dependable as my interpretations of the data and the conclusions I have drawn have been examined and challenged by my supervisors and others who have observed me disseminate at conferences.

While I have worked to ensure the trustworthiness of this research, as a dual systems feminist I cannot pretend to be neutral, nor would I want to. Thus, within this work there are inevitable biases as "no research is free from ideological influences" (Letherby, 2003, p.71). There is the possibility that other researchers would present, prioritise or minimise different 'findings' to those which I have. For example, within this project, I have prioritised the narratives of those whom I perceive as having the *least* power in the social universe as these voices are least likely to be present in research (McKenzie, 2015b). This is an explicit bias that I have actively chosen to instil in this work, others in my position may not have made such a decision.

Further, there will be unconscious, subtle biases which I unknowingly hold which other researchers would not, which will have affected the research process. This view is common in the research of feminists as we reject objectivity and view that "there is no technique or methodological logic that can neutralise the social nature of interpretation"

(Morley, 1996, p.142). My response was to elucidate my biases where possible and to make my "interpretive schemes explicit" (Gelsthorpe, 1992, p.214) through providing detailed information on my analysis techniques (chapter five) and my positionality (chapter two). However, merely outlining my positionality was not enough, and so I was overtly mindful and critically reflexive on my impact on the research. I did this by journaling the research process and reflecting with colleagues about my interpretations. This was key to me reaching the 'best truth' possible, to be professionally accountable and improve my practice as a researcher.

10.5 Recommendations

In response to my research findings, my recommendations to help improve the experiences of working-class women who access universities, transition out of them and enter the labour market are as follows.

I believe that in order to work to eradicate symbolic violence and the reproduction of privilege that I have found in this research, universities should restrict their student intake from private schools to the national average (7 per cent (Sutton Trust, 2019)) to ensure their student population is more representative. At that, the social composition of their staff (i.e. class backgrounds, ethnicity, gender) should be analysed, made public and worked on in the aim to be more socially representative of the UK population. Further, I would recommend that institutions ask academic staff to take implicit bias training, which includes education on how symbolic violence can be enacted upon the working-classes.

In terms of better preparing students for the 'undergraduate' to 'graduate' transition, I recommend that universities provide students with up to date information on the 'state' of the graduate labour market. As well as this, universities could work to better promote paid work experiences and choose not to advertise unpaid work experiences. Further, they could ensure that all businesses who attend their careers fairs offer paid rather than unpaid work experiences.

While these amendments can be made on an institutional level, these would not provide an immediate solution to the broader social issues faced by the women in this thesis and others like them. Further action needs to be taken on a governmental level in order to affect change on wider social inequalities.

First, my recommendations to government for education policy are to reinstate and increase the Student Finance England grant which was removed in 2016. Most of the

women in this study received this grant and still had to engage in term-time employment while studying and effected their abilities to study, socialise and prepare for their post-graduation transition. My concern lies with those who have not received this grant since 2016, along with the increase in fees and the cost of living, I am concerned that working-class women who go to university now are under more pressure to work longer hours than the women in this work had to. Further, I would recommend scrapping the Russell Group and 'Elite' status of universities. I do not pretend that a hierarchy of some other kind would manifest, but I consider that scrapping such titles could help in 'levelling' the playing field.

In terms of employment policy, the government could pursue those who offer unpaid internships and enforce the law. Currently, minimum wage legislation means that unpaid internships are illegal in the UK. However, in 2018, the government reported they had not prosecuted any business on this basis (Butler, 2018), and anecdotally it is widely known that the practice continues.

There are several findings in this research which have their roots in the social policy of the Conservative governments who have been in power since the women started university. For example, the implications of austerity policies have been detrimental to some of the women in this research. My recommendations to the government would be to reinvest in those areas which have been most affected by austerity policies, to increase funding to social and educational institutions in the 'left behind areas' and promote job growth. Under these circumstances, there would be less of a 'brain drain' of graduates away from their 'homes' to find work which was secure and paid a decent wage and thus, less symbolic violence on working-class communities.

Unfortunately, this research has demonstrated that the 'safety net' of the social security system in the UK is not fit for purpose. As well as 'just' funding to services which support those in need (e.g. housing and mental health), building more social housing and introducing rent caps, I support Standing's (2017) call for a Universal Basic Income which could be paid for by removing one thousand tax reliefs in the UK. This would have made a significant difference to some of the women in this study who struggled to pay their bills while studying and who struggled to support themselves as they transitioned out of university. This would also make a positive difference to those 320,000 homeless people (Shelter, 2018) and 14 million people in poverty in the UK (Joseph Rowntree Foundation, 2017).

Finally, I strongly support the Labour Party's (2019) recent proposal of scrapping the social mobility narrative and replacing it with one of social justice. As shown in this thesis, the 'social mobility' narrative is individualistic and is harmful to the individual and the communities that working-class people 'leave behind'. Instead, there needs to be a collective approach to eradicating social inequalities and poverty for all. As Reay (2015, p.2) notes:

> "we will never achieve a socially just educational system in a society where competitive individualism is rife, and the working-classes are seen as deficient, written off as those who are failing to make themselves middle-class."

10.6 Implications of this work

Finally, the implications of this work on the academic community, the participants and myself. First, this work presents a clear case that there needs to be further work done on deconstructing what it means to attain a 'successful transition' out of university. Currently, this standard of 'success' is set by a middle-class bias which isolates some working-class women's transitions, achievements and aspirations as 'less than' 'successful'. My work calls for a more holistic approach, to go beyond considering 'successful transitions' as those which only include those graduates who have attained 'graduate jobs'. As shown in this research, 'successful transitions' also include those where graduates:

1. have graduated with a 'good' degree, the definition of which is determined by the student/graduate;
2. their psychological and physical health is not compromised;
3. they engage in 'meaningful' and sufficiently paid work/volunteering;
4. their cultural and experiential capital is valued in their fields of 'employment' and 'home';
5. their social relations are supportive;
6. they can envision a secure future.

Further, I hope the implications of my work are that academics consider conducting intra-class comparative research in the future. This is because while both 'working-class', Sariah (precariat) and Amelia (UWC) have two different lived experiences and without taking such a granular approach, the inequalities in 'outcomes' would not have been uncovered to the extent they have. This relational and nuanced approach is one that is required if we are to research social class and understand it fully. At that, my work has shown how social inequalities must be researched in mind of 'identities' as

fractured, which include class, gender, ethnicity, and more. Otherwise, the full 'snapshot' is not gathered, and our understanding is not sufficient.

In terms of the impact this work has had on the participants, all reported having a positive experience of it:

> I've loved being a part of it.
> (Jackie, I10)
>
> It's made me feel like someone cares out there, you know, and wants to know how I'm doing. It's nice to know that, you know.
> (Sariah, I6)

They reported that having engaged in this PhD research and the original project helped them develop a self-reflexive practice which they enjoyed practising:

> I look forward – well like I won't now because it's over. Ooh, I'm heartbroken again. But like meeting up with you and yeah like chatting about life and…you actually learn more about yourself because, you know you're in your own mind all day but to actually talk it out and speak out loud you actually learn more about yourself.
> (Jasmine, I10)

Providing them with the space to reflect and develop their skills in self-reflexive practice, they noted how this helped them develop their sense of direction:

> Like also it's kind of good for you because you're just like 'oh what are my goals?' It's like it's a point in your life where you can think about what you're going to do. It's been nice, it's been really nice doing it, I've loved being a part of it definitely.
> (Jackie, I10)

As well as this, Jackie noted that, through the projects, she had developed her knowledge around the relevance of social class in her life, which she would integrate into her teaching practice:

> It's definitely made me like reflect on my university experience more than I would have done if I hadn't been being interviewed. So that's quite good. I think in the first year when I was talking to [INTERVIEWER], and I was talking about getting involved in projects and how I felt like I couldn't and those kind of things, I think that talking about it makes you realise that there's no reason I can't do those kind of things. So that's helped me in that way. […] I think it's going to be useful information, showing that class is still relevant.
> (I10)

It is difficult to pinpoint the impact of the projects' on the data. However, it is highly likely that the participants were more aware than the average student/graduate of social class inequalities as:

- The interview questions were written with the aim to uncover such inequalities;
- Each participant received a copy of the book published based on the first phase of the original project (Bathmaker *et al.,* 2016) which was concerned with the effects of social class background on experiences of HE;
- They had read the information sheet (appendix two, p.253) which outlined that this PhD project and the second phase of the original project was interested in graduate employment and social mobility.

As well as perhaps having gathered a more in-depth knowledge of social class, as with all social research, there is the possibility of participant bias. That is, they could have consciously or unconsciously given different interviewers different information, i.e. they knew I was interested in gender and so they may have been more inclined to speak about gendered matters with me than other interviewers, which in turn affects what constitutes the 'findings'.

The implications of this work on myself are beyond what I imagined possible at the start of the project. In most ways, I feel as though I have experienced an opposite trajectory to *most* PhD students. When I embarked on this research, it seemed as though all other PhD students in my cohort were reaching out to grasp all opportunities, they were bright, optimistic and eager to get their research started. However, this was not me. Instead, I was crippled by all-consuming, ever-present imposter syndrome, which led to regular panic attacks. This was compounded by the habitus war going on inside of me, pulling me to 'go back' and be whom I felt I should be (as described in chapter two).

However, as I reach the end of this journey, and all those PhD students around me have come to face navigating anxiety, mine has somewhat dissipated. I have completed this project in a similar way to the rest of my cohort started: I am reaching out to grasp all opportunities, I am once again bright and optimistic for the future and eager to apply for teaching and research opportunities. This change has come as I have engaged the critical thinking skills I have learnt through doing this research to combat my imposter syndrome. No longer do I view my 'lack of fit' with the wider academic community as a negative. Instead, I view it as a strength and an experience which I can share with others who experience similar feelings.

Practically, I now have a more complex understanding of how power structures work to reproduce privilege and disadvantage through fields and social agents. I have gained the skills to deliver impact on a small-scale, which I now hope I develop on a larger scale. Due to this, and my confidence, I am surer than ever before of my politics and commitment to pursuing social justice through my future work as a researcher and teacher.

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Appendices

Appendix one: Unpublished HESA data

HESA Data Request - 60030

Thank you for your data request. I have extracted the data you requested. According to the 2010/11-2017/18 HESA Student Record, the number of female UK domiciled students who previously attended a state school, were from a low participation neighboured and had a socio-economic classification of 4-8 at UK HE providers were:

Academic year	Total
2017/18	36120
2016/17	34095
2015/16	31950
2014/15	29635
2013/14	28060
2012/13	26630
2011/12	25780
2010/11	24070

Please note that the figures supplied have been subjected to our standard rounding methodology - see definitions for details.

Data for this enquiry has been extracted from the latest or most appropriate HESA datasets and may differ from HESA data published elsewhere. Please click here for more information about the fixed database.

I have provided a link to our standard definitions below. I would advise you to take these into account when examining the data.

Student: https://www.hesa.ac.uk/defs-student

In order to draw comparisons between this data and the number of all students who were at a UK HE provider in the years outlined above, I drew on published data from HESA (2019; 2012b) which allowed me to create this table:

	Number of all students at a UK HE provider	**Number of 'working-class' women at a UK HE provider**	**Percentage of 'working-class' women at a UK HE provider**
2017/18	2,343,095	36,120	1.54
2016/17	2,317,880	34,095	1.47
2015/16	2,280,830	31,950	1.40
2014/15	2,265,980	29,635	1.31
2013/14	2,299,460	28,060	1.22
2012/13	2,340,275	26,630	1.14
2011/12	2,496,645	25,780	1.03
2010/11	2,501,295	24,070	0.96

Appendix two: Information sheet

<u>Graduate employment and social mobility</u>

In today's competitive world, how will young British university graduates fare? Are there going to be rewarding jobs for all of them, or will many end as 'graduates without jobs' or work in low-paid jobs on 'zero hours contracts' for which they are over-qualified? Will the graduate premium, currently estimated at £200,000 over a lifetime, persist? Is the investment in a degree, given the new fees regime, worth it? Who ends up securing the best jobs? Can we still talk of 'graduate jobs' given the realities of the labour market?

In this second phase of the Paired Peers research project we aim to continue working with 60 of those we interviewed initially, following their fortunes through the next three years of their lives. When the original project finished last August the majority had not yet gained employment. Many did not yet know what careers they wanted and were intending to spend the next year back in the parental home, exploring jobs and applying for them. The new research will now explore the experiences of the 60 students, both employed and unemployed, to see how their career trajectories develop over the next three years. This will throw light on the study's major objective, which is to explore universities' contribution to social mobility as students from all backgrounds acquire cultural, social and so future economic capital.

We are asking you to continue as a participant in this successful study, which has received much media attention, caught the interest of academics and policy-makers, and has informed WP and careers practice in some universities. Participation will entail being interviewed 4 times over the next 3 years about your current work, your future aspirations and how these fit into the rest of your lives (leisure, hobbies, friendships and family relationships and the other things we asked you about during your time at university).

Interviews will be conducted by some members of the original team, plus two new research assistants, Dr Michael Ward and Laura Bentley. As well as considering your participation in this project, we ask that you consider taking part in Laura's PhD project which focuses on how gender as well as social class affects graduate transitions in the labour market. She asks that you consider giving your consent for her to utilise the interview data you contributed to Paired Peers phase one and that which you might contribute to Paired Peers phase two.

On the consent form you will be asked whether you would like to give your consent to the Paired Peers research project and/or Laura's PhD research. Feel free to choose none, one or both options. Moving forward, if you are happy to participate in either or both projects, we will interview you in a place and at a time convenient for you. As before

the interviews will be taped and will last between 45 and 90 minutes. They will then be transcribed and anonymized.

We intend to continue to keep in touch with you through the Facebook page and the website and will keep you informed about the projects. We would ask you to keep us informed of any change in your contact details (email, mobile number, address). This information will be kept in a password-protected database.

If you have any questions, please feel free to email Harriet Bradley ([redacted].ac.uk), Richard Waller ([redacted].ac.uk) or Laura Bentley ([redacted].ac.uk).

Appendix three: Consent form

<u>Consent Form</u>

This form is a record of your consent to take part in the research project entitled 'Paired Peers Moving on Up' led by Professor Harriet Bradley and the team at UWE, Bath, Birmingham and Bristol. In addition, if you wish, it is also a record of your consent that the data that you contribute(d) to both phases of the Paired Peers research project may be used in Laura Bentley's PhD research.

Please read each point below and put a tick in each box as you wish.

Paired Peers: Moving on Up	**Laura Bentley's PhD Study**
☐ I agree that data obtained from all interviews can be used by those who work on the Paired Peers research project.	☐ I agree that data obtained from all interviews (both past and future) can be used in Laura's PhD study.
☐ I have read the briefing on the second phase of the project and I have had the chance to ask questions about what will happen.	☐ I have read the briefing on Laura Bentley's PhD study and I have had the chance to ask questions about what will happen.
☐ I know that I have the right to withdraw from the Paired Peers study, and to withdraw any material relating to me at any time.	☐ I know that I have the right to withdraw from Laura's PhD study, and to withdraw any material relating to me at any time.
☐ I agree that data from interviews with me can be used in the reported results for the Paired Peers research project, so long as my name is changed and confidentiality is maintained.	☐ I agree that data from interviews with me can be used in the reported results for Laura's PhD project, so long as my name is changed and confidentiality is maintained.

Name of Participant (please print):

…………………………………………………………………………………………......

Signature of participant: Date:

…………………………………………………………………………………………......

Appendix four: Recruitment survey

Paired Peers Project September/October 2010

1. University ………………………………………………………………………………………..........................
2. Department ………………………………………………………………………………………..........................
3. Subject ………………………………………………………………………………………..........................
4. Age ………………………………………………………………………………………..........................
5. Gender ………………………………………………………………………………………..........................
6. Nationality ………………………………………………………………………………………..........................
7. Pre-University UK home postcode
   or country of residence if not the UK ………………………………………………………………………………………..........................
8. How do you define your ethnicity? ………………………………………………………………………………………..........................
9. How do you define your social class? ………………………………………………………………………………………..........................
10. Please complete the table, showing the members of your family you are currently living with (or lived with until you came to Bristol)

Relation (mother, father, sister etc.)	Occupation (where applicable. If retired state retired and previous occupation)	Attended university? Y or N

11. Do you consider yourself disabled YES NO

If YES please specify ………………………………………………………………………………………..........................

12. Name of school or college attended
Immediately prior to university ………………………………………………………………………………………..........................

13. How many of your school or college peers have gone on to university?

MOST or ALL ABOUT HALF LESS THAN HALF FEW OR NONE DON'T KNOW

14. Apart from family support and/or student loan, are you receiving additional financial support e.g. a university bursary or some other form of grant?

YES NO

If YES – Please name the support you are receiving …………………………………………………………………..........................

Thank you for completing this project survey.

We are looking for volunteers to participate in the Paired Peers project. If you are happy for us to contact you again please provide contact details below.

Name:

Email:

Tel:

Term-Time address:

Appendix five: Self-defined class position at the beginning of university (2010)

			Self-defined class position at the beginning of university (2010)
UWE	Adele	History and Int Relations	"Working-class"
	Jasmine	Sociology	"Working-class with some middle-class attributes"
	Ruby	English	"Working-class"
	Sariah	Sociology	"working-class"
	Sophie	Politics	"In the middle of working-class and middle-class"
UoB	Jackie	Sociology	"Working-class"
	Zoe	Law	"Working-class"
	Anna	Economics and Politics	"Working-class"
	Megan	English	"Working/Lower Middle-class"
	Bianca	History	"Working-class"
	Jade	Psychology	"Working-class"
	Lizzie	Engineering	"Working-class"
	Samantha	Geography	"Middle-class"
	Amelia	Biology	"Middle-class"
	Melissa	English	Not provided

Appendix six: Participant's parent's employment, education and geography

*: The operational categories and sub-category classes range from L1 (highest) to L17 (lowest) (Office for National Statistics (ONS), 2018a).
**: The analytic classes range from 1.1 (highest) to 8 (lowest) (ONS, 2018a).
***: Lower Layer Super Output Areas (LSOAs) are ranked from 1 (least deprived) to 1,909 (most deprived) by the Welsh Government (2014). For the purposes of this research the LSOAs outlined here are rounded to the nearest hundred to ensure interviewee anonymity and data security.
****: each neighbourhood in England was ranked from the most deprived (1st decile) to the least deprived (10th decile) based on a number of data collected in 2010, see Department for Communities and Local Government (2011) for more information.
*****: Young people's (age 18-19) participation in HE between the years 2009/10 and 2014/15. Quintile 1 is the lowest one-fifth of participating areas, quintile 5 is the highest. The National Collaborative Outreach Programme (NCOP) "target wards in England that have low levels of young participation and where participation is lower than expected based on key stage 4 (GCSE level) attainment" (OfS, 2018b, p.1). See OfS (2018b) for more information.
-: Unknown

Uni & class			Mother Occupation	Operational Categories*	Analytic classes**	Father Occupation	Operational Categories*	Analytic classes**	Parent HE	Index of Multiple Deprivation	Participation neighbourhood quintile (POLAR4)*****
UWE FWC	1.	Adele	Sales Assistant	Routine sales occupation- L13.1	7	-	-	-	None	Amongst 20-30 per cent most deprived (500)***	-
	2.	Jasmine	Unemployed- Runs holiday cottage seasonally	Self-employed worker- L9.1	4	Sound engineer	Lower technical occupation- L11	5	None	4th decile****	3 NCOP: X
	3.	Ruby	Childminder	Self-employed worker- L9.1	4	Van driver	Routine operative occupation- L13.4	7	None	4th decile****	1 NCOP: √
	4.	Sariah	Hairdresser	Routine sales and service occupation- L13.1	7	-	-	-	None	3rd decile****	4 NCOP: X
	5.	Sophie	Railway station staff	Routine sales and service occupation- L13.1	7	Storekeeper	Semi-routine technical occupation- L12.3	6	None	-	1 NCOP: √

Uni & class			Mother Occupation	Operational Categories*	Analytic classes**	Father Occupation	Operational Categories*	Analytic classes**	Parent HE	Index of Multiple Deprivation	Participation neighbourhood quintile (POLAR4)*****
UoB **FWC**	6.	Jackie	Cleaner	Routine sales and service occupation- L13.1	7	Engineer	Intermediate engineering occupation- L7.4	3	None	2nd decile****	4 NCOP: X
	7.	Zoe	Local authority worker	Intermediate clerical and administrative occupation- L7.1	3	Drives machines and lorries	Routine operative occupation- L13.4	7	Mother attended PT from 2010	Amongst 20-30 per cent most deprived (600)***	2 NCOP: X
	8.	Anna	Café worker	Routine sales and service occupation- L13.1	7	Electrician ('odd jobs')	Self-employed worker- L9.1	4	None	Amongst 10-20 per cent most deprived (300)***	3 NCOP: X
	9.	Bianca	Lettings agent administrato r	Intermediate clerical and administrative occupation- L.7.1	3	Self-employed	'New' self-employed lower professional and higher technical- L4.4	2	None	7th decile****	1 NCOP: X
	10.	Jade	Council worker	Intermediate clerical and administrative occupation- L7.1	3	Unemployed - does various PT work	Routine operative occupation- L13.4	7	None	6th decile****	1 NCOP: X
	11.	Lizzie	Teaching assistant	Semi-routine childcare occupation- L12.7	6	Chauffeur	Routine sales and service occupation- L13.1	7	None	7th decile****	1 NCOP: √

Uni & class			Mother Occupation	Operational Categories*	Analytic classes**	Father Occupation	Operational Categories*	Analytic classes**	Parent HE	Index of Multiple Deprivation	Participation neighbourhood quintile (POLAR4)*****
UoB **UWC**	12.	Megan	Unemployed	Long-term unemployed- L14	8	Quality assurance manager	Lower professional and higher technical occupation- L4	2	None	10th decile****	2 NCOP: X
	13.	Melissa	Nurse (Stepmother)	Lower professional and higher technical employee- L4	2	-	-	-	None	7th decile****	2 NCOP: X
	14.	Samantha	Housewife (previously a bank cashier)	Long-term unemployed- L14 Previously: Routine service occupation, L13	Now: 8 Previous: 7	Compliance consultant	Lower professional and higher technical occupation- L4	2	None	9th decile****	3 NCOP: X
	15.	Amelia	Supermarket worker (3 days a week)	Semi-routine service occupation- L12.2	6	Foreman (4 days a week)	Lower supervisory occupation- L10	5	None	10th decile****	4 NCOP: X

Appendix seven: Aspiration tracker

	Pseudonym	Subject	Interview 1 Beginning of university	Interview 2 Finishing first year of university	Interview 4 Finishing second year of university	Interview 5 Starting third year of university	Interview 6 Finishing third year of university
UWE FWC	Adele	History and Int Relations	Journalism (current affairs)	"If I wasn't going to be a historian, or teach history, a journalist, I love journalism"	Local politics; civil service; diplomatic service; journalism (world affairs)	After applying for a graduate scheme in diplomatic service: "I don't know specifically, maybe if I continue studying then it will become clearer"	Third sector (reflected in her then-current position work as a charity fundraiser)
	Jasmine	Sociology	Social worker, considering MA	Social work or teaching sociology	Social work or counselling	Wants to apply to do part-time master's degree (MA) in social work as a route to improved employment opportunities	Wants to apply to do a part-time MA in social work to become a social worker or Postgraduate Certificate in Education (PGCE) in order to teach
	Ruby	English	Secondary school teacher	Secondary school teacher	Secondary school teacher (specialising in special needs)	Secondary school teacher (specialising in special needs), applying to PGCE Primary (5-11) course at Bath Spa	secondary school teacher (specialising in special needs). Secured place on PGCE Primary (5-11) course at Bath Spa
	Sariah	Sociology	"I still feel like I'm not really sure yet, but I will know"	Media or Fashion	The entertainment industry (presenting)	"Definitely something to do with media"	"I want it to be like media-related, or fashion and beauty"
	Sophie	Politics	-	Civil service	Work in local government (tax fraud), considering an MA as a route to improved employment opportunities	Local government- Searching for apprenticeships at Bristol council	Local government – council

	Pseudonym	Subject	Interview 1 Beginning of university	Interview 2 Finishing first year of university	Interview 4 Finishing second year of university	Interview 5 Starting third year of university	Interview 6 Finishing third year of university
UoB FWC	Zoe	Law	Lawyer	An “ethical lawyer” but not “a stuffy academic lawyer”. Acting or modelling	Considering acting or modelling once again	Acting or modelling	Acting. Has ambitions to apply for MA in acting at Cardiff
	Anna	Economics and Politics	Not sure but she “want to make a difference”. She applied for internship in charity sector (had to apply for a scholarship)	Wants to have a job that will “help me make things better in like the country or the world”, considering teaching	Does not want to work in the City, spoke with TeachFirst about the graduate scheme and decided to apply (saw this as more compatible with values and motherhood)	Teaching. Applied to TeachFirst but was unsuccessful. Decided to apply for PGCE, Secondary Mathematics at UoB	Teaching. Secured place on PGCE, Secondary Mathematics at UoB
	Bianca	History	Research and museum work	Research and museum work. Possibly teaching	Teaching or solicitor	Considering law conversion course (but looking for internship)	Considering law conversion course (searching for training contract first)
	Jackie	Sociology	Primary school teaching	Primary school teaching	Primary school teaching	Primary school teaching. Applying for PGCEs and Schools Direct places close to home	Primary school teaching. Secured place on PGCE, lower primary at Goldsmiths, awaiting to hear from Schools Direct
	Jade	Psychology	-	Unsure (plan B: work her way up in retail)	Unsure but knows she does not want to do clinical therapy, considers she may go back to retail	Unsure	Primary school or social work
	Lizzie	Engineering	RAF	Engineering (unsure of specialisation)	Engineering (unsure of specialisation)	Engineering (unsure of specialisation)	Project design. Engineering but more of the business side, not “hardcore engineering”

	Pseudonym	Subject	Interview 1 Beginning of university	Interview 2 Finishing first year of university	Interview 4 Finishing second year of university	Interview 5 Starting third year of university	Interview 6 Finishing third year of university
UoB UWC	Megan	English	Writer, but "possibly a teacher in the meantime"	Teaching and writing	Teaching and writing	Teaching (secondary). Secured place on TeachFirst	Have a year out, do TeachFirst (secondary) and then do MA in Screenwriting or Creative Writing
	Melissa	English	Does not know	Does not want to work in finance. Wants to do "artsy" work	Considering publishing or teaching	Unsure. Applying for MA in English at UoB in order to extend education and the decision-making process regarding work. Possibly publishing or journalism	Publishing though still unsure. Applying to do an MA in English at UoB
	Samantha	Geography	-	Research into physical or human geography	PhD and research/lecture or teach	Physical geography (environment and sustainability)	Secured a place on MA Geography at UoB. Desire to go into academia. Will search for funding to do an MA and PhD. If unable to find she will work within physical geography field: could work at environmental agency or "something a bit more specific on climate change and glaciation"
	Amelia	Biology	-	Does not know	Does not know- possibly teaching. Considering MA	Does not know- Maybe go travelling for a year	Does not know. Possibly teaching. Possibly an MA or PhD in the future

Appendix eight: Graduate pay and job

NMW: Minimum wage (£7.70 per hour for 21-24s (GOV, 2019c), as of April 2019. According to Office for National Statistics (ONS) (2013a) this usually equates to around £11,055 per year).

		Role	Where and when	Pay	Role	Where and when	Pay	Role	Where and when	Pay	Role	Where and when	Pay	Role	Where and when	Pay
UWE FWC	Adele	[1] Fundraising Officer, FT	Bristol, Immediately post-graduation	£18,500	[2] Assistant Corporate Fundraiser, FT	Bristol, 2 years post-graduation	£20,800	[3] Charity account manager, FT	London, 3.5 years post-graduation	£28,000						
	Jasmine	[1] Care work with elderly people, FT, temporary	'Home' in SW England, immediately post-graduation	NMW - travel	[2] Mental health support worker, FT (50 hours), shift work	Manchester 3 months post-graduation	£17,000	[3] Sales assistant, FT, temporary 4-month contract	'Home' in SW England, 2 years post-graduation	NMW	[4] Unemployed	'Home' in SW England, 2 years post-graduation	Received Universal Credit for 3 months	[5] Care worker, FT	'Home' in SW England, 3.5 years post-graduation	£18,000
	Sariah	[1] Charity work, PT, voluntary	-	Unpaid												
	Ruby	[1] PGCE, Primary	'Home' in SW England, after UG	-	[2] NQT Primary school teacher, FT	'Home' in SW England, 1 year post-graduation	£22,000	[2] Primary school teacher, FT	'Home' in SW England, 2 years post-graduation	£24,000	[2] Primary school teacher, IT co-ordinator, FT	'Home' in SW England, 3 years post-graduation	£26,000			

		Role	**Where and when**	**Pay**	**Role**	**Where and when**	**Pay**	**Role**	**Where and when**	**Pay**	**Role**	**Where and when**	**Pay**	**Role**	**Where and when**	**Pay**
UWE FWC	Sophie	[1] Data input administrator, temporary, 9 months	Bristol	£14,000	[2] Administration, temporary, 9 months	Bristol, 1 year post-graduation	£16,000 (+ £2,000 bonus)	[2] Promoted to managerial role but stepped down, FT	Bristol, 3 years post-graduation	£19,500 (+ £3,000 bonus)						
UoB FWC	Jackie	[1] PGCE, Primary	'Home' in London, after UG	-	[2] NQT Early years Primary school teacher, FT	'Home' in London, 1 year post-graduation	£27,000	[3] Primary school teacher, FT	'Home' in London, 2 years post-graduation	£30,000	[4] Primary school teacher, FT	'Home' in London, 3 years post-graduation	£31,000			
	Zoe	[1] Barmaid, FT	Greece, immediately post-graduation	NMW	[2] Unemployed,	'Home' in South Wales, 6 months post-graduation	Received Universal Credit for 3 months	[3] Trainee re-mortgage case officer, FT, temporary	'Home' in South Wales, 1 year post-graduation	£14,500	[4] Legal administrative work, FT	'Home' in South Wales, 2 years post-graduation	£28,000	[5] Legal Taxonomist, FT	'Home' in South Wales, 3 years post-graduation	£30,000
	Anna	[1] PGCE, Secondary English	'Home' in SE England, after UG	-	[2] NQT Mathematics Secondary teacher, FT	Bath, 1 year post-graduation	£22,000	[3] Data coder, FT	Bath, 2 years post-graduation	£25,000 (+ 8 per cent bonus)	[4] Promoted to Risk analyst, FT	Bath, 2.5 years post-graduation	£29,000	[5] Secondary Mathematics & Computing Teacher, PT (0.8)	Swindon, 3.5 years post-graduation	£22,000

		Role	Where and when	Pay	Role	Where and when	Pay	Role	Where and when	Pay	Role	Where and when	Pay	Role	Where and when	Pay
UoB FWC	Bianca	[1] Care work, PT and Administrator, PT	'Home' in SW England, immediately post-graduation	NMW	[2] Teach First, FT	'Home' in SW England, 1 year post-graduation	£24,000									
	Jade	[1] Care work, FT, zero-hours contract	'Home' in SW England, immediately post-graduation	NMW, minus travel costs	[2] Retail, PT	'Home' in SW England, after the care work role	NMW	[3] Investment Help Desk Consultant, FT	Bristol, 1 year post-graduation	£14,600	[4] Accounts administrator, FT	Bristol, 2 years post-graduation	£17,750	[5] Administrator (Indexing documents), FT	Bath, 3.5 years post-graduation	£21,000
	Lizzie	[1] Caring for her Nan, unpaid	'Home' in the Midlands, immediately post-graduation	Unpaid	[2] Internship, Aerospace, temporary	Isle of Man, 6 months post-graduation	£14,500	[3] Graduate scheme, engineering, temporary	Midlands 2 years post-graduation + onwards	£34,000						

		Role	Where and when	Pay	Role	Where and when	Pay	Role	Where and when	Pay
UoB UWC	Melissa	[1] Summer internship with a ‘top 10’ graduate recruiter	Bristol	Unpaid	[2] MA in European Literature at UoB	Bristol, immediately post-graduation	-	[3] Internship at a top ten UK social network site, FT temporary	London, immediately after MA	£6,000
	Megan	[1] Learning mentor, FT temporary	‘Home’ in S England, immediately post-graduation	£15,000	[2] Teach First, secondary English	‘Home’ in S England, 1 year post-graduation	£24,000	[3] NQT secondary English teacher	‘Home’ in S England, 2 years post-graduation	£22,000
	Samantha	[1] Master’s degree (MA) at UoB in Geography	Bristol, Immediately post-graduation	-	[2] PhD at UWE in Geography & has also done some lecturing	Bristol, 1 year post-graduation + onwards	£15,700 (stipend)			
	Amelia	[1] Admin, FT with a ‘top 40’ graduate recruiter	‘Home’ in the Midlands, immediately post-graduation	£17,000	[2] TA in English in secondary school	Madrid, 1 year post-graduation	€12,000 (untaxed)			