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The Life-histories of Male ‘Non-traditional’ Students in Two of Scotland’s Ancient Universities.

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Submitted in fulfilment of the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

The University of Edinburgh

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ABSTRACT

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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Abstract

This exploratory study examined the life-histories of 21 men who were mature (27 years+), full-time students in two Scottish ancient universities. Most were first-generation entrants. Individual semi-structured interviews asked about the men's origins and lives so far. The aim was to understand men as gendered beings, and to consider the dynamics that had impacted on their lives. Though useful findings in their own right, the research also used this data to consider sociological theories of contemporary identity/ies, and to contemplate Bourdieu's theories of social-class reproduction.

The legacy of trying to promote equal opportunities through education made Scotland an important test-bed for widening participation. Ancient universities were selected to throw dimensions of educational inclusion/exclusion into relief. Researching male 'first-generation' students responded to concerns that men from manual origins should return to education given the dissolution of their traditional roles.

The research found few 'hybrid' identities, as experienced by first-generation students in other research. This may reflect the men's complex cultural trajectories prior to university, and distancing from former working-class origins. Adopting 'student' identities held few problems. 'Traditional' students were seen as insecure, and mature students as providing a valuable contribution to the institution. For older men, student-hood fulfilled a latent ambition. For others, 'student' added a more positive aspect to their previous identities. The post-modern celebration of playful identities was dismissed, as even playful uptakes revealed politically darker sides. There was more support for the self-reflexive identity project, which was gendered in that (with some notable exceptions) it was constructed in the context of traditional gender relationships.
Bourdieu’s conceptual framework was useful in explaining these ‘divergent trajectories’. The Catholic community could be seen to promote a class-fraction habitus, which valued education, commitment and social networks. Residing in university-rich cities reduced the cultural distance between the men and HE, whilst the ‘flexible’ labour market created spaces where men from manual origins worked alongside undergraduate and graduate others. Such influences were compatible with Bourdieu’s theories.

However, there was another influence that Bourdieu was less successful at explaining. The matrimonial field did not operate with the logic of other fields. Graduate women formed long-term relationships with these men, despite significant differences in their capitals. For Bourdieu, class endogemony is a key part of class reproduction. That is challenged here; human emotion cannot be reduced to simple logic. Furthermore, cities offer importance spaces for the reconfiguration of gender (as well as class) dynamics.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

There are many people who have assisted me in this endeavour, and for many, the words 'thank you' seem entirely inadequate. All of the people listed below have enabled me to complete this thesis in distinct and valuable ways, and I will be forever grateful.

Professors Lindsay Paterson and Lyn Tett have been magnificent supervisors who have both challenged and supported me in ways that I will never forget. I doubt this was the easiest of supervisions, and it is a mark of their professionalism and character that I emerge unscathed. I remain in awe.

My pals and colleagues in Moray House have shared both the best and worst of times with me during my research. They have made coming into university a pleasure, even during those periods when every sinew in my body wanted to be anywhere else but here. To Lesley, Jon, Marian, Catherine, Fiona, Katie, Shereen, Jane and Rosie in particular, I owe my emotional and mental well-being, particularly in the torturous final year. I cannot believe my good fortune in finding myself in their company.

To my family now, my fellow sufferers: my parents, my partner, my children, Myra and Tom, and Jo and Tony have endured without moaning, and supported without question, what I have been doing over the last four or so years. My partner Chris, and my children, Natasha, Connor and Keifer, have had to sacrifice elements of their own happiness so that I could do what I have needed to do. They have also borne the brunt of my emotional extremes during this undertaking, and for these things I apologise. Again, this somehow feels inadequate. I would like them to know how much they have inspired me, and how proud I am to be with them. They have handled unimaginable circumstances during the past four years and shown real strength of character in working through these. I dedicate this work to them.

Finally, I wish to express my unreserved gratitude to the men who offered their histories for my scrutiny. I feel honoured that they have shared some of their experiences with me and my debt to them is immeasurable.
CHAPTER 1
Setting the context

1.1 Introduction

The expansion of the UK higher education (HE) sector in the 1990s carried with it a political ambition to widen participation to social groups who have traditionally been under-represented therein. Such students include women, those who enter over the age of 21, those from state schools and those from lower socio-economic groups (www.hesa.ac.uk). To some extent this has been successful, in so far as there has been an increase in the numbers of students from many social groups formerly under-represented in HE. However, such groups are primarily making inroads into the post-92 university sector whilst older institutions remain over-represented by young, middle-class, ‘A’ level entrants (i.e. the ‘traditional’ student type). This new unequal pattern of participation can be explained by both structural and cultural factors which constrain the dimensions of HE choice for ‘non-traditional’ student constituencies (Archer et al. 2003, Reay et al. 2001). This PhD is interested in the circumstances under which such patterns may be broken.

It studies the life histories (c.f. Goodson & Sikes 2001) of mature male students, as told in individual, qualitative interviews. The men are studying at two of the oldest universities in Scotland. In addition to being out-with the ‘traditional’ age range of university participation, the men are mostly from families with no history of university attendance. Their biographical data were used to contemplate the structural factors and social dynamics (in particular, those related to social class, gender and age) that may have influenced their journeys to university, and also the kinds of identities that they negotiated along the way. It offers a critical realist analysis of their lives, and also an evaluation of the explanatory potential of Bourdieu’s analytical framework in light of them.
Investigating the tension between forces that reproduce social class position and those that may change it, and the role of education within it, is a personal as well as an intellectual interest. I was born and raised on council estates, my parents were and remain manual workers. I gained ‘A’ levels after school with no idea what they were for and no-one to tell me this. I worked in a local bank, the first in my family to reach the dizzy heights of a clerical position. I became a mature HE student after my children were born and have attended four universities in all. Two of these I now understand to be ‘old’ and prestigious. And when I read Bourdieu, he can explain why my life has unfurled in this way, and my own implicatedness in that journey. Mostly.

I tend to understand my location as a PhD student at one of the world’s most prestigious academic institutions in terms of luck. I place great weight on being in the right place at the right time, of reaping the benefits of critical yet accidental meetings. This was not a planned trajectory. Bourdieu explained his own academic journey with reference to luck, of taking the chances that others did not (see Reed-Danahay 2005). But his work leaves unresolved his own ability to traverse cultural distance whilst his theories show why many others cannot. Therefore, Bourdieu’s biography, like my own, doesn’t quite fit his framework and because of this I feel there is a gap there that needs investigating. Investigating the lives of other non-traditional students in old universities is an attempt at this.

My decision to focus on the lives of men was stirred, in part, by concern within the research community regarding older generations of working-class men. There is evidence that such men remain attached to traditional social and occupational roles that are increasingly inappropriate for today’s society, and that their ‘traditional’ attitude to education means they are unlikely to re-engage with learning at a time when it is particularly needed in their lives (McGivney 1999, Marks 2000). This research tries to understand the conditions under which older working-class men do re-engage with education. On a personal level, these academic concerns are reflected in the lives of many male members of my family where I witness older generations struggling with the dilemmas noted above. I also see my teenage sons continuing to
negotiate their lives around traditional conceptions of working-class masculinity, no matter how much I try to help them resolve or avoid such issues. I have a vested interest in trying to understand men's lives.

1.2 Organisation of the thesis

The presentation of my investigation is organised thus: this current chapter, Chapter 1, will now progress to explain the context of HE participation in Scotland. Chapter 2 presents the bodies of literature to be engaged with, namely, the work of Bourdieu, sociological theorisations of identity, and qualitative research with under-represented student groups in higher education. It concludes by posing the research questions to be addressed. Chapter 3 presents the methodological dimensions of this research. It charts the mechanics of how the data were found, interpreted and presented and also includes reflections on dilemmas faced within that process. Chapters 4 and 5 are both dedicated to presenting the research data. The separation is due primarily to the size of the findings. This was exploratory analysis that took a life-course perspective, so there was a lot to find out about. Chapter 4 presents extracts of the men's stories from their family genealogy to their early entrance into adulthood. Chapter 5 continues those stories up until the time of their interviews. Chapter 6 is the final chapter, which uses the research findings to answer in turn the three research questions posed at the end of chapter 2.

1.3 Scottish Higher Education

There are 14 universities in Scotland: four ancients established in the 15th and 16th centuries, four 'old' established in the 1960s, 5 more created by statutory instruments in the 1990s, and the Open University (Caldwell 2004). The sector is slightly different to the English sector. Historically, the ancient universities were more civicly oriented and more meritocratic than their Oxbridge counterparts, although it is important not to exaggerate the extent of these features (Anderson 1992, 2004, Carter & Withrington 1992). Apart from Stirling University and the Open University, all of the other institutions with current university status have histories as highly respected national centres of university standard technical education dating back to early in the twentieth century (Cowper 1970). Thus, distinctions between
ancient, old and new universities are complex, which leads Gallacher (2005) to insist that the sector should be seen as differentiated, and stratified, rather than simply hierarchical.

There is evidence that something of a more civic orientation still exists in Scottish HE compared to the sector in England. Paterson’s (2003) survey of academics’ responses to various statements regarding the purpose of higher education found those in the Scottish sector expressing more of the civic orientations than those in the English sector. This included those who had moved into the Scottish sector from elsewhere. It found little variation in this increased civic orientation between institutional types in Scotland, whereas in England, those in the oldest institutions were found to express the least civic orientations regarding the purpose of HE.

A particularly important dimension of the HE sector in Scotland is the extent of HE provision in the FE sector. Around a third of HE tuition takes place in FE colleges, which offer more flexible and convenient ways to study and make (sub-degree) HE more accessible among the less affluent members of society (Gallacher 2005, Osborne 2005, Raab & Storkey 2001, SHEFC 2005). Table 1.1 below illustrates the importance of this provision.

Table 1.1 Undergraduate level students in Scotland by Carstairs deprivation category, 2001, percentages

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Deprivation group</th>
<th>Ancients</th>
<th>1960s</th>
<th>Post 92s</th>
<th>FECs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 = least deprived</td>
<td>37.8</td>
<td>29.7</td>
<td>28.1</td>
<td>19.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>23.5</td>
<td>23.4</td>
<td>21.2</td>
<td>21.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>17.8</td>
<td>20.5</td>
<td>18.5</td>
<td>21.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>12.4</td>
<td>15.3</td>
<td>17.4</td>
<td>19.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 = most deprived</td>
<td>8.5</td>
<td>11.1</td>
<td>14.8</td>
<td>18.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Raab & Small 2003, in Gallacher 2005:10-11
If access were distributed equally among the population then all of the data boxes above would show 20%, meaning all institutions were just as likely to take a student from the most deprived sectors of society as they were to take those from the least deprived sectors. But only the Further Education Colleges come close to doing this. The table shows that ancient universities have over four times more very affluent students (category 1) than very poor students (category 5) in them. The older institutions are almost three times more likely to do so and the post-1992 universities are still almost twice as likely to have students from the most affluent sector of society (category 1) as from the least affluent sectors (category 5). Raab and Small (2003) found this disparity has been increasing in recent years, as figure 1.1 below illustrates.

Figure 1.1 Trends in the proportion of students from most deprived 40 per cent of postcodes by type of institution and mode of study

![Graph showing trends in the proportion of students from most deprived 40 per cent of postcodes by type of institution and mode of study.]

Note: 1996-7 Open University data omitted due to inaccuracy.
UHi: University of the Highlands and Islands, a partnership of colleges and research institutions formally recognised as a HEI in 2001 (www.uhi.ac.uk).

This additional HE provision contributes to Scotland’s Age Participation Index\(^1\), which exceeds that of the UK. In 2001-2 the Scottish API stood at 51.5%, although it has dropped more recently (to 46.4% in 2004-05) (www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2006/07/07155757/4). Figure 1.2 below shows the API composition according to type of institution, highlighting graphically the importance of the FE sector.

**Fig 1.2** Age Participation Index 1995-96 to 2004-05, Scotland, by type of institution

![Graph showing the Age Participation Index from 1995-96 to 2004-05 in Scotland, broken down by type of institution.](https://example.com/graph)

HEI: Higher education institutions, FEC: Further education colleges, RUK: rest of the UK

Source: www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2006/07/07155757/8

The higher participation rates are also reflected in the fact that Scotland’s population possess more HE qualifications than their UK counterparts. As table 1.2 below shows,

---

\(^1\) API is the proportion of a particular age cohort entering full-time higher education by age 21.
Table 1.2 Percentages of men and women in the labour force with an HE qualification: 1992, 1997 and 2002

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Women</th>
<th></th>
<th>Men</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Scotland</td>
<td>UK</td>
<td>Scotland</td>
<td>UK</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1992</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1997</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2002</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Women: 16-59 years, Men: 16-64 years.


The above table also shows that a greater proportion of women in Scotland possess HE qualifications than men in Scotland. Separating qualifications into degree and sub-degree HE in Scotland reveals disparities. As figure 1.3 illustrates below, men are more likely to have degrees and women to have sub-degree level HE qualifications. Women are far more likely than men to have no formal qualifications and men in Scotland are more likely to have Highers than women.

Figure 1.3 Qualifications by gender, Scotland, 2001

Source: EOC (2001)
However, the above chart represents the population as a whole and hides the recent trend for women to overtake men in the attainment stakes. Isolating under-25 year olds in the above research showed 8% of women had degrees compared to 6% of men (EOC 2001). The evidence of an increasing gender gap is illustrated in different API indexes according to gender. In Scotland in 1995-6 women’s API stood at 45%, and men’s at 39%. Since then the gap has been steadily widening so that by 2004-05, the API for women was over 10% higher than that for men, at 52% (www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2006/07/07155757/4).

Since the start of this millennium in Scotland, women have been more likely than men to embark on degree study and as table 1.3 below illustrates, not only has this trend been increasing over time, but it also appears to increase with age. It shows that in 2006, almost 54% of degree places offered to those aged up to 24, were for women candidates. More starkly, it shows that for those aged 25 to 39, and those aged over 40, the proportion of places offered to women was 58.6% and 64.5% respectively.

Table 1.3 Degree accepts, 2000 and 2006, Scotland, by age and gender

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>2000</th>
<th></th>
<th>2006</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Men</td>
<td>Women</td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>(% of)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24 and below</td>
<td>10 229</td>
<td>11 658</td>
<td>21 887</td>
<td>(53.2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25 to 39</td>
<td>1 050</td>
<td>1 303</td>
<td>2 353</td>
<td>(55.4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40 and over</td>
<td>246</td>
<td>390</td>
<td>636</td>
<td>(61.3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>11 525</td>
<td>13 351</td>
<td>24 876</td>
<td>(53.7)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: adapted from UCAS data (www.ucas.co.uk)

Despite the success of Scotland in terms of the demographic spread of sub-degree HE in the country, it remains that those who choose to transfer to degree level programmes are much more likely to enter into newer institutions than the older
universities and particularly the ancients (Osborne 2005). As table 1.4 below illustrates, over half of those make the transition from FE to HE (who are much more likely to be from traditionally under-represented university groups) go to ‘new’ universities, whilst almost a quarter of them choose old universities and just below a fifth go to the ancient university sector.

Table 1.4 University type of Scottish domiciled students taking higher education courses at Scottish HEIs in 1999/2000

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of HEI</th>
<th>All former FE students</th>
<th>% all former FE students</th>
<th>Not former FE students</th>
<th>% Not former FE students</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ancient</td>
<td>2 787</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>21 752</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Old</td>
<td>3 470</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>19 404</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New</td>
<td>7 753</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>26 168</td>
<td>37.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>604</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2 459</td>
<td>3.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>14,614</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>69 783</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

‘Other’: There are 6 other HEI’s that deliver university level courses (e.g. the UHI, agricultural and technological colleges) (SFCFHE 2005)

Source: Osborne (2005:23)

For those university students who did not attend FE first, their destinations are somewhat different. They are more inclined to attend ancient universities than their FE counterparts (31% of them are in ancient universities, compared to 19% of former FE students. They appear to be less keen on the new universities compared to their FE equivalents (37% of non-FE students go to them, compared to 53% for FE students) and slightly more keen on the old institutions (with 28% of those not in FE choosing old universities versus 24% of those who previously attended FE).

From a different perspective, as illustrated in table 1.5 below, 47% of students in new universities possess HNC or HND on entry, with old institutions having 28% and slightly more than 14% of ancient university students having a HN as their highest educational qualification on entry.
Table 1.5 Highest qualification on entry of Scottish domiciled students taking Higher Education courses at Scottish HEIs in 1999/2000

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>HEI</th>
<th>Ancient</th>
<th>Old</th>
<th>New</th>
<th>Other</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>n</td>
<td>(%)</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>n</td>
<td>(%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HNC, HND</td>
<td>402 (14)</td>
<td>966 (28)</td>
<td>3649 (47)</td>
<td>118 (19)</td>
<td>5135 (35)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>'A' level, Higher, level 3 VQ</td>
<td>1577 (57)</td>
<td>1316 (38)</td>
<td>2227 (29)</td>
<td>379 (63)</td>
<td>5499 (38)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Access course</td>
<td>404 (14)</td>
<td>420 (12)</td>
<td>343 (4)</td>
<td>20 (3)</td>
<td>1187 (8)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>404 (14)</td>
<td>768 (22)</td>
<td>1534 (20)</td>
<td>87 (14)</td>
<td>2793 (19)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>2787</td>
<td>3470</td>
<td>7753</td>
<td>604</td>
<td>14614</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

VQ: vocational qualification.
Note: % may not total 100% due to rounding.

Source: adapted from Osborne (2005:23)

The table also shows a reverse pattern for the distribution of A levels/Highers as the highest educational qualification on entry, with new universities having 29% of entrants so qualified, old institutions having 38% and the ancients having 57% of their student body with the ‘traditional’ university entrance qualifications.

Such patterns continue when looking at other dimensions of ‘non-traditional’ entrants to HEIs. Table 1.6 presents student profiles and institution type according to age. It shows that the post-92 institutions are much more likely to have students over 25 years old than the rest of the sector. Whilst over a fifth of their acceptances in 2005 were for mature students, they constituted just 6% and 8% of the acceptances in the ancient and old universities respectively.
Table 1.6 Degree acceptances by age and university sector in Scotland, 2002

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>20 and under</th>
<th>25 and over</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ancients</td>
<td>79%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>12,626</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1960s</td>
<td>81%</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>8,685</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post 92s</td>
<td>64%</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>11,625</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Gallacher (2005:8)

Gallacher (2005) highlights a continued widening of the differences between the old and new universities, showing the reduction in numbers of mature students attending pre-92 universities between 1994 and 1999. Students over 21 accounted for 19% of old institution intake in 1994, but 14% in 1999. Conversely their presence in post-92 institutions increased from 20% in 1994 to 29% of all acceptances in this sector in 1999. Murphy et al (2002) also show a growing division in entrance qualifications between institutions over that period, with pre-1992 institutions increasingly less likely to admit students with traditional qualifications (Highers or A levels). In 1994 13% of their intake possessed alternative qualifications. By 1999 this was further reduced to 10%. In the post-1992 institutions the presence of students with non-traditional qualifications has increased from 15% of their intake to 31% in 1999.

1.4 Conclusion

This chapter has summarised the personal and intellectual reasons for the study. It has revealed how my own biography has led to an appreciation of, but also a questioning of, Bourdieu's analytical framework with respect to working-class relationships to 'elite' education spaces. It has also highlighted the congruence of some academic and my own biographical concerns to study the nature of contemporary relationships between working-class forms of masculinity and education. The chapter has also sketched the patterns of HE participation in Scotland presenting statistical data to show how older students, those from lower socio-economic backgrounds and those without traditional entrance qualifications remain under-represented in Scotland's ancient university sector.
The chapter has also noted the legacy of the nation’s ancient institutions, the diversification among its range of universities, and the provision of HE to a wider constituency of its population. I believe that this is what makes Scotland an important location in which to study classed relationships to HE. Qualitative studies (to be presented in section 2.4) help to shed some light on the statistically identifiable trends mentioned above, highlighting how a sense of cultural distance between those from non-university families and ‘traditional’ HE institutions contributes to lack of working-class participation in these arenas. Given the relative distinctiveness of the Scottish HE sector highlighted in this chapter, I suggest that qualitative research here has the potential to offer new insight into ways in which such cultural distances might be contested.
CHAPTER 2
Review of Literature and Research Questions

2.1 Introduction

This chapter is presented in three sections. However, the separation is an analytical device only as the issues contained in each section are inter-related. The sections cover, in turn, the work of Bourdieu, theories of identities, and qualitative research among social groups who historically have been under-represented in HE. Such is the inter-relationship between these three areas that no section should be seen as self-contained and the order in which they have been presented does not reflect a linear progression. Rather, the chapter is a structured dialogue between three related areas of interest. At the end of the chapter, the research questions will be presented.

The first section examines aspects of Bourdieu’s work on the dynamics of social reproduction, with some reference to the realm of education. It offers an overview of his conception of classes and social fields, and of habitus and the economy of practices as mechanisms of social reproduction. It incorporates a critical appreciation of his work by other scholars. The second begins with a dialogue between advocates of three sociological approaches on the nature of identity in contemporary western society. It examines the claims of postmodern and reflexive-modern theorists, with critical responses to them both by social class theorists. The section ends with a review of the ways in which men and masculinities have been theorised. The final section presents findings from recent qualitative research that explores the dynamics of HE participation among those with non-graduate family backgrounds. It examines the structural, cultural and psychological dimensions of the transition to studenthood. The findings not only help to situate those of this research, they also frequently engage with the theorisations around class, identity and gender that have appeared in the previous sections.
2.2 Bourdieu and social reproduction

Class

Bourdieu’s work synthesises three key approaches to the study of society; it combines Weber’s interest in symbolic forms and power, Durkheim’s attention to the social origins of action and perception, and Marx’s insistence on class as the essential unit of social analysis (Brubaker 1985). Importantly, Bourdieu’s conception of class is different in both form and function to that of Marx. He states,

Social science should construct not classes, but rather the social spaces in which classes can be demarcated, but which only exist on paper. In each case it should construct and discover ... the principles of differentiation which permits one to re-engender theoretically the empirically observed social space.

Bourdieu (1998:32)

Thus classes emerge on the basis of empirical evidence, as conceptual constructs to assist researchers unravelling the dynamics of the distances or distinctions between groups in the social space being investigated. This relational approach introduced by Bourdieu is widely endorsed as a significant innovation in class analysis (e.g. Charlesworth 2000, Devine et al 2005, McNay 1999, Naidoo 2004, Reay 2004, Sayer 2005, Skeggs 2004). Theorising how such classes come to be formed, Bourdieu offers two interrelated concepts: the economy of practices, which links movement in space to possession and trade in various forms of capital that have class-specific dimensions, and the habitus, which explains how agents come to act and think in ways that generally reproduce their social class locations. The section looks at each of these in turn.

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1 For a fuller account of Bourdieu’s dispute with Marx’s conception of class, see Bourdieu (1991, chapter 11)
Capitals

For Bourdieu (2001), agents' movement in social space (i.e. their practice) can be partly explained by applying the economic principles of exchange to a variety of capitals. Agents inherit, acquire and trade on forms of capital. In addition to economic capital (money, inheritance, property etc), which can easily be seen to affect movements in social space, Bourdieu identifies cultural capital (cultural goods, personal dispositions, educational certificates etc) and social capital (networks, family name, titles) as additional motors of mobility. Thus he offers,

A general science of the economy of practices ... which, although objectively economic, are not and cannot be socially recognised as economic, and which can be performed only at the cost of a whole labour of dissimulation or, more precisely, euphemization, must endeavour to grasp capital and profit in all their forms and to establish the laws whereby the different types of capital (or power, which amounts to the same thing) change into one another.

Bourdieu (2001:47)

Reay (2000), Sayer (2005) and Skeggs (2004) have developed this framework further, arguing that practice also has a moral dimension to it. Sayer (2005) points out for example, that parents' struggles for goods for their offspring are not reducible to struggles for domination over and distinction from others. They are about ways of life. He insists that Bourdieu needs to acknowledge that some of these goods are considered valuable for their own sake, rather than because they bring an advantage over another group. Reay's (1998b) analyses of mothers' investments in their children illustrates this point further. Similarly, the work of both Charlesworth (2000) and Skeggs (1997) emphasise the battles for recognition of being a person of value as fundamental in the struggles of working-class people. Despite this oversight, Skeggs describes the value of Bourdieu's framework,

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2 His work is littered with many other forms of capital, for example, linguistic, academic, intellectual, scientific, symbolic.
3 These are not just consumer goods, but includes a range of things that people may value, for example, relationships, institutions, circumstances (such a good health etc.).
[Bourdieu’s] spatial metaphors of capital (economic, social, cultural and symbolic) are about how bodies can move through social space, with volumes of different capital in different networks/fields ... Bourdieu’s metaphors enable us to understand who can move and who cannot, and what the mobile/fixed bodies require as resources to gain access to different spaces.

Skeggs (2004:48, emphasis in original)

Different kinds of capital are more or less valuable in various social arenas (‘fields’), and the volume and structure of an agent’s capital affects access to certain social spaces, and maintains distinctions between themselves and others. Agents need to be able to convert what they have into that which has value in the field they want to inhabit. Bourdieu is keen to expose the mechanisms of inequality in this economy, particularly that the forms of capital circulating within the working class are less able to be converted into those valued in other arenas. He suggests that symbolic capital, and especially cultural capital, enable inherited privilege to be passed through generations disguised, or rather, misrecognised, as something more legitimate. For him, cultural capital is a pivotal mechanism in the reproduction of social inequality because,

... the social conditions of its transmission and acquisition are more disguised than those of economic capital, [therefore] it is predisposed to function as symbolic capital, i.e., to be unrecognised as capital and recognised as legitimate competence...

Bourdieu (2001:49)

Cultural capital exists in three forms: it can be embodied in forms of dispositions, ways of talking etc., objectified in the form of cultural goods possessed and consumed, and institutionalised in the form of qualifications etc. (Bourdieu 2001).
Education

For Bourdieu, the education system is a key mechanism in the process of social class reproduction. It functions to reproduce existing social hierarchies by consecrating forms of cultural capital possessed by dominant social groups as valuable. He explains,

...by a series of selection operations, the [education] system separates the holders of inherited cultural capital from those who lack it. Differences of aptitude being inseparable from social differences according to inherited capital, the system thus tends to maintain pre-existing social differences.

Bourdieu (1998:20)

In Bourdieu’s analysis, education qualifications are largely misrecognised by society as symbols of intellectual competence, when they actually reflect the symbiosis of a particular cultural inheritance and the dominant cultural arbitrary. He elaborates on why teachers have been unable to realise the inequitable nature of their profession.

As for teachers who incarnate scholastic success and are required constantly to pass judgement on the abilities of others, their professional ethic and morale depend on their regarding the abilities they have more or less laboriously acquired as personal gifts and on their imputing other people’s acquired abilities and ability to acquire abilities to their essential nature ...

Bourdieu & Passeron (1979:70, in Reed-Danahay 2005:48)

Furlong (1997) agrees that the education system tends to distribute rewards according to social origins. He says it occurs because middle-class pupils are likely to share the cultural values and assumptive worlds of their teachers which leads to a greater degree of understanding and appreciation between them. However Entwistle (1978) contests this, arguing that many teachers have working class origins. He offers an alternative reason why teachers from working-class origins may try to ‘impose’ alternative cultural standards on their working-class students.
If some teachers are derogatory of working-class life it is because they think they understand it all too well and reject what they consider to be the intolerable hindrances it puts in the way of favourable life-chances. That is, middle-class values and life-style are preferred from their personal experience of both, and it is probable that some of those who seem most unsympathetic to working-class culture are, like the officer who has risen from the ranks to convert to Catholicism, 'more catholic than the Pope'.

Entwistle (1978:47)

Thus, teachers' dismissal of working-class language is not necessarily the unreflective practice Bourdieu advocates. However, Entwistle seems to conflate two forms of recognition here. One is that teachers' imposition of middle-class standards reflects their higher opinion of them, having experienced working-class and middle-class practices. The other is the recognition that working-class norms will hinder their pupils' paths. In both cases the point is that the teachers are making conscious decisions in their classrooms to try to help the progress of their pupils (which is contra-Bourdieu's position). But the recognition that working-class practices constitute hurdles in later life is entirely compatible with Bourdieu's worldview.

Brown (1987) also qualifies Bourdieu's position on the reproductive tendencies of education by emphasising that education is also implicated in widening horizons as well as reproducing them.

... the school exposes the vast majority of children to alternative understandings of what it has to offer them and the sort of person they might become.

Brown (1987:35)

Bourdieu pays particular attention to the role that linguistic standards play in reproducing existing structures of inequality through education. He acknowledges the 'remarkable' analyses of Bernstein (Bourdieu & Passeron 1990) in this field, which revealed how schools' invisible pedagogies and implicit linguistic codes limited the progression of children from working-class backgrounds (e.g. Bernstein 1975).
Nonetheless, Bernstein’s focus on the rules of language in the classroom was seen to ignore the wider context of symbolic violence and cultural domination of the working classes beyond the classroom (Harker & May 1993). For example,

... no one acquires a language without thereby acquiring a *relation to language*. In cultural matters the manner of acquiring perpetuates itself in what is acquired, in the form of a certain manner of using the acquirement, the mode of acquisition itself expressing the objective relations between the social characteristics of the acquirer and the social quality of what is acquired.

Bourdieu & Passeron (1990:118, emphasis in original)

Bourdieu (& Passeron 1990) proposes that working class lifestyles, which are invariably tied to practical necessity, provide agents with a ‘common parlance’, which has a situational orientation (not disposed to abstract considerations), a reliance on shared figures of speech and non-learned vocabulary. This can be distinguished from the linguistic capital from a bourgeois environment, which displays a literary orientation, latinate vocabulary and a striving for rare/novel expressions. Bourdieu proposes that this latter style of speech gains favourable recognition within the sphere of education (indeed, in society generally). He concludes,

... the unequal social class distribution of *educationally profitable linguistic capital* constitutes one of the best hidden mediations through which the relationship between social origin and scholastic achievement is set up.

Bourdieu & Passeron (1990:16-17, emphasis in original)

In *Language and Symbolic Power (1991)* Bourdieu asserts that working-class men risk a double negation if they attempt to adopt the higher cultural linguistic styles relative to their female counterparts.
Working class male speakers can adopt the dominant articulatory style only at the cost of a double negation, involving both the renunciation of their class habitus and the acquisition of dispositions which are perceived as effeminate.

Bourdieu (1991:18)

Almost twenty years later, Charlesworth (2000) claims that working-class men face even greater educational disadvantage, compared to working-class women, with respect to academic linguistic practices. Charlesworth is referring to the university rather than the school sector, and in his opinion it is middle-class feminists who are responsible for this more recent injustice.

The culture of the university has been transformed by feminist ideas and the demand for highly euphemized, hyper-coherent discourse of political correctness, falls unduly harshly on working-class men.

Charlesworth (2000:300 n6.2)

For some (e.g. LiPuma 1993, Moore 2004, Naidoo 2004, Sayer 2005) Bourdieu’s position on the reproductive mechanisms of the field of education is undermined because he fails to contemplate whether any kinds of benchmarks constitute legitimate standards. Throughout his work, cultural standards are presented as nothing other than the imposed arbitrary of dominant groups, designed to protect their social positions and to retain the value of the capitals they possess. Thus,

... Bourdieu holds an ‘absolute substantive theory of arbitrariness’ to the extent that the content of a cultural product such as a text, or painting or a theoretical development is arbitrary and could just as well be replaced by an alternative product to serve the same function. All that is necessary for Bourdieu’s model is for the cultural product to produce distinction as a means of expressing and reproducing relations of class inequality.

Naidoo (2004:468)
When Moore (2004) unpicks Bourdieu & Passeron’s (1977) (fleeting) explanation of why some working-class pupils succeed in education⁴, he suggests that they must concede that some part of that explanation has to relate to the students’ capacity to understand ‘the epistemological non-arbitrary of real knowledge’ (2004:454). Similarly, Nash’s (1999b) critical examination of Bourdieu’ concludes that,

...there may be a case for recognising that certain cognitive skills are not constituted by the class arbitrary, but are, in fact, necessary to the mastery of an effective form of pedagogy and curriculum in which the skills of literate communication and the concepts of a realist science (all of which are central to a worthwhile education) are given central importance. We may need to pay as much attention to the ‘educationally necessary’ as the ‘cultural arbitrary’.

Nash (1999b:122)

Sayer (2005) extends the point beyond the scholastic field. He refers to Bourdieu’s proposition that social classes use capitals in their struggles to retain their positions in the social field, stating,

...Bourdieu stresses the desire of the dominant to secure not merely power but legitimacy, but then he avoids any discussion of whether any such struggles for legitimacy are themselves legitimate, leaving the impression that that this is merely a way of further increasing their power.

Sayer (2005:99)

Reed-Danahay (2005) suggests Bourdieu’s silence on the legitimacy of academic standards may reflect his inability to resolve his personal dilemma at being part of the elitist institutions that he believed reinforced the widespread social inequality into which he was born. Jenkins (2002) illustrates evidence of such contradictions in Bourdieu’s work. He cites Bourdieu’s assertion that the ‘elevated language’ used by academics, such as their use of taxonomies and euphemisations, performs a symbolic

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⁴ Such exceptions can be explained by familial criteria (such as mothers’ levels of education) or the fact they have undergone more rigorous selection in order to progress (Bourdieu & Passeron 1977, cited in Moore 2004:453)
rather than practical function; that it works to enhance their status and to distance them from the everyday and from each other (e.g. Bourdieu 1988, cited in Jenkins 2002:157-162). But as Jenkins (2002) identifies, much of Bourdieu's own writing can barely be classified as accessible to a non-academic audience; it can be complex, it is often highly stylised and far removed from everyday linguistic practice.

**Habitus**

The concept of habitus is intimately connected with Bourdieu's formulation of cultural capital. It refers to a set of durable dispositions (ways of thinking, acting, feeling) which have been learnt and internalised by actors since birth, unconsciously adopting the attitudes and ways, schemes of perception and evaluation of all those around them. The process is continual; the habitus adapts with experience, but Bourdieu stresses that its internalisation is most intense during agents' early (formative) years. It is a dialectical concept. Bourdieu suggests that as classes and individuals live through objective structures which limit or permit their mobility across a variety of social fields, they develop attitudes and histories which reflect this experience. Thus attitudes, perceptions and behaviours are continually passed on and modified by future generations.

In reality, the dispositions durably inculcated by the possibilities, and impossibilities, freedoms and necessities, opportunities and prohibitions inscribed in the objective conditions ... generate dispositions objectively compatible with these conditions and in a sense pre-adapted to their demands. The most improbable practices are therefore excluded, as unthinkable, by a kind of immediate submission to order that inclines agents to make a virtue out of necessity, that is, to refuse what is anyway denied and to will the inevitable.

Bourdieu (1990:54)

Bourdieu is criticised for focussing on the extent of compatibility and therefore continuity in social space at the expense of recognising places of tension or

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5 It might be possible to argue that this is Bourdieu 'playing the game' of course, adhering to some of the rules of academic field. However, Reed-Danahay (2005) persuasively argues her point (above).
discontinuity (eg. McCall 1992, Naidoo 2004, Power et al (2003), Sayer 2005, Swartz 1997). Sayer (2005) proposes that denial of something can often become a motivating mechanism to try to acquire ‘what is anyway denied’. He and Swartz (1997) think Bourdieu overstates the homology between habitus and habitat. Sayer (2005) suggests that agents may decide to try to change their habitus; that they may deliberately acquire dispositions to enable them to move into another social arena if they so desire. These authors are not rejecting the reproductive potency of Bourdieu’s concept, merely identifying spaces of contestation also. For example,

Bourdieu’s analysis of self-selection as involving a quasi-perfect translation between objective possibilities and subjective aspirations is insightful but not entirely convincing. Miscalculation and distortion of seemingly objective probabilities are also common features found within value and aspiration structures of groups and individuals.

Swartz (1997:554)

This suggests that Bourdieu is not paying due attention to the more conscious aspects of subjectivity. Jenkins (2002) goes further than most\(^6\) in questioning the extent of the influence of the unconscious mechanisms of the habitus. For example,

The subjective expectation of the objective probabilities is a passive representation of cognitive process and practice in which the nature of the habitus is inferred from the consequences of action. It raises awkward questions, such as: How do people know what the objective probabilities are? How, if not at the conscious level, do people act upon these perceptions of probability? Why, if actors can see ‘the way things are’ can they not go beyond this to question the way things are?

Jenkins (2002:82 emphasis in original)

Bourdieu explains the mechanisms operating between the habitus and the external conditions which, in his opinion, results in agents tending to see their situations as natural. For example,

\(^6\) Many of the contributors in this section show concern for the extent of unreflective processes in Bourdieu’s work. However, both Lau (2004) and Nash (1999a) suggests Jenkins’ (2002) critique of Bourdieu is based on a restricted reading of his work. Jenkins does acknowledge (2002:175) that he offers just one way of interpreting Bourdieu’s work.
The categories of perception of the social world are essentially the product of the incorporation of the objective structures of the social space. Consequently they incline agents to accept the social world as it is, to take it for granted, rather than to rebel against it, to put forward opposed and even antagonistic possibilities. The sense of one's place, as the sense of what one can or cannot allow oneself, implies a tacit acceptance of one's position, a sense of limits ('that's not meant for us') or - what amounts to the same thing – a sense of distances, to be marked and maintained, respected and expected of others.

Bourdieu (1991:235)

Elsewhere,

... the coincidence of the objective structures and the internalized structures which provides the illusion of immediate understanding, characteristic of practical experience of the familiar universe, and which at the same time excludes from that experience any inquiry as to its own conditions of possibility.

Bourdieu (1990:20)

There is some suggestion (e.g. Furlong 1997, Reay 2001) that the increasing individualism and meritocratic discourses in education are having precisely the effect Bourdieu identifies. Reay (2001) is critical of testing which she says operates to locate failure within the working-class psyche. Her research shows working-class pupils internalising their poorer test results as their own personal inadequacy, when, in fact, for Reay it is the class bias of the education system (the forms of capital it rewards, the differential investment between state/private school sectors) that lies beneath such injustice.

Willis’s (1977) school ethnography could be seen as evidence to challenge Bourdieu’s position on how dominated classes are complicit in their subordination. Willis (1977) claims that the ‘lads’ who engaged in the rebellious counter-school culture in his research, did so because they had achieved a level of insight into the inequality inherent in the school system. For example,
From the collective point of view, lived out in the culture of ‘the lads’, the proliferation of [educational] qualifications is simply a worthless inflation of the currency of credentialism, and advance through it, a fraudulent offer to the majority of what can really mean something only to the few.

Willis (1977:38-39)

The masculine disdain for qualification, for all its prejudice, carries still a kind of “insight” into the divisive nature of certification, and into the way mental work and technicism are mobilised ideologically primarily to maintain class relations...

Willis (1977:152)

Willis has subsequently stated, with direct reference to the work of Bourdieu, that the counter-school culture he discovered ‘refuse[d] to collude in its own educational suppression’ (Willis 1981:128, cited in Reed-Danahay 2005:54). Collins (1993) supports such a positive interpretation of ‘the lads’ actions, and is critical that Bourdieu’s work fails to consider working-class actions in a more constructive way.

... through these forms the young men also simultaneously achieve a penetration of educational ideology, a real, practical critique of the false promises of educational meritocracy. Hence there is a contradiction: the students are simultaneously (self)disabled and achieve collective insight, in advance of their conforming peers or the liberal staff who would ‘reach’ them.

Collins (1993:127)

It should be noted however that Willis’s (1977) study focussed on a self-selected minority of working-class school pupils. Brown’s (1987) larger study of ‘ordinary kids’ revealed more complex dynamics of conformity and ‘strategic compliance’ among a broader population. Whilst Bourdieu did not comment on Willis’s study, in his theory those who do not conform to school expectations are led more by their unconscious habitus than by purposive ideology critique. Thus,
Even the negative dispositions and pre-dispositions leading to self-elimination such as, for example, self-depreciation, devalorization of the School and its sanctions or resigned expectation of failure or exclusion may be understood as unconscious anticipation of the sanctions the school objectively has in store for the dominated classes.

Bourdieu & Passeron (1990:204-205)

Reed-Danahay (2005) suggests that Bourdieu’s concentration on the role of schools in the processes of reproduction is a limitation of his work. She is critical that, despite Bourdieu’s advocacy of the family as the major source of early inculcation, his focus remains on the formal education sector. This myopia means other important sources of influence in the formation of a habitus are also ignored, and Bourdieu is rightly criticised for overlooking the role of peer groups, religion and the media as forces of reproduction and resistance of dominant cultural judgements (Reed-Danahay 2005). For Collins (1993) such oversights are characteristic of most theories of reproduction; they tend to overlook sources of difference and for him, Bourdieu is no exception. Indeed LiPuma (1993) highlights the fact that there is so much difference between members of the same family that this raises serious questions about the very concept of a habitus.

Devine et al. (2005) question whether Bourdieu’s focus on the importance of cultural capital means that he indirectly denigrates the offerings of forms of popular culture. This is a valid point. I reproduce here the quote that was used earlier (page 17) to illustrate the functioning of capitals in the education system,

...by a series of selection operations, the [education] system separates the holders of inherited cultural capital from those who lack it. Differences of aptitude being inseparable from social differences according to inherited capital, the system thus tends to maintain pre-existing social differences.

Bourdieu (1998:20, emphasis added)

This is a typical example of how, when Bourdieu talks about inherited cultural capital, he is talking about that which circulates among the dominant social groups. And the denigration of working-class cultural capital is obvious in the above quote —
working classes lack cultural capital. They don’t simply lack *middle-class* cultural capital; they lack *any* cultural capital. Even with the acknowledgement that such a slight can be detected only indirectly, Devine et al. (2005) still warn that,

In some respects [Bourdieu’s] arguments can be seen to validate largely discredited ideas that one can read popular culture as a form of false consciousness... Perhaps, here there are things still to be learnt from older studies which were more attentive to the positive virtues of working-class cultural forms.

Devine et al. (2005:16)

The work of Thompson (1963) seems an obvious example of such redress.

Bourdieu’s conception of habitus can be read as reductionist. For example, Alexander (1995) and Jenkins (2002) contend that actors’ negotiating the practicalities of everyday encounters in the way that Bourdieu’s framework suggests means the emphasis is on adapting to rather than shaping their environments. Thus they contend that the habitus inevitably becomes no more than a site for the unconscious replication of exterior structures.

Habitus does not lead us to a social psychology or to the issues of identity, character, conformity and independence. What it initiates, instead, is an endless and circular account of objective structures structuring subjective structures that structure objective structures in turn.


Both authors insist that there is no room in Bourdieu’s concept for critical reflection, or emotions or a construction of self that is not predetermined or a reflection of material structures. Devine et al. (2005) acknowledge that a restricted reading of Bourdieu’s work is able to produce such an impression. They believe that an over-emphasis on the mechanics of capitals and inadequate attention to the wider contexts of fields and of habitus accounts for such perceptions of his work.
Bourdieu the romantic

Bourdieu applies his theories of social reproduction to many fields. For example, he believes that habitus and capitals are just as much the mechanisms of social-class reproduction in the marital field as they are in all others. To begin with, middle-class agents with similar histories and capitals are much more likely to move in social fields where they are much more likely to meet.

The most indisputable evidence of this immediate sense of social compatibilities and incompatibilities is provided by class and even class-fraction endogamy, which is ensured almost as strictly by the free play of sentiment as by deliberate family intervention. It is known that the structure of the circuit of matrimonial exchanges tends to reproduce the structure of the social space as described here; it is probable that the homogeneity of couples is still underestimated and that better knowledge of ‘secondary’ properties of the spouses and their families would further reduce the apparent random element.

Bourdieu (2003:241)

Sentiment of course would be habituated, and Bourdieu stipulates that couples’ sense of attraction to one other is understandable as the confirmation of affinity between one habitus and the other.

This spontaneous decoding of one habitus by another is the basis of immediate affinities which orientate social encounters, discouraging socially discordant relationships, encouraging well-matched relationships, without these operations ever having to be formulated other than in the socially innocent languages of likes and dislikes.

(Bourdieu 2003:243)

Lau (2004) cites Bourdieu’s stance on matrimony as clear evidence that Bourdieu is an objectivist, even though Bourdieu would deny such a charge. Lau shows how, in *Logic of Practice (1990)*, Bourdieu prioritises marriage as a social strategy over other explanations. He suggests that this undermines Bourdieu’s claim for habitus as the mechanism that transcends the objectivist-subjectivist dualism.
[In Bourdieu’s explanation of marriage] structural conditioning exists and is prioritized, but social scientific explanation must go beyond it to specifying the above mechanisms. This is not any ‘transcendence’ but an enrichment of the objectivist perspective. By calling this ‘transcendence’, Bourdieu has simply confused himself and others. Hence, critics such as Jenkins … are right to categorise Bourdieu as an objectivist.

Lau (2004:372)

However, I believe Lau’s charge is based on a misunderstanding of Bourdieu’s use of the term strategy. For Bourdieu ‘strategy’ is ‘an orientation to practice’, not necessarily the strategic rational, calculated action that Lau seems to have perceived it as.

Bourdieu’s theorisation of marriage also exposes the heterosexual-normativity in his work. Dillabough (2004) suggests that whilst Bourdieu’s framework can be usefully appropriated for feminist analyses, his exclusive focus on class and gender as forms of social division means he misses other dimensions of exclusion such as sexuality, race, age etc.

The role of institutions

Jenkins (2002) and Naidoo (2004) identify Bourdieu’s lack of attention to the role of institutions as a weakness, suggesting that there is little difference between conceptualisations of individuals and institutions in his theories. For example, individuals and institutions and fields have a habitus, but there is no indication of how fields and institutions acquire one.

There is in Bourdieu’s theory a gap, which is only partly filled by the habitus, between the micro-level of practicing agents and the macro level of the fields and social space. A theoretical model of institutions is required to fill this gap.

Jenkins (2002:90)

Naidoo (2004) applied Bourdieu’s theorisation of the field to the higher education sector in South Africa. The author is adamant that a simple hierarchically-ordered framework would miss the complexity of the struggles that are going on between
institutions in the sector, and therefore is highly supportive of Bourdieu's relational model. Naidoo (2004) provides examples of how institutions capitalise on the different capitals they each (differently) possess which serve to reproduce class divisions in very subtle ways in some cases. His findings concur with those of Reay, David and Ball (2002) and both papers show how the practices of institutions (such as their entrance interviews/criteria, the kinds of institutions they forge and do not forge contacts with) generate and reproduce specific forms of institutional habitus. Naidoo (2004) joins Jenkins (2002) in suggesting that Bourdieu omits an analysis of a vital link in the reproduction process.

[Bourdieu's] methodological strategy renders the process by which educational or social principles are produced and reproduced invisible to analysis. By excluding the process by which such principles are produced, Bourdieu excludes the key mechanisms by which universities appropriate social forces to reproduce selected principles while excluding and displacing other social forces. His approach therefore leads to less illumination of university practices.

Naidoo (2004:468)

■ Bourdieu and change

Bourdieu identifies how geographical location can initiate the development of cultural divergences within a broader social class or class fraction. As he explains below, access to particular resources may depend on geography, and proximity to those resources influences perceptions of them. Thus their geographical proximity interacts to increase/decrease their cultural proximity. He explains,

To account more fully for differences in life-style between the different fractions – especially as regards culture – one would have to take account of their distribution in a socially ranked geographical space. A group's chances of appropriating any given class of rare assets … depend partly on its capacity for the specific appropriation, defined by the economic, cultural and social capital it can deploy in order to appropriate materially or symbolically the assets in question, that is, its position in social space, and partly on the relationship between its distribution in geographical space and the distribution of the scarce assets in that space.

Bourdieu (2003:124, emphasis in original)
Bourdieu explains that because cities have a greater ‘cultural supply’ it is much more likely that classes in that space engage in greater amounts of cultural activity than similar classes in rural locations7. Bondi (2005) also emphasises the importance of cities as spaces where cultural renegotiations are more likely to occur. Bondi focuses on the gendered dimensions of geography, and in addition to highlighting the ways in which cities are hostile to women, she also wants to emphasise how,

...for many women, urban life is rich with pleasures, including opportunities to escape the narrow confines of traditional assumptions about gender and sexuality. For example, it is in cities that women have gained entry into the male-dominated professions ..., found ways of living in alternative households..., or explicitly challenged gender stereotypes...

Bondi (2005:5-6)

Moving from the dynamics of change that may occur within groups, to the dynamics of change that reside within individual actors, Bourdieu highlights the capacity of agents to improvise in the course of their everyday interaction. Thus,

... subjects are active knowing agents endowed with a practical sense, that is, an acquired system of preferences, of principles of vision and division, and also a system of durable, cognitive structures and of schemes of action which orient the perception of the situation and the appropriate response. The habitus is this kind of practical sense for what is to be done in a given situation – what is called in sport a ‘feel’ for the game, that is, the art of anticipating the future of the game, which is inscribed in the present state of play.

Bourdieu (1998: 25, emphasis added)

Also,

Habitus refers to an ensemble of schemata of perception, thinking, feeling. Evaluating, speaking and acting that structures all the expressive, verbal and practical manifestations and utterances of a person. Habitus has to be thought of as a modus operandi, a ‘generative principle of regulated improvisations’.

Bourdieu (1985:78, emphasis added)

7See Bourdieu (2003:572 n21) for survey data to confirm this trend.
Whilst McNay (1999) and Reay (e.g. 2004) are among those who appreciate the force for change perceived in this way, others (e.g. Nash 2002, Jenkins 2002) suggest Bourdieu's framework is circular, and deterministic respectively.

Bourdieu also identifies external influences that can alter the expected futures of agents, and indeed classes. He contends,

To a given volume of inherited capital there corresponds a band of more or less equally probable trajectories ... (this is the field of possibilities objectively offered to a given agent), and the shift from one trajectory to another often depends on collective events - wars, crises etc. - or individual events - encounters, affairs, benefactors etc. - which are usually described as (fortunate or unfortunate) accidents, although they themselves depend statistically on the position and disposition of those whom they befall...

Bourdieu (2003:110)

Elsewhere,

Because the economy of symbolic goods is based on belief, the principle of its reproduction or crisis is found in the reproduction of crisis of belief, that is, in continuity or rupture with the adjustment between mental structures (categories of perception and appreciation, systems of preference) and objective structures. But the rupture cannot result from a simple awakening of consciousness; the transformation of dispositions cannot occur without a prior or concomitant transformation of the objective structures of which they are the product and which they can survive.

Bourdieu (1998:122)

Bourdieu frequently cites the university staff/student disputes in France in May 1968 as an instance of social transformation (e.g. Bourdieu 1998). He explains how the over-production and consequent de-valuation of university diplomas (the transformation of objective structures) lead to the crisis of belief in the education system among the bourgeois class and prompted the student and staff action. But for Jenkins, his explanation,

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8 McCall (1992) says this is understandable in any case, as Bourdieu is formulating a theory of reproduction after all.
... does not amount to a defence against the charge of determinism. [Bourdieu’s explanations] depend on changed circumstances and it is not clear how these changes can be anything other than external to the social group concerned. It remains difficult to understand how, in Bourdieu’s model of practice, actors or collectivities can intervene in their own history in any substantial fashion.

Jenkins (2002:83)

Bourdieu does usually cite change in terms of macro-sociological arena. Collins (1993) and Sayer (2005) maintain that he thus misses the potential within interactional arrangements, which have transformative potential.

We need to allow for dilemmas and intractable oppositions; for divided consciousness, not just dominated minds; for crisis-ridden divisions in cultural ‘texts’ as well as in economic systems; for creative, discursive agency in conditions pre-structured to be sure, but also fissured in unpredictable and dynamic ways.

Collins (1993:134)

These authors suggest that challenges occurring in the micro-interactions of everyday life should also be recognised for their wider transformative potential.

2.3 Theorising identities

This section illustrates the debate within the field of sociology regarding the nature of identities in contemporary society. Three approaches have been selected, primarily because of their different positions on the relevance of social class as a salient feature of current societal organisation and individual subjectivities. There is the postmodern position that identity is fractured, temporary and free from traditional/collective roots, the reflexive modern claim that identity is increasingly a reflexively-constructed individual project which is becoming ever more distant from former sources of collective identification, and the final position of the class theorists that the disregard for the class dynamic in these other approaches shows a lack of understanding of its nature. The section includes an exchange of critical dialogues between advocates of each approach and also includes contributions to those...
theoretical positions from those conducting empirical research in HE with formerly under-represented student groups. The section concludes by reviewing the literature on masculinities/male identities.

Postmodern identities

There are distinctions between those who offer celebratory readings of the ‘the postmodern condition’ (c.f. Lyotard 1984) and its liberatory possibilities (e.g. Haraway 1985), and those who take up critical stances towards this claimed epoch (e.g. Bauman 1996, Jameson 1991). Core themes within the postmodern perspective include the rejection of (modernist) metanarratives, the dissolution of binaries (such as male/female, straight/gay, science/nature) which are seen as artificial constraints, and the conception of identities as always multiple, fluid, without an internal core. Haraway (1985) and Halberstam (1998) are illustrative of the liberatory imaginings of postmodernism. Haraway’s (1990) concept of cyborg and Halberstam’s (1998) perception of drag queens and transsexuals are offered as examples of postmodern disruptions to the normative boundaries of organic/mechanic and male/female respectively.

For some (for example, Coltrane 1994, Segal 2001), these kinds of postmodern possibilities remain within the confines of the textual or discursive, because these rhetorical invocations bear little relevance to everyday material existence. For Segal (2001), the positions of transsexuals and drag queens serve more to highlight the force of gender boundaries rather than demonstrate any ability to transcend them. She is similarly dismissive of Haraway’s subversive cyborg, claiming that those cybernetic forms that have come to exist (for example, ‘Lara Croft, Tomb Raider’) can barely be seen to disrupt established norms either. Segal argues,

Surprisingly, for those excited by feminist dreams of Donna Haraway or Sadie Plant celebrating the birth of revolutionary cyborgs, liberated from earthly gendered shackles, observers find that such creatures do not often materialize in internet chat mediums, where sexual configurations remain remarkably male-orientated and normative.

Segal (2001:241)
I would also argue that the postmodern identity 'narrative' ignores physical limitations to this process that may or may not be related to class-specific resources. For example, if I wanted to claim an identity as an elite athlete, no matter how many kinds of resources I am able to call on, unless I have the physical capabilities to be competitive in that sport at an elite level, I am simply unable to successfully construct that identity.

For class theorists, postmodernism fails to recognise that the ability to transcend boundaries or to reject traditional confinements requires resources and on that basis it is deemed irrelevant to working-class existence (e.g. Savage 2000). Charlesworth (2000) and Skeggs (1997) extend their criticism of the turn to postmodernism to those who use it within the academe. For them, this whole approach could only have been thought up by those with the privilege to see the world from such a vantage point. Thus the academic retreat from considerations of class to those of postmodernism is seen to mirror the class imbalance of academic spaces (e.g. Charlesworth 2000, Skeggs 1997, 2004).

Another further limitation to postmodern possibilities, as Jenkins (1996) and Skeggs (1997) stress, is that identities are also attributed to people by others. These (usually negative) identities cannot be discarded just because those who have been labelled/named do not want them. Indeed, Skeggs' (1997) research shows working-class women struggling to deny their working-class identities because, as Skeggs reasons, that identity has been constructed as pathological by middle-class others. She refers to the female participants in her research,

[These women] operate with a dialogic form of recognition: they recognise the recognitions of others. Recognitions do not occur without value judgements and the women are constantly aware of the judgements of real and imaginary others. Recognition of how one is positioned is central to the processes of subjective construction.

Skeggs (1997:4)
Postmodernism is also criticised for a lack of critical purchase on matters of social inequality (for example, Coltrane 1994). Kincheloe and McLaren (1998) make this charge more specifically against what they identify as 'ludic' (i.e. celebratory) versions of postmodernism. They warn,

We want to argue that critical researchers should assume a cautionary stance towards ludic postmodernism critique because, ..., it tends to reinscribe the status quo and reduce history to the supplementarity of signification or the free-floating trace of textuality.


However, they and others (for example, Pease 2000, and Peterson 1998) highlight an oppositional postmodern perspective that they believe has critical possibilities.

For example, Bauman’s (1996) postmodern theorisation contains less than celebratory overtones. He constructs the metaphors of pilgrims and tourists, vagabonds and strollers as a way of conceptualising the kinds of ungrounded identities being constructed in the post-modern era. Critically, Bauman suggests that pilgrims and tourists can choose not to ground their identities as they have the resources to travel and to choose that travel. He makes the distinction that for strollers, and particularly vagabonds, the instability of their identities comes from their lack of resources, and the dissolution of their stable environments by the forces of globalisation.

Skeggs (2004) highlights how these kinds of postmodern metaphors are heavily gendered; their emphasis on travel, discovery and adventure are closely connected to male subjectivity. For Skeggs, this stands in contrast to women’s bounded domesticity, which means that women are rarely free to do their own wandering, although they may accompany their husband’s journeys.
In response to these formulaic narratives, Jokinen & Veijola (1997) suggest a new metaphor for the mobile, postmodern, invariably male subject, by replacing male gendered ‘stroller’, ‘tourist’, ‘vagabond’ and ‘player’ with the figure of the au pair.

(Skeggs 2004:52)

However, in the above quote, whilst it seems a valid comment that women have limited opportunities to become ‘tourists’ or ‘players’ in their own right, it seems that Skeggs is also criticising women’s lack of independent opportunities to become strollers and vagabonds. This seems odd, because these are not desirable subjectivities, whether they are acquired by one’s own efforts or else by virtue of one’s attachment to a husband/male partner. In Bauman’s (1996) metaphorical space, ‘strollers’ are those who are led en mass around the shopping malls of the soulless consumer society, and ‘vagabonds’ are those without a place because their former locations have been dissolved in this postmodern era. I doubt Skeggs’ (2004) intention was to suggest that women should be able to become vagabonds independently of and in equal measure to, men.

Bauman (1996) is less than celebratory about the lack of a fixed identity that is seen to accompany the process of postmodernization. He proposes that as the forces of globalisation increasingly demand mobile, flexible workers, workers have to avoid being anchored to a stable identity. This means cutting links to former sources of stable identity, which may have been based in a collectivity (for example, one’s class or locale) or a have a more personal meaning (one’s trade, or history). For Bauman, this is a lamentable feature of contemporary society; it is perceived as psychologically unsettling.

Billig (1995) also identifies the darker side of actors situated in a postmodern society. He emphasises that for some, ‘there is no rapture in ambiguity’ (1995:136). Like Bauman above, Billig also focuses on those members of society who do not have the resources to join in the freedoms or ‘fun’ of postmodernity, warning that their need for a secure sense of belonging may in fact lead to the uptake of regressive
communal identities. In his analysis he suggests that fascist and far-right organisations may become the retreat for the dispossessed.

Hall (1996) suggests that the movement away from conceptions of identities as unitary and stable, towards more recent formulations that show its multiple, fractured, and contingent nature, avoids the violence associated with naming. For example, he identifies how identities such as man/woman, black/white demonstrate that,

... the unities which identities proclaim are, in fact, constructed within the play of power and exclusion, and are the result, not of a natural and inevitable or primordial totality but of the naturalized, overdetermined process of 'closure'.

(Hall 1996:5)

His critique that there is no core to a collective identity needs to be seen in this context, as a liberatory conception, an avoidance of being fixed in a category that has been constructed in the context of exclusion. For Hall (1996) social actors should not claim a sense of belonging to an established collectivity any more. If they do, it is a 'fantasy of incorporation'; a sense of belonging is impossible because there is no authenticity or true core to the self. It is important to note that Hall (1996) is referring to issues of 'ethnicity' rather than class, and that perhaps, these distinctive forms of identity may operate somewhat differently.

Nonetheless, Castells (1999) demonstrates that the need for these kinds of connections still exist. Castells offers empirical evidence, rather than abstract theorisations, that new patterns of cultural belonging are emerging among those who are resisting or are excluded from these globalising processes. He suggests however, that these 'communities' are not being formed around social class identities, but around locality, nation and religion. Indeed, Anderson (1991) and Ballard (1998) both show how such communities of belonging are being (re)constructed in new spaces when people relocate outside their country of origin. Further, empirical research within the field of higher education (Archer et al 2001, Reay 2001, Tett
provides ample evidence that *working-class forms of belonging* remain. Their research shows how many working-class students are having to confront deep psychological issues when they enter the non-working-class realm of the university and that this happens to a large extent because they are fighting to retain their sense of attachment to their class whilst their higher education can be seen to pull them away from it in some sense.

Also in the field of education, Hughes (2002) takes up two of the other metaphors that circulate within the postmodern or poststructuralist discourse, the exile and the nomad. Specifically, Hughes (2002) adopts Benhabib's (1992) exile metaphor to examine the experiences of working-class women students in 'elite' higher education, who were the subjects of Tett’s (2000) research. Hughes suggests it is useful to conceive the working-class women as exiles, as having identities without a fixed place, as it offers a more positive interpretation of their experiences than is generally offered in the empirical work in this field. Within this metaphor, the women in Tett’s research are not seen as being torn between two communities, in the way Tett perceives them. Instead Hughes (2002) suggests they are seen, more positively, as being able to wander across borders by virtue of their HE. Hughes (2002) also proposes that the exile metaphor carries the seeds of transformation. This is because as exiles, Tett’s (2000) working-class women have the potential to gain critical insight into their former situations, now that they can look at their previous community from a privileged position outside of it.

For both Hughes (2002) and Skeggs (1997), the ability to see the wider structures of inequality requires such travel. However, that position could be undermined by the fact that the women in Tett’s (2000) study, community education students, were politically active before they entered HE. This suggests that the women had already acquired critical insight without entering formal education, and begs the question, ‘what was it that allowed their insight to develop?’

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9 This body of work is presented in greater detail in section 2.4.
10 Skeggs (1997) relates this to her own academic journey, which allowed her to understand more fully the dynamics of her working-class origins.
I would also question the extensively emancipatory politics of exile invoked by Hughes (2002), which seems odd given that exile is generally induced by expulsion. The qualitative research on ‘non-traditional’ HE students, which will be examined at the end of this chapter, is littered with examples of working-class women encountering negative reactions to their HE endeavour by sections of their working class communities. Here, it is the threat of exile that hangs over them, rather than the freedom. However, Hughes’ (2002) call to acknowledge the pleasurable opportunities of cultural mobilities, brought about by working-class participation in HE, is important.

## Reflexive identities

Beck (1996) and Giddens (1991) are the ‘major architects of the individualisation thesis’ (Brannen & Nilsen 2005). Whereas postmodernism is projected as a radical break from previous historical era, Beck and Giddens claim that a shift in modern sensibilities is occurring. This shift involves the detraditionalisation of identities away from those connected to the bonds of the family, workplace or locale, but does not go so far as the postmodern conceptualisation of identities that are floating free of any sources of stable attachment. Instead, for Beck and Giddens, social actors are more able to choose multiple sources of identity that are meaningful to them, including those attached to collectivities which they may decide to identify with. Both authors contend that these new sources of collective identification have shifted from those rooted in traditional attachments such as class, family, workplace and locale, to those connected by ascribed characteristics such as age, gender, ethnicity, and/or issue-based collectivities (such as the environmental movement, religion).

Giddens’ (1991) individualisation thesis emphasises the ontological impact of globalisation. Like Bauman (1996) earlier, Giddens suggests the demand for mobile and flexible workers has weakened connections to traditional ties\(^\text{11}\).

\(^{11}\) Claims of such stability may be challenged by historians (e.g. Rose 2001, Thompson 1963) who paint a more complex picture of mobility, negotiation etc.
For Giddens this brings greater freedom, but also greater responsibility as agents need to organise their own lives as traditional trajectories disappear. The continuous adaptation to changing global environments can lead to identities that are incoherent and fragmented. Giddens (1991) suggests there is a psychological need for actors to organise their ‘selves’, to search for ‘ontological security’ in a world of flux. Therefore, he proposes, actors are now involved in processes of continuous reflexive life planning, they construct ‘narratives of self-identity’ as a means of giving coherence to their lives in ever changing circumstances.

The reflexive construction of one’s own biography also occupies centre stage in Beck’s (1996) thesis. For example,

...both within or outside the family, individuals become the agents of their educational and market-mediated subsistence and the related life planning and organization. Biography itself is acquiring a reflexive project.

Beck (1996:90)

But Beck (1996) is concerned to show that a logic of risk has replaced the once dominant logic of class as an organising principle of society. He proposes that natural risks used to be confined to local concerns, but that globalisation and manufactured risks have now uprooted, increased and dispersed risks globally. For Mythen (2005), the binary of local/global in relation to either natural or manufactured hazards is dubious to begin with. Nonetheless, according to Beck’s thesis, people currently perceive greater threats to their security than ever before (e.g. from environmental damage, global terrorism) and respond by trying to take greater control over their own lives, ‘individualisation’, as traditional agencies (for example, national governments, welfare regimes, legal institutions etc.) are deemed increasingly unable to offer protection from such threats.

Some of the critiques directed at postmodernism earlier can be applied to the reflexive modern position also. For example, it has been highlighted that there is little recognition in the theories that the resources needed in order to engage in such
reflective acts of construction and planning are unevenly distributed along the lines of class, and other social divisions (for example, Brannen & Nilsen 2005, Savage 2000, Skeggs 2004).

When discussing how people construct their own life course trajectories, how they make choices, how they cobble together do-it-yourself biographies, little reference is made to the availability of resources to do so.

Brannen & Nilsen (2005:422)

But reflexive modernisation draws additional criticism because the process is also seen as highly gendered (Britton & Baxter 1999, Reay 2003a, Skeggs 2004)

There is no sense in Giddens that the possibility of having a self may itself be a classed, raced or gendered issue... The self appears in Giddens as a neutral concept available to all, rather than an inscription, a position of personhood produced to retain the interests of a privileged few, requiring for its constitution the exclusion of others.

Skeggs (2004:53)

Britton & Baxter (1999) emphasise how individual narratives of identity and place are always situated in wider public narratives, which are permeated by gendered assumptions. These include the expected selflessness of women, putting the needs of the family before their own and primarily residing in the home, whilst men are expected/permitted to forge more public selves in the work and the social arena. The authors contend that it is therefore mainly men who are permitted to be more self-centred and autonomous, and, therefore, who may embark on construction projects.

Brannen & Nilsen (2005) and Reay (2003a) each comment that the individualisation theories bear the mark of their makers, who have not even contemplated how their propositions may apply differently to non-white, non-western, non-male, non-middle-class others. Reay states that,
While Beck recognises there are psychological costs in any project of putting the ego at the centre, he does not seem to recognise that [such projects] have traditionally been more acceptable for some groups in society rather than others: men more than women; the middle classes more than the working classes; white Western cultures more than, for example, Asian cultures.

Reay (2003a:306)

Brannen & Nilsen (2005) see little value in Beck’s thesis, claiming it is too focussed on agency, it is too simplistic, decontextualised and that its ignorance of structural forces allows inequalities to go unchallenged. Nonetheless, Mythen (2005), Reay (2003a) and Savage (2000) perceive positive aspects of his work. Reay agrees with Beck’s contention that in risk society, failure is seen as personal rather than structural inadequacy. This concurs with much of her empirical findings (e.g Reay 2001). But she qualifies Becks’ assertion that the universal presence of risk equalise social divisions. She states,

According to Beck …, risks have an equalising effect. While this may be true to the extent that everyone has to confront the risks of global warming and nuclear war, it is certainly not true when the focus is on social inequalities of gender, race and class in the context of higher education.

Reay (2003a:313)

Her empirical findings lead Reay (2003a) to point out that risk falls harder on some. For example, Beck suggests that reflexive modernity means different things for men and women. The requirements for flexible, mobile workers reinforce men’s traditional roles, but place a greater burden on women who have to struggle with traditional domestic roles and the new labour demands. However, Reay (2003a) complicates this further by suggesting that the middle-class woman can reduce the burden of employment/domesticity because she has the resources to off-load her domestic work onto others, such as a gardener and/or a nanny. Thus some (women) are more free to construct Beck’s kind of biographies and experience less conflict in combining women’s traditional roles and new industrial ones.

Mythen’s (2005) and Savage’s (2000) disagreement with Beck is that he over-states the case, in terms of the logic of risk replacing the logic of class. Both agree that risk
is indeed a more prevalent feature of contemporary society than it was before, particularly so in Mythen’s examination of the employment sphere. For Mythen (2005), if Beck relativised his claims, they would be more acceptable. For example, Beck states that,

Processes of individualization deprive class distinctions of their social identity. Social groups lose their distinctive traits, both in terms of self-understanding and in relation to other groups.

Beck (1996:100)

Yet the loss of traditional attachments is contested by qualitative researchers in the field of HE (for example Reay 2003, Tett 2000). Within their research (presented later in this chapter) there is ample evidence that working-class students, men and women, have ‘giving something back’ as part of their motivation for HE. There is no place for such communitarian motives in the individualisation thesis. Mythen (2005) suggests that if Beck were to claim a relative loss of cohesion or distinctiveness rather than their disappearance, he would be on firmer ground.

Mythen (2005) and Savage (2000) also suggest that Beck needs to see that the perception and experience of risk/individualisation is mediated through existing structures of stratification. For Mythen (2005) Beck’s concerns ought to switch from the perception of risk as an organising principle of contemporary society, to the impact of risk as an organising principle.

Savage (2000) proposes that Beck’s individualisation thesis shows he does not understand the nature of class, and that Bourdieu offers a more appropriate account of the processes of individualisation. Bourdieu’s framework was examined earlier in this chapter, and from that it is evident that whilst he never used the term individualisation, Bourdieu seeks to explain the processes by which social actors differentiate themselves from other groups. For Savage (2005), Bourdieu’s account looks at processes of individualisation as they are embedded within systems of stratification. He is seen to understand the ‘social character’ of individualisation. This is a central flaw in Beck’s approach according to Savage, who insists that,
...modes of individualisation are related to modes of class identification and are not a departure from them.

Savage (2000:118)

**Male Identities**

This section will focus specifically on masculinity and men. Whilst there is an enlightening body of literature examining the impact of gender on boys and youths in relation to education (for example, Archer & Yamashita 2003, Connell 1989, Mac an Ghaill 1996, Lingard et al 2002, Martino & Berrill 2003, Reynold 2001), it remains unexamined here. In part this reflects limitations on thesis length. But also, it reflects the fact that the focus of the PhD research is more on the men's current educational relationships rather than those they recall of their schooldays\(^{12}\).

The section addresses the question, ‘how can we understand men?’ Seidler (1992) and Kimmel (1994) offer personal insight,

Men have grown up to identify with the public world of work. We have learned to be independent and self-sufficient. We have learned to go it alone and do without the help of others. We have learned to identify with our work, even when it is not a matter of finding personal fulfilment but simply earning a wage ... Often there is little that prepares us for relationships, for in learning to be self-sufficient, we do without others. Often our very sense of male identity is sustained through our capacity for *not* needing the help of others.


Other men: we are under the constant careful scrutiny of other men. Other men watch us, rank us, grant our acceptance into the realm of manhood. Manhood is demonstrated for other men’s approval ... If masculinity is a homosocial enactment, its overriding emotion is fear.

Kimmel 1994:128 -129

\(^{12}\) Their schooldays are relevant of course, but are not the primary focus of the research.
These quotes are representative of the insights offered by a community of pro-feminist male writers (see also Kaufman 1994) who suggest there is psychic insecurity beneath such typical masculine traits as, for example, independence, emotional illiteracy and homophobia. Their work is mostly self-referential, but qualitative research by women researchers (for example, Faludi 1999 and New 2001) also position men as damaged beings in order to explain their findings. Campbell (1995), Faludi (1999) and New (2001) research different constituencies of working-class men in the aftermath of industrial decline in the UK and USA since the 1980s. All three works highlight combinations of male despair and also violence within their respective communities. Faludi’s (1999) research in America and that of New (2001) in the UK, come to understand the violence of men and their use of drugs and alcohol, in part, as their inarticulate responses to the pain of their existence. To illustrate,

Alcohol is often used by young working-class men as a compensation for exclusion from means of consumption, and by men of all classes as an escape from overwork, injuries and ill-health. Large numbers of men become dependent on these substances and are impaired by their misuse.

New (2001:743)

There was something almost absurd about these men struggling week in week out to recognise themselves as dominators when they were so clearly dominated, done in by the world.

Faludi (1999:9)

It is perhaps harder to be persuaded by Faludi’s sympathetic understanding of the men to whom she is referring, above; they were attendees at a counselling group for men who had been convicted of beating up their wives. Indeed Segal (2001) suggests that Faludi’s (1999) work might be some from of redress for her earlier book, Backlash (1991), which Segal feels was perhaps too harsh on the male sex. Nonetheless, Faludi (1999) and New (2001) both emphasised the psychological limitations men had in finding other ways of expressing their pain and frustration as
their jobs and in some cases their families dissolved. New (2001) in particular proposes that men’s recourse to drugs, violence and alcohol should, in part, be regarded not as social activities but as signs of mental ill health.

Campbell’s (1995) analysis of the unemployed men and youths on council estates is different in tone to the two works cited above. Campbell emphasises that employment for men has a deeply social rather than psychological meaning; when it is taken away the pain they feel is derived from their inability to so easily escape from their familial responsibilities and enjoy the more social environment of men. Thus men’s reactions to the loss of that employment, which Faludi (1999) and New (2001) may understand as mental ill health, Campell (1995) understands instead as selfish, and as demonstrating men’s inability to even take responsibility for themselves. She says,

In employment, the men’s exit from the domestic domain was excused – they had to go out to work. In unemployment they have no alibi, their existence is domesticated. But their resistance is evident in their emotional and physical itinerancy. As workers, their flight from fatherhood was mediated by their pay packet: men’s quest to purge women from the world of work ... was expressed symbolically in the notions of ‘breadwinner’ and the ‘family wage’. In unemployment, men’s flight from fatherhood has no hiding place, they have children and then leave someone else to look after them. What they all seem to insist upon, however, is that someone other than themselves take care of them too ...

Campbell (1995:202)

In New’s (2001) work, there is a sensitive consideration of the dilemmas faced when presenting an understanding of men that recognises their oppression, despite their implicatedness in both macro and micro processes of domination. Coltrane (1994) addresses this issue also but is more determined than New (2001) not to portray men as victims. He is sensitive to the fact that for a man to suggest that men are oppressed is perhaps more politically charged than if a woman were to make similar claims. However, Coltrane (1994) and Messner (1993) are adamant that men are not oppressed by virtue of their gender, although they do suffer because of it. Messner (1993) suggests that that suffering should be regarded as the price they pay for the
privilege they obtain from it. He says that whilst men may complain about the costs of their gender (he is referring as much to the pro-feminist male writers here as to the general population of men), they are obviously reluctant to give up their privileges.

McMahan (1993) critiques the assumption that men are emotionally blunted. He interrogates others' empirical research to illustrate that men do nurture, care about others and express emotion. For example, he shows men's emotional investment in their families, how they care for sick partners. McKee & O'Brien's (1983) research on the impact of fatherhood also showed men partaking in these kinds of activities. Nonetheless, McKee & O'Brien (1983) McManan (1993), and Segal (2001) also show how sometimes the impetus for men to undertake such 'feminine' tasks is actually the absence of women. Segal (1993) and Whitehead (2002) emphasise how men cannot necessarily change under their own steam. Their research shows how structural constraints operate to keep men more distant from their caring tasks, for example, childcare provision, paternity policies, unequal pay etc. This means that in order for men to change, there has to be structural changes to allow them to change.

Kerfoot (1999) locates the potential for change in gender relationships outside of a structuralist framework, suggesting that,

... emotional intimacy presents a range of possibilities for subject/object positions: social encounters are thus characterised by movement ... as participants ... move within and between subject/object positioning in playful fashion. This playful attitude to relationships stands in contrast to the discourses and practices of masculinity.


Giddens (1992) proposes that new kinds of intimate relations are being forged as society moves away from the traditional constraints associated with modernity. He envisions the development of 'pure relationships' where parties become involved with one another on a basis of equality and proposes that the pursuit of such relationships will be of central importance to many people's lives. However, Jamieson (1998) critiques his proposition. She highlights the fact that there is no empirical evidence to substantiate his claim, and also suggests that other
contemporary forces, such as consumerism and self-interest, may exert greater and negative influences on people's intimate futures.

MacInnes (1998) states that sociological analyses of gender are sometimes guilty of conflating psychological and sociological dynamics of behaviour, so that some social research too readily attributes gender inequality to social forces, without contemplating how individuals themselves may hold some responsibility for their positions. He argues for analyses to separate internal dimensions of behaviour (what he terms 'sexual genesis') in order to identify the purely cultural forces of gender segregation. However, Jefferson (2002) and Jenkins (1996) argue that the psychological and sociological aspects of human subjectivities are so inextricably entwined that one cannot be understood without reference to the other. Recent psycho-social analyses (e.g. Frosh et al. 2003, Lucey et al. 2003, Walkerdine 2003, Walkerdine et al. 2005) illustrate this position. For example, Lucey et al. (2003) found that those who had experienced upward mobility from their working-class origins still joined in the wider social processes of the pathologisation of the working-classes. The authors came to understand such responses as psychic defence mechanisms, unconsciously invoked to distance (and therefore protect) their insecure middle-class identities from the pain of their ever present working-class selves. Such 'splitting' shows how the social and psychic dimensions of working-class existence are entwined and I suggest that these analyses offer reflective and subtle understandings of human subjectivities, far removed from the perhaps analytically cavalier work MacInnes (1998) may have encountered.

Connell (1996) provides an important framework for the theorisation of male subjectivities. Within it, social space is conceptualised as a relational arena where relationships between different kinds of masculinities are constantly negotiated. There is a dominant, hegemonic form of masculinity that is perpetuated by the most influential social institutions (the state, church, media, etc.). Connell proposes that currently, the holders of institutional power are white, middle class, bureaucratic, careerist men and that this has become the hegemonic form of masculinity in western society. Alongside the dominant form of masculinity is a multitude of other kinds of
masculinities that stand in relationship to it. (They may be complicit with it, subordinate to it, or marginalised from it). Connell also emphasises that they stand in relationships to each other so that what may be marginal form of masculinity in one arena, may perhaps be the hegemonic form of masculinity recognised in another.

Whitehead (2002) believes the importance of this work for analyses of gender can barely be overstated. In particular he believes Connells development of the concept of ‘hegemonic masculinity’ (initiated first in Carrigan, Connell and Lee 1985) provides an innovative, non-essentialist understanding of men’s practice that still shows their role in the maintenance of a society based on male domination. Indeed it is often employed to explain the adoption of a range of male identities in particular social arenas (e.g. Archer et al. 2001, Mac an Ghiall 1996, Segal 1993). As Whitehead explains,

The power of the term lies in the fact that theorists can align themselves with the notion of patriarchy and male dominance, while mitigating any reductionistic oversimplifications through use of a concept that speaks of fluidity, multiplicity, difference and resistance, not only within the category women, but also amongst men.

Whitehead (2002:91)

Nonetheless, there are important critiques. Jefferson (2002) challenges the proposition that there is only one form of hegemonic masculinity, and that that form resides in important institutions. He asks, why, if all other institutions contain complex mix of forms of masculinity, should there be no such diversity here? An examination of the models that Connell holds up as examples of hegemonic masculinity cast doubt on the empirical evidence for his theory when they are subject to scrutiny. Donaldson (1993) and MacInnes (1998) suggest that the variety of masculinities among sports stars (one of Connell’s hegemonic ideals) are diverse and contradictory. For example, they suggest between them that sports stars who are also models, or who are family men, those who cry, or who are injured, all challenge any simple ideal of a hegemonic masculinity. Segal (1993) acknowledges the complexity of the notion of a hegemonic ideal but proposes that the instances of those who deviate slightly can be accommodated.
Connell's framework is also criticised because it fails to recognise the internal psychological processes (of both class and gender) that are implicated in the construction of male identities. Research by Frosh et al (2003), and also Donaldson (1993) illustrates how choosing to adopt certain forms of masculinity can be made in order to satisfy internal/psychological problems. Donaldson (1993) suggests men's take up of sport is connected to a need to feel close to others. Thirty years ago, Tolson's important work (1977 cited in Messner 1997:57) drew on the concept of a damaged male psyche to explain why working-class and middle-class men adopted specific masculine identities in response to the destabilising effects of contemporary capitalism. He suggested that middle-class men began to established control in the domestic sphere as a response to their diminishing autonomy/control in the business world. For working-class men, Tolson (1977) posited that their overt displays of control and their hyper-masculine style in the workplace was actually a way of enacting power when in reality, they had very little. More recently, and from a more personal perspective, Kaufman (1994) emphasises the psychological effects of assumed power with a sense of powerlessness that he, and therefore other men, experience in contemporary society.

For Hall (2002) there is a significant flaw in Connell's (1996) framework in that it fails to consider the dimensions of either political economy or class power. He queries whether a framework that claims to explain widespread social location can do so without reference to material circumstances and privilege. He is also critical that domination seems to be the only dynamic in Connell's analysis, claiming that this is not only a disservice to men but that it ignores the structures that impact on location and therefore, identities. Some of Hall's (2002) concerns could be seen to be addressed in Bourdieu's (2001b) account of male, or rather masculine domination. Bourdieu (2001b) also conceptualises the social position of men in terms of domination (primarily masculine domination over women, but also over other forms of masculinity), although his analysis focuses on the symbolic and the structural mechanisms, which he suggests have allowed such unjust societal arrangements to remain remarkably consistent over time and across cultures.
From his anthropological research of the tribal Kabyle society, Bourdieu (2001b) traces how processes of gender differentiation have developed into a form of symbolic violence whereby women’s social positions, and also the habitus they have acquired through such socialisation, have become devalued relative to the positions and habitus of men. The invocation of a gendered habitus allows Bourdieu (2001b) to reveal the unconscious dimensions of masculine domination, such as gendered schemes of perception and embodiment, which implicate men and women in the reproduction of the gender order. He suggests that for men this often takes the form of their unreflective diminution of the women around them, and/or shows in their angst-ridden need to validate their masculinity in the view of other men. Like some of the pro-feminist male writers previously mentioned (e.g. Donaldson 1993, Kaufman 1994, Kimmel 1994), Bourdieu (2001b) also views masculinity as damaging to some men; it is a trap but one that nonetheless brings rewards.

As might be expected from a Bourdieusian framework, Bourdieu (2001b) integrates the habituated nature of symbolic violence with the institutional mechanisms that he perceives as key drivers in the reproduction the gender order. He names the family, the state, the church and the school as key sites in this process, highlighting how they each reinforce a form of patriarchal family morality and shape perceptions within society.

2.4 Qualitative Research on HE Participation

The research in this section highlights the web of complex dynamics that surrounds the relationship between HE and those for whom university attendance is not the familial norm. Whilst quantitative research can also identify what factors, and combinations of factors, influence HE participation (e.g. Paterson 2003, 1997). This research is less interested in statistical inferences, no matter how technically sensitive. It is more concerned to expose the personal and emotional relationships to higher education, including how HE is perceived and emotionally and practically negotiated by individual social actors who are outwith the ‘traditional student’

13 Note that Bourdieu (2001b) is particularly sensitive to avoid blaming women for their complicity.
constituency. In that task it joins a body of (necessarily) qualitative research, which as the section will demonstrate, covers a wide variety of ‘non-traditional’ students; from school-leavers to older adults, from those in the midst of deciding whether or not to apply for university to those already there, both on qualifying routes and on degree courses. Some of the research includes those who have rejected HE (non-participants) and those from families with established HE histories (‘traditional students’). Collectively, the body of work examines the ways in which social divisions, such as class, gender, ethnicity and age\textsuperscript{14} interact with each other, and with structural mechanisms, and impact on ‘non-traditional’ students’ participation in HE. Its attention to the personal experiences and emotional dynamics of higher education offers valuable insight into the wider patterns of HE participation presented in Chapters 1 and 3.

This final section of the literature review presents three themes within the qualitative findings that are central to this research: choice, experience and gender. It begins by illustrating the research findings surrounding the dynamics of HE ‘choice’ for under-represented student groups. It shows the structural, cultural and emotional forces that impact on decisions whether or not embark on HE, and if so, where. The section then presents the findings related to the experiences of students from under-represented HE groups, before presenting those findings that emphasise the gendered nature of their HE participation.

\textbf{The dynamics of ‘choice’}

Qualitative research emphasises how decisions regarding whether or not to attend HE by those with no familial history of such attendance bear little resemblance to the rational choice model on which policy initiatives are based (e.g. Ball et al. 2002, Brine & Waller 2004, Burke 2006). The findings (for example, Archer, Hutchings and Ross 2003, Ball et al. 2002, Bowl 2003, Brine & Waller 2004, Burke 2006a, Edwards 1993, Davies & Williams 2001, Reay 2005, Skeggs 1997, Tett 2000) provide ample evidence that HE contemplations for under-represented university

\textsuperscript{14} Sexuality is less of a feature in this work. However, see Epstein et al (2003) for research on this.
groups take place within structural constraints and contain complex emotional dimensions that are inextricably connected through axes of class, age, ‘ethnicity’, religion and gender, which change over time and context.

A prevalent narrative in the research with those from non-university backgrounds is that universities were perceived as places attended by other kinds of people, by those described as middle-class/wealthy/posh or else by those who were exceptionally clever (e.g. Hutchings & Archer 2001, Marks et al. 2003). Hutchings and Archer (2001) suggest that either perception of student meant that they were hardly the kinds of people their working-class respondents would want to emulate. Marks et al. (2003) found that to be a student was perceived as self-indulgent among their respondents who valued ‘work’ (i.e. employment) as a basis of self-respect. Hutchings and Archer (2001:87) also identified a narrative of students as partying, drunken, lazy, sheltered individuals who were perceived as unable to cope ‘with the real world’. However, they discovered that perception was held by a particular community of respondents.

This [narrative] was used exclusively by white respondents, suggesting that it draws on traditional British constructions of class differences which are not shared by black and Asian working-class groups.

Hutchings & Archer (2001:84)

They also found these negative perceptions were mediated by age, and were held by older respondents in their sample, which concurs with similar findings from Davies & Williams (2001). Hutchings & Archer (2001) suggest the attitudinal differences could be due to younger students having been raised within the era of HE expansion. Davies & Williams (2001) found that whilst the older respondents in their research had held negative attitudes towards students earlier in their lives, these had changed over time, due to their increased familiarity with HE as their lives unfolded.

The research also revealed more negative attitudes to HE expressed among white working-class males, which the authors suggest is connected to traditional notions of working-class masculinity (e.g. Archer et al. 2001, Hutchings & Archer 2001,
Archer & Leathwood 2003, Marks 2000, 2003). For example, the research of Archer and colleagues cited above showed a discourse among Asian men where manual work was rejected as dirty, and HE was perceived as a route to upward social mobility. This stood in contrast to narratives from white working-class men whom the authors found continued to define their masculinity in terms of breadwinner social roles and manual labour. This group also generally showed more scepticism regarding the potential of HE to alter their positions significantly. (It should be noted that I have only selected the tendencies of two specific groups from this very subtle piece of analysis, presented also in Archer et al. 2003).

Marks (2003) claims that white working-class men have an ambivalent attitude towards education and that this could be seen as a result of their experiences under the Thatcher government in the 1980s in the UK. He suggests (although without empirical evidence to substantiate his claim) that the former industrial workforce were offered/forced into ineffective training and education initiatives during the 1980s and that this experience feeds their current scepticism towards education (and authority). Research by Davies & Williams (2001) and Warmington (2003) reported optimism in their sample of mature students regarding the economic and employment related benefits of HE. This does not dispute Mark’s (2003) assertions, but Warmington (2003) found that dissatisfaction with their labour market histories was an important part of the reason his respondents gave for their return to education.

Research by Ball et al. (2002) and Reay et al. (2001) includes middle-class and working-class respondents and identified class-mediated differences in the nature of choice regarding HE participation. They show how for middle-class students, university was part of a normal biography. For example,
Young people, like [middle-class] Antony, are living out what Du Bois-Reymond (1998) calls a normal biography. Normal biographies are linear, anticipated and predictable, unreflexive transitions, often gender and class specific, rooted in well-established life worlds. They are often driven by the absence of decisions. Such young people talked of going to university as ‘automatic’, ‘taken for granted,’ ‘always assumed’.

Ball et al. (2002:57)

Their research showed how the contemplations of attending university for working-class students represented a disruption of their ‘normal’ class biographies (which do not feature university participation). For working-classes, not going to university is a normal biography and deciding to pursue something different means negotiating a process with which they have no familiarity. The examinations of middle-class relationships to HE (Ball 2003, Power et al. 2003) confirms these tendencies to some extent. However, it also showed these ‘normal’ biographies were not free from insecurity and doubt, revealing middle-class students also struggling with post-school trajectories, particularly when those students wish to break the ‘normal biographies’ of their families.

Reay et al. (2001) make the point that a ‘seamless’ school/university transition only ever occurred among the most privileged respondents in their research. Thus,

Whilst [an] advantaged minority are operating within spheres where the diverse influences are predominantly reinforcing rather than in competition with each other, for the majority of students there is less of a fit between educational institution and family and friends.

Reay et al. (2001:3)

The research identified the degree of fit or dissonance between the institutional habitus of the family, school and university had a significant impact on the educational trajectories of academically ‘able’ young people. It illustrated how middle-class families shared the assumptive worlds of the private schools, and how these schools had developed ‘cosy intimate connections’ with Oxford that smoothed the progression of their pupils from one institution to the other. This was contrasted with community college staff who were cited as often struggling against the familial
habitus to try to get young people to remain in education. It also showed how those staff's efforts to get their pupils in Oxford was more akin to 'stabbing in the dark' as they lacked the networks or knowledge of staff in the private school sector. The authors concluded that,

Institutional habitus has a significant impact which permeates the choice making processes in all 6 institutions, making some choices virtually unthinkable, others possible and yet others routine.

Reay et al. (2001:8)

In the expanded HE sector, it appears that choices to study in 'traditional/elite' universities remain largely unthinkable by working-class potential students, whilst choices to study in 'newer' (post-92) universities are becoming much more possible. The dimensions of this 'choice' revealed by qualitative research include the structural constraints which impact on 'non-traditional' entrants. Constraints of time and of finances dominate the research findings (e.g. Bowl 2003, Davies & Williams 2001, Brine & Waller 2004). Hutchings (2003) shows how working-class considerations of HE involve very complex calculations where foregoing immediate earnings has to be considered against the loss of those earnings, costs of attendance and predications of possible future financial rewards. Davies & Williams (2001) emphasise how working-class students' participation requires a constant balancing act of financial and familial commitments which makes their HE participation constantly risky and fragile.

Women students in particular are found to struggle to find the time required for their studies and meet their familial responsibilities (Edwards 1993, Bowl 2003, Reay 2003a, Tett 2000). The sparsity of institutional arrangements that may alleviate such pressures is widely condemned by these researchers. These constraints were seen as implicated in many first-generation students' decision to 'choose' to study at local institutions. Davies & Williams (2001) propose that availability was also a major factor in non-traditional student choice, rather than the pursuit of a preferred subject. This included the availability of information (about courses and finances etc.), of family friendly timetables, and of flexible entrance routes and qualifications. Brine &
Waller (2004) noted how all three of their respondents who applied to a traditional university on the basis of access course qualifications, were rejected, but offered places elsewhere. The lack of accurate and timely information was also identified as a significant factor in 'non-traditional' student choice of institution (e.g. Bowl 2003, Reay 1998a). Reay (1998a) in particular highlighted how chance and serendipity were as much a part of HE choice for first-generation entrants, with prospective entrants taking advice from chance meetings with distant family relatives or members of the general public.

The research showed some evidence that working-class students perceived differences between the statuses of some universities, although their perceptions were not necessarily accurate (Ball et al. 2002, Hutchings & Archer 2001). It also revealed some students' beliefs that their attendance at 'lower status' institutions would impact on the value of their degrees (e.g. Bhatti 2003, Archer 2003). Typically,

...I'm not going to the 94th university ... fair enough I [would have] studied hard for that degree but they [employers] would just assume that my quality of education was different from somebody who went to a higher universities (sic).

Loretta,  
(black African female, cited in Archer 2003:130)

Institutional status was not necessarily the powerful mediating factor among working-class students as it was found to be among middle-class entrants (e.g. Ball 2003, Power et al. 2003, Reay et al. 2001). Instead a discourse of wanting to 'fit in' on campus was often cited as an important dimension of choice by 'non-traditional' potential entrants, whether this related to their age, 'ethnic', religious and/or classed identities (e.g. Bowl 2003, Reay 2003b). Yet there were some counter-intuitive examples where first-generation students were found to reject or deride those (post-92) institutions that had widened participation to 'non-traditional' students. For example,
I came here because I did an access course and the college I went to had links ... with the university. ... I got in. Because anyone can get into [university name], it’s an inner city polytechnic for God’s sake! Like you don’t have to be academically elite to get into [university name] because that is why I am here. Because I live locally and I am stupid basically.

Neil (white male, cited in Archer 3002:129)

I’ve sort of avoided all the universities with lots of black students, because they’re all the universities which aren’t seen as so good.

Candice (black working-class female, cited in Reay 2003b:54)

What is reflected in these quotes, and commented on in the research (e.g. Archer (2003), Ball et al. 2002, Hutchings & Archer 2001, Reay 2003b), is the fact that these working-class students are effectively implicating themselves in what they perceive to be the compromise of HE standards. I expect most would agree that this is a lamentable state of affairs, but I wonder whether the judgements of such students should not be pursued in other directions also. For example, could they not be understood also as critiques of the kinds of ‘higher’ education that are being made available to them?

The analysis of Bourdieu offered earlier (section 2.2) posited that it is inadequate to regard social class distinctions as based on little more than an imposed cultural arbitrary determined by the middle/upper classes. I think that without an interrogation of the nature of distinctions emerging in the HE field, which (uncomfortably) has to include a consideration of the value of different kinds of knowledge, research could reproduce the flaws in Bourdieu’s theorising. Relatedly, Houston & Lebeau (2005) suggest that the time has come to investigate the realm of HE institutions in order to clarify whether established assumptions regarding class and culture are still relevant. In their review of some of the work cited above they state,
...the concepts of middle-class and middle-class culture, rarely defined in the works stigmatising the latter as being what is exclusively learned at university, need further elaboration following the dramatic expansion of this “class” in most western societies since the mid-20th century...

With the subsequent fragmentation of the new middle class, a tension is said to have arisen at the heart of middle class culture (Savage 2000:159), ... [that] calls [for] more analysis of institutional cultures and practices regarding student access, integration, etc.

Houston & Lebeau (2005:5)

■ The HE experience

Bowl’s (2003) respondents were critical of the imbalance of power between mature students and university staff that they experienced. Her respondents reported that they didn’t know the rules of the game in terms of what was expected of them, and the tutors didn’t seem willing to make these explicit. Bowl makes the point that this was not uniformly the case, with some lecturers/tutors more or less accessible than others, but that overall the mature students experienced staff as distant. Like respondents in Edwards’ (1993) research, Bowl’s respondents complained at the marginalisation of their experiential knowledge within their university. She concludes,

> The external doors of academia may have been opened, but the internal doors which might reveal the expectations of the academy remained closed, and the concerns of students’ own lives, experienced through discrimination, poverty and responsibility of parenthood, were excluded from discussion, even when they were highly relevant to the taught curriculum. The constituency of higher education may have been changing but its habitus appeared to have remained more or less intact.

Bowl (2003:139-140)

There was evidence of ‘good practice’ on Community Education courses as research by Bamber & Tett (2000), Bhatti (2003) and Tett (2000) revealed how students felt their life experience was a valuable part of their university studies.
Bowl’s (2003) respondents also found (again with variations) that younger students were less serious about studying and that university for them carried more of a social agenda and the mature students expressed anger that they asked for extensions to essay deadlines too readily. Bhatti (2003) reported how none of the mature Community Education students in her sample socialised with ‘traditional’ students or mature students on other courses. She suggests that not only was this a lost opportunity for others to learn from the life experiences of these older students, but that it also suggested ‘a profound sense of difference from other undergraduates’ Bhatti (2003:71).

Bhatti’s (2003) study includes commentary from some tutors regarding the presence of mature students in the university. For example,

Why do I teach them? ... I find your typical students too tame and unchallenging. This lot tries my patience to breaking point ... once you’ve pitched your knowledge against their experiences, you realise how empty life is without the Jimmys and Mandys of this world. You realise how society really treats people...

John, cited in Bhatti (2003:72)

This example of mature students challenging the tutors’ knowledge in a stimulating and positive way sat alongside another form of challenge that mature students presented. Another tutor in Bhatti’s (2003) sample suggested that mature students presented a risk to the tutors; because the students had risked so much to enter university, they were so desperate to succeed that they would ‘test the integrity’ of the tutor in trying to subvert expected standards if they could not meet them.

The tutor’s comment in Bhatti’s (2003) research hints at the psychic dimensions of the learners’ investment in their course. Other research emphasises this aspect of the working-class HE endeavour, suggesting that because HE is seen as a middle-class undertaking, working-class students’ HE journeys raise issues of personal identity that does not happen for middle-class students (e.g. Lucy, Melody & Walkerdine 2003, Reay 2001, Reay et al. 2001, Tett 2000, Bhatti 2003, Walkerdine 2003). Whilst this work also notes that the HE endeavour also produces pleasurable
experiences (self-development, self-awareness, confidence etc.), it shows how HE participation also frequently involves a struggle to retain an integrity to one’s community that causes pain.

Lucey et al. (2003) and Reay (2003b, 2005) propose that for first-generation working-class students, going to university is tied up with a sense of shame that middle-class students do not have to confront. This is because, by embarking on a higher level of education, such entrants are effectively implying that they want to be different from their parents or others in their surroundings. The work points out that parents often have the desire for their children to do better than them, but regardless of parental endorsement and pride in their educational progression, Lucey et al. (2003) and Reay (2005) suggest that educational progression invariably has psychic consequences for first-generation working-class entrants. Reay (2005) further suggests that even where working-class students manage to succeed in their HE, they probably endure a further, class-specific pain because they probably attended a ‘new’ university and are aware that such institutions do not have the respect that older universities have.

There is ample evidence (e.g. Edwards 1993, Reay 2001) that as working-class students continue in education, they risk feeling dislocated; they are becoming different from many in their domestic communities, whilst at the same time not being quite integrated into their new academic spaces. For example,

I suggest that among its many promises and possibilities, higher education poses a threat to both authenticity and a coherent sense of selfhood for these working-class mature students. Class hybridity does not sit easily with a sense of authenticity.

Reay (2001:337)

Brine & Waller (2004) qualify the discourse of psychic struggle, by suggesting that their research shows it to be weaker. They reveal that half of their eight respondents were with middle-class partners at the time of the research. It could be suggested (although the authors do not sate this) that such partnerships may have helped reduce
the cultural antagonism between competing identity positions. Additionally, Brine & Waller’s (2004) study showed other women reacting against the derision of their families towards their educational journeys, and instead embracing their new educated identities. The researchers emphasise how denial can be a motivating force as well as a de-motivating one.

Research by Power et al. (2003) also highlights the psychological dangers for those seen as ‘traditional’ students (in terms of standard entry requirements). They propose that such students are even more harmed by educational failure as they are in an environment where educational success is much more expected than it is in working-class environments. They propose that failure is always relative so that middle-class failure is relative to their higher performing peers and the high expectations (and usually qualifications) of their parents. The authors remind the reader that even middle-class students can have damaged educational identities.

Nonetheless, in their research, it emerges that those middle-class prospective entrants who failed to meet the admissions criteria also had the confidence to challenge and pursue their cause with the intended university. This was usually successful. It also showed how middle-class ‘drifters’ and ‘changers’ (i.e. those who did not continue their education in a linear path) still achieved success in other avenues as they drew on networks and familial resources in other areas. This patterns of relative security by middle-class school-leavers concurs with Reay’s (2003b) findings. In that paper, the author juxtaposes the contemplations of middle-class respondents with narratives from working-class potential students, showing the worrying consequences that similar educational failure means for them. For example,

It is very, very worrying, because I haven’t got any safety nets any more. I really don’t know what I’m going to do if the worst happens, if I don’t get the grades for university, I am really, really scared. It really is scary.

Shaun (white, working-class, cited in Reay 2003b:55)
Gendered dimensions to HE participation have been mentioned earlier when research revealed women's struggle to combine domestic as well as student roles. Research with mature women students showed negative responses from their families to their perceived deviant and selfish act, which has not been found with male returners (e.g. Edwards 1993, Skeggs 1997). Wilson's (1997) research with mature students of both sexes found negative and positive familial reactions to both the men and the women undertaking HE. However a difference emerged because Wilson (1997) found that whilst the men in her sample said that they expected others to be feeling negatively about them due to their educational undertaking, it was only women in the sample who had actually experienced negative reactions first hand.

Mature student discourses that emphasise motivations of becoming role models or of giving something back to their families and/or communities were sometimes reported as gender specific (e.g. Tett 2000), but other studies found it existed among either sex (e.g. Bhatti 2003). Archer et al. (2001) and Tett (2000) found that men tended to embark on HE for instrumental reasons whereas women's motivations included dimensions of self-development and/or the benefits to others (Luttrell 1997, Skeggs 1997). Yet Britton & Baxter (1999), Reay et al. (2002) and Thomas (1990) found motivations of self-development, of the intrinsic worth of the enterprise, existed regardless of gender. Britton & Baxter (1999) emphasise that students may hold different reasons for HE simultaneously, and that these reasons change over time.

Nonetheless, Britton & Baxter (1999) were surprised to find that more male than female students in their sample expressed motivations for HE that were based on self-transformation. They suggest that implicit in all these men's accounts was a crisis of masculinity, proposing that when women enter education, they do not reassess their femininity whereas they observed that men reassessed their identities as men. In their own words,
The crisis which gives rise to a 'search for the real self', therefore, is frequently a crisis of masculinity. These changes are often accompanied by explicit statements about their changing conceptions of themselves as men, partners and fathers, than we find in the women's accounts, where feminine identity does not appear to be a central, or at least stated, issue.

Britton & Baxter (1999:189)

After deliberation the authors conclude that processes of self-transformation ought to be perceived as individualistic and self-centred, which means they are therefore more accessible to men (given that men have fewer responsibilities for others and more autonomy compared to women).

It could be argued that in Skeggs' (1997) research, the working-class women are indeed struggling to reconcile their classed femininities with educated identities that are not perceived as valuable forms of femininity in their working-class communities. However, as Archer & Leathwood (2003) identify below, whilst working-class masculinity might be a source of power in some arenas, it is middle-class masculinity that commands power in education. Thus Britton & Baxter's (1999) proposition that working-class men's entry to HE leads to them reassessing their masculinity is supported, because they are preparing to leave the arena where it has power, and move into another (education) arena where their form of masculinity has none.

Archer & Leathwood (2003) and Marks (2000) propose that working-class men's attachment to their breadwinner social roles (no matter how relevant those roles may be today) added an extra dimension to men's participation in HE. Both pieces of research believe it to be an important factor in men's rejection of a return to education. Whilst Marks (2000) explains it in terms of responsibilities, Archer & Leathwood (2003) focus on dimensions of power and identity, specifically,
...the non-participant men's attachment to these discourses [breadwinner, labour] may relate to the way in which these identities allow the men to exercise various forms of local power in relation to other working-class men and women. In comparison, participation in higher education could interfere with the maintenance of these powerful identities, for example, by removing the men from spheres of manual work in which identities are produced and reducing the 'masculinity' capital within an arena where middle-class men exercise greater power/competency.

Archer & Leathwood (2003:182)

The implication is that HE presents an added risk to male identity that women do not have. Yet Burke (2006a, 2006b) and Tett (2000) found that men may enter HE with more positive educational identities than women. Tett (2000) revealed how mature returners' understandings of previous school failure were explained differently by men and women. She found that whilst women spoke of pressures of home/domesticity pulling them away from their education, men presented more agentic narratives of school failure that prioritised their own withdrawal in face of such dissatisfaction. Burke (2006b) also found this in her study of male returners. She suggests that men have recourse to a narrative of 'lazy but talented' to explain their school failures, which is not available to women. She draws on the influential research of Weiner et al. (1999) which highlighted the gendered dimensions of school success, noting how the stereotype of the 'industrious girl' stands in contrast to the 'naturally talented boy'. In Burke's research (2006a, 2006b) men display quite some confidence in their educational abilities, showing little contemplation of the risk of failure. Instead, they identify their previous lack of educational achievements to have been as a result of their laziness.

Marks et al. (2003) also found an expression of gender in the way respondents spoke of guilt attached to their studenthood. Whereas women spoke of feeling guilty at not spending enough time with their families (common also in Bowl 2003, Edwards 1993 for example), men spoke of feeling guilty in not being able to provide for their families. Tett (2000) reports how mature women students introduced their familial life into their discourses of university life, whereas men appeared to keep their domestic and personal lives quite separate from institutional and academic demand. For example, Tett (2000) noted that whilst many students spoke of time pressures...
during their studies, only women related these pressures to their familial responsibilities.

Thomas's (1990) research sought to test the existence of gendered attitudes to education by exploring the motivations and experiences of male and female Physics and English HE students. She found that some attitudes were subject specific rather than gender specific. For example, physicists of both sexes tended to be more money/careerist, whereas English students of both sexes tended to have more intrinsic motivations. However, there were some gendered dimensions of their respective experiences.

Thomas (1990) found that when men are in the minority in the classroom, as with the male English students, they did not perceive it as a disadvantage. In fact, the author notes that men seemed to think they were more worthy of attention because of it (p147). This situation stood in contrast the female Physics students who Thomas found were less confident at being in the minority. The research also found that female Physics students had difficulty in seeing themselves as physicist, which Thomas suggests reflected the tension with this identity and their female identity. However, amongst the male English students Thomas found the boundaries between male and professional identities were much more fluid.

2.5 Conclusion and research questions

The review began by presenting aspects of Bourdieu's work most relevant for this research. It showed the value of analysing distinctions between social groups for class analysis, and the value and possible useful extensions of his formulation of capitals. It illustrated Bourdieu's position that education imposed a dominant cultural arbitrary that resulted in failure for many outwith the hegemonic cultural strata. It highlighted his inability to interrogate the legitimacy of academic standards, which undermined his position somewhat. It revealed the concept of habitus as contested, seen as either a reductive assimilation of external structures, or as a useful concept to explain the human reasons why actors are complicit in their subordination. It also
criticised Bourdieu's lack of attention to working-class agency and to the value of
the non-dominant cultural forms. Finally the section looked for forces of social
change and found Bourdieu's prioritisation of structural change. This invited calls for
a greater acknowledgement of the forces of change residing within individuals.

The chapter then examined the three important theorisations on the nature of
contemporary identities. It showed the postmodern claim that identities were
unanchored and the potential freedoms this offered to individuals. The challenge was
made that identities are not as easy to discard or construct for some. There was an
acknowledgement of the critical postmodern commentary that there were sectors of
society whose lack of resources excluded them from such projects. Critiques came
from those who suggested that social actors cannot cope with such flux and that
contemporary forms of collective identity are being formed. The postmodern
traveller was criticised as a gendered construct, which may make it more applicable
to this research with men. Reflexively constructed identities were also critiqued as
masculine narratives and also as overstating the extent of individuals' detachment
from former sources of collective identities.

Theorisations of masculinity showed how the notion of a damaged male psyche were
used to explain contemporary male behaviours. It identified tensions between
understanding men both as victims and as oppressors, and also tensions between the
sociological and psychological forces used to understand their behaviour. It
introduced Connell's influential framework, highlighting the benefits of a relational
and fluid conception of masculinities in contemporary society, but also presented
problems with its lack of political economy and empirical utility.

The final section of the review presented the findings from other qualitative research
with variety of student populations. It showed the complex ways in which dynamics
of class, ethnicity, age and gender mediated the relationships to higher education. It
showed the particular risks attached to working-class students' HE participation, not
only in practical terms, but also within the realm of the psychic. It highlighted how
some students sense of cultural dislocation and also men's particular cultural
dislocation in terms of working-class masculine configurations of identity.

As this chapter has demonstrated, the PhD research sits within a vibrant and highly
contested academic area. From within that arena, it will address the following
research questions:

1. How have the dynamics of class and gender impacted on the educational
   journeys of mature male students, and what other structural and cultural forces
   were significant?

2. How useful is Bourdieu's framework, and his concepts of capitals and habitus, in
   explaining the men's experiences?

3. What kinds of identities are evident in the men's transitions to student and other
   key biographical moments, and how can these be understood?
3.1 Introduction

The aim of this research was to gain an understanding the lives of mature, male, first-generation students, and to consider the societal dynamics that may have influenced their journeys to ancient universities. It was a qualitative study, which selected men from two of Scotland's four ancient universities and asked them to talk about their personal and familial biographies during individual loosely structured interviews. Interviews were audio taped, transcribed in full and scrutinised according to the principles of grounded theory. A critical realist theoretical approach was adopted. This chapter explains why I chose to conduct the research in this way, and provides a reflective account of how it was conducted.

The chapter begins by explaining the philosophical and personal positions that have influenced the nature of the enquiry. This is followed by an explication of the research design, showing why and how the particular institutions, participants and methods were chosen. The remainder of the chapter gives a detailed account of how data were produced and analysed. It includes my reflections both on the process, and on how my practice has impacted on the findings that are presented in chapters 4 and 5. The chapter ends by presenting a few details of the participants.

3.2 The nature of the enquiry

Whilst the research was interested in what had happened in the men's lives that had led them to become students at a later stage in their lives, it was also interested in how they felt about the events and circumstances that they encountered on those journeys. I wanted to know why they had made the decisions they had, what hopes, fears and expectations had informed them. The literature review earlier revealed calls for a greater understanding of the emotional/psycho-social dimensions of social divisions (e.g. Walkerdine 2003, Frosh et al. 2003). It also illustrated the importance
of this domain in Bourdieu’s framework, which connects the internal dispositions of social actors to external forces via the concept of habitus. This research therefore placed great importance on discovering the subjective dimensions of the men’s lives. A qualitative approach was adopted, given its superiority in accessing this kind of data (e.g. Hakim 2000, Silverman 2001, Denzin & Lincoln 2003).

Beneath the research is a constructivist epistemology, a belief that knowledge of the world resides in the meanings social actors give to it (see Blaikie 1995, Crotty 1998, Stanley & Wise 1993). Therefore the task of research is to try to understand how people make sense of the world. Qualitative interviews have become the ‘gold standard’ method employed in the quest to capture actors’ understandings of the phenomena being researched (Mason 2003) and were the method employed in this research. From a constructionist perspective, interviews are not sites where actors understandings are to be unearthed by the researcher. Instead, interviews are seen as interactions where such understandings have been produced by both parties, the participant and the researcher (e.g. Oakley 1981, Mason 2003, Walkerdine, Lucey & Melody 2002). Thus,

Respondents’ answers and comments are not viewed as reality reports delivered from a fixed repository. Instead they are considered for the ways that they construct aspects of reality in collaboration with the interviewer. [In qualitative research] the focus is as much on the assembly process as on what is assembled.

Holstein & Gubrium (1998:127)

The assembly is historically, culturally and psychologically mediated (Lawler 2002, Walkerdine et al. 2002). Therefore, this chapter presents details of the interview processes, including my reflections on the interview dynamics that may have influenced what was told to me. It also documents, not only the procedures, but also the tensions, struggles and contradictions I encountered during the analytical process. Making these things visible is designed to allow others to judge the reliability and/or validity of the findings I claim from this research (see Mason 1996, Olesen 2003, Schwandt 2003, Silverman 2001).
This research is informed by a critical realist understanding of the nature of reality which enables the version of events produced in interviews to stand as the men’s truth\(^1\), whilst recognising there are other dimensions of reality (and therefore other ways of understanding theirs). Critical realism claims that three levels of reality can be (theoretically) distinguished, the empirical (the things we measure/experience), the actual (which exists whether we experience them or not) and the real (that which produces events – mechanisms) (Danermark et al. 2002:20-1, Porter 2002 and 1993, Sayer 2000). Looking at reality from a critical realist position enables these levels of reality to exist simultaneously. This means the integrity of the empirical reality of the research participant is maintained alongside the other ‘real’ domain of mechanisms and forces that the researcher is looking for.

This realist ontology sits quite comfortably with a constructivist epistemology, primarily because of its interest in the situated understandings of the social actors (Crotty 1998, Lincoln & Guba 1998, Porter 2002, Schwandt 2003). It is particularly appropriate for research that investigates the dynamics of social class because, as the research on social class cited in the previous chapter illustrated, social actors may make sense of their world unaware of the wider social forces that have impacted on their lives and their understanding of them. For example, Charlesworth (2000), Sayer (2005), Scott (2000) and Skeggs (1997) all describe how actors’ denial of class can in fact be an instantiation of it. Thus a critical realist lense allows the researcher to analyse why actors may claim or deny the relevance of class (and/or other social forces) in their lives, by contemplating the wider social structures in which their perceptions have been formed. It also permits the researcher to suggest the structural influences on actors’ life-courses that they may not perceive when they present their life stories.

From different perspectives, Ramazanoglu & Holland (2003), Stanley (1993) and Rojeck & Turner (2000) perceive problems within this endeavour. Speaking from a feminist research paradigm, Ramazonoglu & Holland (2003:161) endorse Liz Stanley’s (1984) concerns that if participant and researcher interpret the participant’s

\(^1\) Produced with and through me in the interview and on these pages of course.
life differently, then the researcher may effectively be discrediting women's consciousness. Rojeck & Turner (2000) accuse Skeggs (1997) of doing this to the working-class female students who participated in her research. In his opinion, Skeggs (1997) is guilty of over-riding her research participants' understanding of their experience and privileging her own interpretation. He suggest this is a trait associated with those whom he terms 'organic intellectuals', academics who have risen from working-class communities and by virtue of that experience claim to know better than those who remain there. I disagree with Rojeck & Turner's (2000) condemnation, as Skeggs explicitly reflects on this dilemma in her text (Skeggs 1997: 28-31).

In fact, Skeggs’ work (1997) exemplifies the quest for research integrity that I believe is embodied in a feminist methodology. Whilst acknowledging there are diverse models of feminist research (e.g. standpoint, empiricist, post-modern), common to them all include matters of researcher reflexivity, a sensitivity to power/gender relations in society and in the conduct of research, a respect for participants' own understandings and a sensitivity to the researcher's moral responsibilities etc (e.g. Fine et al. 2000, Lawler 2002, Stanley & Wise 1993, Oleson 2003, Ramazonoglu & Holland 2003). Because I am a feminist and because I am exploring the impact of gender on social actors' lives I am inclined to regard my research as a feminist endeavour. Yet because it is not concerned with the politics of women's experience, my claim may be disputed (Stanley & Wise 1993, Olesen 2003). Yet, would it not be possible to claim that an analysis which attempts to understand how masculinities are constructed is helpful not only to men, but to women because we share the world with them?

Haywood and Mac an Ghaill (1998) and Layland (1993) suggest that the exclusion of men from (sections of) the feminist research gaze has led to men being constituted as one-dimensional oppressors. The research presented in section 2.3 earlier concurs with their views that men should be seen to occupy complex and contradictory positions of privilege, pain and disempowerment. As Layland points out,
The latent effect of seeing feminist research as exclusively about women's lives is that it allows things male to go un-investigated, almost as though the idea of male-as-norm were not being questioned any more. However, we must demystify power and its components, one of which is the production of 'masculinity' and masculine' behaviour. Having the opportunity of seeing the social interaction of gay men has allowed me to see the possible variations in the construction of these phenomena.

Layland (1993:129)

Layland (1993) revealed how her feminist consciousness initially led to her having doubts about undertaking research with men. However, she reasoned that as she was studying gay men, they shared the experience of 'hegemonic' (c.f. Connell 1996) male oppression, and thus were more deserving of a feminist's time. Layland's (1993) motivation to understand gay men was linked to her biography, just as mine is. For that author, it was trying to understand more about homosexuality in light of her son's sexual orientation. For me, it is the operation of class in my own life that grounds my interest.

I acknowledge that the knowledge of how class/gender/education interacted in the lives of mature male first generation students that is presented in this thesis is mine, and that my classed and gendered subjectivity is inevitably entwined with its production. Feminism means being reflexive about it. But also,

A feminist methodology of social science ... requires ... that the mythology of 'hygenic' research with its accompanying mystification of the researcher and the researched as objective instruments of data production be replaced by the recognition that personal involvement is more than dangerous bias – it is the condition under which people come to know each other and to admit others into their lives.

Oakley (1981:58)

Oakley's quote is interesting in that it does acknowledge that personal involvement is, at some level, dangerous bias. This stands in contrast to Olesen (2003) who suggests that bias is a misplaced term in qualitative research. I am more aligned to Oakley's perspective, acknowledging that bias can be present and that it can be
dangerous, but that it has other possibilities as a resource also. I expected it to be a resource in that it may help me to make connections with the men in the interviews, and that it might also make me more aware of subtleties in their responses that others may miss. (Of course, I also acknowledge that my ‘familiarity’ may also lead to me missing other avenues that researchers at a greater distance from the subjectivities of ‘working-class’ may perceive.) Therefore, in this research I have needed to be sensitive to bias because of my own sensitivities regarding the injuries that I believe being working-class entails. Some of that was documented in the first chapter, in that my motivations for studying social class were revealed. However, how class makes me feel was not.

Many of those who write about class highlight the pain, insecurity and sense of pathologisation that goes with it (e.g., Charlesworth 2000, Sennett & Cobb 1972, Skeggs 1997). In my own remembrances these things are to the fore. It is much harder to see the pleasurable aspects from my current platform. I found Annette Kuhn’s work years ago, but her quote is always on my office wall.

> Class is not just about the way you talk, or dress or furnish your home; it is not just about the job you do or how much money you make doing it; nor is it merely about whether you have A levels or went to university, nor which university you went to. Class is something beneath your clothes, under your skin, in your reflexes, in your psyche, at the very core of your being. In the all-encompassing English class system, if you know you are in the ‘wrong’ class, you know that therefore you are a valueless person.  
> Kuhn (1995:98)

It is an essential part of the methodological process that my reader is aware of how deeply I feel about class. Providing aspects of my biography is not enough, but really interrogating my interpretations, for psychosocial analysis, was required (Walkerdine et al 2002). As Loftland & Loftland (1995) and Acker (1981) identify, biography and interest are the foundation of much research.

...the norms of scholarship do not require that researchers bare their souls, only their procedures.  

> Loftland & Loftland (1995:13)
Having bared my soul, I will now lay bare my procedures.

3.3 Research design

■ Location

Scotland was chosen as it offers an important test-bed for widening participation. Chapter 1 mentioned its legacy of trying to promote greater educational opportunity, the provision of FE routes into HE and a differentiated HE sector as potentially presenting fewer barriers to widening participation than in other parts of the UK. So if widening participation beyond the post-92 institutions is to occur anywhere, then it ought to occur in Scotland. Selecting from the ancient university sector was designed to throw issues of exclusion/inclusion into sharp relief. To begin with, it was more likely to find students feeling ‘out of place’ than (perhaps) a study based in newer institutions might have done. But more importantly, studying working-class students in ‘elite’ spaces allowed the possibility of testing assumptions regarding classed forms of knowledge, that as chapter 2 has suggested, belies the work of Bourdieu and also some of the qualitative research in this area.

The decision to collect data from two institutions was primarily taken in order to broaden the demographic range of potential participants in the research. Two universities also offered the opportunity to undertake a provisional analysis of institutional cultures, although this was not the main objective. Of the four ancient universities in Scotland, two have greater numbers of ‘non-traditional’ students and the other two have poorer representations from non-traditional student groups. As table 3.1 below shows Glasgow University and Aberdeen University have greater proportions of students from state school, from lower socio-economic groups and from low participation neighbourhoods in their walls than either Edinburgh or St Andrews universities.
Table 3.1 Participation of under-represented groups in higher education: Young full-time first degree entrants 2004/05.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>University</th>
<th>Total entrants</th>
<th>Entrants who are young</th>
<th>From state schools/college</th>
<th>From NS-SEC classes 4,5,6,7</th>
<th>From low part neighbourhods</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>n</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>% (%</td>
<td>% (%</td>
<td>% (%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aberdeen</td>
<td>2 100</td>
<td>86.0</td>
<td>83.9 (83.5)</td>
<td>25.8 (26.1)</td>
<td>15.3 (13.1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Edinburgh</td>
<td>3 840</td>
<td>88.4</td>
<td>66.7 (78.4)</td>
<td>17.1 (20.8)</td>
<td>8.2 (10.1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Glasgow</td>
<td>3 695</td>
<td>88.7</td>
<td>86.6 (81.2)</td>
<td>22.7 (23.2)</td>
<td>16.7 (11.3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St Andrews</td>
<td>1 235</td>
<td>96.0</td>
<td>64.7 (76.0)</td>
<td>13.1 (19.0)</td>
<td>6.1 (9.1)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(%): institutional benchmarks, set by Funding Councils.
Source: from HEFC performance indicators in higher education, table T1a.

The picture with mature students is less clear as table 3.2 below illustrates,

Table 3.2 Participation of under-represented groups in higher education: Mature full-time undergraduate entrants 2004/05

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>University</th>
<th>Number mature entrants</th>
<th>No previous HE &amp; low part. neighbourhood</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>n</td>
<td>% (%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aberdeen</td>
<td>295</td>
<td>15.4 (13.7)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Edinburgh</td>
<td>445</td>
<td>11.0 (12.4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Glasgow</td>
<td>420</td>
<td>14.3 (13.6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St Andrews</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>16.7 (13.3)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: from HEFC performance indicators in higher education, table T2a

This data were not of much use anyway, in light of the fact there is no gender breakdown for mature students, mature students are seen as those over twenty one years old. Further, the measure of low participation neighbourhood/no previous HE is not really useful for this study. In taking a life history perspective (c.f. Goodson & Sikes 2001), I am interested in men whose origins might have been in the 'low participation neighbourhoods', but who may well have moved during the course of their lives.
In deciding which combinations of the four universities to choose from, another important consideration was that each university had to be in cities where other universities existed. Researching in such cities would allow dimensions of institutional choice to be examined. Thus if it was not geographical distance that informed choice of institution, then other factors, in particular, cultural distances, could be examined more clearly and this would be an ideal environment in which to test Bourdieu’s propositions. Edinburgh and Glasgow universities lie at either end of the widening participation spectrum in the ancient sector, and the fact that they each contain the variety of HE institutions, as table 3.3 shows, necessary for this research made this a useful combination.

Table 3.3 The universities in Edinburgh and Glasgow, at 2002

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>City of Edinburgh</th>
<th>University Type</th>
<th>City of Glasgow</th>
<th>University Type</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The University of Edinburgh</td>
<td>Ancient</td>
<td>Glasgow University</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Heriot-Watt University</td>
<td>1960s</td>
<td>The University of Strathclyde</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Napier University</td>
<td>1990s</td>
<td>Glasgow Caledonian University</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It is important to recall, as Chapter 1 pointed out, that all of these institutions have long and reputable educational histories before being granted ‘university’ titles. Nonetheless, the pre-1990s universities can be distinguished by their strong research profile and teaching bias towards traditional academic disciplines and high status professions, whereas the 1990s institutions have a greater vocational orientation and their research is more applied (Caldwell 2004). Edinburgh and Glasgow universities are further distinguished as both are members of the self-selecting Russell group of universities\(^2\). Their dominance is also illustrated by the fact that in 2002/3 these two institutions together accounted for almost half of the Scottish Funding Council’s research grant (Caldwell 2004).

\(^2\) The Russell Group was established in 1994 when 19 of the largest research-led UK universities formed an association to lobby government and support their common cause. (www.russellgroup.ac.uk)
Edinburgh and Glasgow are also Scotland's largest cities and their historical differences and population demographics provided further impetus for selecting them. Crudely, Glasgow has a rich industrial heritage that produced a professional industrial bourgeoisie whereas Edinburgh's importance lay in government and civil organisations, producing an administrative bourgeoisie (Devine 2006). The recent construction of indices of deprivation, at both local authority and ward level, are also helpful in presenting pictures of these cities. It is important to mention that on all dimensions of deprivation they show Edinburgh and Glasgow containing wards at both ends of the deprivation spectrum. However, Glasgow has more wards that are among the most deprived in the country. Of the 100 most multiply-deprived wards in Scotland, 41 are in Glasgow, and 3 are in Edinburgh (Social Disadvantage Research Centre 2003). Figure 3.1 below presents a useful snapshot of both cities’ relative position in terms of patterns of deprivation by local authority in Scotland.

Figure 3.1 The Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation; Range of Ranks by Local Authority

source: Social Disadvantage Research Centre 2003
(www.scotland.gov.uk/library5/social/siod-07.asp)
Other indicators of broad differences between the two cities include: Edinburgh has greater proportions of home-ownership among its population (80% own or have mortgaged homes, compared to 48% in Glasgow); Edinburgh has more managerial/professional inhabitants than Glasgow (1 third, versus 1 fifth in Glasgow); it has fewer Scottish-born residents (78% compared to 89% in Glasgow), and fewer residents classed as long-term unemployed (3.2% compared to 8.4% in Glasgow). Table 3.4 below illustrates that Edinburgh has a higher proportion of people with education qualifications in its workforce than Glasgow, and Glasgow has a higher proportion of people without any qualifications compared to Edinburgh.

Table 3.4 Qualifications held by local authority group, 2003, percentages
Adult population 16-64 years

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>No quals.</th>
<th>'O' grade or equivalent</th>
<th>Highers or equivalent</th>
<th>First or higher degree</th>
<th>Professional quals.</th>
<th>Base</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Edinburgh</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>810</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Glasgow</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>1 046</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scotland</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>10 038</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Scottish Executive (2003)

The final data to be presented in this chapter relates to patterns of university participation in the two cities. The next two pages present maps of participation by census ward in Edinburgh and Glasgow.

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3 see table 1a, appendix 1.
4 see table 1b, appendix 1
5 see table 1c, appendix 1
6 see table 1b, appendix 1
Figure 3.2 Young participation by census wards (1991): City of Edinburgh

Source: www.hefce.ac.uk/polar
Copyright © higher Education Funding Council for England
Shows proportion of children from each area who left school between 1995-1997 and entered UK FT degree/HND/HNC within 4 years
Figure 3.3 Young participation by census wards (1991), City of Glasgow

Source: [www.hefce.ac.uk/polar](http://www.hefce.ac.uk/polar)

Copyright © higher Education Funding Council for England

Shows proportion of children from each area who left school between 1995-1997 and entered UK FT degree/HND/HNC within 4 years.
These two maps suggest that there are inter city differences in HE participation by young people in the two locations selected for this research. The map of Edinburgh (figure 3.2) is dominated by large areas where over 43% of the school-leavers resident therein, embarked on some form of higher education within 4 years of leaving school. It shows pockets of low participation below 24%, and these are concentrated at the city centre and also out to the east of the city. The pattern for Glasgow (figure 3.3) is a much broader distribution of low participation wards (i.e. below 24%) throughout the city. There are 3 discernible concentrated areas of higher participation, but also more wards in the middle range of participation (24% - 32%).

However, the maps should be used with caution. It is worth noting that the size of the wards in each city may inadvertently present a skewed vision of the nature of participation. Edinburgh (figure 3.2) has a number of geographically very large wards, which contain the highest rates of young participation, which gives an impression of wider participation throughout the city as a whole. Conversely, Glasgow (figure 3.3) contains very many smaller wards, which may be a factor in why the pattern in that city appears to be more complex than in Edinburgh.

With that caveat, it is still apparent that patterns of participation differ between the two cities so that Edinburgh might be seen to add greater young participation to the list of greater levels of HE, and greater levels of affluence and greater proportion of professional classes, to its distinctions from Glasgow. Yet Glasgow’s ancient institution attracts more ‘non-traditional’ students than Edinburgh’s. It is this phenomenon (simplified here of course) that makes an interesting site for the PhD undertaking in terms of an examination of the complexity of cultural differences and their relationships to higher education.

- Recruitment strategy -

Neither institutional data nor that collected by the HEFC or UCAS provided useful indicators of the size of the research population. HEFC record anyone over the age of 21 as a mature student and UCAS have 4 age categories, which means that students over the age of 27 cannot be identified in either system. HEFC data quantify the
numbers of mature students who live in low participation neighbourhoods and have no previous HE qualification. They do not identify the gender of the students (although I could apply the established gender ratios to approximate). But as I am looking at mature men, their current home locations now may bear little correlation to their social class origins, which is the dimension I was most interested in. In light of all this I decided on a blanket approach to recruitment, and adopted a number of strategies to advertise my research around the campuses as widely as I possibly could.

With the invaluable assistance of the universities' Lifelong Learning departments, I negotiated and conducted mailshots at both institutions. I posted flyers at strategic points around the campuses (e.g., in the canteens, library and departmental notice boards, on the walls outside men's toilets) every few months over the data collection periods. I approached department heads, student representatives and widening participation personnel, sending flyers and posters and asking that they disseminate my research appeal across as wide a student constituency as possible. I also had tea with the principal at one institution, which endowed me with his permission to use his endorsement of my research to try and open more doors. However, I decided that using his endorsement may have been perceived as an intimidating gesture by those I approached for help. So I decided not to use it.

From the variety of men who volunteered for my research, and the ways they became aware of it, I know that quite a few of those I approached for help gave their time for me, and I would like to express my gratitude. However I have no guarantee that all strategies were replicated in the same way at both institutions as much of the time I was relying on others to advertise my request to the student body, with little idea of who did or did not do so. I had asked that people would inform me of what, if anything, they were able to do. Some people did but many did not. Nonetheless, these were factors beyond my control. For my part, as the following section illustrates, there was a sustained attempt to advertise and recruit throughout the university population.
There was an exception however. I decided not to specifically advertise in the engineering faculties (although I reserved the option to reverse this decision if insufficient numbers of volunteers came forward). I made this decision because I was more interested in finding men students who had not followed trajectories expected of their class and gender. I reasoned that the engineering professions were more aligned to traditional masculine trades and so probably presented less of a challenge to traditional classed and gendered educational trajectories. I was more interested to find men of working-class origins who were in less technical areas, such as the social sciences and similarly ‘feminised’ educational arenas. However, as many access courses are only in these disciplines I need to acknowledge that perhaps these subjects were less freely chosen and more all that was on offer.

I assumed that engineering may be considered a more available route to the professions for working-class boys than say, law or medicine, and so I decided to make a particular effort to try to recruit men from these latter disciplines instead. I searched for their dedicated libraries, and placed more flyers on notice boards within these buildings. I reasoned that the professions of law and medicine are associated with higher forms of cultural capital and that to find men of working-class origins in these departments would further stretch the capacity to theorise about social class and capital conversions.

Recruitment began at Edinburgh University. In October 03 I began pinning flyers on noticeboards in university libraries, canteens and student notice boards in various buildings around the campus. [A copy of the flyer is presented as appendix 2.] I also negotiated the administration of a mailshot on my behalf by the 'lifelong learning' department. The timing of the mailshot was crucial, having to avoid exam times when students would have their minds on more pressing matters, and also avoiding the ends of terms when students would have been less likely to embark on something that may have eaten into their holiday periods. Fortunately, agreement was reached by November 2003, and later that month 631 appeals letters were sent to men who
had taken courses with the Lifelong Learning department between 1999 and 2002. The years reflect the extent of the Edinburgh University records.

The database from which the appeal letters were sent contained the names of 1512 men originally, with no way of knowing what courses they had done, what age they were, or what qualifications they had previously possessed. I selected a random sample of 600 (40%) from the database, by selecting all the names contained on the first one and a half pages, then ignoring the next one and a half pages, then selecting all those on the next one and a half pages etc. until I reached the end of the address list. In addition an extra page of addresses was included which contained those men whose surnames had a ‘Mc’ or ‘Mac’ prefix, the logic being that such men were slightly more likely to be of working-class Scottish origins. There was another address list from Edinburgh University’s Lifelong Learning department which contained 78 men who had been part-time access course students over the same 4 year period. This was two pages long and each page contained two columns of addresses. Letters were sent to those addresses in the first column of the first page, and to those in the second column on the second page. Again, this was another random strategy, which saw letters sent to 31 more men. [A copy of the letter is presented as appendix 3].

Letters were sent to students from Edinburgh University in the first instance in order to gain some idea of the response rate of this strategy in order to see if it was worth employing the same idea at Glasgow University. To begin with, I concluded that it was not as the mailshot of 631 men produced just 36 enquiries. I was surprised to receive a few letters of support from men who did not fit my criteria. I was also surprised to receive a few enquiries asking how I got their addresses, as this was something I had not thought about. I had assumed it was sufficient that my letter was on Edinburgh University headed paper. I realise my error.

The mailshot also produced a phone call from a spouse informing me that her husband had died. This event made me realise the harm that such a seemingly innocuous strategy could inflict. I expressed my sympathy and apologised as best I
could to the man’s widow, given the shock of the phone call. I would have liked to have composed a more sensitive apology and to have sent a card or flowers after our conversation. But with no access to addresses, I had to try to content myself that my verbal apology was accepted as genuinely intended. This was of little comfort to me.

I began discussions with Glasgow University’s Lifelong Learning department in October 2003 and was much happier with the fact that their database was more sophisticated than that at Edinburgh. Glasgow’s could be filtered by age and by course, which meant I wouldn’t waste as much time or resources as I did for the Edinburgh university endeavour. I checked with the administrators regarding the monitoring of bereavements among their former students, but was informed this was an unavoidable risk. In January 2004, I sent out 104 letters, which was all the male former access course students who were born after 1979. In addition, and because of the error I realised I had made on the Edinburgh University mailshot, the Glasgow University letter also included a compliment slip from its Lifelong Learning department, informing the recipients of who I was and of the way in which their confidentiality had been protected by the university.

The mailshot letters set out the criteria for inclusion in the study and gave my email address, university address and university office telephone number and asked for interested participants to get in touch. In an ideal environment it would have been better to provide pre-paid contact material, so that prospective volunteers had only to tick the relevant boxes on a stamped, addressed postcard. However cost restrictions meant I had to pass more of an onus on the recipients than I would have liked.

In between both mailshot periods, and within the middle of term times, I maintained a strategy of putting up flyers on university notice-boards (as they are only displayed for a few weeks and then removed). This method resulted in 12 more volunteers. Towards the end of my data collection period (April 2004) I approached the 'Equality and Diversity Officers' named on each university’s website, 11 in all, asking that they may also advertise my research. I sent the flyer as an email attachment.

7 The men had to be over 27 when on their undergraduate degree, they could have been 2 years younger than this when on their access course.
Theoretically at least, this could have resulted in a final university-wide appeal for mature male students. I asked the officers to inform me if they had been able to display my flyer, but only a few responded.

One 'officer' contacted me to highlight the ethical concerns that they had in being seen to endorse my research, given their position of power relative to their students. I had assumed that their roles in the universities' 'widening participation' initiatives may have made them more willing to assist me. I had also assumed that being in research-intensive universities may have inclined them to advertise my research. The ethical caution of that officer could be contrasted with the actions of two other officers. I learnt from 2 volunteers that staff members had approached them directly. The staff did not ask them to take part, but physically gave them the flyer and told them that the research was taking place. I, of course, was not entirely happy with this and checked in the interview that they were not there because they felt in any way obliged to take part. Fortunately for me, that was not the case.

At Glasgow University there was another useful route into the institution that was not available at Edinburgh University. There were links from the main university webpage to the Mature Student's Association (MSA). (There used to be a 'postgrad and mature students society' at Edinburgh University, which also had its own space (PAMS House) but this was closed in 2001.) Glasgow's MSA has its own dedicated flat, with a fully equipped kitchen, 2 study rooms with desks, shelves and books, a 'chill out' room with sofas and soft lighting, and a computer lab. I was invited there by a club official after making email contact, introduced to everyone and subsequently offered a room there in which to conduct my interviews.

Some of the men who had responded to the Glasgow University mailshot used this facility. Those who used it allowed me to advertise my research on their noticeboard and I know from a couple of interviews that they also advertised by word of mouth for me. Although this proved an invaluable resource, it may also mean that I have a

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8 I was surprised to find no facilities for children in the flat, no toys etc. Over the course of many visits it was evidently used mostly by men.
less random sample of men in the Glasgow University sample. It may also have affected the data another way in that the men who frequented the association house were friendly with one another and frequently mentioned in their interviews they had discussed my research with one another.

Altogether these strands of the recruitment strategy found 37 volunteers. After each man had expressed a willingness to take part, they were contacted either by phone or email, thanked for their offer to participate, and asked to provide a few details about themselves. Specifically, I asked if they could tell me their parents, siblings, and own occupations, the kinds of surroundings they grew up in, and a little about their school educational history. I logged what course and year they were then on, and also the route by which they entered that course. It occasionally took a further probe to clarify these things. Selection for interview was based on this data.

Selection strategy

I used a theoretical sampling strategy, that is, participants were selected in terms of their ‘usefulness’ in exploring my theoretical positions. Generally speaking, I was looking for men who were from working-class origins, who were mature students and the first in their family to embark on HE. The benefit of theoretical sampling is that there is some degree of flexibility in these criteria, in light of what emerges as appropriate for the theoretical analysis (Silverman 2001). Thus ‘deviant’ cases could be included to test an emerging theme, or the sample size could be amended in light of what had already been gleaned (ibid). I began with an idea that 8-10 cases from each institution would be an appropriate (and manageable) sample; however that was always intended as a guide only.

During the first stages of the Edinburgh University call for volunteers, there were more responses from male students in the Community Education and Social Science courses. Later, participation from some of these students was declined in favour of men who replied from medicine or law. Where responses were concentrated in
certain subjects, selection for interview was influenced by the year of study in order to increase the spread of experience.

Theoretical sampling did lead to the boundaries of the selection criteria being breached in some cases. The letters and flyers stated that men had to be 27 years old or more, and first generation university entrants. Yet in the findings chapters the reader will notice the quite dominant presence of William, a medical student whose father (and many relatives on his paternal side of the family) are doctors. William was included by his claim to be working class, because his mother (the daughter of coal miner and maid) raised him in the absence of his father, the financial hardship he endured and the injustice he feels in relation to middle-class students. Howard was also included, even though he believed himself to be unsuitable. He suggested his ‘firmly middle-class family’ background meant he was too close to the ‘traditional’ student boundary. Yet neither parents nor grandparents had university education. Further, the whole family made their living from their family boat building business. Thus Howard also presented an interesting case of boundary making. Both of these men were invited for interview on the feeling that they would provide insight into the operation of capitals. As Staeheli & Mitchell (2004) say,

If ... boundaries are associated with exclusion and control, then it seems reasonable to look at the boundaries.

Staeheli & Mitchell (2004:156)

But there were other men at the boundaries that I chose not to invite for interview. Four men had parents who did not go to university after school, but who went into professions that had non-graduate entry at that time. Of these parents, two mothers were architects and had attended art colleges. Their husbands were both teachers, one of whom became an FE lecturer. One man had a mother who was a nurse and a father who was a lecturer at a prestigious university. The fourth man had an

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9 It is worth noting that the NS EC guidelines which suggest how the categories can be condensed, users are instructed that the one into which Howard fits, namely, intermediate, could be ignored (ONS 2002).
established familial history of university education (grandparents, aunts/uncles, nephews/nieces), but his father had deliberately decided not to attend. This man was rejected more easily as representing an anomaly in a middle-class family history. The other three men were less easy to discard\textsuperscript{10}. Nonetheless, I eventually decided that with two parents each in professional occupations and at least one within each parental pair now possessing degrees (gained as mature students), such men would introduce even more complexity into an already complex arena.

I decided to include a few interesting participants who were not as ‘mature’ as I expected the 27 years+ criteria to produce. This was because I had not thought about postgraduate students when I set the age 27 criteria. Being 27 and a postgraduate student meant that three volunteers had actually followed quite a ‘traditional student’ trajectory, moving from school to university. However, all three were indeed first generation university entrants, with parental histories in working-class occupations. Finding these men extended the scope beyond what I originally envisaged. I consider it a quite a fortunate accident.

Only a few (7) initial volunteers did not maintain contact. After two emails I thanked them for their initial enquiry, saying I understood the pressures of student life, and wished them well in their studies. One man was omitted from the study after I had interviewed him. It emerged in the interview that during our pre-selection telephone conversation, he had lied about being a student. (Or at least, he had disguised the fact that he had completed a qualification the previous year, and that it was not at the designated institution either.) My early intuition left me feeling uneasy in his presence when we met before the allocated interview time. He seemed very keen to be interviewed, and as we strolled from the street to the building where the interview was to take place, he was beginning to talk over me during our ‘chit-chat’. I hoped that he might relax during our interview and that, perhaps, his behaviour was due to being nervous, or even that my perception of him was gendered. For example, perhaps if he had been female and acting in this way, I may have perceived him as

\textsuperscript{10} I use that word deliberately. I did feel like I was throwing them away, despite being very sensitive in my letter informing them that I couldn’t interview them.
confident and enthusiastic, whereas because he was a man, I may have been more inclined (unfairly) to see him as threatening and domineering.

I do not want to dwell on the interview, other than to say I should have trusted my intuition. The man appeared to me to revel in having an audience for his views about class and gender inequality in education. As it progressed those views became less guarded and increasingly distasteful. My attempts to structure the interaction, which initially included humour, and then a later adoption of a more assertive and professional persona, failed. Even writing about the interview is making me feel uncomfortable. I ended it by saying we had no more time, and once he left I went to talk to a friend about it and calm myself down. Schwalbe & Wolkomir (2001) and McKee & O’Brien (1983) warn of uncomfortable and possibly dangerous moments that may arise when women interview men. I have to agree and, with hindsight, realise that I should have checked the location out more thoroughly. Colleagues in the building knew that I was conducting an interview in that room, and I had thought that it was a safe location, being on a main corridor on the ground floor. But as the interview progressed I began to note the lack of traffic in the corridor. I also noticed that the man was sitting between the door and me. I am not suggesting this was intentional on his part. But I am suggesting it was a mistake on my part. I also noticed that the telephone in the room was beyond my immediate reach. All of these things are security lessons I have learned. And I also had an alarm for future interviews.

Thankfully I have never had to use it. And I also feel obliged to emphasise that this was an exceptional experience. As uncomfortable as it was, it should not overshadow the sensitive, reflective and caring dimensions of masculinity that were much more common in my research interviews.

There was an element of my recruitment strategy which brought another ethical issue. The more I visited the MSA house at Glasgow University the more I became aware of how close some of those relationships were. At a later point this brought issues of anonymity and my responsibilities to the fore. As I explain later, I have
always explained the limits of anonymity to my respondents, and have felt fairly satisfied that I was being as honest as I could. But towards the end of my data collection phase, I was writing a conference paper based on a few interviews that had taken place at the beginning of the period. As I had always informed the men of the way I would use their data, I always used to ask if they ever wanted to see the things that I produced. I thought this would also show me to be trustworthy and honest, as well as providing an example of how academic work gets made. But knowing that the men could read what I produced certainly adds a sense of responsibility and heightens one’s commitment to show respect to those who have helped us.

However, by the time the paper was almost complete, I had spent more time at the MSA house and realised how much contact the men had with one another there. I suspected that they may have been able to identify one another from some of the details in the paper, and that they may have revealed things in the interview room that they would not want their friends to know. I had anticipated disguising names, courses and other personal details of course, but realised that some of the key life moments that I wanted to use might well identify a particular man to his peers. Fortunately, as exams approached and my interview stage drew to an end, we each became focussed on other things. I presented the conference paper, but did not submit a copy for public distribution as I had not resolved these issues by that time.

I am not sure that I have fully resolved this yet. But since that first paper, I have had time to reflect more fully. I have found ways of inserting similar events into the men’s histories in such a way that I believe I have gone a considerable way to negotiating key elements of their histories with a respect for their anonymity. Again, I have learnt from this. It highlights the risks of interrupting someone’s life, no matter how well intentioned, and then stepping out again. Perhaps, if I had spent longer ‘in the field’ I would have known in advance that the men were such close friends and would have been able to discuss more fully the implications of this in the interview. But that is not always possible. So in future, I would be more interested to ask about friendships and connections with other respondents in a similar situation.
3.4 The interviews

I used in-depth loosely structured interviews where I simply asked the men to tell me about their lives. I devised a 'conversational guide' (Burgess 1984) which, rather than ask questions, identified areas of the men's lives that I thought we ought to cover. [This is presented as appendix 4.] However, I always made the point of talking through the guide with the men and emphasising that they didn’t have to follow the topics in an orderly way, and that they were free to tell me about other aspects of their lives that they deemed important to them. I gave one guide to the respondent (we usually left it on the table between us) and I had one on which to write prompts or notes as the interview/conversation progressed.

I made every effort to try to make the men feel relaxed during their interview experience. This is not only to aid disclosure, but is a basic expression of humanity. I made us hot or soft drink and we engaged in 'small talk': 'how did you get here; what about this weather; how are your studies going' etc. After a while the pleasantries would draw to a close and I would begin explaining what the research was about. At this point I did not mention the term 'social class' unless the men had already used it in their pre-interview communications with me. I talked about first-generation students, or men from families where university isn't the norm. If the men began using the term in the interview, then so would I. However, one of the volunteers, Darren, knew me. I was his tutor on the university access course two years earlier. (He had responded to a flyer on a library noticeboard.) Therefore this man would have known my interest in social class before we began the interview. I talked to him about this, emphasising that he did not have to endorse my belief in class. I told him that in fact I was looking to test it, and that if that category was meaningless to him, then he should not use it just because he was speaking to me. It would be impossible to say his prior knowledge of me and my views did not colour what he said, in a way that would not have happened with the other men who took part.

During our interview preparation talk, I paid particular attention to the mechanisms for, and also to the limits of, anonymity and confidentiality. I explained the future
use and users of the information, making sure the men understood that my work would be presented in public and published at some point. I emphasised to them their right to withdraw consent at any time and I also offered each man access to my interpretations extracted from their interview at a later date if they so wished. I was surprised at the lack of enthusiasm for this. A few men said they might want to, but others stated that they trusted me and so there was no need. No one ever contacted me to ask for copies.

The time was also used to emphasise the non-linear, participant-led nature of the interview. I explained how they were considered experts in the arena of men's lives, that they would have ideas about what was important and that I would take my lead from this. Schwalbe & Wolkomir (2001) suggest that in line with gendered subjectivities, placing men as the expert knower is one way of getting them to talk in interviews. In my case, this was no deceit or strategy. Only the men knew how their lives had been lived.

All of this time described above was dedicated to fully explaining the implications of the men's participation in the research. This was not only for reasons of ethical responsibility, but to put them at their ease and to help them understand the intentions of the interview. It was anticipated that allocating interview time in this way would yield more, good quality, biographical data. I then asked if I could audio record the interview (all men agreed) and the interview proper began.

Most men asked where I wanted them to begin, and so I asked them to tell me something of their early family life, what their parents did, about their brothers and sisters and where they grew up. Things generally progressed fairly smoothly in the interviews, although some men showed signs of being nervous at first. One man began with a history lesson of the Irish potato famine in order to tell me about his family tree. I allowed this to continue (it went on for quite some time!) because I thought that he was exceptionally nervous and needed time to get round to telling me some things about himself. It worked. He had quite an emotional past to tell me about. Another chap began the interview with a condensed history of his life — almost

-95-
delivered in bullet points. I had to be more resourceful in this interview to get him to talk about his feelings rather than the events. Overall, I am quite pleased with most interviews. I believe nerves were settled, rapport was established and a degree of trust was developed on most occasions. I noticed that I took a much more passive role in my early interviews. The transcripts show very few interruptions from me. It is in the later interviews when I tend to probe the men's reflections in more detail. I suspect this has to do with my own confidence increasing by that point. More practically, it is also due to the fact that I had more of an idea what I might have wanted to find out about, given that I now had data to build on and themes to think about.

Miller & Glassner (1998) and Silverman (2001) reflect that the characteristics and social categories to which the interviewer and participant belong inevitably impact on what is produced in interviews. Invariably the way the men responded to me was affected by my subjectivity and theirs. Would they have said different things if the interviewer were a different sex, or age, or class, or occupation to me? Almost certainly. It would be too simplistic to assume that men are more used to talking to women. The findings of this research have shown lots of contradictory examples, where mothers and sometimes sisters were seen to be emotionally distant, and men told how they confided in brothers and male friends. Nonetheless, Grogan & Richards (2002) found that when men were interviewed by a female researcher, interviews lasted longer than when they were conducted by male researchers. However, I belong to all sorts of other social categories than just 'woman' and I had to decide how to manage these. For example, because I wanted the men to be responsive to me, I did not dress or act with 'professional' detachment. I wore jeans, walking boots and loose fitting jumper for the interviews, with no decorative jewellery, and just a little cosmetic make up\(^\text{11}\). I joked with them, if they seemed amenable to humour.

I also 'played' on my working-class Northern English accent a little, as a means of reducing the possible cultural distance the men may have perceived between myself

\(^{11}\) Whilst I didn't want to appear sexually attractive to the men, I didn't want to frighten them either! So I wore a little foundation and eye-liner, and tidied my hair.
and them. However I cannot be sure that every Scot would recognise the class implications of my accent. I have been told by my Scottish peers that the fact that it is an *English* accent means it may automatically be perceived as a *middle-class* accent by some Scottish people. Therefore, in the sample, Scottish men may have not picked up this indicator whereas the English men may have. However, it may not be that my accent is the only marker of my class background of course. In Bourdieu’s term, my bodily hexis may still bear the trace of my origins (e.g. 2001).

Schwalbe & Wilkommir (2001) propose that for men, interviews may be perceived as a threat and opportunity in the performance of masculinity. They suggest that it may be used as an opportunity for men to display their possession of masculine traits (powerful, in control, autonomous and rational), but also that it could be seen as a threat because it inevitably means giving up an element of control. McKee & O’Brien (1983) reported something of this. In their study of fatherhood they decided to interview fathers in their own homes (usually with wives and family members in the vicinity), suggesting that the domestic location may have impacted on the persona presented by the men. They propose that had they interviewed men whilst they were at work, in their public domain, the place where they maintain their power over women, they may have been more controlling and more likely to have tried to dominate the interview.

I have to say that I found few examples of men trying to take control of the proceedings. This could be because the men I interviewed were in academic spaces; indeed in academic ‘careers’ they may have been more predisposed to be reflective in the interview situation. Perhaps the fact that they were mature men who were in higher education meant that they were less of the ‘hegemonic masculine’ type (c.f. Connell 1996) to begin with. I could also posit that because they knew I was doing a PhD, I was (relatively) more powerful/knowledgeable than them in this particular sphere. All of these things, and more, are possible contemplations. However, I think the point to be made is that after conducting these interviews, with the exception of one unpleasant individual, I think Swalbe & Wolkomir (2001) and others (e.g.
Oakley (1981) present an overly simplistic representation of men as domineering and over-state the case for interviews to be seen as a place of gendered conflict.

Stanley (1993) is also critical of the simplicity of Oakley’s (1981) representation of interviews, because it overlooks how power struggles may exist in interviews between women, not just between women and men. I would like to suggest that one of Oakley’s key mechanisms for gaining trust, reciprocity, does not have to be seen as gender specific. Whilst I could not share gendered experiences with the men in my research, there were other dimensions of experience that we could share, such as parenting, separation, mature studenthood. Ultimately, like McKee & O'Brien after these interviews I also came to realise that there is so much more complexity to men’s subjectivities than Swalbe & Wolkomir (2001) present. I suggest, contra Swalbe & Wolkomir (2001) that interviews could also be seen by men as an opportunity for them to relax and stop performing ‘masculinity’. Indeed, it may also be seen as a situation were we try to assess men in a new light.

McKee & O’Brien (1983) and Pryke (2004) document their feelings when participants’ expressed disdainful worldviews in their interview. Whilst Pryke (2004) reasoned that he had some right to challenge those he interviewed, on account of the fact their denial of war crimes as crimes was an affront to humanity. McKee & O'Brien (1983) maintained that ‘interview etiquette’ should prevail and they decided not to challenge the sexist, racist or homophobic views they sometimes encountered. Whilst I had decided it was not my role to ‘enlighten’ any ‘uninformed’ men, there were times when appearing to be un-phased by what they said was a problem. However, I had reasoned that if I wanted men to talk I had to provide a sympathetic ear; they wouldn’t tell me things if they thought I was judging them.

A particular moment stands out when one man told me of not paying for his son from a previous relationship because in his present circumstances (as a student) he could no longer afford it. As this connected to something of my own biography, I tried not to give away that I was disappointed when he said this, particularly, because the man had until that point presented himself as a dedicated father completely immersed in
the babies he now had in a new relationship\textsuperscript{12}. But I am afraid that when he then told how taking out those maintenance payments was part of the financial calculations he did in order to decide if he ought to go to university, I cannot honestly say that I did not reveal something in my eyes. I felt that he looked at me longer after he'd told me this. (I may have imagined that he did.) If he did, then it may be because he had some sense of guilt now he had made the dynamics of that decision apparent to someone else. But he may have held my gaze because I gave some sense of disappointment away. I don't know if I could have helped myself in that case.

With my biography and my feminist understanding of the world, I also found that I had to stop myself from giving away any indication that I disagreed with some of the men's perspective on parts of their lives, where these related to the lives of women. For example, there were three occasions where men mentioned they had tried to persuade others of the benefits of re-engaging with education. These were not family members, but friends and work colleagues. When I asked about whether they had encouraged their wives and/or children to try something like this, and they said something along the lines of 'she's happy with her life', my instinct is to question his assumption. In all three of these cases, the women were the primary carers for the children (and one imagines, for her husband also), they also had paid employment, and they helped with the man's studies.

I wonder whether I am more aware of the implications of the things they say in relation to the women who appear in their stories. For example, when men are derogatory about some of the women in their histories, when they are called 'unhinged', 'mentally unstable, should know better', 'pretentious' etc., these judgements seem instinctively unfair to me, because of my knowledge of how it feels being a women. But when other men in their narratives are called names, 'a nutter', for example, I do not think so readily about the power dynamics that may have (mis)informed those judgements.

\textsuperscript{12} He talked of the valuable extra involvement he could have in their lives now he was at university. He talked of the amount of time he was with them and how important that would be to their relationship.
3.5 Data analysis

The analysis of qualitative data is usually seen as arduous. The reason why it is found to be difficult is that it is not fundamentally a mechanical or technical exercise. It is a dynamic, intuitive and creative process of inductive reasoning, thinking and theorizing.

Basit (2003:143)

There was no separate self-contained phases of data collection and then data analysis in my research. Like most qualitative endeavours, there was necessarily a constant movement between the two related activities. Whilst at some times one activity would predominate, (for example, I would have a cluster of interviews following a mailshot or I would have more time for transcription during university holidays), when I was taking part in interviews I was thinking about the themes that were beginning to emerge, when I was transcribing I was linking the interview being transcribed to previous ones. Ely et al. (1991, cited in Basit 2003:144) suggest there should be an ‘intense conversation’ between the researcher and the data, which describes my own process quite neatly.

The interviews were transcribed verbatim, 14 of them by me, and 6 by professional transcribers¹. I reluctantly used transcribers when it became obvious that I did not have time to complete this process with every interview tape. Once I had the tapes and transcription documents returned, I listened to the tapes again, making amendments to the documents. For example, putting in pauses ..., directions {raises voice, spoken very softly, with reluctance}, filling in the spaces left by the transcriber when the conversation was deemed inaudible, the word irrelevant (erm, ah etc.), and correcting anything misheard. I consider this to be part of the analytic process. The hours spent, ear glued to the side of the tape recorder, carefully listening, one small section at time in order to write down exactly what I heard, meant that right from the very beginning I was already deeply involved with the data. Even as I was writing what was being revealed on one tape, I would be thinking how

¹The audio equipment failed during Daniel's interview. Fortunately, I realised at the time and so made hand-written notes. Nonetheless, some data were lost between the tape failing and my later realisation that it had done so.
this related to contrary or similar things heard in other interviews and the theories I intended to apply to the research. I always kept a scrapbook by my side, to jot down these provisional early connections.

Once I had transcribed 4 interviews from Edinburgh University, and there was a break in the cycle of interviews, I began to review the transcripts in greater depth. I constructed a computer database that recorded the men’s subject, year, previous HE, access route, current family status (wife, 2nd family, step-children ages) and the same for their family of origin. I also recorded these on paper, usually in the form of a mind-map, as I find I remember visual arrangements more readily than typed or linear notes. I also kept a stock of A3 size paper on my desk, and, intermittently, this was used to map out the points from the collection of histories that I had encountered so far. Each of these recordings contained the same kind of biographical information about the men, and perhaps a note on the most significant themes contained in their interviews. Having all these details, in different places, in different forms, meant that I had constant reminders of the men I was involved with. The notes were on my desk, on my wall, on my computer, and at the start of every transcript.

I always had notebooks and scraps of paper available to scribble down ideas; these were at the side of my desk, in my bags for the journeys between home and university, at home by my bed to capture the kind of revelations that only seem to leap out in the darkness of the early hours. Whilst this may seem a messy way to conduct an analysis, it was a really useful and comprehensive mechanism. The principles of grounded theory advocate a constant comparative method (c.f. Glaser & Strauss 1967), and this research undertook such an approach as far as practical. Transcripts, and tapes, were constantly revisited, new themes explored, and perhaps pursued. I would revisit those scraps of paper at a later date, perhaps after having reviewed a few more transcripts and/or a few more ideas, and then some of these early ideas would be reignited. The ones that became increasingly credible were mapped out on A3 sheets of paper and again these mind-maps were added to, reworked or discarded as new ideas emerged.
The staggering of the periods of calls for research volunteers meant that I would have dedicated periods of transcription, then breaks to consider what was emerging and plot my ideas, then another period where I was inseparable from my tape recorder and computer once more. Interviewing also came in periods, as replies tended to come in quickly and dissolve just as quickly after a new appeal had been made (i.e. after a mailshot, after a visit to post flyers, after the emails to ‘widening participation officers’). This meant that for just over 18 months I was collecting, recording and contemplating my data. It is true to say that at times I could get lost in it, with little sense of direction. Meetings with my supervisors were invaluable for pulling me to the surface, and helped me to begin the process of clarifying my ideas. My supervisors also encouraged me to write conference papers, which led to even more concentrated periods of thematic organisation and distillation of my interview data.

When working (relatively) inductively in this way there is a real danger of drowning in your data. I say ‘relatively’ inductively as I brought theories and questions with me into the research, such as those surrounding masculinity, and social class reproduction presented in the literature review. Miles & Huberman (1994) recommend that researchers should have a ‘start list’ of concepts or codes as they begin their analysis as most researchers have at least some provisional ideas of the kinds of things they are looking for as they begin their research. Now that I have learned to swim rather than drown in my data, I wouldn’t have done it any other way. I suspect the PhD process is quite a privileged time in terms of the luxury of being able to spend so much time with your data, and to spend so much time being creative and reflective. I doubt my future research activities will allow such indulgence.

Psychologically, I also feel that the world of scribblings, post-it notes, coloured pens and mind-maps feels safer than making the step to constructing text. It is almost like leaving the playfulness of the nursery school and making your way up a very steep hill to the disciplined halls of the university. And I confess that my journey was

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14 Even at this stage, I would not claim that I have saturated my understanding of the data.
probably slower than it could have been. At first I thought that transferring my ideas to an electronic coding programme would help. I took a one day training course to familiarise myself with the NVivo package\textsuperscript{15} and after what I now know to have been too little preparation, I began to code my first transcript. Basit (2003) emphasises that in order to use such programmes, the researcher has to spend considerable time thinking about her data and how she intends to organise it. Sadly I encountered this advice after I had given up on it.

The fact that my use of electronic coding has been so limited is in part due to my lack of rigour in learning how to use it, rather than the limitations of the resource per se. But I have found it limiting in some way, which may simply reflect my personal idiosyncrasies, although I suspect there must be other qualitative researchers who experience similar issues. To begin with, on the occasions when I tried to apply codes to sections of transcripts, I found that looking at the transcript on my computer screen and separating the text using the mouse on my desk, was really quite alienating. My physical separation from the act of extraction (which took place in cyber-space) seemed to remove me emotionally from the procedure. Sitting on the floor holding the men's words in your hands, and taking the scissors to them, feels different. Also, I tend to be able to remember things that leave a visual impression on me. When I highlight a piece of text on a page of transcription, I can later visualise where it was on the page. If I cut a piece of text from the page, the shape of it is a visual stimulant for me. I know where it fits. I know where it belongs. But when NVivo prints off the sections I have selected, the page it gives me bears no resemblance to the text as it was originally placed on the transcript. Similarly, for me, having the transcript to hand, resplendent with the markings of coloured highlighter pens, scribbled notes on the margins, post-it notes dispersed along the edges and asterisks, bullet points and whatever visual devices I used to mark significant areas on the page, enables much better visual recall than the computer screen with vertical coding stripes lined up along the right hand margin, even when the coding stripes may be coloured.

\textsuperscript{15}I would recommend others to take the 5 day course as a single day only sketches its potential. However with limited resources, at least I had a grounding in the programme.
My 'traditional' procedure for organising transcription data ended by printing multiple copies of each transcript and cutting out the quotes that illustrated the categories/themes that were becoming important. This was an iterative process, returning to transcripts in light of further interviews and/or analysis. I had lots of envelopes with categories or themes written on them, and popped the extract into the envelopes I thought it belonged in. Every so often, I would empty the envelope and begin sorting once more, clipping together extracts into smaller categories, removing or relocating them as deemed necessary. Alongside this physical sorting process, I would also construct mind maps to help me theorise connections.

These visual aids, as well as the sorting of data and written recordings, helped in the task of constant comparison (cf Glaser & Strauss 1967) and therefore to stimulate connections, patterns and notable differences between the men. Whilst the principle of grounded theory stipulates that this process continue until the point of conceptual saturation occurs (cf Glaser & Strauss 1967), there were always both practical and theoretical reasons why I could not do this. Practically, this would have taken too much time (Basit 2003). But also, this is an exploratory piece of research, designed to find out what is going on, rather than produce a theory or hypothesis from it. Therefore, grounded theory at this point in this piece of research, has been employed as the guiding principle for the analytical process, and the rigour and invitation to inductive thought has been appropriated to the best of my abilities.

The final point to be made about my treatment of the data, is reflections on my attempt to treat it as narrative, in the sense that Lawler (2002) identifies.

...I am not using narrative here to indicate a 'story' that simply carries a set of 'facts'. Rather, ... narratives [are] social products produced by people within the context of specific social, historical and cultural locations. They are related to experiences people have of their lives, but they are not transparent carriers of that experience. Rather, they are interpretive devices, through which people represent themselves, both to themselves and to others. Further narratives do not originate with the individual: rather, they circulate culturally to provide a repertoire ... from which people can produce their own stories.

Lawler (2002:242)
I would like to emphasise how my ability to adopt this stance towards the narratives has been something that I have been developing over time. As this chapter has already explained, I have had to monitor my tendencies with particular men to question what they told me. But I have also found my moods affected my approach to my analysis in ways that I didn’t even recognise or could connect consciously to my relationships with the men or their stories. Fortunately within the time frame of a PhD I have had the luxury of returning to my interpretations again and again, and of sharing them with others’ in order to check my evaluations. I have learnt from this.

3.6 The Participants

The three tables below provide a brief snapshot of the 21 men who took part in this research. They have been separated in this chapter according to age cohorts, although elsewhere, (tables 4.1 and 4.2, page 108-110), the men are organised according to the university they were attending at the time of the research. The names cited are all pseudonyms and the vagueness of their ages is again a device to try to protect their anonymity.

Table 3.5 Participants: Youngest cohort (under 30), youngest to oldest.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Institution and course</th>
<th>Personal details</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nathan</td>
<td>PhD social science: EU</td>
<td>Single, mortgaged flat.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>James</td>
<td>Undergrad social science: GU</td>
<td>Single, shared house</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tony</td>
<td>PhD natural science: EU (Undergrad at GU)</td>
<td>Co-hab with graduate girlfriend</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ryan</td>
<td>Undergrad medical doctor: EU</td>
<td>Single, returned to parental home</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>William</td>
<td>PhD natural science: EU (undergrad at GU)</td>
<td>Single, n/d re housing status</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grant</td>
<td>Undergrad social science: GU</td>
<td>Single, remains in familial home</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes: n/d: no details, EU: Edinburgh University, GU: Glasgow University
Table 3.6 Participants: Middle cohort (aged 30-40), youngest to oldest.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name/Age</th>
<th>Institution and course</th>
<th>Personal details</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Daniel</td>
<td>Postgraduate medical doctor: EU (undergrad natural sciences at 'old' English university)</td>
<td>Co-hab with male partner, mortgaged flat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Darren</td>
<td>Undergrad social science: EU</td>
<td>Co-hab with female partner, mortgaged flat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Matt</td>
<td>Undergrad law: EU</td>
<td>Co-hab with female partner, mortgaged flat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Howard</td>
<td>Undergrad teacher training: EU</td>
<td>2nd marriage, lives with step + biological children, own home outright.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stuart</td>
<td>Undergrad community Ed: EU</td>
<td>Single, n/d re housing status</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nigel</td>
<td>Undergrad community Ed: EU</td>
<td>Divorced, co-hab with female partner. Close contact with child from marriage.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3.7 Participants: Oldest cohort (over 50 years), youngest to oldest.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name/Age</th>
<th>Institution and course</th>
<th>Personal details</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Alan</td>
<td>Undergrad social science : GU</td>
<td>Divorced, weekend custody of teenage children. n/d re housing status</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stephen</td>
<td>Undergrad social science: GU</td>
<td>Married 20 years, teenage children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Richard</td>
<td>Undergrad social science; GU</td>
<td>2nd marriage, mortgaged house, no contact with child from 1st marriage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Michael</td>
<td>Undergrad social science: GU</td>
<td>Married 20 years, teenage children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Robin</td>
<td>Postgrad teacher training: EU (undergrad via OU)</td>
<td>Recently divorced, adult children, rents cottage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Edward</td>
<td>Undergrad social science : GU</td>
<td>Divorced, single, shared housing, lost contact with children from marriage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frank</td>
<td>Undergrad social science : EU</td>
<td>2nd marriage, baby. Owns home outright. Good relationships with former wife + children.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Robert</td>
<td>Undergrad social science : GU</td>
<td>Single, mortgaged flat.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
3.7 Conclusion

This chapter has discussed the assumptions, ethics, practicalities and methodological issues of this research undertaking. It has shown how a constructivist epistemological position has been combined with a critical realist theoretical stance, which allows the actors accounts of reality to sit alongside the account of the researcher interested in other levels of the ‘real’ (i.e. the mechanisms of social mobilities). It revealed my classed subjectivities and my battle to disentangle my feminist being from my desire to understand the impact of gender on men. The chapter then showed the logic of the research design and of the reasons for selecting Edinburgh and Glasgow Universities. I have shown exactly how I recruited the volunteers and the theoretical sampling that led to selection. The interview and analysis process were laid bare. My interviews were shown to have raised issues of confidentiality and also raised some complex issues regarding the gender dynamics of the undertaking. Gender was seen as an influential factor in terms of what was said and interpreted from the interview situations, rather than an implicit threat within interview situations with men. Describing the analytical procedures showed my physical attachment to the data, and also gave some insight into the iterative nature of the endeavour. The chapter has ended by presenting a few details of the men on whom this research is founded.
CHAPTER 4

Findings: Pre-adult biographies

4.1 Introduction

The literature review highlighted the importance of early familial life to how we experience the world as adults. Bourdieu’s class-specific generative mechanisms are firmly rooted in the infant familial home environment, and recent socio-psychoanalytic work, such as Frosh et al. (2003), Lucey et al. (2003) and Walkerdine (2003) for example, calls for social research that recognises the influence of this realm. That is the point of this chapter. It presents the men’s accounts of their ‘pre-adult’ lives from the social flux into which they were born, up until their early post-school steps into the realm of emerging independence. It should be remembered that many interviews did not progress in a chronological order and that therefore the data regarding the men’s pre-adult lives presented here have been extracted from various points during their interviews and reassembled here by me. In this respect, the sense of order that is present in this chapter is my post hoc construction. This is in addition the men’s own processes of post hoc sense making that would have been an intrinsic part of their interview narratives, whether consciously or not (Lawler 2002).

The chapter is divided into two parts. The first part, early childhood, opens with a brief historical overview of the families the men were born into. It foregrounds instances of inter-generational movements that were mentioned, illustrating the complexity involved in understanding the social-class position the men were born into. The movements of interest are those associated with geographies (i.e. both physical and social space) and with the composition of familial capitals. The section then focuses on the way the men experienced the social and physical geographies of their early life, paying particular attention to the impact of council estates and of religious communities that emerged as important in the interviews. This is followed by an exploration of the intimate relationships that the men recalled from that time, which allows some insight into the wider emotional landscape of class and other
social positions. The section concludes by looking at the men's school experiences and the relationships between the school, family, community and other institutions.

The second half of the chapter, *post-school transitions*, explores how the men moved from the realm of compulsory education into the early stages of independence. From the analysis of the interviews four post-school pathways have been identified; continued education, employment, vocational training, and the armed forces. The chapter presents each of these paths in turn. Some men moved between these pathways, and may appear in more than one section. Given the limited timeframe of this transitionary period, the extent of such fluidity is not particularly problematic for the organisation of this chapter. (The fluidity of the men's lives becomes much more of a problem in Chapter 5, where boundary crossings become much more complex.) This half of the chapter presents the men's explanations of why they took the routes they did, including their reflections on the relevance of a university pathway at that point in their lives.

Not all men will appear in every section of the chapter. This reflects the semi-structured nature of the biographical interviews, which allowed men to focus on those aspects of their lives that were more important to them. To illustrate the men’s narratives, the chapter presents verbatim extracts at some points. These quotes follow the following convention:

... is used where I have omitted a small section of the narrative, either to condense the quote or to help it to make sense to the reader,

[ ] is used where I have inserted a word or phrase, again for clarity or else to replace the original for reasons of anonymity,

{ } is used where I describe an accompanying action to what was said,

- is used were the speaker changed the direction of the sentence abruptly, and

italic is used to show when the speaker clearly emphasised a particular word or phrase.
4.2 Early childhood

In addition to the mentioning of parents, peers and siblings, the lives of grandparents and occasionally even great-grandparents were referred to when I asked the men to give me some idea of their family background. Members of maternal and paternal extended families also made appearances in some men’s interviews, uncles, aunts and cousins for example, and collectively these all helped to provide a wider sense of the diverse social spaces the men and their families have inhabited over time. Tables 4.1 and 4.2 on the next two pages provide a useful (albeit crude) snapshot of the men’s families of origin. All towns and cities, except Edinburgh and Glasgow, remain un-named to protect the anonymity of the participants. Being born in Edinburgh and Glasgow was significant for the research and therefore these locations have been named. To further preserve identities, ages have been approximated, similar occupations replace the original occupations and generic terms such as ‘professionals’ and ‘armed forces’ have been used instead of more specific identifications.

Table 4.1 Dimensions of the men’s family of origin: Edinburgh University students

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name (age)</th>
<th>Grandparents occupation</th>
<th>Parental occupations Father, Mother:</th>
<th>Housing Details</th>
<th>Siblings and parental relationships</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Darren (mid 30s)</td>
<td>Paternal: n/d Maternal: n/d</td>
<td>F: delivery driver M: school meals assistant</td>
<td>Council estate, N England. ‘We had yards not gardens’</td>
<td>2nd of 2. ‘We weren’t a close family. Not their fault. Mine’</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(continued over...)
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Paternal:</th>
<th>Maternal:</th>
<th>Occupation</th>
<th>Area</th>
<th>Details</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Grant</td>
<td>n/d, (not</td>
<td>history in</td>
<td>scientist (non-</td>
<td>Affluent area of</td>
<td>3rd of 3. 'Happy childhood.' Brother with</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(late 20s)</td>
<td>professionals)</td>
<td>medical profession</td>
<td>graduate) M: nurse</td>
<td>Edinburgh. Private rent.</td>
<td>mental illness.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Howard</td>
<td>plumber, shop</td>
<td>lorry driver, h/w</td>
<td>naval engineer</td>
<td>Born in N. England, move</td>
<td>2nd of 3. 'Provided financially, not</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(early 40s)</td>
<td>assistant</td>
<td></td>
<td>(scholarship) M:</td>
<td>to S. England, aged 7</td>
<td>emotionally.'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(early 30s)</td>
<td></td>
<td>farmers</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nathan</td>
<td>n/d +</td>
<td>'not professional' + seamstress</td>
<td>taxi driver, builder M: clerical, h/w, did highers, Nathan:12</td>
<td>South side Glasgow, 'very working class'</td>
<td>4th of 4. Only son. Parental gendered expectations. Church goers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(mid 30s)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(late 30s)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(late 40s)</td>
<td></td>
<td>business</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stuart</td>
<td>n/d</td>
<td></td>
<td>driver, farmerhand M: housewife, cleaner</td>
<td>Small town, N. England.</td>
<td>3rd of 3. Large age gap. 'Surrounded by love.'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mid 30s</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tony</td>
<td>n/d</td>
<td></td>
<td>s/e builder M: cashier</td>
<td>Council estate, outskirts of Glasgow. Bought + built extension.</td>
<td>1 other sibling. Emotionally distant from father. Mother + school discipline</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(late 20s)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(late 20s)</td>
<td>legal professionals</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Legend:  
- n/d: no details  
- s/e: self-employed  
- h/w: housewife  
- 'paraphrase of men's own words'
Table 4.2 Dimensions of the men's family of origin: Glasgow university students

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name (age)</th>
<th>Grandparents' occupations</th>
<th>Parental occupations</th>
<th>Housing Details</th>
<th>Siblings and parental relationships</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Alan (mid 40s)</td>
<td>Paternal: n/d Maternal: n/d</td>
<td>F: retail manager, sales representative M: nurse</td>
<td>Glasgow, n/d</td>
<td>5th of 5. Controlling father. Active Catholics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Edward (early 50s)</td>
<td>Paternal: Poor Irish immigrants Maternal: farmers</td>
<td>F: labourer M: employed, but n/d</td>
<td>Council estate, Glasgow</td>
<td>4th of 5. Teased by family. 'Bookish'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>James (late 20s)</td>
<td>Paternal: n/d Maternal: n/d</td>
<td>F: shipyards M: n/d</td>
<td>'Working-class town', close to Glasgow. Parents raised on Glasgow council estates.</td>
<td>7th of 7. Father 'undermined our confidence'. Children support each other. Catholics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Robert (mid 50s)</td>
<td>Paternal: n/d Maternal: travelling musician, grandmother dec'd when daughter was infant.</td>
<td>F: wood machinist, large factory M: maid, housewife</td>
<td>Owned, tenement flat, Glasgow: 'not a lot of people bought flats in those days'.</td>
<td>1st of 3 adopted children. 'not close'</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Intergenerational change

Many family histories contained examples of generational Irish immigration. Of the nine men born in Glasgow, six had at least one parent of Irish origin (Alan, Edward, Graham, Stephen, Michael and James). Two of the men born in England were also of Irish decent (Matt and William). Whilst most Irish migration was recalled as a search for employment, this was not so in Matt’s history. Matt told of his maternal grandparents as wealthy, landowning farmers who sent his mother to England as a teenager to train as a nurse (because, in their opinion, females were of little use in farming).

The story of Irish geographical mobility appeared to be connected to religion in many cases, and most of the men mentioned above told of their familial Catholic identities and active church involvement. This did not happen in William’s case, which told of his mother’s (and his own) agnosticism towards religion. Stephen, who was raised by his grandparents from an early age after his mother’s death, told of his Grandmother’s subsequent rejection of the Catholic Church, but of him following his Grandfather’s commitment to it. There were a few occasions where a Catholic social identity was linked to an implicit motivation of self-improvement (Stephen, Matt). Matt perceived this as a reaction to the history of Anglo-Irish relations in England,

Matt: I have never really thought of it but being a Catholic was a status thing as well. You could identify being an oppressed minority. You didn’t feel particularly English being brought up by Irish Catholics. And you felt you were a minority in a Protestant world. And I was raised with this ‘oppressed mentality’, sort of thing.

There were two cases (Howard and William) where families had moved from the north of England to the south which both men recalled was undertaken to escape the unemployment in that region in the 1960s. (The men are of different generations of course. Howard was a child in the 1960s, whereas William was not even born. William’s recollection was therefore informed by his mother’s accounts of her history.) In addition to the geographical movements, both men also spoke of inter-generational social mobilities in their families.

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Howard was born in northern England but his family moved to the south when his father gained employment in the naval industry. He stated that both sets of his grandparents were working class (lorry driver/shop assistant, plumber/housewife). His mother became a primary school teacher and his father qualified as a naval engineer after gaining a scholarship. Howard recalled the difference in living standards that accompanied the move to England, and the relative ease with which he fitted into his new environment. Yet he did recall how his family were often seen as slightly different to the ‘southern’ population.

Howard: I suppose in terms of our family identity there has always been a northern link [i.e. northern England]... so that could be what set us apart, you know, our working-class background.

Howard states with confidence in the interview that his family are now ‘firmly class.’

William’s mother completed compulsory education in the 1960s, and he told how she believed she had to leave the industrial north if she wanted to make a better future for herself. The daughter of miners and domestic workers, William’s mother gained a place at a ‘prestigious’ art school and became an art teacher and later married his father, who came from a family with a long history in the legal professions. For William the dissolution of their marriage when he was an infant left him and his mother in a financially precarious position. This seemed central to his claim during the interview to belong to the ‘working-class’. Throughout William’s interview was a narrative of the inequality and injustice of his life compared to those of the middle-class others around him. He cited his disadvantage because his mother could not afford private education or additional tuition for him. Off tape, William talked about a particularly hard year for his mother and himself when all their clothes were bought from charity shops and the food they ate was the ‘own-brand’ of the supermarket. He spoke of his perceived disadvantage when he had to take paid employment during his university studies (which he began and completed at the ‘traditional’ age), and particularly when he had to work during his gap year in Morocco.
Robin’s interview also contained a narrative of familial mobilities, both geographical and social. His maternal grandparents’ small transport business was bought as part of the Government’s post-war nationalisation programme and they used the windfall to relocate to a more affluent area. Like Howard above, Robin also talked about the shifting social geography that accompanied this physical relocation. He recalled how his Grandfather would vehemently reject any suggestion that their family were working-class. But later, when he was commenting on what he saw as the ‘pretentiousness’ of his mother, Robin stated that his mother believed she was born into the wrong class. This may suggest that her sense of their familial social-class location was different from that of her father’s.

At another point in the interview, when describing where he lived as a child, Robin made the distinction that his rented house was ‘a private rent, not council’. It therefore seemed that this distinction mattered to him. But then when Robin talked of his early family life, with his single-parent mother and newly affluent grandparents, it appeared the subtleties of such social demarcations had impacted on Robin’s childhood. He told of his lack of social integration in his family’s new surroundings.

Robin: It’s like social inclusion, you know. You’d get wind of a party going on at somebody’s house and it would be down the posh end of town were the big houses were, obviously. But you’d only hear about it too late. You’d never ask so you’d ... I can remember on one occasion saying ‘are we going down the tennis club, I really fancy placing some tennis’. It was ‘oh you can’t, because your parents are not members.’ It’s that kind of ...’yeh, you’re one of us but you’re not really.’ And I felt that.

Grant also spoke of the subtleties of movements in social space in his history. With a middle-class mother and father ‘not of that background’ they lived in a rented a house in an affluent area of Edinburgh. As his father progressively carved a successful scientific career his parents were able to buy a modest house in that area. Grant defined his position as lower middle-class, but at various points during his interview he highlighted how this changed according to context. For example, among

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1 Grant seemed to want to leave the explanation at this. I did not press for further details.
his sports team-mates, within the socially-diverse environment of his school, and among the people at the college he later attended, Grant felt he was seen as a middle-class person. Elsewhere he recalled that within his neighbourhood, and among his girlfriends’ social groups, he felt positioned as middle-class.

Grant: I had a girlfriend who went to [an Edinburgh private school]... and when I was with her friends, they were sort of aware that I wasn’t from that sort of private education background. And there was always this feeling that, you know, ‘Sara’s boyfriend, he’s a bit working-class’, sort of thing, ‘and we don’t really know where he’s from.’ And yet, when I was at [college] I was always, everyone thought I was really posh and stuff. So I was kind of, ‘well how come they are all thinking this, and they are all thinking that?’ That’s why I was - I was kind of aware that there was this total distinction.

Each of these narratives provides insights into the subtleties of demarcations that Bourdieu (e.g. 2003) identifies as significant in thinking about relative positions in social space. The men are recalling how they began to sense their difference from others around them, and suggest that from quite an early time in their lives, they were beginning to notice the impact of economic and cultural capital distinctions.

It was also possible to perceive movements occurring in the men’s origins in terms of the composition of familial capital. In particular, there were a few parental histories where the men thought their fathers had married women who possessed higher levels of cultural, educational and/or financial capital than themselves. (The use of the term capitals here is my own. The men did not express it in those terms.)

For example, Matt’s mother stayed on in further education until she was 18, and he knew his father was not so highly educated. He believed that even becoming a nurse was a downward step from someone of her background.

Matt: My mum came from probably quite a wealthy family but became a nurse and so probably didn’t realise for a long time that her social status had probably diminished.
Matt also told how his mother used to control the family finances, which meant that his family acquired the kinds of things that Matt associated with a middle-class lifestyle, ‘foreign holidays, private pensions, mortgaged home and investment portfolios’. Matt believed that this led to his father feeling uneasy among his co-workers/friends because of the differences between their families, although this lessened over time.

Matt: I think my dad felt, not undermined, but I think he felt a little insecure, and he couldn’t … he wasn’t in that position of your typical working-class bloke any more. But he also didn’t have the respectability of the middle-classes either, the automatic sort of acceptance of the middle-classes. He didn’t speak the language.

Grant also told of his mother who was privately educated and from a very affluent background, in contrast to his father’s. He relayed how his father became a successful scientist, emphasising how this was achieved by a lifetime’s dedication to the sector rather than a family history within the profession or a graduate education. Unlike Matt, there was no mention in Grant’s narrative of any tension arising from such differences.

The narrative of having mothers who appeared more intelligent than fathers occurred quite often (Tony, James, Nathan, Alan, Graham, Edward). Nathan knew his mother had progressed further in education than his father, and Tony and Alan both mention their mothers winning educational prizes. In a few cases the men believed that disparities in parental capitals led to direct tension within the family home. Alan and Graham both attribute negative aspects of their fathers’ relationships with their families to fathers’ feelings of inferiority with respect to their wives. Alan cited the fact that she won a scholarship to become a nurse to indicate the level of her intelligence. During the interviews these men appeared to have rationalised the persistent and caustic sarcasm that their fathers directed at family members as originating in such feelings.

Alan: My Dad had a bit of a chip on his shoulder about not having academic qualifications. And as his kids grew up he could feel threatened by that. Cos my ma was intelligent. OK she didn’t go to
university but she was smart. And he felt threatened by her intelligence, so he would try to belittle her.

Other men detected slight differences in the social-class background of their parents, albeit without the harmful consequences identified above. For example,

Robert: [My father] was an extremely working class person...from very poor Lancashire people. [My mother] herself was, oh gosh, very sort of mixed background. ...But I think her family must have been upper working-/lower middle-class really. Her father taught highland dancing, and played the bagpipes and used to travel all round the country.

Robert told how his mother would take him to cultural events (recitals, theatres, galleries), and that his father did not go. Alan and Stuart also told of something similar. The absence of the fathers may have been employment related of course, but may also suggest that there might have been differences in cultural preferences between them. Indeed, this glimpse into dimensions of difference in the men’s parental histories suggests Bourdieu may indeed present a more homogeneous picture of working class habitat than may often be the case (e.g. Sayer 2005).

The geography of the home

Tables 4.1 and 4.2 indicated some diversity in the familial homesteads among the men. They also illustrate an interesting difference between the samples from either institution; all of the nine men attending Glasgow University were born in or close to that city (as was one of the men attending Edinburgh University). Of the 12 men attending Edinburgh University, only 3 were born/raised there. Most of the Glasgow-born men mentioned living in, or on the edges of, large council estates. Among the Edinburgh university men, one English born student and two of the Edinburgh-born students repeat this kind of narrative pattern.

Descriptions of estates ranged from being among the poorest areas, for example,

Frank: My dad said ‘be proud of your roots, son’. They were slums!
James: I think my town for a start is very much a working-class town... Generally I think we were living in the areas of town that were ... in poverty.

Michael: I was brought up in [estate]. Have you heard of it? It was a hard area...

to those whose particular part of the estate was not as bad as others, such as,

Nigel: I wouldn't say it was a deprived area. It's deprived now. It's worse than it was years ago

Tony: It was a very kind of, not deprived, but it wasn't exactly a very affluent place that I lived [in]. It was kind of all council schemes, council houses.

James: I mean it was hard when I grew up but a lot of the gangs, the warfare at the time had kind of settled down a bit so, it wasn't so difficult when I grew up there.

Tony told how his parents had bought their council home and there were also cases where parents had moved to a newly-built private housing estates that were being constructed next to the boundary of the existing council owned estates (Richard, Matt). All of these men's narratives showed how this small degree of symbolic mobility had consequences.

Tony: ... and my dad was kind of getting on quite well with his building career at that point. He built a couple of extensions on our house...and all my friends fell out with me because I was a snob because my Dad had built an extension on his house.

The death of Richard's father led to the family returning to Glasgow², where his father's life-insurance policy enabled his mother to buy a small house on a private housing estate that was being built next to an existing council scheme. Richard

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² Richard was born in Glasgow but the family had moved to Canada when Richard was a baby. His mother returned after the loss of her husband.
reflected that they were not affluent. The house was small and also his mother had to work full-time to provide for the family as a lone head of household. He saw little difference between his house and the council houses that were literally across the road from it. He told how it was that he became aware of such demarcations,

Richard: I came in from school and was upset. 'They keep saying I live in a boat house mum. Why do they say that? I don't live in a boat house!

It emerged that Richard wasn’t attuned to the local accent and the children at school were actually identifying that he lived in a ‘bought’ house not a ‘boat’ house. The subtleties of such demarcation were also evident in Darren’s interview, where he provided the instantiation of it. After making the point that his own area of the estate was not the worst, Darren recalled the new-build private housing grouped on the edge of his estate. He perceived that these houses were not so different from his own; they were not grand and they were built close together. But he remarked later that some pupils in his school lived on this and similar estates, identifying them as,

Darren: Estates which had gardens instead of back yards.

Edward’s narrative contained a dramatic example of how, in his opinion, living on a council estate affected his opportunities. He told of being uncharacteristically drunk on his 16th birthday, and being found in this state by the police. He emphasised how he was not being violent or offensive, but was arrested, kept in the police cells overnight and charged for this offence. Edward was convinced that if he had lived in a more affluent part of the city, the police would have taken him home and he would have received an informal warning. Edward told of his sense of shame and of his damaged reputation from this incident, which prompted him to leave the college course he had just began, as he didn’t want others finding out about him.

For many men raised on council estates life outside (and often inside) the home was portrayed often with reference to a form of tough working-class masculinity. Within the narratives the composite parts of this particular masculine style included manual labour, alcohol consumption, homophobia and physical toughness. The research
showed few men adopting this ‘tough’ form of working-class masculinity although many lives were lived within its shadows. Graham’s narrative suggested he was most consistently involved in this kind of behaviour, and that on occasions it was more serious than it was for the other men. For example,

Graham: There was nothing to do in the scheme at night. Play football. When you get to about 14 it becomes drink, drugs and going out....
[later]

Graham: When I was 15 I was fighting, and breaking into schools and shops - it was typical schemie³ life.

Darren: I was a bit of a rebel I suppose. I just got into loads of trouble...I hardly ever went to school. Just used to hang around the town centre, get drunk, start fights.

Nigel: I was a bit of a jack the lad as well, you know

The narratives of Darren, Graham and Nigel also included the use of illegal drugs occasionally before they reached their teens. Two of them explained their actions within the context of the harsh surroundings of the estate, as in part being a survival strategy. Thus,

Graham: ‘maybe it’s because I was small framed ... there was definitely a kind of naturalism to the scheme that I wanted to be part of. Maybe it was attention seeking, or maybe it was fighting for my own survival, my own space. I don’t know what ... And I was protecting my younger brother a wee bit too. Maybe it was a bit of all that...

Darren: I just got into loads of trouble ... I hardly ever went to school. Just used to hang around the town centre, get drunk, start fights.
[later]

Darren: I don’t even think that that was really me back then. You sort of had to do it.

³ In Scotland, a housing estate is sometimes referred to as a housing scheme. A ‘schemie’ refers to a person who lives on a scheme.
Darren and Graham also spoke of ‘hanging around’ the street as there was nothing much for youth to do either in the immediate future or their employment prospects. This was not part of Nigel’s narrative who told of his ambition to join the armed forces. He also had activities on the estate that kept him occupied (youth club and army cadets) and an aunt out-with the estate who offered him breathing space away from estate life. Nigel related his use of drugs (he was sniffing glue and consuming alcohol at age 11) to the brutality he said he incurred at home from his violent stepfather. Other men also told of their fathers’ abusive behaviours towards their families, which increasingly included bouts or threats of physical abuse (although none were as severe as Nigel’s history). They linked their fathers’ behaviour to the form of tough working-class masculinity of that generation (Alan, Graham, James).

Despite the fact that few men adopted this type of masculinity, its dominance on the estate was referred to on quite a few occasions. For James and Edward, having siblings who had a presence on the estate afforded them protection. Both suggested that had it not been for the participation of other family members in the public life of the estate, they would have been victimised therein. Daniel told something similar. He lived in a small town and described himself as ‘neither popular nor on the margins’. He believes his siblings’ ‘street cred’ made his ability to move around the town easier. I asked Daniel whether his sexuality may have influenced his perceptions of his vulnerability.

Daniel: With the benefit of hindsight I think it probably did. But I can’t say I felt different because of my sexuality at that time. I just wasn’t entirely comfortable in that environment.

Robert recalled his expectation of being bullied. He lived in Glasgow, although not on an estate, but saw himself as a target given the ‘bohemian’ circles he moved in. He described his strategy of dressing so out-landishly that ‘people wouldn’t know what to think of me.’ Graham told of his brother’s outlandish dress sense.
Graham: I feared for my brother at one point. You should have seen how he went about! I thought he was gay. Actually he was dealing drugs. So that was alright.

The hint of homophobia among working-class males was also present in James’ narrative. James recalled a frightening incident as a teenager where he thought his parents might have perceived him to have been kissing another man. He had been taking drugs and was in the act of blowing the inhaled smoke of the drug from his own mouth into the mouth of another man. (This is known as a ‘blow-back’ and is done to increase the intensity of the effect of the drug for the recipient.) As he was doing this he saw his parents drive by. This sparked an episode of panic in James that was so severe (combined with the drugs in his system) that he claimed he has never indulged in hard drugs since. He described in detail the powerful ‘bad trip’ he endured through that night, induced purely by fearing the consequences of his father ‘discovering’ his son was homosexual. I asked whether they would not be horrified that he was using drugs.

James: [my parents] were quite liberal when it came to drugs really. But my parents, especially my dad, wouldn’t stand for that [i.e. homosexuality].

Robert suggested that the contemporary drug culture was significantly different to the drug culture he indulged in during the 1960s. He commented on the negative connotations of ‘sink estates’ now awash with drugs. Robert charted his fascination with ‘mind-altering substances’ which began with the combinations of legal drugs he had been taking for the serious health problems he had endured since childhood and moved into the bohemian art world he sought out in the west end of Glasgow in the 1960s. He presented it as a culturally enriching transition, thus,

Robert: [the drug taking then] was more of a middle-class thing. There were working-class people like me in it, but we came into contact with more middle-class people. So moving to [that area of the city] I suddenly found myself in the company of artists, writers, down and outs, university lecturers. Educated people many of them. I like to think I was exposed to middle-class culture.
These reflections are allowing a complex picture to be built up about how class was lived when the men were younger. There is a sense of a class habitus within them, of dispositions being formed in relation to the particularities of the location where they were raised. It is interesting to note the men's stated awareness of cultural expectations around them at that time in their lives, (e.g. not to be gay, not to be bookish, not to be 'non-hegemonic'), but also to sense the ways in which these were negotiated (e.g. the space provided by family members, by bohemianism). The interplay of structures, of culture and of agency is increasingly evident.

**Intimate family life**

**Mothers**

Most mothers were held in high esteem in these narratives. For some, they were admired for the sheer amount of labour they undertook – raising children with inadequate incomes and surroundings, and also having paid employment in quite a few cases (William, Matt, Edward, Richard etc). Others prioritised the emotional dimensions of their mothers' lives, telling of the support they received (Matt, Frank, Ryan, Daniel) and some men referred to a 'special relationship between mother and son' as they perceived it (Alan, Richard). Alan told of the conflict in his family between his father and mother, and also his sister and mother, and told how he would always defend his mother.

Alan: She was a beautiful person. Had a drink problem, for a longer period than I thought, so it turns out. Very intelligent. She just wanted to be a nurse. Didn't want to be a sister. Just wanted to help the patient... She could walk in the company of kings or tramps and ... converse with them the same as anyone else. She was just a beautiful person. I know there's this mother-son thing, you know, closeness.

Richard also highlighted his close relationship with his mother. His father died when Richard was 8 and he recalls a happy domestic life with his mother and sister for many years. Because of this he believes he is quite a feminine man, calm. If there had been just his mother then perhaps he may have taken on 'the man of the house' role. But the presence of his older sister meant they were just a very feminine household. When his mother re-married in Richard's mid-teens he moved back to
Canada for a while. He contemplated whether he felt displaced by her new man. Although her new husband is ‘an OK kind of guy’ he has interrupted that ‘special bond between mother and son’.

It has already been mentioned how some mothers took their sons to events (Robert, Stephen, Stuart, Alan). And there were quite a few narratives that positioned their mothers as being intelligent; in some cases men recalled their mothers being awarded scholarships or school prizes or else staying on at school beyond what was the norm for that generation. Some mentioned their mothers’ strategies to progress their son’s education. Robin and William’s mothers were single parents. Robin told how he failed the 11+ at school and was refused grammar school entry. But after his mother’s persistent badgering of the school head, he was allocated a place. He suggested his mother was ‘pretentious’ because of her motivations, as he saw it. He contemplates her reason for wanting to get her son into the grammar school,

Robin: It wasn’t about the education, a better education. It was about mixing with the right sort of people.

William’s mother appeared as a similarly influential part of his home life. He told of her efforts to provide the best education for her son without paying for it given their financial position after his middle-class father left. William said his mother sought and sent him to the best school in the area (a Catholic school) and also obtained a high quality musical education for him – for free – by enrolling him as a chorister at the church and then the abbey. William emphasised his mother’s commitment to making him an independent young man, increasingly giving him responsibility for looking after himself. He told how his 12th birthday present was a lesson in how to do the laundry, and then laughed when he told how she never did his washing again! Whilst he recalled not appreciating it at the time, William reflected that it was probably a good thing.

But there was also an element of feeling neglected in his story. William mentioned his mother’s prolonged absences from the home when he was growing up, due to his
mother's involvement in various feminist organisations. He told how she travelled for meetings, seminars and rallies and also held meetings at their house. He also recalled how uncomfortable it was for him, as a young man, to come home from school to a roomful of women 'talking about how horrible men are'.

Tony's mother enforced a strict homework regime, and he recalled her motto: 'there's no TV til there's no homework'. He recalled how he resented that imposed discipline at the time, although (like William's laundry experience above) he appreciates it now. He is convinced that he would have failed without it. Nathan also recalled restrictions enforced by his mother, telling how she wouldn't allow him to hang about with local gangs.

Graham and Alan both told of their mothers' increasing dependence on prescription drugs and/or alcohol during their childhood, which they link to the struggles they faced in raising their families on limited incomes. Both women, and indeed many of the mothers in the narratives, were in employment as they raised their children, and are praised for their industriousness and ability to sustain paid and unpaid work.

Daniel recalled his mother being really supportive of anything her children did, but that she wasn't able to help them academically. He believes this was because she left her convent school functionally illiterate. Daniel further admires his mother for returning to education as her children progressed, so that now she too is at university.

**Fathers**

Frank, Nathan, Robert and Tony's narratives focussed on a lack of understanding between themselves and their fathers as they were growing up. Robert suggested his (adoptive) father's withdrawal may have been due to what would now be recognised as 'post-traumatic stress disorder', following his active military service. Nathan recalled his teenage relationship with his father as particularly strained, suggesting his father was emotionally illiterate (at that time). Tony also:
Tony: My dad’s kind of, he’s not really an influential part of my life. All he really is is someone who’s there that goes out and works and comes back home again. I never really had a relationship with my dad.

Frank’s narrative was one of greater tension, with a father whom he believed did not understand his children’s desires to escape their surroundings. Frank attributed it to his father’s Protestantism. He reflected,

Frank: He had no idea how to communicate [with] my brother on that level, for going out and making money, and [having] the symbols of making money – the big car, the gold rings and stuff. He hated that, my father. He said to him ‘just remember where you come from.’ …My father took great pride, he was the sort, ‘working-class proud and stay absolutely proud to your roots.’ It’s a very narrow view. I didn’t see that when I was younger, but certainly when I got older.

[later]

Frank: [My father] was a stronger character than most I met in my life. So he might be more extreme perhaps. He wasn’t untypical by any means. With his {pause} ‘the voice of the working-class Scots male’. A Protestant you know, as well. That was the problem...He was all for working for money and staying true to your roots.

For some men, their biological fathers left soon after birth (Robin, William, Nigel). Stephen was raised by his grandparents, and he was told at age 11 that the man he had known as his uncle, was in fact his father. He told how neither party had any interest in changing their established relationships, and Stephen continued to refer to, and think of, his grandparents and father as his parents and uncle respectively. Some men’s fathers died when they were young (Daniel and Richard). The impression of step-fathers was either fairly neutral or else negative. William’s narrative barely mentioned the step-father who has been with the family for decades. Nigel described the brutality of his step-father; Robin described his step-father as a ‘nutter’, ‘racist’ and ‘psychopath’, although there was no mention of physical violence during his time with the family.
Other men provided greater detail on the dimensions of abuse they felt at the hands of their fathers. Alan recounted how his father labelled him 'Mr C' due to the grades he got at school. Alan saw it as increasingly vindictive, and reveals how it has damaged his self-esteem. James' narrative also mirrored Alan's pain at a father's comments which abolished his self-confidence over the years. In both interviews I asked if their fathers' behaviours could be understood as sarcasm, or 'working-class' wit, without malicious intention. But Alan and James (and similarly Charles, below) were convinced of the intention. They suggested that even if it began without malice, it became increasingly malicious over the years.

In Nigel’s story the abuse was physical as well as verbal. He told how his step-father would beat him and also his mother. As he grew Nigel was to take the beatings on behalf of his mother and little brother; he told how he would direct his father’s violence away from them and onto him instead. Conversely, James told of experiencing the worst of his father’s abusive behaviour because he was the youngest in the family and the only one left at home at that point

Few men presented even abusive fathers as one dimensional characters. Here they show the more complex nature of those men:

Alan: So I don’t think my dad had much self confidence. He was good at his job. He was a shoe salesman. He was also a manager for [a department store]. Then a salesman. A very good salesman. Tried to join golf clubs, couldn’t quite get in...but we were happy. Got a lot of good memories. But the older he got the more vitriolic he got. And after they split up he just got worse and worse.

Alan: He had a great sense of humour. It was a sarcastic sense of humour, and you could either use it as a positive thing or put it to detrimental use. He’d a great imagination. He had a lot of good qualities about him. That many good qualities that can enhance people, doesn’t make up for the concentrated badness that can almost destroy people.

James: He did want to fight [his sons] quite a lot ... But we were all [grown] up by this time. He never actually picked on us when we were young y’know. ... On the other hand - and this is what everybody used to say about him - he was incredibly sensitive, an incredibly sensitive man.
And absolutely, really fair, and loving in many respects. And my brothers, even to the day he died, my brothers totally respected him. Totally respect him. Even my mother loved him, to bits...

James: He had this terrible drink problem, which again we looked his background and he had that – his father died when he was 9 and he was brought up by uncles and so they’re all a bit kinda rough, they’re all working in the shipyards, and they’re all really hard kind of working-class men, and it was a difficult time, just through the war and just after the war. And he, he had to become really hard himself. From a lot of the stories he relayed to us, life was pretty harsh back in [that town]. And he became a really really hard man. I mean physically. A really hard worker. And as a builder he was out dealing with people who were really, y’know quite coarse on a day to day basis. ... And this is the bizarre thing, he was an incredibly sensitive man. He played guitar, he used to sing a lot of beautiful songs, love songs, and folk songs and all sorts. He was really loving towards my mother in may respects you know. But he seemed to have this kind of flip side as well. This ‘Jekyll and Hyde’ thing. When he'd get drunk he'd get very verbally abusive. But never ever hit my mother.

James; He'd never lay a finger on my mother, which is really, for us - we totally respected y'know. So, to this day as well. ...He was a very fair man. He was always standing up for people. Always defending people. A real warrior of a man y'know ... one of the things that we said was that nobody messed with his family,

Graham: My father was a steelworker. He was an Irish immigrant. Came over when he was 6. Mother was born and bred here. Working class. My father drank an awful lot. Beat my mother up. Gambled most of his money away. He was a mixture of Santa Clause and the Devil. One day it was - you know he's a great father. I don't know what your experiences were but mines a - I think sometimes everybody has a {pause} kind of bad childhood {pause} but it wasn't that bad, you know. He didn't really hit us {pause} much. It's just the standard kinda, you see when you see him now, guilty and not the man that he was, it makes me want to weep when you think of [him] a few years ago. I don't hang with my dad now but he's a broken man. There's no spirit there.

Some men told of how their father had influenced their political/moral perceptions. Grant told how his father used to discuss moral issues and wider social events with him, from the TV or in the newspaper for example. Stephen told of a very close relationship to his (grand)father. He remembered always being encouraged to read by
his father and that there were always lots of newspapers and socialist literature around the house.

Stephen: My grandfather was very left wing. There was always Joe Jordan books lying round the house, Robert Tressell, you know. I suppose it’s, my grandfather, obviously he was a Catholic as well. He always wanted to better himself.

MW: Would you say he pushed you then?

Stephen: No, he was just there. It was just that books, he always told me ‘if you pick up a book you will learn something every day.’ So he just read all the time, and he’s been a great influence on my reading you know. He would buy newspapers cause he would say ‘you always need to know what the other side is thinking.’

MW: Was he politically active then?

Stephen: Only in his head. And he was a member of the trade union but he was never an official or a member of the Labour party. I think, he knew what he thought was right and wrong, and how these things should be tackled and the rest

Matt linked his own political outlook to the era of industrial conflict he was raised in. He said,

Matt: Growing up in [that city] in the 1980’s you couldn’t help but be politicised.

In particular his narrative emphasised his sense of injustice on behalf of his father, and the rest of the industrial workforce that he felt were mistreated by the Government of the day. This was also present in William’s narrative where he told of his grandfather’s participation in the miners’ strike of 1984, and his mistreatment not only by the government but also by the police whilst on the picket line. Matt was even closer to those events, he actually took part in the protests, and this experience is the reason for him deciding to pursue Law at university now. Matt is similarly angry at the way he feels his father has been treated by the government.

Matt: He worked for the railways for forty-five years and they just ... laid him off and just went ‘bye, we’re privatised. Now piss off’. After forty-five years. ...he worked from fifteen to sixty years old and then had five
years signing on [unemployment benefit] ...and I was really angry about that. There was my dad, because I had been on the dole previous to my dad signing on, and I was thinking, ‘I’m a fucking waster, a [was a] complete feckless waster when I was on the dole, and you are having to sign on with the likes of me.

Families
Outside of these specific narratives of parental relationships, two narratives of overall familial relationships emerged. Relationships were either described in broadly positive terms where siblings and children were generally supportive and emotionally connected (Daniel, Stuart, Stephen, Matt). In James’ narrative, despite the contradictions of his father’s behaviour above, the level of support between the children, and their mother, means his narrative was more positive than many others. A more frequent narrative was one of feeling friction and isolation within the family and some men actually refer to their childhood as dysfunctional (Darren, Frank, Nigel, Robert).

Robert was adopted by an elderly couple at a time when there was a shortage of suitable adoptive parents. His ‘parents’ later adopted another 2 (unrelated) children. He believes they were all regarded as ‘problem children’ due to ill health and this is why people who may have otherwise been seen as unsuitable parents, were allowed to take them. There is no hint of anything unsavoury in Robert’s childhood, but he insists there was just no emotional attachment (at least on his part). He refers to his family as ‘a collection of individuals’.

James laments the loss of emotional closeness as a result of his father’s (and then his mother’s) slide into alcoholism. He also felt that being the youngest of 7 children, there was a sense from his father that he was in the way now; that he was the remaining barrier to his father spending time alone with his wife after all the years of child rearing. His parents’ separation was not divisive and his mother still tended to her husband and tried to support him to reform his alcohol addiction. There were many attempts at reconciliation, where James and his mother tried to live with his father, although James recalled how these usually ended in failure. James said that
eventually he sensed such hostility to his presence from his father that he stayed
away from his father’s house, and at 14 he lived alone whilst his mother moved back
with his father.

Graham’s narrative of his parents was similar to that of James’, and he also told of
his isolation at home. He suggests that feeling overlooked at home may have been a
factor in his ‘macho’ behaviour on the streets of his estate, cited earlier. He reasoned
that it could have been a way of getting the attention he was lacking at home. His
closing comment is worth re-reading here,

Graham: Or maybe it was just [that] I wanted to get noticed, cos I
certainly didn't get noticed at home.

Again Graham was the youngest and, like James, says he saw the worst of this
parents’ demise after his siblings have left. His mother began her addiction much
earlier in his life than was the case with James. He recalls a particular incident with
his mother,

Graham: I came home from school to find her lying naked in the back
garden. Off her face. Unable to wake. I had to get her dressed and take
her in the house.

Darren and Howard also described their familial relationships as unemotional. Whilst
Darren considers that he may have some responsibility for that, Howard believed his
parents were the distant ones.

Howard: My parents were supportive in the physical sense – house car
money etc, but they were emotionally detached from their children, we
couldn’t go to them with personal issues.

Edward told of the constant teasing he endured from most of his family, for being
bookish and withdrawn. He told how he was described as ‘Mr Daydream’, ‘Dozy
Dan’, ‘Simple Simon’ and so on, by his family, even his mother.
Edward: ...although don’t get me wrong, she always said it with a smile on her face. I loved my mother dearly ...but these things, labels, in terms of conditioning and of giving a child his identity that’s dreadful. That’s what I got as a youngster.

Edward also recalled how his mother would sneak him rewards for his educational achievements, which Edward suggests must have been quite a task for her, given the poor circumstances she was raising her children in.

Frank’s story also told of his sense of not fitting in but with him it was in reference to his peer group. Frank’s narrative contained a celebratory tone with respect to the culture of the working-class male, but he also told how he also enjoyed other kinds of activities that were deemed outwith this culture. He told of wanting to see plays, to talk about books, and go to art exhibitions as a youth. He recalled a particular incident,

Frank: There are parts of my life that I really enjoyed but...it's not enough for me. It never has been. I've known since I was 17/18. ...I remember it was the Edinburgh Festival and I'm saying let’s go to a play and they're thinking 'see nancy boy over there!'

The 'nancy boy' jibe that his friends direct at Frank is a derogatory term meant to imply that he is effeminate/homosexual. Frank eventually learns his lesson and postpones these kinds of leisure pursuits. He has no idea why he should have had these interests without any external influence, but his narrative certainly demonstrates the adaptive nature of a class habitus.

In presenting accounts of the men’s early family life it is worth contemplating the relationship between habitus and habitat that is beginning to emerge in their reflections. The notion of a smooth fit between these two spheres is contestable from many accounts, although it has to be remembered that these memories have been constructed by the men at a time and from a place far removed from their earlier circumstances. Nonetheless, a picture of inculcation of class related dispositions is problematic, as men apparently perceived the injustice of some of their surroundings
(particularly where this relates to their parents). By highlighting diversity within familial forms of capital (political, cultural, financial and emotional capital) it is more difficult, in these accounts, to see the reproductive tendencies in the formation of habitus. However, so far the findings relate only to the institution of the family, and to the early years of the men’s memories, therefore a wider lense may help to bring such tendencies into sharper relief.

**Experience of school**

The impact of geographical space (in relation to a school and working-class conurbations) was evident in some narratives (Graham, Richard, James, Darren). Graham reflected on his very different behaviours in school and in the council estate where he lived and had his social group. Graham attended a Catholic school for which he was bussed from the housing scheme in the morning and returned in the evening.

Graham: I was never any trouble at school. I was only in trouble when I was in the scheme. Cos all my friends, you know ...

Richard and James’ narratives identified a counter-school culture among the catchment areas of their local schools. This was most obvious in James’ narrative, but was implicit in Richard’s comment also.

James: [they] are very narrow minded in their outlook which is one of the things I experienced in school, where people were very dismissive of learning. Particularly, not only the boys but the girls as well I suppose. But that kinda group of harder boys that would dismiss school work and dismiss academic achievement. To a certain extent I did experience that when I hung about with the guys from my town. I experienced them making fun of me for going home to do a bit of [school] work you know. I don’t know how much this influenced me. I’m sure it must have done. At that age we can all be a bit sensitive y’know and very easily swayed by our peers.

Richard: I suppose it wasn’t such a bad school, for those brave enough to stick their head above the parapet...
Implicit in Richard’s account was that a pupil had to be brave if they wanted to appear clever. Richard also told how his school paid most attention to the high achievers and that average students were overlooked, which mirrored Stuart’s recollection also. Tony offered a contrary narrative of his ‘bog standard State crappy comprehensive’ focussing on the lowest achievers, whilst he felt those academically able pupils (himself included) were thought to need less attention.

Darren: It’s strange when I look back at it. At that age I already thought that people who were going on and doing well at school and going to either college or university, are people who were from these estates. The people who were seen as quite – posh, upper-class. Although of course I had no concept of class at that point but I just knew they were more well off than I was.

Graham’s separation from his council estate peers was due to him attending a Catholic school. Overall, a narrative of Catholic schools emerged that was positive (Matt, Graham, Daniel, Alan, Edward). Matt and Daniel in particular mentioned how they thought their Catholic schools encouraged their pupils to achieve. Whilst Matt, Edward and Daniel were high-achieving students, Alan and James also spoke of being encouraged to say on in school despite weaker grades. However, Matt and Daniel both mentioned unease at what they perceived to be the contradictions in that otherwise positive ethos. They each recall feeling how their school’s treatment of pregnant girls, and the Church’s teachings on homosexuality, made them ill at ease.

Stephen told how his education was also affected by religious commitments. He was a practising Catholic, but told how his (grand)mother refused to send him to a Catholic school, because of her dismissal of the church. He recalled how attending a non-denominational primary school presented no problems for him and he was one of the highest achievers. However he suggested his transition to high school was increasingly blighted by sectarianism. He told,

Stephen: You don’t hide your faith…I was in a lot of fights….
Eventually this led to his non-attendance at school.

Michael’s school narrative was also one of increasing non-attendance. He emphasised how this was not due to lack of interest in school subjects, but rather the institution. He recalled simply teaching himself.

Michael: Primary school – no problem. Secondary school – absolutely no interest. People would try and teach me science, geometry, area of a triangle. Pass [i.e. no interest]. Basically, all I did the last two years was bunk school. I’d bunk school and go down the local park and sit and read books all day. Three or four books. I mean, I wasn’t bunking school and sitting in the house all day doing nothing. Or getting into trouble. I was sitting outside all day reading books … I actually sat beside the river and taught myself the Latin verbs and French verbs for the exams.

Michael said that he went to school to take his mock exams and achieved good passes. However he didn’t return in order to take the ‘real’ exams a few months later.

Michael: I had no need to. I’d proven I could do it.

Grant attended Catholic school although this was due to its location close to the family home.

Richard was critical of the lack of guidance he believed he received in school, in particular because he had an aptitude that should have been nurtured. He mentioned that he had recently reviewed his yearly school reports, and comments,

Richard: I was looking over my report cards recently, and, it’s there, running through every year: creative writing! It’s obvious I had a talent for it. Someone should have picked up on that.

Robin attended a grammar school, despite failing his 11+. His mother worked to get him accepted, as a means of him mixing with ‘the right sort of people’. However it seems this mechanism failed as Robin recalls not being accepted in that school, as
being outside the ‘cliques’. Together with a small group of other working-class rebels, he sensed a division along social class lines,

Robin: ...They’d mix with you in the playground. They’d work with you in class. But there would always be that separation after school.

For those who felt they did not achieve, or did not achieve as well as they could have, narratives of distractions and lack of application appeared.

Alan: My lack of education is more to do with just a lack of motivation. I mean, I would look at people and think, they’re gonna go to university and just think ‘nah, I couldn’t do it’. So I never saw it as a goal. I never thought it was something I could do.

Matt: My A level results were just down to not being arsed, and deliberately not being arsed. It was such an easy way to rebel; stop applying yourself.

Edward, Tony, William mention their interest in girls diverting their attention. Other narratives exhibited a rejection of education.

Darren: I couldn’t stand school. Hated it. I was a bit of a rebel at school I suppose ...I just couldn’t get away from school early enough.

Stuart: I just hated it. I wasn’t very confident at school. I was a bit shy...Looking back, [the teachers] could have done more really. I can see why it was quite difficult for them. Big classes, mixed talent. But I didn’t find them as helpful as they could have been...I just became {pause} indifferent {pause}. I just gave up.

Howard referred to his upwardly mobile family as ‘unconventional. ... very left wing’ and suggested that part of his parents’ beliefs was the challenging of authority. He told how his parents refused to send their children to school in uniform, that he wore tie-dyed trousers and had long hair whilst his sister’s hair was extremely short. But he says,
Howard: My parents had a strong belief in education, but they didn’t have the necessary understanding of relations to push it through.

Some men who attended Catholic school spoke of the close relationship between home, church and school. This was mostly seen as beneficial to their educational achievement as not trying at school brought shame on the family. However there were occasions when men mentioned the educational insecurity of their parents (Daniel’s mother, Matt’s father) who they believed suffered at the hands of previous generation of Catholic institutions.

Matt: My father was a big man, a strong man, but he would quake at the sight of nuns.

Daniel: My mother was very insecure about education. I think she was punished at the convent. … She was probably dyslexic.

Three men had ‘parents’ who were of an older generation than other parents around them (Robert, Stephen and Stuart). All of these men believe the outlooks and attitudes of their elderly parents influenced their education progression. It meant the significance of finishing school was not recognised and the men were not punished for absences.

Some men regret their parents not pushing them harder at school and reinforcing the value of their education. Richard was slightly critical of his mother who did not discourage him from leaving school to take an admin job. The value of employment over education was also present with Stuart and Tony.

Stuart: [my parents] took interest, but didn’t interfere too much. Check if I’d done my homework, go to parents’ evenings. They didn’t push me like they did once I’d left school.

Tony: When I was at school, the feeling I got from my parents was to get good marks because you’ll get a good job. It wasn’t really get good marks because you can get to university. It was more of a means to an end to get a good job.
There were other reasons for lack of involvement of parents, connected to familial tensions. Grant told how his parents’ attention was distracted at that critical time because his brother was suffering from mental illness and he was their priority. Elsewhere,

Alan: So there were 5 of us kids close together, so by the time you got to secondary school, their relationship was all-consuming with each other – like arguing all the time, or else they weren’t talking cos she wasn’t living with him...So really, what we did, didn’t really come into it.

Towards the end of school Nigel, James and Graham were each experiencing very disturbed domestic circumstances, and this began to influence their behaviour and performance at school. James’ and Graham's parents were both separated by this point, with both fathers becoming increasingly consumed by alcohol and violence. James began to sense paternal resentment of his presence and eventually ended up living by himself at age 14 as his mother attempted reconciliations with her husband. Graham witnessed the demise of his mother also and was taking responsibility for raising his younger brother. At around the same time, Nigel was beginning to grow tall enough to try to protect his mother and younger brother from the abuse administered by his stepfather. Even though all of these men recalled enjoying school, trying hard and achieving well, Nigel and Graham increasingly took to drink and drugs. (Eventually they both ended up in trouble with the authorities.)

James told how he had the support of his 6 older brothers to help him through such times. His elder brother had become a mature student at a university in Glasgow, when James was nearing the end of school and James recalled how this brother in particular encouraged him to try to stay on in school.

In this section the process of inculcation of classed dispositions is beginning to emerge. The men are recalling the expectations of key others in terms of their educational ‘success’ and for many working-class men such expectations were low.
Dropping out, non-application and/or disruption can be understood therefore in classed ways although not as a habitual rejection of education as Willis (1977) may contend. Instead a more complex picture is emerging where structural and/or cultural factors are seen as getting in the way in what was possible. The complexity of a class based habitus is increased by the number of men who did ‘succeed’ in their education, and it is interesting to contemplate the impact of the ethos of catholic schools and communities as a contributory factor in those dispositions.

4.3 Post-school Transitions

Some men had secure ambitions to continue in education and gain sufficient Highers/A levels to go to university (Daniel, Matt, Nathan, Tony, William, James, Ryan). Common to all of these narratives were their schools’ assistance in university applications and choice processes, with no mention of parental guidance (except in William’s case).

Alan, Grant and Richard spoke of going to college after school and embarked on highers/O levels. None of these narratives contained a university trajectory. Alan spoke of wanting to delay entering the labour market, Grant studied sport because it was something he enjoyed and Richard also took subjects for pleasure. Grant attributed this ‘wandering’ in part to a familial lack of knowledge about such routes in addition to his Brother’s illness. Richard continued in education to study English but his mother lacked the knowledge of the process. He left to take a clerical job, regretting that she did not encourage him to stay on. Ryan wanted to join the armed forces from school but was dissuaded by his school and family. Instead he took Highers with view to vocational education to follow in father’s trade (electrician), although he told of his lack of commitment to this course of action though.

Stuart also progressed to a ‘vocational’ education, although he told how he ended up there because of what he believes were the cultural prejudices of his careers’ advisor. Stuart informed the advisor that he wanted to be a sound engineer, a career that would build on his love of music. However he suggests that the advisor, not knowing the paths to such a career, suggested that he should become an electrical engineer
instead and that that which might lead to his chosen career. Stuart is convinced that this advice reflected the advisor's stereotypical view of trades appropriate for a working class youth such as himself. Nonetheless he completed his 'electricians' certificate' and tells how he spent a further year working as an electrician on building sites, where as a very shy young man, he endured the teasing and initiations that were routine in that environment.

Robin began 5th year at the grammar school his mother managed to ‘illegitimately’ gain entry to, but told how he did not have a clear sense of direction or future career path. Indeed. Robin’s notion of suitable work was largely self-informed. He recalled making judgements about the men who passed through his life from time to time. His mother was mostly single and these men were mostly friends. Looking at their clothes and the way they carried themselves, he distinguished between those with transient types of employment and those who may have a career type of employment.

Robin: But I could see that those people didn’t have careers, they had jobs. And this guy with the suit that came round I could see that he had some kind of profession about him. I was aware that there was a difference between having a profession and having a job. So that’s why I asked him, I think. And I think that’s what set me off.

Robin took advice from this man, an engineer, regarding a similar career. The man advised him that the best way to become an engineer was to get a vocational qualification and then work your way up, claiming that those with on-the-job experience were more highly regarded in the profession. Robin told of the reaction to this suggestion in school,

Robin; ... the careers’ advisor ... said ‘what do you want to do?’ I said ‘anything with engineering I’d like to be, but I don’t want to do the university route really. What I really want to do is a craft apprenticeship, maybe start with a city and guilds. And she said ‘well of you want to make grub-screws all your life you might as well leave now.’ Gave me the [leaving] form, and I’d left by the end of the week! And I still look back on that with shock and horror, that a teacher could take such a loaded attitude to a student that affects their whole lives. I don’t regret that she made that stupid mistake, but I’m still shocked by it.
After being asked to leave school Robin failed to hold down lots of temporary/transient jobs. After a year repeating such patterns, and realising his own lack of commitment and tendency to quit, he turned to another one of his mothers' friends for advice, asking,

Robin: 'What can I get into that's easy to get in to and hard to get out of?'
And he said, 'the army son'.

And Robin subsequently enlisted.

Frank, Graham, Edward and Nigel each recalled achieving good grades in their secondary school education and stated they would have liked to have continued into post-compulsory education. Various factors intervened. Whilst Frank enjoyed his 'typical working class male life' he also reflected that it came at a price. The cultural and economic conditions of the familial home dictated he found employment - despite being recommended for progression into higher education. It even dictated the kind of employment he was allowed to take whilst living in his father's house. He was offered two forms of employment - a place on the factory floor, but also a position as office junior, in light of his good school grades. He recalled,

Frank: My mum wanted me to take the office job, but my dad was furious. They had a big row about it. You work for money and money alone. Not for career or job satisfaction....my dad won, but I was grateful to my mother.

There was a similar tale of a maternal intervention in Edward's history. Edward also had the chance to continue his education, having won prizes throughout his school life and been very industrious. The reader should recall that Edward told of giving up his university ambition after being prosecuted for drunken behaviour. Instead he looked for work and, like Frank, had a number of options and a father who preferred those that offered the most pay immediately. In Edward's story his mother prevailed and Edward went into an accounting position.
In Michael's family, there was a definite cultural standard of what constituted 'manly work'. He relayed,

Michael: 'if you didn’t get your hands dirty, you weren’t in work. You were a snob.'

Michael had an ambition to join the armed forces after school but with memories of Vietnam and the beginnings of the Northern Ireland conflict, his family would not permit it. He trained as a mechanic instead, but after a year the garage he worked for went into liquidation and he took the opportunity to enlist.

Indeed armed forces emerged as a significant factor in many men's lives. Like Michael and Robin above, they did not enter straight from school. Darren and Nigel were the youngest when they entered the armed forces, and their motivations were remarkably similar. Both told of feeling scared at how their lives would turn out if they remained in their respective council schemes with their peers.

Darren: I knew the way some of them were headed. Maybe I was worried that I was gonna head that way myself. I was drinking more and my friends were sniffing glue more. And I’d started sniffing gas as well and it was only gonna be a short step before I was onto glue and God knows what else. There was a very big drugs problem in [my area]. And I could just see me being involved in that. So I did make the right decision [to join the military]. Looking back now. But I’m not sure I saw it like that at the time.

MW: what were your aspirations when you left school?

Darren: Didn’t have any, except to get away from school. I also wanted to get out of [the city] as well, so I though I could be a truck driver. Get a HGV. Job for life. So that’s why I joined the army – to get the licence. Get away from school, from the city, move away from my family...I just wanted to get away. To see other things. Cos I knew that if I’d have stayed where I was, I’d have ended up going round in circles and not end up getting out. Not really breaking out of this...I suppose, vicious circle. I just didn’t see any way out for me personally.
Graham was particularly concerned because he was beginning to get involved with more serious forms of criminal activity. He told of a distant relative who was an officer in the armed forces. During a family visit, this man took Graham for a walk to a local naval base.

Graham: ...and he said 'you know, if you want out of all this, join the forces.' And so that was me.

Despite Nigel's childhood ambition to join the military, his involvement with the police and drugs was too deep by the time he would have been old enough to join. Stephen, apparently, enrolled on a whim. He told the tale of going to the town centre for a haircut – to shed his ‘hippy’ locks – and seeing that the recruitment centre was next door to the hairdressers and he simply wandered into that shop after his haircut. Although he denied the two events were connected, it is possible that the change of image from hippy indicated he was already on a road of change. Whereas in Robert’s narrative, he told of actively seeking out the bohemian scene at this age.

What emerged in this section is how certain schools managed to develop a habitus that incorporated higher education among young men with no familial history of such processes (with the exception of William). For others, it showed the ways in which class and gender specific expectations affected their trajectories often in ways that they seem to have accepted. Whilst there is a sense of resignation rather than an active embrace of their early classed and gendered trajectories, the apparent lack of resistance may be seen as indicative of ‘what is for the likes of them’ and be therefore regarded as within their habitus as it was developed at that point.

### 4.4 Conclusion

This chapter has mapped developments in the men’s ‘pre-adult’ lives. It has sketched some of the familial movements occurring in the men’s families, from geographical relocations (from Ireland to Britain, from northern England to the South), social mobilities (illustrating the tensions of transitions moving between social class
locations, as perceived by the men). It also showed how some men felt a disparity in the capital composition between parents.

It then moved to sketch the impact of the physical spaces into which the men were born, illustrating the cultural norms associated with (mostly) working-class estate life. The impact of a tough form of working-class masculinity was a common theme, but so was a theme of educational ambition, perhaps related to the Catholic community. It also showed the intimate relations within those geographies, showing extreme examples of violence/abuse and poverty, and also compassion, sensitivity. Such contradictions could be seen within individuals. Despite narratives of happy and supportive family lives, an alternative narrative of feeling 'out of place' was also identified.

Finally the chapter ended by showing the paths the men were taking as they negotiated their early steps to adulthood. Quite a few men remained in education, en route to university whilst others remained in education in order to defer labour market entry. Classed and gendered expectations were seen as influencing those paths to employment and vocational training, and military service emerged as an escape route from what was perceived to be unpromising working-class environments. Chapter 5 will now take up the men's stories from this point.
CHAPTER 5
Findings: Adult biographies

5.1 Introduction

Chapter 4 presented accounts of the men’s origins, and their childhood experiences up to their transitions to early adulthood. This chapter presents aspects of their ‘adult’ biographies to the time at which they were interviewed. It is organised in four sections. Section one charts the men’s occupational routes up to the point at which their current student experience began. ‘Occupation’ is used here in a broader sense than merely employment. It means the activities that have occupied their time, so that studying and voluntary work can be included as occupational activities also. Section two then presents developments in their personal lives over that time. The third section highlights the early stages of the men’s transitions to students. It shows the context in which their thoughts of university study developed, and follows the practical and psychological adjustments the men mentioned in their narratives. Their preconceptions of the university environment and of their place in it are implicated in that psychology, and these are included in this section. The chapter ends by examining the men’s reflections on their HE experiences. It illustrates their feelings about the academic demands of student-hood, and their relationships to the institutions, and others both within and outwith that environment. It also includes the effect that they believe their studenthood has had their lives.

As with the previous chapter, the reader is reminded that this chapter is based on the men’s narratives and that what was told reflects the relationships in the interview and the wider social context in which it took place and the biographical influences of both the men and myself (e.g. Lawler 2002). The reader is also reminded of my authorship of this chapter, for I am responsible for filtering everything that was told to me, and for organising, interpreting and presenting all the data here. The dilemmas involved in this task were discussed in Chapter 3, but it would be complacent not to jolt my reader’s memory at this point. Finally, the extracts of the men’s narratives
that are presented in this chapter follow the same conventions that were described at the beginning of chapter 4.

5.2 Occupational paths

The occupational paths taken by the men were diverse, and sifting through them to find organising principles or patterns was not easy. Organising according to traditional classed and gendered occupations seemed appropriate, but carried the danger of reifying social stereotypes. Organising the men’s occupational journeys according to standardised occupational hierarchies was also a consideration, but this reduced a collection of dynamic journeys to movements along a single axis of occupational ranks. However, conceptualising the men’s occupational undertakings in terms of spaces overcame these concerns. It allowed different occupations to be grouped together according to a feature of the work that seemed important. Conceptual spaces also avoided hierarchical relationships between what the men did, because spaces were demarcated around features of occupations rather than their statuses. Seeing spaces rather than occupations is also a more fluid framework. It focuses attention on the dynamics of how men came to occupy different positions within an occupational space, as well as on how they moved between them.

From the analysis of the interview data the following occupational spaces were identified,

- ‘Traditional student’ spaces
- Military spaces
- Social care spaces
- Routine occupational spaces
- Creative spaces

‘Traditional student spaces’ and ‘military spaces’ emerged as distinct categories fairly organically from the interview data. Quite a few men spent time in each of these spaces and also the boundaries of each space were easily identifiable; the men
either were/were not university students at the ‘traditional’ age; they either were/were not in the armed forces. The other categorisations had to be more actively constructed. The interview data revealed that many men spent some time in caring occupations and roles. This was isolated as a distinct category because of its significance as a ‘divergent trajectory’ in terms of male gender expectations. ‘Routine occupational spaces’ encompasses both service and manual occupations where men had little room for autonomy, and these were not surprising occupations given their gender and/or class. The final space is small by comparison. Three men’s occupational lives moved into the creative industries (the arts, crafts and media). The significance of the space lies not in its size, but in its distance from formal systems of adult education. It could be argued that, historically, the military and many companies in the routine occupational sectors have provided routinised education and training provision whereas this has less of a presence in the creative sectors. Therefore the creative space is, to some degree, a counter-factual case, which given the exploratory nature of this research, makes it worthy of consideration.

Many men moved between these occupational spaces, and will therefore appear in more than one section. Where this occurs, the reader will be made aware of what preceded and followed the men’s appearance in that space.

■ ‘Traditional student’ spaces
As chapter 4 showed, Daniel, James, Matt, Nathan, Ryan, Tony and William all began university at the conventional time. Most had traditional entrance qualifications (Highers) except Ryan who entered a ‘new’ university with a HND qualification. Of the 7 men in this space, 4 failed to complete their studies at that time. The 3 who completed at that time (Daniel, Nathan and William) were postgraduate, ‘first generation’ students at the time of this research. Ryan and Tony were asked to leave this space. Tony returned two years later to complete that course. Ryan, like James and Matt, left the space for longer, and when they returned to HE, it was for different subjects and at different institutions.
Daniel, Tony and William began degrees in biological sciences, Ryan in electrical engineering. Matt's Seminary was, of course, exclusively male. James and Nathan took social science degrees. Four of the seven men who occupied 'traditional student spaces' attended Catholic schools (Daniel, James, Matt, William).

James and Nathan provided the only narratives which indicated a lack of confidence in their capacities to enter university. Lack of self-confidence was a prevalent theme in James' story (which attributed to his father's behaviour), but he told how his (Catholic) school still encouraged him to apply for a university, despite his less than outstanding grades. The picture was reversed in Nathan's biography, where he told of his own self-belief in his university destination despite his school's lack of confidence that he could succeed.

Nathan: Instead they suggested I try for a HND and I said 'no, I'm going to university'. I don't know why, I really don't...I just always had this feeling that that's what I was going to do.

Coming from a non-university background, with no books in the house and parents whom he believed had been emotionally harmed by their own educational experience, Daniel attributed his educational success to luck, claiming that he was merely fortunate enough to have been born with a good memory.

Daniel: I have a half-decent memory and because of that I get the rewards. I do well in exams, I get praised and that gives me the confidence to explore other subjects. I am thus able to work the system. Those who don't do well in exams, who don't remember rather than don't understand, get knocked back. They take a few hits, and that's got to have an effect.

Selection of universities appeared mostly informed by schools, and men talked of their options in terms of matching courses with their expected grades. Matt had few
choices for his Seminary studies, accepting the first place that became available. However, he recalled being made aware of institutional hierarchies by the school. 

Matt: So yeh, I was told that new uni’s weren’t proper universities. We were only encouraged to apply for the old uni’s.

Tony also had a sense of a hierarchy among his local universities in Glasgow.

Tony: At school the interpretation I had was that Glasgow was the best university and Strathclyde was second and then Glasgow Caledonian and then various little institutions lagging behind. But he recalled another dynamic in his decision also.

Tony: I liked the idea of going to Glasgow University. The west end of Glasgow... it’s quite a cool place to live and hang out. And the main building’s a really nice place. So yeah, I just fancied going to Glasgow. I visited Strathclyde and Glasgow Caledonian but I didn’t really fancy them much.

William also recalled having a limited understanding of institutional differences at that time.

William: Well everyone knows about Oxbridge. {pause} Ours [i.e. the university in his home city] is like Edinburgh, it’s a sort of ‘Oxbridge reject’ as we call them. But they’re top – and UCL, and LSE. They’re sort of the equivalent of.... an Ivy League, a group apart.

The city William lived in contained an old university. He rejected it because he wanted the ‘proper student experience’ of living away from home. He selected Manchester University, citing that at that time, the early 1990’s, the city was emerging as a hedonistic centre of youth dance music. He arrogantly assumed (his words) that he would get the grades to go to Manchester, and told how he visited no others and randomly selected Glasgow as a second choice believing that he would never attend. After he did not get the grades required by Manchester ‘and they would not lower their offer’, William studied biological science at Glasgow. In the

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1 In the meantime, Matt undertook social care work and appears in that section later in this chapter.
interview he reflected that this turned out positively, having enjoyed the social and academic experiences of that university.

Daniel told of visiting a few institutions (alone) before making his selections. He rejected Manchester for looking bleak (although he reflected that the dreary weather on visiting day probably influenced his perception), Lancaster for its rumoured high suicide rate and Durham for feeling 'insular, closed'. He chose his English 'old' university for his biological science degree because he said the campus felt welcoming, looked great (in the sunshine) and because,

Daniel: ...there were more people like me there. More than anywhere else. Certainly more than I have found here [Edinburgh University].

Ryan visited 3 Scottish universities for his electrical engineering degree, Aberdeen (ancient), Dundee and a non-ancient university in Edinburgh. He suggested that 'no great thought' went into his decision, but believed he probably selected the Edinburgh institution because of the traditional buildings and the beauty of the campus.

The narratives of James, Nathan and William highlighted financial considerations of their choice. For William this meant not selecting universities close to London, to reduce his living costs. For James and Nathan this meant selecting from institutions in their home city (Glasgow). Nathan also said that he wanted to stay at home; he selected only local institutions. He recalled having some concept that Glasgow university was 'more elite' than the other universities, but that this did not deter him from applying. He chose 2 teacher education courses and 2 social science courses among three local universities (including the ancient). He preferred social science, but if he failed to get the necessary grades, said he would happily become a primary school teacher. Nathan failed to get the grades to study social science at Glasgow University, but succeeded in that subject at a non-ancient university in the same city.

In addition to local institutions, James added an institution further afield. Like William, his narrative included a desire for the 'proper student experience' away
from home, but James’ story also included a narrative of escape. James told how his father’s increasing alcoholism during his youth impacted on his decision to apply to a polytechnic on the southern coast of England.

James: ... to get as far away from him as it was possible to get.

He recalled having no notion of any difference between a polytechnic or a university at that time, and when he met the entrance requirements, this was where he began his social science degree. What is evident in these men’s narratives is that they had developed a habitus that had come to incorporate higher education despite this being (with the exception of William) exceptional within their families and working-class communities. Perhaps even more surprisingly, there are instances of recognition of institutional habitus and capitals that reside with the ‘elite/traditional’ institutions, but that there is little sense of distance between themselves and these relatively exclusive spaces.

‘Traditional student’ experience

James, Tony and William’s accounts documented financial pressures, increased socialising and bouts of laziness during their time in this space. James and Tony began failing their courses and were asked to leave during their second year.

Tony: I’ve always just kind of cruised along. Just did enough to get enough Highers to get into university, and just passed enough exams to get to second year at university. And then I got tripped up. My ‘just enough’ wasn’t enough I suppose. I also had some financial problems...and I wasn’t really interested at that point. So I kind of got kicked out, but I’d decided to leave before that.

William’s narrative placed greater emphasis on financial pressures than the other two. He talked about feeling financially disadvantaged both in relation to affluent middle-class students, and also to the working-class home students at the University of Glasgow. He told how his mother was ‘in between jobs’ at this time and would have been unable to offer financial help. He also suspected her politics may have
prevented her from assisting him, mentioning her ethos that he was responsible for his own life and should 'make his own way in the world'. He recalled,

William: I found there was a lot of people from my class who lived at home and {pause} were proud to go to the local university. That was part of their aspiration. They didn't feel the need to move away...They tended to {pause} be wealthy in the sense that they didn't take out any loans, didn't pay rent and had money. A lot of them now have gone on to get their own flats because of the money they could save up as a student...But then, they've never had the experience of moving away from home...

Later William suggested that local students exhibited an insular outlook when it came to considering their post-university options, rarely being prepared to consider moving outwith Scotland. William's account of studenthood also contained references to male student depression.

William: A lot of my male friends were depressed, on Prozac. Took themselves off it over a year.

MW: Why male friends in particular? Did you have mostly male friends?

William. No. I had more female friends actually.

He suggested the bleak winter weather of west coast Scotland added to what he perceived as the difficult transition from youth to adulthood faced by males. He told how one of his friends had committed suicide at that time. William completed his degree, and tried to secure a doctoral position, without success. He then undertook work in financial services and sales to clear his student debt, and told that he always intended to return to medical research.

Glaswegian James spent more time relaying his sense of cultural difference from the students at the English polytechnic he attended. He reflected,

James: Perhaps it was taking a working-class mentality into a middle class or upper class institution. I always remember it was one of the things ... that I suffered from at the time, was this view that I wasn't articulate enough. That I hadn't really hit that. I hadn't really been steeped in a

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background of reading and — Rousseau y’know. I’m a ‘Daily Record’2 [reader] … So I think it was just the fact that I was working-class. That kinda clashed with that institution. And it made me feel sort of intimidated.

However, James also told of the social benefits he thought his working-class Glaswegian identity brought him at that time. He linked his popularity among other students to the release of films such as ‘Trainspotting’ and ‘Braveheart’ which gave his working-class Scottish accent great appeal. He recalled his time in HE as dominated by social activities, where he partied and enjoyed being a central part of the social scene. He also recalled the limitations of his identity,

James: I’m aware of the fact that I had this strong, broad Glaswegian accent when I spoke and they were more refined English accents. … I hadn’t realised I had an accent until I was away. In many respects it did help me in a social setting, but not so much in the academic sphere.

James’s reflection provides useful insight into the value of capitals within different fields, and also within particular points in history. Had it not been for the cultural ascendancy of working-class Scottishness at that particular time, perhaps James could not have traded on the positive value of his identity in the social field. Ultimately, James identified one of the negative aspects of his classed habitus as a feature in his failure at university at that stage in his life. He referred to his lack of confidence as a reason for not seeking help when he began falling behind. When he left his course, he joined his brother in London, taking a variety of ‘routine’ employment, including building site labourer and sales.

Daniel took work in laboratories, before deciding to embark on further study to use his biological sciences degree to become a medical doctor. Nathan also finished his undergraduate degree wanting to go on to higher study and relocated to Edinburgh because of a particular post-graduate course there.

2 The ‘Daily Record’ is a Scottish tabloid newspaper.
Matt and Ryan told of their decisions to leave their courses. Chapter 4 showed how Ryan began his electrical engineering certification with little conviction, having been dissuaded from joining the military after school. Two years into his degree he told of meeting a friend who was already in the armed forces, and after hearing his friend’s experiences of military life, he left his degree course and enlisted in an ‘elite’ section of the military (his words). Matt told how he became increasingly disillusioned with his Seminary instruction. Chapter 4 illustrated how he had entered into it to fulfil his ambition to help people, but perceived that the course was training him instead to disseminate church doctrines and maintain institutional power. After he left, Matt returned to his home city, unemployed, and told of his slide into a state of depression.

■ Military spaces

Darren, Graham, Michael, Stephen, and Robin each joined the military in their late teens, after temporary/insecure ‘routine’ occupations. Ryan entered at a similar age, although he left his university engineering course to enlist. The men served from 5-18 years. Chapter 4 explained that Darren, Graham, Stephen and Robin joined the armed forces to avoid the insecure futures they thought they faced (unemployment/temporary employment). Graham recalled the difficult transition he made entering the service at such a young age.

Graham: When I joined the [forces] it was hard {long, slow emphasis}. Coming from a scheme, ...and I was still a child you know, I wasn't a big person by any manners or means you know. For the first 2 years it was damn hard. Hard work hard fitting in cos I was a boy in a man's world.

Only Michael and Ryan told of childhood ambitions to become soldiers. Despite the fact that only one third of the men who entered this space expressed the desire to actively do so, the narratives of ‘military spaces’ were mostly positive. For example, all men praised the travel and education opportunities it afforded them. Michael's 18 years service provided him with the constant intellectual stimulation he craved, learning new skills every year. In fact, Michael could not praise the army strongly enough in this respect. Alongside the formal training, a picture of literary
engagement emerged within the men’s accounts. It seemed that men read constantly whilst in the service, swapping books and discussing material.

Graham: You’d be surprised. There’s a lot of reading goes on in the [military]. You’ve got no-where to go, nothing much to do with your free time. So, reading and chess.

Michael: The [military’s] a very boring life believe it or not, if you weren’t into sports. A lot of time you are just waiting to do the job you’ve been training for, so a lot of men read.

Another positive feature within some men’s narratives was the belief that the military was a more egalitarian space.

Stephen: I know you might expect to find discrimination etc...but I never encountered anything like that. It’s not the image you have is it?

Robin: It’s such an egalitarian system in the forces. I mean, I’d heard for years stories about violence and brutality and stuff like that. I never saw it. And it is an egalitarian system...you know, you rise to the level of your ability. Almost automatically within the system.

Ryan continued the narrative of fairness, although in his narrative it was not a common feature throughout all sections of the military. He had joined an elite section of the armed forces and compared the way this section was treated in relation to others that he witnessed.

Ryan: In the army, they speak to each other like you wouldn’t speak to your dog ... [In my unit] everybody is spoken to with a bit more respect from the lowest of the lowest to the highest of the highest. In the army I can't believe the way the Lance Corporal speak to privates and all that, it's appalling.

The men rarely mentioned negative aspects of forces careers. References to the horrors of military campaigns they were involved with appeared as concise occasional statements. For example,
Robin: I'd just been in a fairly shitty scenario in Africa; the end of Rhodesia, beginning of Zimbabwe...I'd seen some fairly filthy things down there.

Michael: That is one of the ways I actually came to philosophy: 1978, Belize. It made me think about God...

Graham: I was in [a campaign]. I lost some of my best friends [there]. I don't speak about that very often any more. It was a long time ago. I can't even remember it all.

These men said these things and their narratives moved on to another point. However, there was an important finding that emerged from a conversation with Graham, after the 'formal' interview had taken place. When we were relaxing in a coffee house after the interview the conversation returned to his participation in the campaign. He then described seeing a man welded to the side of the vehicle as it became engulfed in flames. He told how there was nothing he could have done to help him. He also told of other deaths in the campaign. As he relayed these events in another space, unrecorded and intimate, his pain was evident to me. The flamboyance I perceived in his interview was gone. He sat still, staring at the table. There were long silences. It emerged then, that he had left the forces soon after this incident and that he spent the next 2 years under the influence of both alcohol and drugs. Graham told me that his brother eventually intervened and helped him to come off these addictions. All of this was absent in the account of his life presented for me in the interview room. Contrary to his assertion that he couldn’t even remember it now, in that space it seemed it was still very close to home. Given the revelations from my informal meeting with Graham, I am frightened to think what might lie beneath Robin's statement of shitty things in Rhodesia, or how bad Michael's jungle experience must have been if it made him think about the existence of God.

Darren's account of his military life showed more ambivalence than the other men. It included an element of resistance to full integration. Chapter 4 showed Darren was

3 Graham later agreed to the inclusion of this material.
fairly uncommitted to this path from the outset; he really wanted a driving licence. By his own standards he reflected that he was ‘a pretty rubbish soldier. Incompetent’. He talked about his commitment to retain his working-class, northern English accent whilst in this space. He claimed to have consciously resisted acquiring a ‘forces accent’, a nondescript, bland accent, acquired by soldiers’ constantly relocating. Darren emphasised that he dropped his working class accent when he felt the time was right, which was when he felt no more allegiance to his home town.

**Reasons for leaving the armed forces**

Most men left this space at the end of a contractual period, although Robin bought himself out soon after the Rhodesia/Zimbabwe ‘scenario’ mentioned above. Stephen decided not to renew his contract in order to start a family with his wife. Ryan and Robin both pinpointed specific moments where they saw the spectre of regimented futures stretching out before them. Robin went for a careers’ interview when he returned from Africa.

Robin: I spoke to a careers’ advisor. They sat down and mapped out 25 years for me...It scared the life out of me...Suddenly there was an institution and it was almost like being in a prison in a sense, in that the routine was gonna be for a long time ahead. I didn’t want that.

Ryan remembered a moment when he looked at the older men around him in his unit. They were close to retirement, aged in their 40s, and Ryan sensed that their civilian employment would not reflect the responsibilities they had in the forces. He felt that he ought to get out of that career at his age, if he was to stand any chance of forging a career in the civilian realm. During his service Ryan had assisted medics in the field and was impressed by what they did. He sought advice from a few and subsequently left the marines (unemployed) with a plan to become a doctor.

**Post-forces transitions**

Ryan returned to his parents’ home in SW Scotland and studied at 2 colleges (one local one away) to gain the 5 Highers in a single year that he knew was required for entry to medicine. Ryan mentioned the role of luck in achieving this goal, because
one of the courses he took at night school should have been cancelled due to lack of interest. Ryan expressed his gratitude and good fortune to have been allocated a tutor who manipulated attendance documents to keep the class running when it should have been cancelled due to lack of demand.

Robin and Graham each left with specialist IT/systems skills that were in demand in the private sector. Both men established themselves as consultants and told of being hugely successful for a number of years. Graham’s narrative emphasised all the things he bought with his wealth, sports cars, houses (to rent out and to occupy) expensive clothes, indulgent (drink and drugs). He now recalled it as a life of excess. Robin’s narrative was very different. It was more focussed on his attempts to acquire the technical skills to extend the scope of his consultancy role. He took a variety of courses (technical and also via the OU). Eventually both businesses became less successful. Robin explained,

Robin: I applied to British Aerospace for a job in Canada. Actually the same job I was already doing in the UK...and the irony was that the union prevented me from applying for that job because I didn’t have a degree. So that was the reason I decided to do a degree.

Graham: Basically I became a support engineer, a baby engineer. I never signed anything off...

‘Signing things off’ means having the authority to state that a job has been duly completed. Graham told how once he had completed an IT project, someone else had to do this. He also stated that this other person would then present Graham’s work to senior staff and would take the praise for it.

MW: What would you need to have been able to sign things off?

Graham: {said instantly, no hesitation} A degree. As simple as that. Just a degree.

Graham, Stephen, Michael and Darren all expressed a criticism that the armed forces did not offer sufficient help in finding them employment in civilian life. Most forged post-forces occupational paths in routine service sector and experienced insecure
employment and bouts of unemployment. Stephen and Michael told of taking night
courses and of continuing their reading habits. Darren told of leaving with a notion
of possibly becoming a nurse. He began a course in social care as a way of entering
the field, suggesting,

Darren; I suppose cos the army tried to make me into this macho
person. That wasn't me. So maybe [the course] was a reaction to that.

However the course was not what Darren had expected, 'cleaning up people when
they’d soiled themselves' and he did not continue. Most of his occupational path was
spent in routine occupational spaces (below).

It might be expected that all-encompassing institutions such as the military exert a
particularly strong influence on the dispositions of those within them. This may be a
reason why the men believe in the egalitarianism of the military and why they do not
present the things they have done and seen as anything other than the routine of the
job. Yet there are suggestions here that the institutional habitus and the personal
habitus were not necessarily congruent, which Bourdieu (1998) identifies as a motor
of change.

■ Social care space

Edward and Frank’s adult paths developed from routine occupational spaces to
careers in the social care sector. Frank told how the monotony of being a bus driver
led him to find other activities to bring a sense of personal fulfilment. When his
children were young he began voluntary work in the social care arena. Over time this
work increased and he took courses in counselling etc. Eventually he was offered
full-time paid employment and career progression to the managerial post he occupied
until 6 years ago. Recently, work-related stress led to Frank taking a sabbatical.
Edward charted his transition from clerical positions to eventually hold a responsible
position within the social work arena. He worked in that arena for 6 years, and
remembered it as a fulfilling occupation. Five years ago, he resigned (and refused to
discuss the circumstances) and had not been in employment since.
Alan, Nigel and Stuart entered this arena during periods of unemployment. Government ‘volunteering’ initiatives offered a variety of placements. Alan became involved in a community drama project, Stuart worked in an advocacy centre and Nigel worked in a youth centre.

Frank: Over the years I've had friends say, cos I talk to them, for example, 'I was in a bit of bother then, when we spoke and you helped'. And you mull these things over. I've always been someone who they can talk to. This has built up over the years. I've always been bored with the superficial in life.

Nigel: I want to get involved, to try and help - people that can need us, like - with my experience, with what I've been through. I've got a lot of good experiences but I've had a lot of bad experiences, been a bit of a jack-the-lad as well, but like put them on the right road and point them that way, eh?

Nigel told how he had always retained contact with the youth club that had helped him so much during his disturbed adolescence, recounted in chapter 4. After working as a volunteer he gained employment there as a part-time youth-worker. Nigel told how he believed his experiences as a former user of the service made him an understanding and insightful youth worker, but that he found his role was limited because he lacked qualifications which would have allowed him greater autonomy and input into decision making.

Stuart was also offered employment at his voluntary organisation, and stayed for 4 years. He spoke of the pleasure of working in a female-dominated environment, after the ‘macho’ environment of the building sites. Nonetheless, he also told of the limitations of his employment although he did not relate that to his (lack) of qualifications, but to the small size of the organisation. He felt he would have to leave if he wanted to ‘progress’. After discussion he was offered a year’s sabbatical, went travelling for 6 months, and then resigned. He now works part-time for a delivery firm. Both he and Nigel mentioned how supportive his colleagues were and how much he enjoyed his position. In particular they encouraged them each to think about going to university themselves.
Routine occupational spaces

The initial part of Frank's adult biography, before his entry to social care space, contained a variety of traditional, working-class male occupations - baker, bus driver, building site labourer. Frank recalled a particular period when he worked on a building site in southern England when he was in his 20s. He socialised with a group of Irish labourers. He recalled how he could talk to them about the kinds of things he was interested in, that his friends at home would tease him about.

Frank: I met other guys who were happy enough to talk about literature and music and artistic things in the pub, and show interest in the same things I was doing. And it's all right for working class guys to be doing this. So I'd found something out.

Most of Nigel's 'pre-university' occupational history occurred in these spaces. He told of being a window cleaner, doorman and scaffolder amongst many other roles. Some of this employment occurred in the 'grey economy'. Stuart also spent two years on building sites as an electrician, and recalled finding this occasionally difficult. He told how he was a shy, reserved youth and had to endure teasing from the other workers and the initiation 'ceremonies' that were devised for new recruits. He became unemployed when the company went into liquidation (and moved into the social care arena above), and for the last 2 years Stuart has worked for a courier. James also worked on building sites, after leaving his earlier university trajectory. Robin also worked on building sites, but in a consultancy capacity rather than manual worker. Like Nigel and Frank, Michael also talked of occupying many different spaces within this arena, and like Nigel some of this was in the 'grey economy'. For the last 5 years Michael was in stable employment in the retail sector. He was in charge of security, which he presented as a typical form of post-forces employment for many men.

Richard and Alan rose to managerial level work after years in the service sector. Richard became very wealthy and successful in insurance and Alan forged a career in retail management. Six years ago Richard had a health problem which resulted in him leaving his job. The problem was not life-threatening, but was related to stress.
At that time Richard had young children with his 2\textsuperscript{nd} wife, and decided that he ought to leave his stressful job as a preventative measure.

Alan’s entrance to the management ranks came after promotion from the shop floor. He recalled how tentative this initial move was, applying for a trainee position only after he realised less qualified people had applied. Later changing companies, he sacrificed further promotion in order to spend more time with his young family. His also felt that his reluctance to adopt a ruthless, exploitative management style also blocked future promotion.

Alan: You were sort of expected to {pause} dehumanise people. Tell them what to do. Why not ask them? You weren't open with them …I couldn't do that. You don't have to treat people that way.

Alan was made redundant 6 years ago and hadn’t secured employment in retail management since. He believed his insistence on not working weekends (he has custody of his children every weekend) means he may never return to that sector again. During the last year Alan worked as a part-time cleaner for his church. He suggested that taking the job was, in part, a way of repaying the kindness he has found there during his life.

James spent some time selling door-to-door after he left university in his 2\textsuperscript{nd} year. He relayed his unease at the ethical aspects of this employment.

James: You were encouraged to pressure people. Selling things they didn’t need to people who couldn’t afford it. It became a real problem for me.

He left and found other work in the building/maintenance industry.

William decided on employment after failing to find a PhD post on completion of his degree.
William: I came out [of university] with a huge overdraft and I wanted to get rid of that. So I thought, ‘right, transferable skills’ Gonna go into commerce and get some big names on the CV ...quite capitalistic...

He began temping in Glasgow, in financial services.

William: Very badly paid but it did look good on my CV. Then I joined a horrible American company, in sales. That cleared my overdraft. Horribly macho and money-orientated and everything that’s wrong with capitalism in a nutshell.

He found being employed in Glasgow less fun than being a student in Glasgow, and after a year moved to London believing that a City profile would enhance his CV further. He stayed rent-free by house-sitting for a friend. He described this work as ‘Excel purgatory’ and told how he continued to read medical papers and apply for research opportunities. As time went by he reflected on an increasing dilemma,

William: ... this is the real test now, because I am gonna start earning a very good wage and may be offered full-time positions here. Am I interested in being a scientist or do I want to earn money?

He chose science over money and eventually gained a PhD place at Edinburgh University. When Tony worked during his ‘interrupted’ undergraduate degree it was also in the routine administrative position. It was his experience of this kind of work, where you were ‘not allowed to speak to your neighbour’, that he said helped him to appreciate his return to study even more.

Chapter 4 ended with Grant embarking on a HND in a sports-related subject. After completion he worked in gyms in the private sector. He told of his increased awareness of the unused provision in those gyms compared to the inadequate provision of leisure facilities in the public sector. Grant also mentioned the relationships he developed with the gym users. He told how most of them were graduates.

Grant: I was mixing with a lot of people who were from higher education, just through my sport maybe, or through the gyms. Mixing with people
who had degrees and all sorts. I was talking to people who – it became clear to me, who’ve just not - I mean they can’t be, they’ve got hardly anything I don’t have. And I would say I didn’t realise that until I was 23 or 24, which is pretty old to start thinking about it. You know, maybe I could do a degree.

After his military service and a brief spell in the social care arena, Darren found temporary jobs as a charity-fundraiser, barman etc. He mentioned a few friends from his bar job in particular who were students and whom he developed close friendships with. There was a similar narrative of realisation to that provided by Grant above.

Stephen’s military-gained organisational skills eventually led to employment in large companies. In both cases he ended up being made redundant and used his last redundancy, 5 years ago, as payment to become self-employed taxi-driver. Part of his decision was the flexibility of returning to study.

Creative spaces

Howard and Robert spent most of their occupational lives in these spaces. Howard joined the small family boat building company from school as a craftsman. Robert’s illness made regular employment unattainable as did his long-standing ‘facination with mind altering drugs’ also. Robert told of his desire to mix with bohemian social groups, and spent much of his adult life in theatrical circles and the unregulated labour market. At one point he did some formal training to try to secure his career. However, he believed that that was a bad decision.

Robert: It was recommended to me that I go to drama school….and they assured me it would improve my prospects. A complete pack of lies. In fact, it made it worse because I’d been away from the theatre for a year, whereas if I’d have stayed in the theatre I would have kept up my networks. … People wanted experience not qualifications.

After leaving his seminary training Matt eventually did voluntary work in a local radio station, which led to other media opportunities for a number of years. He
obtained a variety of positions without formal qualifications to do them. Like Robert, he suggested that networks of contacts gained him employment. Matt would not tell me what he was doing prior to embarking on university, other than,

Matt: Let’s just say, I was in my own little sub-cultural world.

The experiences narrated in this section highlight the effects of different compositions of capital within many men’s lives. For example, William’s city trajectory stands in contrast to that of James, which may be related to the cultural capital embedded in William’s history and the very different form embedded in James’s. The very fact that both men contemplate different horizons may be seen as indicative of their different habitus. However, so far this chapter is also highlighting the actions of individuals that illustrate its adaptive nature in ways that can be seen to disrupt what might be expected of classed and gendered males.

5.3 Intimate spaces

This section provides a sense of changes in the men’s personal lives. Most men referred to changing relationships with their birth families, and their narratives also showed many men forging their own family units. In some men’s narratives, non-familial friendships were emphasised.

Amongst the older cohort of men, was a narrative of becoming husbands, fathers and breadwinners relatively early in their adult lives. This was mostly reflected on as poor decisions and none of the men’s marriages were presented as based on love or attraction. Edward told of facing unplanned fatherhood, which prompted him to marry his girlfriend and also leave his trainee administrative job for non-career employment that offered higher wages. Frank presented his marriage almost as a cultural habit, whereas Howard and Alan recalled other motivations.

Frank: I got married quite young. Got a job. It was the standard working class life …
Alan: I suppose it says more about my frame of mind at the time. I wanted to be happy, she was happy, so I thought I'd be with her.

Howard: I suppose I just saw [marriage] as a way out of my family really.

It is important to remember that these men were reflecting on marriages that had occurred quite some time ago, and that had subsequently failed. Robin's interview took place less than a year after his marriage had ended. His bitterness was evident in the interview. He'd reflected on happier times, emphasising his active role in providing opportunities for his family.

Robin: For example when my wife wanted her own business, I set that up for her. When my daughter wanted to go to art college, I made that happen.

Elsewhere,

Robin: My daughter wanted to learn to ride. So we joined the Pony Club. I eventually became chairman of that.

Whilst Robin's narrative focussed on his willingness to become involved in his family's activities, Nigel's familial narrative was one of periodic abandonment, where he revealed how much of his adulthood was marked by periods of alcoholism. Sometimes he would get drunk and not go home to his wife/young son for days. He referred to such episodes as 'condensed periods of self-destruct' and how, at his worst, he had became involved with a neo-Nazi organisation. He depicted the moment of lucidity when he realised what he had become, stating it became a turning point in his life. He returned home, and was 'surprisingly' forgiven by his wife.

Nigel's narrative was full of admiration for his (ex) wife, claiming how she understood his behaviour was linked to the abusive childhood he endured because it was an experience they shared. Whilst they divorced 4 years ago, according to Nigel they have remained close and raise their son in an amicable relationship. At the time of the interview Nigel had been in another stable, co-habiting relationship for 3 years. He told how they met when his current partner worked in a pub that he frequented. However, it emerged that this woman was in fact a graduate accountant,
with a well-paid accountancy job, and a bar job she did for the social interaction. At various points in his narrative, Nigel reflected on their social differentials,

Nigel: Her parents ... mmmm {he seems like he is struggling to describe this}... how can I say this, it's not bad or anything. I would call them middle class. I would say that they were middle class because her dad had a career. He was an electronic engineer. Stayed in America for so long, came back and set up his own business. I would class him as middle class.

Nigel: Her middle brother is an accountant, and her younger brother is {pause} a carpenter {nod of head, raised eyebrows, smiling}. Not a joiner. A carpenter {almost exaggerating someone else's emphasis} Carpenters make nice things. Joiners bang things together. {laughing}

Nigel: Her dad was from working-class background, but he worked his way out. But I [originally] thought of them as a middle-class family, because of where they were staying, with the nice big house and us in our one-bedroomed council house. That's my assumption of him, me being from the working class.

Nigel told how close he is to his partner's family, particularly her father. It emerged that they shared a childhood history of living with domestic abuse. It emerged that her father was a working-class man, who had become wealthy through his own retail business. They had sent their daughter to private school and she had a business degree from Edinburgh University. Nigel was full of praise for his partner and her family, talking of the support they have shown him over the years, as he fought with his alcoholism and related unstable employment patterns. He also told of their encouragement of him in terms of returning to education.

Stephen and Michael remained with the women they married in their 20s and have teenage and adult children. Frank also had adult children, from his first marriage which ended 8 years ago, although he states that they all have a good relationship still. Frank married again 4 years ago and at the time of his interview announced he had just become a father again by his 2nd wife when he was in his 50s.
Howard and Alan both told of their poor relationships with their first/former wives, but of their close bonds to the children that they had together. Their personal narratives were similar in that both men told of their being separated from their children after custody battles with their wives. Howard and Alan said they became the full-time parents when their marriages ended. For Alan this lasted for 6 months and for Howard, a year. However, they each told how when their wives returned, despite their legal custody battles, the wives were granted primary custody. Both felt discriminated against.

Graham has been with his long-term partner for 20+ years. They do not cohabit but spend a lot of time together. He described his partner as a well-educated professional woman from a wealthy professional background. Her father was an architect, held a senior position in the masons, and according to Graham,

Graham: He took a real dislike to me. Being Catholic and working-class and taking his baby off him.

Although Graham believed he’d earned her father’s respect subsequently, her mother was a significant part of Graham’s narrative. He told that he was really close to her, ‘worshipped her’. She died 2 years ago after battling with illness. Her battle and death had a huge impact on Graham, leading him to re-evaluate his life.

Matt identified a degree of social difference between his background and that of his long-term partner, although not to the same extent as the two men above. They met whilst she was completing her degree and Matt was doing something he would not divulge. He reflected,

Matt: Her background, I think not wildly dissimilar from my own but if you met [her parents], clearly much more middle-class than my parents. Certainly up a level. But, although I think her mum comes from a very poor background. You wouldn’t know it...she’s very ‘we have a position and a reputation to uphold and we have to be seen to be doing the right thing’... And [my girlfriend] still suffers from that. ...How things appear is still quite important to her. So is status.
Tony met his partner during his time in retail work when he had failed his 2nd year at university. She was a student, and it emerged that they used to attend the same school and lived quite close to one another when they were younger. As their relationship developed, Tony realised her family had certain criteria for their daughter’s suitors. He recalled,

Tony: When I say, ‘they expect people to be educated’, they don’t really but I’m sure they’re pleased that I went back [to his studies]. The reason I went back was partly because I wanted to do it. But partly because I know it was kind of a good thing to do, in her family’s eyes. It was kind of, it wasn’t forced upon me that I couldn’t go out with their daughter if I didn’t go back to university. But it’s kind of obviously appreciated that I do.

They decided that Tony would continue to work full-time to support his girlfriend while she completed her studies. Then she would work to allow him to return to his. However, his return was jeopardised by the additional cost of re-taking the year he failed. He approached his family for assistance but they refused.

Tony: [My family] have got a very working-class kind of ethos. They work for their money and their money’s theirs. And they teach their kids that ethos which is a good thing. ...But part of the problem that I’ve had [with them] is when I asked them for the money to go back to university. They wouldn’t give it to me because they thought it was a waste of money and a waste of time.

There was no implication that their refusal was connected to a chance that he might fail, again. Tony saw it as connected to their perception that university was not necessary for a secure future. Nonetheless, Tony suggested that his parents’ refusal to help him pay to re-enter the university course added to a process of distancing that was already underway.

Tony: I feel much closer to her parents now than I do my own. They are like my family now.
Tony’s and Matt’s narratives both contained references to the independence, and/or careerism of their partners. Whilst Tony neared the end of his undergraduate studies, he told how his girlfriend announced she was relocating to Edinburgh (they lived in Glasgow) as she had taken a job there. He was surprised that she had not consulted with him. Matt also reflected that within his social group, in most partnerships it was the woman who had the career and the ambition.

Tony: She just came home and said, ‘oh I’m moving to Edinburgh. Are you coming?’ It would have been nice if she’d asked me. So I did. But she’s done it again. Going to work in Spain for 6 months. We split up for a while about that. But now, it’s difficult when you’ve both got careers I suppose.

Matt: ...maybe that’s just the type of people I mix with, but the women are more driven than the men. The men are much more sort of laid back, much prefer to sit there and watch it all happen around them. And the women are out there, real sort of ‘no, I want this’. It’s ambitious women. We’ve all married that lady Macbeth! {laughing}

Just as chapter 4 hinted at the cultural diversity within some men’s parental relationships, this chapter also presents a sense of complexity, whereby partners with different kinds of capital seem to be coming together. However, the degree of stability should not be overlooked either. Nonetheless, in some men’s narratives they are explicitly rejecting aspects of what might be regarded as key aspects of a male habitus, such as dominance over women and over staff/customers in the workplace. (At least, that what has been stated.)

Quite a few narratives contained instances of mental ill health in the men’s lives, not only themselves, but also brothers, friends, fathers and (occasionally) mothers. James told how low self-esteem and bouts of depression led him into studying a variety of faiths for comfort. Matt spoke of his depression after he left seminary and other times when he was unemployed and had no direction. Alan and Edward both refer to extended periods of depression in their lives. In Edward’s case these occurred after his marital breakdown, and later when he left his social work employment. These episodes required medical intervention. When Alan’s marriage ended he withdrew from all social contact. During the interview he told of his loneliness and regret that
his friends didn’t intervene. However, more recent conversations with his friends made him realise that,

Alan: ... they thought I was OK. But I was building walls like they were wicker fences. Do you know what I mean? Right, emotions eh – there's a wall right there! Relationship yeh? Up goes another one... {He is miming the laying of bricks on top of one another}

Chapter 4 presented Robert's narrative of feeling 'out of place' in his natal home. In adulthood, he told of his abandonment of these ties with his childhood family.

Robert: I haven’t spoken to them since the day I left home.

The intimate relationship in Robert's narrative related to a former tutor, an older woman who Robert has the greatest admiration for. She has been very ill and Robert has taken considerable time nursing her.

These narratives of familial separation mentioned here are those of a different magnitude to a general discourse of men’s increasing separation form natal families. Some parents had died and the men had also relocated geographically in most cases. The chapter will not dwell on these as they may be seen as a common part of adulthood. Also, perhaps those men with non-eventful (i.e. non-disrupted) personal lives may have had less to say about them. Thus the impression of disruption and/or emotional turmoil within this chapter could be seen as a skewed representation of wider trends.

5.4 Transitions to student

This section begins by presenting the men’s first steps on their HE journeys. It shows the context in which their thoughts of studenthood developed and has

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4 For those men who succeeded in their ‘traditional student’ pathways earlier, this applies to their current HE endeavour.
extracted from their narratives the variety of reasons they gave for possibly returning to education. It also shows the preconceptions they held at that point (of themselves, the institutions and of students) and the adjustments they made as they entered the HE environment. Next it charts the dimensions of choice – of institution and subject before presenting their experiences of university. This includes their relationships with other students, staff and knowledge and also their relationships outwith the institution. The section and the chapter ends, appropriately, with their reflections on the value of what they have done.

- Reasons for university

A strong link emerged between university and illness. Richard and Robert described experiencing major health scares, which led them to re-evaluate the direction of their lives. Robert had been plagued by serious illness since childhood. In later years there was a particularly life-threatening episode.

Robert: I didn’t know how long my heart would last out. Still don’t. So I needed to plan as if I was going to live for a long time.

Seven years ago Richard required emergency medical treatment and hospitalisation. He began to reflect on the costs of his managerial position, primarily the stress and the time spent away from his young family (with his 2nd wife), and this was how he recalled the notion of university surfaced.

Richard: it wasn’t like a bolt of lightening or anything like that. I just started to think...and I always regretted not going [to university] when I was younger.

Frank also told of stress-related ill health from his managerial post. He was granted a year’s sabbatical, and during this time his thought turned to education

Frank: It was something I’d always wanted to do...Not for work I’m too old anyway ... and the kids were adults so they didn’t need me ...
Michael linked his thoughts of university to an *anticipation* of ill-health. He cited his family's history of ill health, which affected men in their 50s and ended their working lives. Michael reasoned that if he succumbed to it, he needed a way of earning a wage that didn't rely on physical capacities. He explained his fears,

Michael: I don’t want to end up 50 and on the dole. Like the rest of the dross.

In Graham’s narrative, the death of his partner’s mother led him to evaluate his life. After years of living a materialistic and indulgent lifestyle since leaving the military, Graham reflected on the type of person he had become,

Graham: You wouldn’t have liked me. Honestly. I was arrogant. Belligerent. Flashing my cash. You wouldn’t have liked me at all. Not many people did.

He told how he reversed the pattern of excess (stopped buying things, stopped taking drugs) and considered ways he might be able to help others. Becoming a teacher was part of those contemplations.

Like Michael above, other men’s narratives also contained instrumental/employment reasons for their HE. Darren, James and Matt all cited their increasing dissatisfaction with their employment histories and prospects as they began to reach the end of their 20s. All men had histories of unemployment and unstable jobs in the unqualified employment market, although for Darren this occurred after his military service. After being made redundant Alan had been unemployed for 4 years, despite his managerial experience. He told of his brief relationship with a woman who had been on a university access course, something he was unfamiliar with until then. This led to a consideration,
Alan: ...and I thought, if I’m gonna be unemployed for another four years, then I’d rather I had something to show for it. So that was my motivation for coming to uni. And to give something to employers that says ‘I’m flexible’. It’s not a case of ‘oh you’re a certain age and therefore not capable of changing your attitudes and learning skills’ and so on.

In Robin’s story it was marital break up that turned his thoughts to university. Like those above, his was also a search for employment and stability.


There were also examples where HE was related to a stated desire to ‘give something back’ to the community. The narratives of Graham, Stephen, James, Nigel and Robin all contained this, although sometimes it was unclear whether this was an original intention, or whether it emerged during their subsequent studenthood. Graham and Stephen claimed the intention from the outset.

Stephen: I knew from the minute I walked in here that I wanted to teach.

Graham: I want to be a teacher... If I could get some kid out of the scheme and into university, then that’s – it only takes one... I want to try and give something back

James: I could be a role model. You know, show them that it can be done.

Robin stated his intention to use the teaching certificate he was studying for to teach in state schools in poor areas (this was after the interview). All four men linked their ambition to a desire to help boys who may otherwise fail at school.

Other narratives revealed psychological dimensions to some men’s university endeavour. Chapter 4 told Edward’s account of how his university ambition had been thwarted when he was younger. This chapter showed the sudden dissolution of his social care career 3 years ago, and the clinical depression that followed. He reflected on his decision to embark on HE,
Edward: I'm not doing the course for career reasons, given my age and so on. From a vocational point of view unless I was going into teaching, which I don't want to go into, it's probably not going to be useful in a career. I'm doing it purely for self-development reasons and because I wanted to do it years ago. And its kind of, I don't know, a mid-life crisis maybe {laughing}. Instead of chasing young women and making a fool of myself that way, I've come here. It's just been a life ambition to achieve.

Edward concluded that it was luck, bad luck, that was the main reason for his current studenthood. He suggested that if he hadn't lost his job he probably never would have come.

There was also a narrative of 'proof' in some men's accounts:

Graham: And I've always wanted to do this. Whether I'm proving this university theory for me [i.e. the theory that he is capable of it], proving it even still to my family, I really – its probably a bit of both.

Darren: I say to a lot of people, when they say why are you doing a degree course at your age, ... I suppose I am proving to myself that I can do it. I know that I can do it. But I'm proving that I can. Because I had so many doubters when I was at school. I think that's a very fundamental point why I'm doing it. So I'm proving it to myself but I'm proving it to them too.

Stuart: I've never been one to blow my own trumpet to say, 'I've done this or I've done that. I've got a degree.' It's not about a career or having a degree and showing it off, that sort of thing. It's a personal kind of thing. It's about proving to yourself that you can achieve it.

Alan: My brother was more excited than me when I got up to university. He said 'Congratulations, you're the first man in the family to go to university!' For me, that wasn't a prime motivating factor. It wasn't even important. It was more to do with me proving something to myself, as much as anyone else.

Alan was also proving to employers that he is adaptable. There was an additional dimension to Alan's stated reasons for HE, and that related to his children. He reflected on the impact that he imagined his continued unemployment might have had on his children. Thus if he went to university,
Alan: ... they can say my dad's a student rather than he's just not working. Because when I first started out they were only young so it wasn't that important. It's just – Dad's superman! It's been hard for them to find out I'm not superman...I'm not the tallest guy in the world...I'm not the strongest guy in the world. I'm going bald - So it's 'you're a student'. Aye that's right. So it's no big deal now. 'Oh right, you're a student. Good.' And they can say it's Glasgow University. So it's no problem at all.

James' return to education also displayed a psychic dimension (in addition to a more superficial one). James's narrative contained many references to his lack of self-esteem. He told how after failing at university (at the traditional age) and then taking on varieties of 'worthless' employment for 4 years afterwards, with limited income, he needed something to restore his self-esteem.

James: I wanted to get back to academia so I could empower myself and maybe get myself into a good position. There are other factors as well. I wanted to meet women and have a good time. So... there was a whole range of factors as to why I went back to uni.

Grant's journey to HE appeared to be based on a quest just to increase his understanding of the world. Grant told how his work in private and public sector gyms highlighted the extent of social inequality around him. He contrasted the luxurious and under-utilised private sector provision with the poor-quality, over-subscribed public provision. He said how issues of social justice began 'just ticking away in your head'. His motivation for university appeared to be about intrinsic value of education.

Grant: People say, 'what do you do?' and I say 'I'm at university' and it's 'what are you going to do when you finish?' I mean, as if that's somehow directly linked to it. Which it isn't necessarily you know. They don't see education as being an education in itself.

Some men's narratives mentioned how others had turned their thoughts to university (Howard, Nigel, Stuart). When Nigel and Stuart were voluntary workers in social care, they told how they were encouraged by the (graduate) staff to contemplate
going to university so that they could secure careers in that sector. Each man told of the staff's belief in their ability to succeed. For Howard, the seeds of his university potential were planted by staff at his children's school and the other 'education professionals' he encountered during his involvement with the PTA, and the parent teacher council for Scotland. It was suggested within these circles that he would make a good teacher. He reflected,

Howard: ... and I always felt that I'd missed out on something.

Howard’s children were at primary school when this occurred. The narratives of other fathers (Frank, Michael and Stephen) with older teenage children contained references to their current reduced parental responsibilities. They each cited this as a reason they were now able to embark on HE, which, in each of their narratives was presented as a long-held desire that were unable to fulfil due to the role as main wage earner.

There were other narratives of dissatisfaction with the patterns of their lives:

Stuart: The delivery job is OK. The pay’s good for the type of work it is. But it is hardly rewarding or challenging.

Matt: I think I had six months of feeling pretty low and I know I needed to do something. I wanted to go to university more than I wanted to do law. I didn’t want to do something pointless, or something that was pointless for me. I was 28 and I was thinking that I could go and do something for the sake of doing it but, I wanted to go and do something that had a career and a job. Something guaranteed at the end of it. So that how I came to be doing law.

It is important to consider where the seeds of thoughts about university education come from for first generation students. The purpose of this analysis is to consider how the habitus has adapted so that any perceived distance between 'elite' HE institutions and those from working-class backgrounds has been negotiated. It may be that the ways in which men are more able to travel (c.f. Skeggs 2004) provides the opportunity to exercise the generative principles of the habitus more frequently than women from the same origins.
Preconceptions

It is important to present the preconceptions the men held of the incumbent HE students, and of themselves as future HE students, in order understand the dynamics of their own transition.

Both Frank and Robin told of holding poor opinions of students based on their personal experience of them earlier in their lives. Frank’s opinion was formed when, as a young man, he recalled feeling displaced in his home city when the students returned at the end of the summer holidays. He lived in Edinburgh and referred to the yearly influx of new students as,

Frank: ...the invasion of the English southern mindless. They would take over our pubs. And I mean take over. They never mixed.

Robin’s opinion had been formed over a decade ago, from the graduate trainees he encountered as he undertook consultancy work on building sites.

Robin: I had fairly strong views, contemptuous views of graduates and the graduate community. Because I found them {pause} insufferably self-confident {pause}...Very often, we would use the graduates as a source of fun, because they were so easily conned. And it was that kind of thing. Life skills seemed to be short. You know ‘you may have a PhD mate’ I remember telling a guy this ‘You may have a PhD, but can you find your own backside in the dark with both hands?’ {Pause. Then, said very quietly,} Probably not.

Neither man mentioned these opinions altering prior to their own studenthood, whereas in Tony’s narrative, there is the suggestion that earlier negative impressions he had of students did indeed alter during high school.

Tony: The perceptions I had before, well, when I was young, was the typical ‘lazy student’ perception that you have from television and things like that. It’s just lazy dirty students. That’s the only perception I probably did have all the way up to late high school I suppose.
Darren's preconceptions of students was related to his more recent past, since he had been living in Edinburgh. He relayed how he also believed Edinburgh University was dominated by young middle-class English.

Darren: I certainly thought the people would be a bit snobby and this 'yah' thing ... I thought they would be a lot younger than me and they were all going to be from a certain level, a certain class background ... As for the institution, I thought it was gonna be stiff and a bit snobby itself. I thought I was gonna find it quite difficult to fit in, really.

MW: So how's it been?

Darren: It's been fine. I haven't had any problem at all.

There was a lot of evidence that many men had some familiarity with students and/or graduates before they entered HE. Having lived in the West End of Glasgow for most of his life, Graham told how he was always used to students. When he became financially successful in the 1980s he used to rent out flats to students and regarded them as hardworking, polite and respectful. Stephen also told of positive image of students, particularly during his years as a taxi driver.

Stephen: Yeh they do get drunk and can be rowdy but, they're not like the stereotype. When I was taxiing, they were always polite, always respectful. I have no problem with them.

Grant and Darren told of becoming familiar with students as friends, colleagues or clients as they worked in the gyms and bars (respectively) around Edinburgh. Again their opinions of students were positive, with Grant recalling how these relationships led to him realising students/graduates were not as different as he may have imagined.

Grant: I was mixing with a lot of people who were from higher education, just through my sport maybe, or through the gyms. Mixing with people who had degrees and all sorts. I was conversing with people and it became increasingly clear to me, they've just not - I mean ... they've got hardly anything I don't have. And I would say I didn't realise that until I was 23/24 which is pretty old to start thinking about it. You know, maybe I could do a degree.
It should not be forgotten that Darren, Matt, Nigel, Richard and Tony were co-habiting with partners who were graduates before they began their own HE journey. Alan, James and Stuart each mentioned having mature students in their social circle, again before they entered university. Stuart recalled a chap at work, James talked of his older brother, and Alan mentioned a former girlfriend, all of whom talked about and advised them on becoming a mature student. For Matt and Ryan, most of their social group consisted of students and/or graduates. This was because they had remained close to former school friends, most of whom progressed and succeeded at university at the ‘traditional’ time.

When it came to preconceptions the men held of themselves as potential students, there was a strong discourse of self-belief in their academic abilities in their narratives. Many men mentioned how their earlier educational ‘failure’ at school/FE was due to external influences (sexual attraction, laziness, peer groups etc.) rather than their lack of ability. For example,

Darren: I want to do a degree. I’ve never done one before. Never tested myself that much before. And I knew that I had the intelligence to do it, but I just thought that as I’m getting older my brain cells have started to deplete and so I had to do something about it.

Yet there were a few instances of doubt.

Graham: I have got a good brain and I know I have.

[later]

Graham: I really wanted to do it [begin university] but I was so scared. I mean truthfully scared.

MW: Of what?

Graham: Not fitting in. Maybe being pretentious. Maybe not having the academic ability any more.
And in another interview,

MW: How did you think you would fit in at university?

Stuart: I’ve always been pretty good with people. Always been able to adapt in social situations...I wasn’t 100% sure what they would be like, the other people on the course. It didn’t overtly concern me. The main concern was ‘is this gonna be for me? Am I gonna be capable of it? But the access course was a good start. I did have some concerns, but it was more about the workload. I kind of knew the Community Education course would have people about my age too.

■ Choice of institution/subject

Some men’s ‘choice’ of institution within each city was determined by course (Howard’s secondary school teacher training, Robin’s PGCE, Matt’s Law degree, Ryan’s and Daniel’s medical degrees). Some graduate men moved between cities: Nathan relocated from Glasgow to Edinburgh because of specific lecturer/research environment, Tony moved from Glasgow to Edinburgh because his girlfriend had relocated, Daniel moved from Newcastle to Edinburgh, because he believed an ‘Edinburgh University’ medical degree had higher status than many other awards, and Robert moved from a non-ancient Glasgow university to Glasgow University because of a suitable PhD position. The section will focus on the university they were attending at the time of the research. Whilst Tony and Nathan provided the opportunity to compare Edinburgh and Glasgow universities, and Robert to compare an ancient/non-ancient institution, this will not be done. In part, this is because they were studying different subjects or else the same subject but at a different level between these institutions, which may affect the ability to compare.

Some men mentioned having little knowledge of institutional differences when they began their HE journeys (Stuart, Grant). They each told how they would have attended any institution, but that they had become aware of the access courses that were linked to the ancient institution first. One day, Grant saw an advert on the side of a bus for Edinburgh University’s access course.
Grant: I thought that Edinburgh was going to be mostly English, and it is like that. Unbelievably like that. All the kids are English... predominantly middle class.

MW: Didn’t that deter you at all?

Grant: It didn’t deter me. It almost sort of, challenged me to go there {laughing}. I knew the teaching was going to be really good. And I knew the philosophy was, it’s got a really good philosophy department. So I was keen to get my teeth into it, sort of thing.

MW: How did you know these things about it?

Grant: Just from the, just from, I just knew that it was going to be good.

MW: From your college tutors perhaps?

Grant: A wee bit. And I just, I had a wee bit, I just sort of imagined them being a good sort of strong, strong academic institution which is something I just haven’t come across before.

And,

Darren: There was a time in my life, not that long ago, when I just thought a degree is a degree and it didn’t matter where you got it from. I wasn’t aware that a degree from a different institution meant more. I certainly knew Oxford and Cambridge were the best, but after them two, I didn’t have a clue. To be honest with you I thought a degree at Oxford was still the same as a degree at the Open University. The same as polytechnics.

Stuart: ['Edinburgh University'] does have a certain draw, because of the name and the reputation ... A high university. That’s good, psychologically, whether it’s right or wrong. So I probably would have chosen it anyway even if I did know about the others... Being in Edinburgh, you think about Edinburgh University.

Alan and Michael gave examples of other universities not meeting their expectations of a ‘university’. Both told of visits to non-ancient universities in Glasgow. Alan told how the institution he visited ‘did not look like a university’. Michael told of his attendance at an induction day at the HE institution which first offered him a place; he perceived the diversity among the non-traditional student body there as something very negative.
Michael: Now maybe it was just because I was straight out of the [armed forces], but I looked around and there were these people with dreadlocks, and rings in places that weren’t healthy. And this lady turned up in a Porshe, very short skirt and very high heels, toddling in there ‘ooo, my husband’s got money and I’ve got nothing to do so I’m going to do a degree’ {mimicking a high-pitched voice}. And I thought, this is not the fucking place for me ... and I just turned and walked away.

There were examples where men insisted that the ancient university was the only place they would attend. Glasgow men in particular indicated a familiarity with the institution, it was part of their landscape. When they were asked why they chose Glasgow University the responses included:

Alan: I went to Glasgow uni because I considered it the best. It’s an old university and basically that’s the reason I chose it. I love the West End. It situated in a great place. ....I’ve seen it lots of time and there’s this image about it. Not snobbery. Just, mmm. If I wanted to spend four years somewhere I’d like to say it was Glasgow uni. The alternatives were Paisely and Strathclyde. Strathclyde doesn’t look like a university. So maybe it’s to do with image. But Glasgow uni, this has got a good reputation.

Alan told how another university was closer to his home, but that he took two buses in order to attend Glasgow.

Alan: For me, it was Glasgow or no-where. I only applied here.

MW: What if you didn’t get in when you applied?

Alan: I’d have waited and tried again.

Elsewhere,

Graham: I’ve [lived] in the West End since 1978

MW: Did you know of Glasgow University’s reputation?

Graham: Oh Christ yes. Its reputation is for being a real good university. One of the top 5 in Britain... I’ve always had a good idea of Glasgow [university]: locale, everything about it - prestige. I think that was always on my mind.
Edward: It's one of the best universities in Britain. Certainly the best university on this side of the country, compared to places like Paisley. If I'm going to do a degree, I want to do a degree in the best place I can.

Edward emphasised that his choice of institution was not about having the prestigious name on his degree certificate (which he assumed was more important to the younger students, given how it could affect their futures). His narrative illustrated the significance of Glasgow University for him, thus,

Edward: I just wanted to come over here where my roots are. Come to the university and just start anew.

Michael and Nathan’s narratives included the perception of the higher knowledge possessed by staff in these universities.

Michael: You can’t get this level of knowledge at a school or college. These people are the ones with that level of knowledge and that’s why you come to a place like this.

Nathan: Instead of being taught by people who are good teachers with some knowledge [he is referring to his non-ancient university experience], here you are taught by people who write the books.

And for those attending Edinburgh University:

Matt: Maybe I'm an academic snob. I wanted to go to the big university in the big town. All my pals have been here. I didn’t want to go to Napier or Heriot-Watt. I wanted to go to Edinburgh....And I came from an education background where applying to what were formerly polytechnics was a second rate choice and you were discouraged from doing that.

Frank: It was Edinburgh or nothing.

Darren: I certainly knew that Edinburgh University was the best and I thought well, if I'm gonna do a degree, and its gonna be one that Edinburgh University offers, then I might as well go there.
When it came to choosing the subjects they wanted to study at university, many men told how their university subject was a continuation of an interest they had pursued for a long time before becoming students. Edward, Graham and Richard all told of their long-standing love of literature. Whilst Graham wanted to become a teacher, Edward and Richard told of ambitions to become writers. Frank and Michael emphasised how their subject was not chosen with an eye to employment.

Frank: It's not for a job. I don't need a job. I'm too old.

Michael: The reasons for these two subjects was because they are my two interests and that was the only reason. I couldn't give a hoot about employers and what they want. I see me at a point where this is my life—not Tony Blair's, not some government's.

Alan in Glasgow and Matt in Edinburgh each wanted to study Law. For Alan this stems from his experience of his custody battle with his former wife (cited earlier), and the sense of injustice he felt at the time. Matt's inclination to law was also founded on a sense of social injustice. In his case it was his familial experience of the miners' strike which instilled in him a sense of resentment towards the police. On his university access course, Alan discovered there was no access route for Law at Glasgow University and instead went on to a social science degree, choosing subjects that interested him and suited his scheduling criteria. At Edinburgh Matt told of meeting the highest entry requirements to the Law faculty, including an interview with the Dean of admissions.

James' told of choosing those (social science) subjects that might help him to understand the behaviours he had encountered in his life. Similarly, Nigel related his choice of Community Education degree to his troubled youth where the youth club has been a source of comfort. He and Stuart told of wanting to use their (Community Education) degrees to be able to help others).
Stuart: I'd got to a time in my life where I wanted to do something that was a bit more stimulation, more challenging, that played to my strengths. I chose the course because I know my strengths are working with people. I also want to be challenged. This aspect of the course is far more important than getting a job at the end of it. I mean, I know it's a professional qualification and there will be a chance of getting employment ... but the main reason for doing it is not about how much money I'm going to earn. It's just that this might be something I'm good at and I'm going to get something out of it personally.

Grant's narrative contained a greater sense of trying to understand the world and also a love of knowledge for its own sake.

■ Financial implications

Men with parental responsibilities, in particular, highlighted the financial implications of their studenthood. The chapter has already cited Michael and Stephen's tales of having to postpone their HE ambitions because of the financial demands of raising children. Part of Stephen's decision to use his redundancy payment to buy a taxi 8 years ago was his desire to eventually enter university and still be able to provide a wage from his taxi.

Robin had financed his step-daughter's university studies for three years. However, with the collapse of his marriage and his desire to train to be a teacher, he took the decision not to continue that support.

Robin: Other people have to work when they're at university. If she fails...It will do her good to work.

Richard's narrative also told of reducing an existing financial commitment to a child from a dissolved relationship as a consequence of his HE ambition. He told of the complex calculations he undertook before deciding that university was achievable for him. He calculated that the loss of his earnings (from the full time job he gave up through stress) would be compensated not only by loans, bursaries and his wife's income, but also by the cessation of the financial contribution he was making for his child by his 1st marriage.
Richard: I'm sorry, but I can't give it to them if it's not there.

To compensate for the expected decline in family income, Michael, Stephen and Richard told of their wives taking additional paid work. Michael and Stephen re-organised their existing employment around their studies, working weekends in retail/taxiing respectively.

Robin suggested that as he had supported his wife and family for such a long time, it ought to be his turn to receive financial support from her now that he needed it. Matt, Tony and Nigel each told that they were being financially supported by their female graduate partners. (Tony had supported his partner whilst she completed her degree first.)

Richard's and Howard's narratives contained examples of how their status as men being supported by their wives raised issues with other family members. They each depicted that it wasn't an issue for them,

Richard: I grew up in a very feminine house. I suppose I could have been the man of the house, but with my mum and an older sister that never really happened. So I've never really been the typical sort of man

Howard: I've never really adopted that breadwinner ideology. As long as we have somewhere to live and food. And whatever [income] comes in is shared.

The cost of university education was mentioned occasionally, usually in relation to the men have a sense of entitlement as consumers of a service. Stuart presented quite a solitary narrative of the risks attendant with the cost of his education. He said,

Stuart: I would feel bitterly disappointed if I had to drop out. That is always a risk but, even if that did happen, I would still come away having learned or gained something. Student loans is a bit of a worry, if you fail and you're left with this debt. I saved up a bit before I came on the course and I work part-time. So it doesn't give you a lot of time to yourself, [or] the time for your family and friends. If your friends want to go out and you can't, so you're giving that up as well.
Alan presented his ‘investment’ in his education as a useful indicator to future employers. Thus,

Alan: [doing the degree] means you’re an optimist because you’re taking on 12/13 thousand pounds worth of debt and are optimistic that you’ll pay it off.

5.5 The HE Experience

■ Relationships with other students

Those who expected Edinburgh University to be dominated by young middle class English students (Darren, Frank, Stuart) found their preconceptions were valid to some extent. Frank spoke of realising that not all students around the campus conformed to his negative preconception, but suggested his negative stereotype prevailed in the social science course. For Frank, and for Stuart also, this was seen as a learning opportunity between people of different cultural backgrounds. Whilst Stuart told how this was achieved in the Community Education course, Frank appeared angry that neither the students, nor the tutors, took advantage of this resource in his course.

Stuart: If you’re in a class with lot of people who are middle - well, they’re from Kent or wherever, its got to be a good experience for me cos I’m going to learn about that … everybody has their prejudices but if you can find out about them, address them, talk about them, then an experience like this with lots of people from lots of different cultures and backgrounds, it can only be enlightening, you know.

Frank: … now that [gap] can be a fantastic learning thing, if they’d been willing to talk and share, but I’m afraid they weren’t. And certainly they weren’t interested in me and my background and so I just felt this gap. I think I was open to know what [their lives] must have been like.

Frank, Matt and Daniel suggested that students may vary according to subject, which was related to the academic and workload demands of the course. Frank suggested the concentration of ‘partying’ students on the social science course reflected its low entry requirements and light workload. Daniel suggested that the medical science
students entered their courses already prepared for the vigorous academic demands and consistently high workload. Matt mentioned his perception of the literature students, who he saw constantly under pressure form the demand of their course. He compared those industrious students to his own law school experience of relatively light workload and not necessarily particularly high standards.

The most sweeping statements regarding Edinburgh university students appeared in William’s narrative.

William: I don’t like to label people – ‘yahs’ or what’s the term? ‘hooray henrys’. But these people that have had an education that’s bought them this amazing confidence and it is a big difference I think. Coming from a comprehensive and it’s like ‘there’s a big world out there and it could go either way.’ People that have come from very well, expensive schools shall we say, where it’s like ‘you are the future and you can do anything’, that’s so noticeable in the way they act and generally in the way they study.

William: I can see why Scottish people find a lot of English people offensive like that. Cos there is this thing of ‘oh marvellous’ {mimicking a very upper-class voice} and all that ‘la-di-dah’ sort of thing and ‘what about the rugby’ sort of. Glasgow’s [students] definitely seem more proud and it was good to go to the local university.

It should be noted that William experienced Glasgow University as an undergraduate, whereas his experience of Edinburgh was as a doctoral student. Therefore he may have been less integrated into the wider student community at Edinburgh.

Despite Robin’s previous negative views of students, they did not appear in his narrative of his university experience. (This could be because he was on a postgraduate course which meant he rarely met younger students, and also spent less time on campus than men on other courses.) A weaker narrative of negative experiences with ‘traditional’ students could be found with Michael, Tony and Grant. This tended to mention their perceived lack of application, not paying attention, generally immature behaviour. Michael described the younger students as not wanting to learn,
although he perceived their behaviour as reflecting their age rather than their social class. He likened the attitude of the younger students on his course to that of his teenage son, whom he described as always watching TV, not interested in anything much etc. That is not to say aspects of it did not annoy him. He was critical that they were too quick to ask for extensions (and that in his perception, staff were too quick to grant them), and rarely took responsibility for learning beyond the lecture material.

Younger students were seen as needing sympathy by quite a few men (e.g. Howard, Graham, Matt, Edward). There was a perception that some were being forced go to university against their will. Whilst this was generally attributed to their parents, Howard also implicated the Government in his narrative.

Howard: You sometimes wonder, come on guys you know, what are you doing here? Why are you here? I find that disappointing. But I think that has to do with the Scottish Executive’s concern for education. They’re pushing people where they don’t want to go. You know, why should they have to go to university? It doesn’t suit them. So some of them are here because, well, that’s what you do after Highers.

Some men perceived that the younger students were just too young to cope with the experience.

Graham: The kids, the younger students they – I think all the kids should have done an access course for a year...I think they come unprepared. The university treats them like adults and they’re not adults yet. And it takes them so long to find their way, and they’re just kids.

Edward: ... some of the youngsters you know they are totally lacking in confidence and I think ‘God, if I’d have been here when I was 18/19 I would probably have been the same, right enough’.

Graham appeared to adopt an almost paternalistic attitude towards the students, and told of setting up study clubs at his home so that he could feed them and provide somewhere comfortable and warm for them to stay.
Graham's and Edward's narratives each contained counter-examples of the traditional student stereotype, suggesting that in their experience some mature students were as inclined to drinking and be lazy. Edward included himself in that category. Indeed in Matt's narrative and in Darren's also, there was reference to their disappointment at the lack of drinking among the student body!

Darren: There was a couple of times when I had to meet people from tutorials to discuss what we were going to say in the next tutorial. They're all, we'll meet in the library. So I said, we'll meet in a pub, we'll make it more interesting! A couple of them didn't turn up. 2 of them turned up and just had a glass of water. One had a coffee and so it's like - this isn't really what I had in mind!

Matt: I have to say I am sorely disappointed at the lack of drinking among our student body. I mean the other day, 4 o clock and the bar was empty, except for a couple and one of them was drinking coffee!

The behaviour of young students that may be interpreted as a lack of application, was understood in Graham's, James', Matt's and Ryan's stories, as a lack of confidence. Their narratives showed how younger students would talk about academic issues outside the formal learning environment, and show that they had researched the relevant material. The men understood the younger students' actions as a sign of insecurity in the presence of their lecturing staff.

Matt: They can [formulate an opinion] but they are just too quiet to do it. It's not that these people are not able to think about such things, its just that they are not willing to do a lot of it, and they are too shy and too frightened and too in awe of these academics...They have come from places where they don't talk back to teachers and they still see these people as their teachers.

Ryan's narrative revealed more serious consequences of such insecurity as he told how some younger medical students would not ask for the help they needed, and would also try to cover up any mistakes they may have made, rather than be seen as needing assistance. Ryan, (and Tony later), suggested that staff, and other students,
therefore appreciated the confidence of mature students in the university as they were
more prepared to seek clarification and engage with their lecturers.

In some accounts there was still a sense of distances between the younger students
and themselves, which was related to combinations of age, family life cycle, gender,
sexuality. This was sometimes presented as their own choice, for example,

Alan: I’ve already got my friends, I don’t need any more.

Richard: When you’re older you do different things. You’re more
interested in dinner parties. You don’t want to go traipsing round the pubs
in gangs.

Daniel told how he preferred to adopt a ‘cosmopolitan’ identity rather than a student
identity at this time in his life. He gave the impression that he still had a very active
social life, but said that he avoided those bars frequented by students in favour of
more cosmopolitan areas of the city.

Elsewhere some men spoke of their sense of loneliness in their university,

Darren: I’m ... conscious of the fact that I’m walking around by myself
99% of the time. In fact, 100% of the time. Occasionally I’d see
somebody I’d know and you’d stop and chat. But you don’t stand and wait
for someone, [to] go somewhere together. I see lots of people doing that.
In some ways I wish, I wish that I did have somebody I could go to
lectures with.

Grant: University for me has been, I suppose a very lonely experience. I
haven’t really made any friends.

Alan: To be honest I haven’t made any friends...I’m paranoid about this
‘dirty old man’ thing, with all the young girls here. I felt really
uncomfortable from the word go and its’ still there. Even though
[conversations] have an academic foundation, I’m very aware that ‘this
guy’s old enough to be my Dad!’...And the guys, they’re like {facial
gesture, like distain} to say that I’m gay...A couple of the girls I’ve
spoken to are Ok but most of them are like {facial gesture, same as
previous} like you’re a predator.
The impact of gender that was evident in Alan’s narrative also appeared in those of Stuart and Ryan. In their stories it was in relation to men being a minority presence on their Community Education and Medical courses, respectively. Both men seemed not to feel uncomfortable with their relative rarity, with Ryan reflecting that his gender made his relationship with the nursing staff smoother than those that the other (female) junior doctors had with them.

Stuart: When I was at work in mental health, going on training, males were in the minority. You know, going on counselling training and things like that, it would predominantly be female. So I’m kind of used to that. And in the class it’s mainly women, but that doesn’t really bother me. It’s nice to have women around you. I’ve never been a kind of total ‘man’s man’, how you would describe a kind of macho world.

Ryan: I suppose the men get an easier time really. The female students have to work really hard to get the nurses on side. Not the men.

In Bourdieu’s (2001b) theorisation of masculine domination, symbolic violence occurs with women whether they conform to cultural expectations or not, because to deviate carries even harsher penalties. Whilst the two quotes above explicitly state that this may be the reverse for men in particular contexts, it may be worth contemplating whether this applies to other social arenas. If this is so, then their inclinations to traverse boundaries, to undertake the kinds of travel that may afford them greater stimuli to adapt their habitus, may be much greater than for women whose gendered habitus may therefore be more resilient to adaptation.

**Relationships with staff**

There were examples of men believing that their status as mature students’ helped them to develop more informal and productive relationships with staff (e.g. Ryan, Matt, Tony). However this was seen as largely dependent on the staff member. Matt recalled mostly positive relationships with staff in the law school, telling how he was on first name terms with many of them and how they would talk socially
outside of lectures. He also recalled how some preferred to maintain a distance. He recalled one member in particular,

Matt: He doesn't allow anybody to call him by his first name. He insists on being called Doctor. You just think, piss off, I don't care who you are, if you are insisting I call you doctor, you will call me Mr. Only because, if you are going to make that type of barrier I'm going to put it back at you.

Grant told of his surprise at the difference between his treatment as a student at college, which he portrayed as informal relaxed and friendly, with the impersonal way he believed students were treated at university.

Grant: Here, it's just, keep the distance from all the lecturers....the lecturers aren't there to help you at all.

He recalled the first time he went to see his director of studies,

Grant: ...and I said to him, 'how are doing'. And he just kind of looked at me. Sat behind his desk and er. You know, I was obviously older, obviously wasn't a younger student, ... and I said 'I wonder if I could get some advice'. {pause} to which there was silence. And I said, 'do I call you Dr or do I just call you Geoffrey?' And I'd said it almost as a joke, an ice-breaker, you know. And he said 'You call me Dr. Dr is better.'

Stephen and Tony were full of praise for the teaching staff at Glasgow University. Tony recalled how he felt his involvement in learning was more active after his 3 years in employment. He believed his more active involvement in lectures and tutorials were appreciated by the staff.

Tony: When I went back the second time I was always one for using tutorials to actually voice my opinion and say things, whereas most other people ... would not say anything. And I would get really annoyed at that. And I would kind of try and answer the questions and put questions to the lecturers. So I did get on with them really well in that respect. And I was also class representative so I kind of had a good kind of tutor-lecturer relationship.
Grant and Michael both studied philosophy at different institutions, but their narratives were remarkably similar. Both men spoke of their surprise at the narrowness of the knowledge held by the teaching staff.

Michael: These people are only creating work for themselves with semantic arguments. And that’s what I’ve paid 16 grand to find out. I did find out a lot about philosophy, but I also found out about this small elite who are just passing ideas round and writing books and creating work for themselves...there’s nothing they have told me that I can’t read in a book.

Grant: I think [the older institutions] are built on a sort of dying principle that you know, ‘we hold, we as lecturers, as philosophers, ... we hold this sort of really mysterious knowledge which is quite unattainable... so we have to have this sort of elevated position. And you can only access it after however many years of going to university. And you can only access it maybe, not so much nowadays, but you can maybe only access it if you are from the right background yourself”.

Michael’s narrative told of him challenging the assertions made by some lecturing staff, in light of his personal experience and also in light of his own reading of their philosophers’ texts rather than simply relying on the lecture notes. There were other incidents of the men expressing their dissatisfaction with the ‘knowledge’ that was being presented to them.

Matt: I actually walked out of one of my lectures the other day. This guy delivering, basically, capitalist propaganda on the ‘right to buy’ legislation. He was pushing how it should be made easier. Not a thought about the wider social issues. Complete right wing bias.

Frank: I remember in Scottish History, it was just tutors basically telling lies to impressionable young students ... Again, an ego thing you know [the tutors].

Whether the men challenged the staff or not, another presence in the narratives was the belief that their presence in the lecture halls and seminar rooms was of benefit to the institution, that their views were valid. This was challenged in Robert’s narrative. Robert was both a PhD student and an experienced social science tutor. He offered the following interpretation of the mature student presence,
Robert: I saw with a lot of mature students, when they came to university they had an idea of what it was going to be like. They had a worldview and they weren’t prepared to change that.

Robert also offered insight into the ‘established’ academics, contrasting their social incompetence with their intellect. His deference stood in complete contrast to Matt’s narrative.

Robert: I’m fairly deferential. I’m quite respectful of authorities and people in education, although I realise that a lot of these people here couldn’t tie their own shoelaces. They’re really incompetent...so as human beings they’re maybe incompetent, but as academics or intellectuals they’re actually interesting people.

Matt: I see academics as my peers. I am at university, they are at university, we are doing different jobs. They know more about this than me. My job is to receive some of their knowledge, but I don’t defer to any of them.

■ Relationships with non-university others

Narratives of the relationships between the ‘student’ men and their adult domestic environment were generally narratives of support. Many partners were shown to be providing financial, emotional and practical support (Darren, Howard, Matt, Michael, Nigel, Richard, Stephen, Tony). In addition to taking extra paid work, Michael, Richard and Stephen told how their wives acted as proof-readers also. Whilst Michael and Richard maintained that their wives were only interested in the grammar of the writing, Stephen’s story relayed his wife’s interest in the content and plans to embark on education herself. Stephen also told of his children’s interest in his topics and of the discussions in their household. Michael relayed how he had been banned from invoking his university theories in his house, due to the lack of interest of his children and/or to potential for heated arguments. Alan suggested that his knowledge was largely irrelevant to the lives of his teenage children, who were pursuing practical subjects at school/college. He relayed that his knowledge of the process of university would be of benefit to them, should they ever want to pursue it.

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5 As opposed to their natal families
The more prevalent theme in his narrative was of using his current university participation to show them that it was OK to fail things in life, because there are always other things that can be done.

Alan: If my son failed his exams 'Dad I left it late.' I'd say, 'it's alright son. It's no great secret. This is how people are. And this is how I've overcome it. Use [my knowledge] that way if you want it. If you don't, find your own way.

[later]

MW: Would you like your children to go to university at some point?

Alan: No. No, it's not a necessary part of life ... I've explained that university does offer you better opportunities. Must go? Not necessarily because they might just want to be street sweepers. So, I would encourage them to go if they wanted to go. I would certainly never put them off ... I think it's best done when you're 18/19, but if you don't have that choice ... then when you're not working, you can do much worse than going to university and learning.

Narratives of relationships with birth families were complex. A lot of men were distant from them at the time of their studenthood. Sometimes this was through bereavement, at other times some men told how it was actively chosen. There were narratives of familial pride in their achievements. Alan and James told of the strong support of their siblings. Nathan, Matt, Stuart and Daniel spoke of returning to their home communities and of feeling that their parents were proud of them.

Daniel: It's actually quite embarrassing. They think I'm really hard working and clever. But I'm not. I know lots of others who are so much more intelligent than me.

Tony: The impression I get from my close family is that they are, they are proud of the fact that I have graduated and I will graduate and I will be a doctor and things like that. But they still say to me 'are you always going to be a student? Are you going to be a student for the rest of your life?'

For a long time Nathan did not realise that his father was proud of his son's educational achievements. His narrative of paternal relationship was one of
emotional distance. However, Nathan recalled an incident when his father invited him to his local pub. During the evening Nathan relayed how many of his father's friends were congratulating him on his educational success and that it became increasingly evident that his father had showed immense pride in his son amongst his friends. This came as quite a revelation to Nathan.

Some men recalled with affection how little had changed in their birth families, no matter how well educated they had become. This was relayed with a sense of warmth in most cases. Tony was the exception.

Matt: To some extent I get frustrated because I still have exactly the same conversations, and I still lose the same arguments. I really did think by this point that I would be able to absolutely wipe the floor with any of them in an argument, and I still lose. ...and I don't find it any easier to explain myself than I ever used to. Now I just think, well, there's some things I can say and there is no point in saying it because they will just outwank you as pretentious.

Daniel: When I first went to university, and when I came out, I suppose I went home and I was a wee bit arrogant really. You know, this is me, get used to it! ... So now I love to sit and hear about the lives of people I no longer know.

For others (Darren, Tony), the narrative was of a distance that was increasingly difficult to negotiate. Tony talked of not being able to ‘fit in’ with his former familial environment any more.

Tony: The problem I have with my family I think is now I am educated, I am still being educated, my outlooks and views on life have completely changed. I just see, in my family, all they do is work, go home and watch Coronation Street. And that’s it. That’s all their life involves. And that’s, I’d like to culturally enrich my life and do things and tastes I guess, it’s a terrible thing to say nowadays but I consider myself maybe to be a different class from them now.

MW: Where do you think this has come from? From doing your degree?

Tony: It’s probably to do with my girlfriend and her family sort of showing me the way as to, how you can better yourself and have a better
life and see life though another perspective. University I suppose you do meet lots of other intelligent, kind of interesting people which would be, you talk to and learn things from do things in life, do different things. I think part of the problem with not going to university is that all you can do is go to work and come home and that’s it….I mean. I don’t really think my family has ever been to art galleries or musical recitals or anything like that. I think being educated opens your eyes to new things.

Graham and Frank related a sense of their distance from former working-class communities, in entirely different ways. Both men grew up in deprived communities, but Frank’s story highlighted his sense of loss at the camaraderie of those communities. Chapter 4 showed Frank seeming to rejoice in the working-class life of his youth (‘dancing, drinking, fighting’) whereas it also showed Graham desperate to leave his working-class estate. When they reflect on their former communities, there is quite a disparity of opinion.

Graham: There's nothing there for me any more. I look at them and I think - they’re sad⁶.... And I know I shouldn't and they're probably not all sad but - I'm talking about guys my age that maybe, went to Spain once. Live across the road from their mum. Their view of life is narrowed. Soaking up all the soap opera...nothing else.

Frank: I’m proud that I got excluded rather than I excluded myself from it …it hurts a little bit and I noticed that as the years went on. I still follow my football. I still love going to the pub and talking to the guys and that. But I feel isolated now.

Darren and James told of feeling less comfortable with their ‘higher up’ positions. Darren told how he enjoys 'middle class' cultural activities (ie the theatre, opera), but that he was less than comfortable about other ways in which he feels his sensibilities are moving. Darren confesses to having to police his attitudes towards those who fit the contemporary image of disaffected working class youth in Scotland,

Darren: … I sometimes have to stop myself thinking things that would make me a snob. Because of my background I'll never have a snobby attitude but I do find that I have joined in this 'ned' bashing thing. I have done that and I have to stop myself. It’s like having someone lower down

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⁶ The tone in which this was said I believe implies that Graham means the men are sad/pathetic rather than sad/unfortunate.
James: Maybe there are occasions when I feel {pause} slightly superior in that I can express myself better than other people, you know. I was at a party at the weekend ... with some guys from [his town]. And one of them was at college, which is obviously slightly different from university. I could see that he kind of lacked an ability to express himself, maybe as well as I did. And it felt good in a sense, but not that I wished to gain any sense of {pause} superiority.

Outside of the family domain there were a few instances of others’ negative responses to the men’s studenthood. However it appeared that these people were not among the close circle of the men involved (Alan, James, Stuart, Richard). Stuart recalled some occasional teasing among other men in the mailroom where he worked.

Stuart: I suppose there’s a bit [of tension] at work. You know, you're a working class boy and now you're a student going to Edinburgh University and you're all la-di-dah, so there's a little bit of that.

James: You do get some kind of slagging for want of a better word. Ribbing from other people, in [my home town] for being at uni. Like ‘oh he’s a student. He’s this, he’s that.’ You know, people just can’t handle that. Like if I say to them. Me? I’m doing psychology’ they make all sorts of funny faces and go ‘oooooo, psychology, ooooo!’ {said in high pitched tone, mimicry}

James: My family were really supportive. ...one or two of my pals were not supportive of the idea of going to university. It wasn’t that they were negative about it or anything. But it was just the way, y’know, you would get the working-class mindset, making fun of students and so on. So they don’t really value it as much as my older brother has.

Richard and Alan mentioned how it was comments from people they were no longer close to that were negative. Both men dismissed these opinions as those who expressed them were unimportant in their lives. James and Frank each recalled
occasions where they were seen to be ‘getting above themselves’ by members of their working-class communities. Even though Frank has moved out his former estate during his progression into a social services career, he still used to drink in pubs near that community. He told of being engaged in a conversation and when asked what he did for a living, he was annoyed at the assumptions that were being made about him on the basis of his education. For Frank, there was no explicit derision of his progress, but he believed there was an underlying sense of this.

Frank: Now I’m no sociologist but the impression was that I was definitely seen to be getting above myself.

In James’ narrative, the tension was less subtle,

James: Funnily enough I introduced myself to someone a while back, that I hadn’t seen for years. It got to a point when I used to get called ‘Jamsie Boy’, but I ended up getting – I decided to call myself James. Not because I thought it was pretentious by any means. I just felt it was a bit more grown up. It may also be a bit more, suitable for me progressing in a career and so on. ....But I remember meeting a guy in a pub recently who I hadn’t seen for years. I went ‘hi, how you doing?’. He said ‘what’s your name again?’ I went “James” and he went {pause} ‘whit’s wrang wi Jamsie Boy?!’ {said in broad working-class Glaswegian accent, almost exaggerated} So that’s the kind of thing you deal with.

Student identities

Adopting a student identity rarely emerged as a negative process among the men. Matt was a notable exception.

Matt: When people say, what do you do it’s with a sort of half apologetic thing that I’m actually still a student, as if its something to be embarrassed about.

MW: so wouldn’t you maybe say instead, ‘I’m training to be a lawyer?’

Matt: No, no. I don’t like that. I don’t really like status or anything…I don’t like people who think they can get automatic respect. ... I only ever get the lawyer thing out when I think that somebody, when I really want to throw somebody off the scent, because its great to be able to do it.
Alan was a cleaner in a church before he began his studies, which he rationalised in part with a discourse of ‘giving something back’ to the Church as it had played an important part in his life. Becoming a student revealed how he had not perhaps been as content with that occupation as he had previously made out. He reflected,

Alan: It wasn’t until I was a student that I thought – well that’s OK [to be a cleaner] cos I’m doing it because I want to. {pause} It was almost as if being a student legitimised – made it socially acceptable to be doing jobs that – well, that I can do better than.

Alan: It’s more to do with stigmatization. It was like ‘oh, you’re a cleaner. Is that all you’ve achieved?’ But people do judge you by it, which is their problem. But being a student it was like, ‘well I won’t always be here. There will be other opportunities for me. It is my choice to do this. Because it suits me – 6 hours a week. And having that student thing made me feel quite comfortable. I knew I was working for something greater.

There is little sense of enjoyment of the educative process in Alan’s narrative. Whilst indeed he may have enjoyed it, the emphasis for him is on the outcome, what it says to future employers about him. For example,

Alan: What I expected the degree to do for me was challenge me. And to have a piece of paper to say to people basically, ‘listen. This is what I can do if I put my mind to it’...and also probably to say to an employer, well while I was unemployed I wasn’t sitting around scratching my arse, watching television.

Grant’s narrative was a complete contrast to Alan’s. As this extract exemplifies, for Grant, it is the process, the value of education for its own sake, that is the benefit of his university experience so far.

Grant: I’ve got friends at [my work] or who have jobs, which are the most mind-numbing jobs you can imagine. And [they think] ‘oh my God, university? That must be so boring!’ And the reality is, that it’s a complete privilege. To go to university and study for three years. To go to the library and read all sorts and sit in coffee bars and philosophise {laughs}. To be as pretentious as that! {more laughter}...I know that if they were to
be given a taste of how education, in the right sort of way, they would do it and they would love it.

For some, the degree (so far) wasn’t seen to have been enough of a challenge. In some narratives, the men mentioned how getting the required grades could be achieved by writing what the institution required, rather than any intellectual engagement. Matt and Michael suggested the game is to bring out all the perspectives and don’t conclude anything from them.

Howard: I suppose I was in awe of it [higher education] before going through the process, not that I have my degree yet. But I feel it’s much more of a – it has less currency for me.

Matt: I was surprised at how easy it was. I jumped through the hoops and they weren’t particularly high and they weren’t on fire.

Grant: At the moment, to be totally honest, I’ve just completely played their game. I’ve written really middle of the line issues and very academic language. Just a transfer of information. But I think in the forth year I’m gonna try and change that quite a bit and write essays from more my viewpoint which might not be so bogged down in the academic, and bring in other issues as well.

Michael: I got the impression that I was back in the army. It's not about what you want to do. Put down what the lecturers want and get the mark. And I resist that.

Some men mentioned how they believed they had changed as a result of their university undertaking. This was about changing their perspectives in life. For example,

Darren: It's given me a new way of looking at the world. It's made me more willing to change ...to take on influences. I suppose I'm moving away from the working class constraints. I have different attitudes and standards. Sometimes the working class can be - insular, be quite restrictive. So really, it's about not being blinkered
Matt: I am a bit more sympathetic to the views of people who previously, before going to university, I would have been quite antagonistic towards. There is a lot of privileged people there and I would have seen myself as some sort of modern day class warrior before going to university, and really just hated these people for who they are. But I don't now. I will sort of understand it and I will talk to them about it.

Michael: {sarcastically} I always thought I was right. Now I can prove I'm right!

For some it was about increasing their confidence (James, Alan). Quite a few narratives attributed their lack of self-esteem in part to their parental circumstances. Alan told of his reaction when he received his first grade from his studies,

Alan: ... and I had the essay in my bag and I was round at my Dad's and I just wanted to wave it in his face. To show him – 'There dad, see? Fuck you'... but I never...

However, James illustrated how this was not necessarily a process completed yet. He was mentioned earlier when reflecting on how he felt when he realised he was more eloquent than someone else who was from his working-class community and was also a student at this time. However he later told of another social setting where the gains he believes he has made, were questioned.

James: I was in court the other day, as a witness, and there I was at this law court and yet again, although I've come on in leaps and bounds, I was faced with this slight insecurity you know. Is this out of my league here? Is this out of my league intellectually? Am I intelligent enough for this? Am I sharp enough to become a lawyer...and it was quite interesting experiencing that again cos I hadn't really felt like that for the last couple of years at uni.

Matt's narrative suggested that his esteem may have been affected by his belief that he was being scrutinised by others outside the family. He dwelt on this at length,
Matt: ... people presume when they know that you are working-class and you look and sound working-class and you do working-class things, people think they know other things about you. And it’s great when you can tell them that they don’t know other things about you, ... and it gives you — some people are very posh and don’t need to achieve or attain anything because people make presumptions about them. They think, ‘oh you must be quite wealthy; you’re probably got a good job; you’ve come from a nice family’. Whereas people make different presumptions about you. Whereas as soon as you can say ‘I’m working-class and I’ve got this’ then they are lost with their presumptions. I think that’s damn right and to some extent that’s part of the reason for doing it... before I went to university I wanted to have the status of being a lawyer. And now I actually try to shrink away from it because it doesn’t matter to me anymore. My priorities have changed with regard to it and that’s the really important thing actually. I don’t care any more what somebody thinks because I’ve proved to myself what I can do. And with pretty minimal effort.

The adoption of student identities has been seen in this section to be full of contradictions and tensions. The underlying insecurities of a working-class emerge within some of these, and as the following chapter will contemplate, even those narratives that reject an association with a working-class habitus, such denial may be considered as an instantiation of it.

5.6 Conclusion

This chapter has presented an overview of the occupational and personal trajectories of the men’s adult lives. It showed how those men who began university at the ‘traditional’ age made the institutional choices and also how they experienced their HE. Despite some financial pressures, discourses of enjoyment and freedom were evidenced. The chapter also showed the importance of military employment within the research sample. Whilst some men held earlier ambitions for this trajectory, for others it was presented as a means of escape from the prospects of their youth. The men held generally positive views of their military lives (despite witnessing some horrors), noting in particular the opportunity for travel and education. The Social care arena was also seen to be a significant space occupied by many men, who mentioned a desire to help others as a reason for taking these occupations. Some men
entered the arena quite deliberately, whilst others entered as voluntary staff during periods of unemployment. The routine occupational spaces were rarely presented as fulfilling occupations, with some men resenting the masculine culture of some workplaces, and many experiencing redundancies or temporary bouts of employment. For those in creative spaces, employment was also insecure, with contacts playing a more important part than education for success in this field.

The chapter then charted the men’s intimate lives, showing relationships being made and remade. It showed men who were in relationships with partners of a similar origins, and more recent partnerships between men and women of slightly different social backgrounds. Some of these new relationships were with graduate women and this emerged as significant within the men’s accounts of the process of deciding to try to enter HE. Other markers in this process included the end of the family life cycle where children were no longer dependent, and also the threat or advent of unemployment. The transition to student may have been aided by the fact that few men appeared to hold negative preconceptions regarding university students. The chapter then showed how the men made the institutional and subject choices for their HE and a strong narrative of wanted to attend the most reputable institution was evident. Subject choice was relayed more strongly as a matter of personal interest, although there were considerations of future employment also.

Finally, the chapter presented the men’s reflections on their HE experience. Views of students being lazy were in a minority, and a narrative of young students as frightened was more evident. With the exception of a postgraduate tutor, there was a general view among the men that their personal opinions, of texts and of lecturers’ assertions, mattered and were legitimate contributions to the HE discourse. It also appeared that the men’s HE endeavour was supported by many of those within their social groups, although some on the outskirts may have been derogatory.
CHAPTER 6
Analysis and Discussion

6.1 Introduction

Chapters 4 and 5 have mapped the men's histories to date, presenting their pre-adult and post-adult experiences respectively. From those chapters the reader should appreciate the diversity of each life-course, and also have some sense of events that have been shared by some of the men. This chapter presents a sociological consideration of those findings, placing the men’s narratives within the context of wider social forces, and also the academic literature presented in chapter 2. It is organised in three sections; each section addressing one of the research questions posed at the end of that second chapter.

The first section of this chapter considers the first research question, ‘How have the dynamics of class and gender impacted on the educational journeys of mature male students, and what other structural and cultural forces were significant?’ It focuses first on the ways in which occupational and educational structures may have influenced these journeys¹, noting how these structures have changed over time and the significance of that change for the lives of the men here. It then examines the cultural forces that were entwined in the men’s lives so far. Whilst the dynamics of class and gender were the primary focus at the outset of this study, other cultural forces, e.g. age, religion, nationality and sexuality also emerged as significant.

Part 2 considers the second research question, ‘How useful is Bourdieu’s framework, and his concepts of capitals and habitus, in explaining the men’s experiences?’ It conceptualises the men’s histories in terms of positions in social space and contemplates whether their movements are explainable by the operation of an economy of capitals. It looks at their relationships (in terms of distances) to other social groups that appeared on their radar at various points in time. This section then

¹ These structures are closely connected despite being presented here as separate.
moves to the internal motivations and dispositions of the men to contemplate the operation of the habitus using this research data. It considers the utility of the concept in the context of (apparently) ‘divergent’ trajectories and Bourdieu’s accounts of how these might occur.

Part 3 of the chapter responds to the final research question, ‘What kinds of identities are evident in the men’s transitions to student and other key biographical moments, and how can these be understood?’ It explores the men’s accounts in light of the theories of contemporary identities cited in chapter 2, contemplating the extent to which their emerging identities still bear the traces of their classed origins, and also the extent to which they may be seen as having shifted towards more reflexive and/or postmodern subjectivities. It also considers what has been learnt about masculine identities from this research. The section ends by placing their adoption of student identities in the context of other research on non-traditional students.

6.2 How have the dynamics of class and gender impacted on the educational journeys of mature male students, and what other structural and cultural forces were significant?

Because of the age range among the men in this research, from 27-52, and the fact that they sometimes also included previous generations in their narratives, it was possible to get a glimpse of social and structural change occurring over generations. Additionally, because of the different ages of the men, it was also possible to see how the same change was experienced differently by men of different ages. It was fairly obvious that structures within the occupational and educational fields were significant in the men’s journeys, whether these forces impacted directly on them as individuals, or whether they experienced the residual effects of these forces acting on
others around them\(^2\). The section discusses the effects of these structures in turn before turning to consider the more culturally mediated forces that appeared as significant.

### Occupational structures

Changes in occupational structures could be seen to have influenced the men's journeys to university. A pervasive feature among the men's narratives was the impact of working-class industrial decline and political unrest in the 1980s. This research saw the impact of that restructuring over generations. The older cohort's (e.g. Stephen, Michael, Frank, Robin, Richard, Edward) occupational histories began with tales of plentiful employment opportunities, whereas the middle cohort told of the loss of employment by the older generations around them (i.e., their fathers, and occasionally their grandfathers) and of the unemployment/insecure labour market they themselves faced (Darren, Stuart, Matt, Nigel, Graham). The narratives among the younger cohort also included a few references to the lost industrial occupations of their grandfathers and fathers (James, William). These men all stayed on in education after the compulsory period, which again suggests a generational/historical change in the occupational field.

The research revealed complex patterns of costs and benefits within these broad occupational trends. The effect of witnessing the political struggles against deindustrialisation that erupted in the 1980s, and the effect of unemployment among older generations appeared to have left an imprint on the psyche of some men. Chapter 5 showed some reflections on how a generation of men were seen to have been damaged by these policies. They linked paternal depression and (increased) alcohol use to their loss of employment and perceived lack of future employment. Amongst the men themselves, the middle cohort, there were narratives of their own experience of unemployment, insecurity and perceived bleak futures, and of their own battles with drugs and depression presented in that context.

\(^2\) Obviously there is difficulty in separating their experience as individuals to their experience as part of a society. The point should become clearer as the discussion unfolds.
This research has uncovered the emotional dimensions of deindustrialisation and I suggest this is an important part in understanding the processes of 'learning not to labour' (Lingard 2003) that has been associated with generations of working-class young men being raised in post-industrial times. Whilst it is important of course to focus on how men are (or are not) adapting their notions of manual masculinity in light of the new occupational economies (illustrated by Kenway & Kraack 2004, Weiss 2006), this research has also shown the painful emotional processes around the transition to these new occupational conditions. So here, learning not to labour was also about learning why not to labour. The men’s (recalled) experience of manual labour was that it was harmful to those employed in it, and also to their families because of the culture that surrounded it. Do I believe this may have influenced any journeys to university? For some of the men who experienced something of the turbulence of the 1980s there is a link between those times and their HE endeavour. Mostly it appeared to influence some of the subjects they chose to study; there was a curiosity to understand those times. However, it was not the case that it motivated them to pursue education in light of these experiences. Perhaps the strongest connection was in Matt’s history where his own direct experience of industrial action and (in his opinion) police brutality, is one of the main reasons for him studying law when he decided to return to HE.

Military occupational spaces emerged as perhaps exerting a more direct influence on the men’s HE journeys. In some men’s histories, particularly those in the middle cohort, military employment was undertaken to avoid continued occupational instability (and the perceived dangerous trajectories they may have otherwise fallen into alongside their peers). Again, the effect of this structure was both positive and negative, although it should be noted that the men mostly spoke of it in positive terms. They spoke positively of the skills, education and travel their service entailed and also mentioned the military in almost meritocratic terms, where skills and hard work were rewarded. Although they did not dwell on their days in the military in too much detail, the picture was more akin to Morgan’s (1994) presentation of military life, which included the routine, mundane and non-aggressive aspects of the service. There was no discourse of brutality or bullying, except where Ryan claimed he had
witnessed it elsewhere in the forces, and Stephen denied it as a feature of military life (although for him it was a feature of his civilian life before enlisting). The men therefore would have little support for New’s (2001) assertion that military service ought to be regarded as part of the systematic mistreatment of men; that it is the misrepresentation of their nature (i.e. as aggressive), that it invariably involves the trauma and degradation of male bodies and psyches etc. However the silences in their narratives perhaps spoke more than they did.

Why do I think their military service holds some significance for their journeys to studenthood? This research uncovered a literary/learning culture that should be acknowledged and it is suggested that the education and training of the armed forces maintained a learning culture that similarly educated men working in other civilian organisations may not have experienced. The men could be seen as lifelong learners in some sense, which as the qualitative research shows (e.g. Bowl 2003, Brine & Waller 2004, Tett 2000, Warmington 2003), seems to be important for those from the working-class who eventually end up in HE as mature students. Further, it could be suggested that the armed services allowed geographical mobility for boys from areas of high local unemployment, and enabled them to forge trajectories that were different from their peers. Some men stated that they had an idea/fear of what their lives would have been if they hadn’t broken away from the environments of their youth.

A further way in which occupational structures appeared as important in the men’s HE histories was its current structure in which part-time temporary employment (the extension of entry level jobs) meant that only the older cohort were ever established in hierarchical, full time careers. It was mainly the middle cohort and a few of the younger men who spoke of their increasing dissatisfaction at the lack of stability in their employment histories and cited this as reason for university. Warmington (2003) suggests this is an important, but overlooked, aspect of mature students’ return to HE.
Another obvious change in the occupational structure that could have impacted on the men’s HE trajectories was the increasing credentialisation of the labour market. However, this was not a significant theme. Robin expressed it most strongly and seemed to have experienced it most strongly also, when he recalled he could no longer gain employment in his occupational field without formal qualifications. Mostly in the narratives, whilst the implications of their studies was related to employment, the requirement of a degree as a necessary qualification for that, was not expressed strongly. A stronger narrative was of the desire for a degree, for more personal reasons. For some it was the fulfilment of a dormant ambition, that may also lead to employment. For others there was also the meaning of a degree to others, who they perceived may pass judgement on them (e.g. Alan and employers, Matt and middle-class others). The discourse of their degree as entry level qualifications was rarely a sole or primary consideration in many cases. This was even evident among PhD students, who spoke of their love of the subject rather than the PhD as a qualification for employment.

**Education structures**

It is tentatively suggested that restricted educational opportunities for women of their mother’s generation had some influenced in some men’s educational journeys. Many men believed their mothers possessed greater ‘intelligence’ than their occupations might suggest. It is tempting to suggest that it is because previous generations of women were impeded by educational, occupational and cultural barriers that their sons here have benefited from having mothers with higher cultural capital staying at home. For example, mothers who studied to become teachers and nurses at that time, may well have been university graduates with access to a range of professional careers had they been born a generation later. Indeed, amongst the younger cohort, some mothers were studying for university degrees at the time of their sons’ interviews (Daniel, Nathan). This adds weight to the suggestion that older generations of women in this research had perhaps been prevented from realising their educational potential. However, without actually asking those women, it is
wrong to suggest their lives (occupations and husbands) were more ‘settled for’ under conditions of constraint, rather than actively chosen.

There is greater confidence in the assertion that the men’s journeys to university have been affected by the more recent increase in female graduates, because many men in this research spoke of receiving support and encouragement from graduate women in accessing higher education. Amongst the middle cohort men, some became friendly with female graduates when they worked as ‘volunteers’ in the social care sector, during times of unemployment. It may be seen as an unintended consequence of occupational and educational structural change (c.f. Beck 1996). The other way in which graduate women may be seen to have influenced the men’s routes to university was evident in their personal, rather than professional, sphere. Quite a few men in this research were in long-term relationships with graduate women, who again offered support and a source of inspiration for the value of higher education and the men’s capacities to succeed therein. The statistics in chapter 1 may suggest that the men in these two cities were relatively more likely to encounter graduate women than in other kind of conurbations.

Catholic schools also emerged as an interesting theme within the sphere of education structures. I was surprised by how many men in this sample attended such a school, in Scotland and in England. A common narrative from these men was that they felt encouraged to achieve by their schools. There was no narrative among the Catholic-schooled men of teachers having low aspirations of them or else of feeling ignored in favour of high achieving students, which appear in other research with mature students (e.g. Bowl 2003, Marks et al 2003). The findings chapters have shown some men identifying an aspirant Catholic mentality, either among in their families, their communities and/or their schools. Others have mentioned the Catholic schools they attended having higher educational results than others in the locale. Perhaps, the state provision of these schools may have impacted on the men’s inclinations to return to education, in a number of ways. The men spoke of the aspirational ethos of these institutions and also of the ways in which the close connections between home/school/church served to reinforce the need to behave appropriately in school.
Further, whilst most men did not succeed in progressing to HE at that time, many 
mentioned that their peers from their schools did. By keeping in touch with their 
peers many non-university men had university friends as they were forging other 
routes in the world. This has meant many men retained a familiarity with the realm 
of higher education despite the fact that they themselves did not attend.

There was some evidence that the financial structures of higher education may have 
delayed men’s entry to higher education in order to accumulate savings to help them 
survive. Again, the relationship between HE and a flexible labour market meant that 
many men were able to continue in part-time employment (or take it up) in order to 
alleviate the financial demands of university. Unlike other studies (e.g. Archer et al 
2003, Davies & Williams 2001), paying for it did not produce a significant discourse 
of risk in this research. Instead there were other discourses of entitlement. This 
meant that for these men in elite spaces, to some extent, they saw they had a right to 
be there.

■ Cultural forces

The men's narratives produced an impression of a type of masculine culture linked to 
communities which were embedded in heavy industrial labour. This was barely 
presented as a positive image. The narratives revealed the physical and psychological 
injury to the workers and to their families that accompanied this hard working life. 
The familial damage ranged from increasing financial hardship aligned to increasing 
alcohol consumption, to, in some cases, increasing levels of psychological and 
physical harm inflicted on wives and children by drunken fathers. (In this study, the 
sons of fathers who were self-employed tradesmen, drivers, machinists etc. rarely 
mentioned a culture of this type.) But the culture was not so one-dimensional as 
other common aspects of this generation of working-class men were revealed also, 
such as an appreciation of poetry and socialist political thought.

Some men told of movement in and from school being affected by their gender 
and/or class. The guidance into science subjects was often referred to, despite some 
men recalling their talent and/or interest in literature or more creative subjects. Some
men believed their post school transitions, into electrical engineering, into higher paying manual trades rather than trainee level careers, into working with your hands, away from working with young children, reflected such cultural norms. However, I was surprised at the presence in the men's narratives of numbers of men in occupations that contest gendered expectations, with other men being cited as nurses, hairdressers and carers.

The ideology of the male breadwinner has been shown as a major obstacle in the way of working-class males return to HE (e.g. Archer and Leathwood 2003, McGivney 1999, Marks 2000). The evidence from this research suggests that this is the case in older men (who were probably raised when the ideology was relatively strong), but that the middle and younger cohorts this narrative was either not adopted, or being challenged.

To begin with, the experience or threat of unemployment is a significant factor in why some men began to consider university. There were recent ruptures in formerly stable employment histories among older men, whilst for many younger men a stable occupational employment market has never been experienced. It is suggested that a perceived inability to compete in the occupational field of their choice has led to studenthood in Robin and Graham and Alan’s cases. For the first two men the IT skills acquired in their military service, that allowed them financial success in the civilian realm, eventually became outdated and required certification, so their thoughts turned to other possibilities. The changing nature of the retail sector where Alan had risen to managerial levels required weekend working patterns that he wasn’t prepared to undertake in light of his weekend familial commitments. Stephen, Richard and Frank each cited health scares that they believed would have made it unwise to continue in their employment fields. For Richard and Frank this was the desire to reduce stress in light of actual physical deterioration, whereas for Stephen this was an anticipated physical decline. However, it is perhaps worth noting that Richard and Stephen did not receive medical direction to leave their respective forms of employment (office management and taxi-driver respectively). This raises the spectre that their stated reasons for HE entry could have been presented as more
‘acceptable’ answers for men to give. Rather than simply saying that they wanted to
go and the opportunity was there, it was necessary to suggest they needed to address
their current employment undertakings for the good of their health and the future
financial stability of the family.

Even where the narrative of ‘it was time I did something for me’ occurred, it did so
within the context of breadwinner responsibilities having been seen as mostly
fulfilled. Thus Frank, Michael and Stephen delayed their HE until such commitments
were redundant, which then gave them time to do something for themselves.
However, the lack of breadwinner roles was a feature of this research by men in
other kinds of relationships. There were just a few men in either long-term same sex
relationships, or else intimate relationships that did not involve cohabitation. But
many other men had not been the breadwinner in their heterosexual cohabitation
relationships (Howard, Matt, Tony, Darren). In fact, here it was told that the main
source of income came for the women and that the men were supplementing that.
Tony and Matt told of ambitious mobile career-orientated partners. These findings
concur with those of Bondi (2005) who suggests that cities are providing fresh
opportunities for the renegotiation of gender roles and identities.

Nonetheless, there was still evidence of traditional gender roles being adopted
although this was mostly among the older cohort. Here I could see, even if the men
could not, the double burden of work their wives undertook and the reproduction of
separate spheres that their husbands appeared to be recreating at university. This
ranges from the maintenance of the home and family as he reproduces traditional
employment patterns in HE, to providing a variety of support: financial support
(taking on additional employment jobs or becoming the breadwinner), emotional
support and academic support (becoming proof readers).

The research found another gendered narrative that may be seen as significant for the
men’s return to HE. The findings here concur with those of Burke (2006b) and Tett
(2000) regarding men’s propensity to provide more agentic reasons for their ‘failure’
at school. Stephen and Michael in particular told of their decision not to attend
school, and to do other things instead (employment and self-education respectively). Where the men did not achieve what they were expected to achieve at school, this was mostly attributed to their emerging interest in other things (girls, socialising) and/or to their own laziness. Weiner et al. (1999) highlighted the gendered discourse of ability in schools, which implies that boys don’t have to try to be clever (in contrast to girls’ industriousness). If this was indeed a reflection of a gendered narrative (either instead of or in addition to an actual representation of the men’s school behaviour), then the fact that the men here had access to a cultural script of ‘lazy’ rather than ‘not clever enough’, is to suggest they had access to a resource that may have allowed them to keep their educational identities intact.

6.3 How useful is Bourdieu’s framework, and his concepts of capitals and habitus, in explaining the men’s experiences?

- Capitals

The research found that movements through social space could usefully be explained in terms of the composition and conversion of familial capitals, in the way advocated by Bourdieu. Bourdieu emphasises the importance of cultural capital in this endeavour and there was evidence to support this from this research. For example, men told of their families increase in financial capital and their ability to move to middle class geographical spaces, but that this did not entitle them to enter middle-class social space (e.g the golf/tennis club, the parties in the ‘posh’ houses). Whilst Robin felt this personally, he and Alan told of others’ exclusions. Their narratives did not reveal why Alan’s father ‘never quite made it’ into the golf club. Nor do we know whether Robin’s mother or grandparents even applied to those organisations. The important point in terms of the dynamics of class distances and class reproduction is that those kinds of spaces were not entered by working-class people, despite their accumulation of financial capital.
In the other direction, William’s familial loss of financial capital may have made his location in middle-class spaces an act of negotiation financially, but his narrative of remaining in those spaces is one of entitlement. His mother and his paternal family had the cultural resources to know where to go to get ‘better’ education, indeed, the cultural resources to know the difference. Whilst Williams narrative is of bitterness at having to work during his gap year and his ‘traditional’ university trajectory, the fact remains that gap year and university were part of his familial ‘normal biography’.

The suspected ‘higher’ cultural capital of mothers in particular may have influenced the men’s HE journeys. The men's narratives told of mother’s taking them to cultural activities such as galleries, recitals and theatres, which may not necessarily be associated with working-class pursuits. This phenomenon may also be extended to include some men’s current relationships with educated/graduate women. However the fact that the men, then and now, appear to be accepting some of the cultural mores which could be seen as being the motif of the middle-classes, presents a challenge to Boudieu. According to Bourdieu, the distinctions between these different kinds of cultural activity should be regarded as arbitrary, and any legitimation of middle-class cultural norms should be seen as no more than misrecognition of inherited privilege. However, the narratives of the men show them recognising the intelligence of their mothers, valuing the ways in which their graduate girlfriends’ families communicate and socialise, endorsing the benefits of the kinds of things learnt at university. In some cases these things are explicitly seen as being of greater value than the activities that are perceived to remain within working-class communities, such a watching the television, working/sleeping and shopping.

One point of importance here is that the men are projecting these activities onto those communities. Whilst they may have some basis for those assumptions, looking around their families for example, the truth of the matter is they no longer inhabit those communities in most cases. Therefore they may be implicated in an act of pathologisation of the working-class, as identified by Skeggs (1997, 2004) and
Charlesworth (2000), among others. This can be understood of course in terms of 'splitting' (c.f. Lucey et al. 2003, Reay 2005, Walkerdine 2003), whereby the aspect of one's previous subjectivity that presents the most psychic damage to the self that one is currently trying to construct, is rendered despicable as a means of maintaining a distance from it. The men's attitudes to working-class others may indeed be seen in this way. However, whilst it is rather an uncomfortable issue, and a sensitive one in that I do not want to be implicated in any way as deriding the cultural norms of working-class communities, the rather uncomfortable question that is also raised by this research, is whether there are different cultural values of these kinds of activities. Thus, is going to the opera or art gallery of higher cultural value than watching a soap opera, not because it is more likely that middle-class people do it, but because intrinsically, it is. This question is not raised in Bourdieu's work because, as others have identified (Sayer 2000), he ignores the issue of what may constitute more or less valuable forms of cultural activity.

The recognition of emotional capital (Reay 2000) as another important force in social mobility was validated in this research and I agree that it can be seen as less class-specific than Bourdieu's existing capitals. As Reay (2000) identifies, the possibility of utilising this kind of resource may be limited in households that are in a constant state of trying to survive in testing circumstances. There was much evidence for this among the men in this research; those whose fathers were employed in heavy industry and whose mothers also were in employment whilst raising their large families. It was apparent that such parents did not have excesses of time to invest in their children's emotional well-being and there were a few cases where the stresses of their environment led to addictions which further diminished this already scarce resource.

There was also a sense of this kind of 'shortage' in William's narrative, as he told of his mother's absences and also of his 'enforced' independence due to her feminist commitments. Howard's origin was also not one of poverty, but he also spoke of the lack of emotional support from his parents. His narrative was similar to that of some other men who recalled destructive relationships between parents taking their
attention from their children. Thus, the poverty of emotion may not necessarily be class specific and indeed the point should be made that other working-class men (Darren, Stuart) spoke of strong emotional bonds in their household. Even in households with limited availability of emotional investment, time was found in many cases, otherwise, how would men know that their fathers had sensitive sides?

Relatedly, Grant’s narrative provided a useful example of the limitations of Bourdieu’s conception of the economy of capitals. His relatively affluent upbringing also involved his brother’s suffering from mental illness. In this event, Grant recalled his parents’ focus on his emotional well-being rather than his educational success. This highlighted a useful point about not every action being an investment in the capitalistic sense that Bourdieu presents it as (Nash 2005, Sayer 2000). Whilst Grant’s parents could be seen as making an ‘investment’ in him, their reward for that is his happiness rather than their advantage over others.

I suggest that the research found that the membership of a Catholic community could be regarded as a form of capital. In one sense it could be regarded as a form of social capital because of the networks of successful peers from these schools that may have implications for the men’s own subsequent return to higher education. I also suggest that it could be seen as a form of cultural capital, specifically, the embodied form in that it appears to have provided a sense of confidence in, and a positive disposition towards, education in some men in this research. Bourdieu’s usual reference to religion is in terms of it being another form of misrecognised privilege or institutional power. Indeed, the experience that Matt relayed of his seminary would seem to agree with that to some extent. Matt told how he left his seminary because he felt he was being trained to administer Church power rather than help people. But at the level of community, the Catholic community could also be seen as a class fraction in Bourdieu’s terms, because the impression from the narratives in this research suggested that its history and its future orientation (it was seen as aspirational, perhaps as a response to a perceived history of oppression) could help to explain some of the men’s ‘divergent’ working-class trajectories.
Staeheli & Mitchell (2004:156) state the benefit of focusing on the boundaries in order to highlight the mechanics of demarcation. This research highlighted the subtleties of distinctions, made by a variety of class fractions. Byrne (2005) suggested that the geographies of demarcations around new build estates was increasingly important in understanding classed mobilities (or, in his terms, the lack of them). In here, distinctions of ‘boat hose’ and ‘yards not gardens’ (and also I suggest, of ‘chippie versus carpenter’) attest to such subtleties. Since the men’s move to higher education, the maintenance of boundaries was evident in other ways, which included former communities monitoring for signs of pretension: when ‘Jamsie Boy’ became ‘James’, and when men spoke of the ridicule they envisaged if they used academic language around their families.

There was evidence of bi-lingualism, both in terms of language and cultural expectations, but also sometimes a refusal to move between two cultural realms and an increased distance from working-class others (e.g. Tony). In between, there was evidence of negotiating a fluid space, acknowledging the acquisition of new educated subjectivities, but not wanting to appear superior to those who had not. Where men talked of boundaries that were relatively close together, between themselves and their girlfriends’ families in some cases, the distinctions between their girlfriends’ families slightly higher class position often came down to their possessions and their desire to be distinguishable from others, which the men did not perceive in their own families. The ambiguity of boundary work was further illustrated in Nigel’s narrative where he had to revise his earlier assumption about the middle-class position of his girlfriend’s family when he discovered her father was in fact working-class but successful.

**Marriage and the economy**

The research revealed generations of marriages and co-habitations between men and women of different social class positions. This may have occurred between their own parents and also with the men themselves. I suggest that this has been a significant factor in some men returning to education. Examples of Graham, Darren, Nigel, Matt, Tony told of finding inspiration and support to undertake HE from their
graduate partners. That is not to say that their partners have been the only or even primary motivation for returning. The men were becoming familiar with graduates before these partnerships. Bourdieu sees marriage as another arena where subconscious cultural matching leads to the reproduction of social class locations. He suggests that even where agents appear to be a disparate match, then secondary properties of their families would reveal avenues of unexpected compatibility.

The secondary properties of the men’s graduate partners were known in two (contradictory) cases. Nigel initially thought his girlfriend’s family were middle-class due to their affluence and the fact they put their daughter through private education. Nigel began to talk about his connection with her father as a fellow sufferer of domestic abuse. That could have been seen as a secondary property connecting these two people, albeit one that was not class specific. However, later in the interview Nigel revealed his own incorrect assessment of the father as middle-class which means that Bourdieu’s theory of secondary properties remained intact. However in Graham’s narrative, there is no such connection. Indeed he talked of his partner’s father’s distain for him as working-class and as a Catholic. Nonetheless, they have been together for over two decades. Whilst Graham may present an extreme version of cultural distance in relationships, relationships with graduate women were fairly common in this research. The existence of partnerships with members of different class or class fractions in this research would present a challenge to Bourdieu and again reflects his oversight of the emotional dimensions of human action.

**Habitus**

Alongside this economy of capitals is the habitus is key to understanding why individuals act as they do, allowing unique adaptations over the life-course to the class-based dispositions inculcated since birth. Chapter 2 described Bourdieu’s ambiguity when it came to explaining divergent trajectories. The histories in this research provide a fertile soil in which to chart such activity, because it actually contains men’s accounts of their motivations.
The way in which the habitus tends to adapt aspirations to what is objectively available was critiqued (e.g. Sayer 2005) as overly simplistic because it overlooks the extent of struggle and exaggerates the extent of fit between habitus and habitat. That critique was borne out in this research. It saw young men desperate to escape their working class circumstances and others who recall a sense that they never quite fitted in with their early surroundings. There were references to Catholic identities as entwined with aspirational mentalities and there was also evidence of political resentment at the treatment of the industrial workforce under the Thatcher government. Some men told of undertaking military service or marriage as a way out of their earlier circumstances. However, such reflections may not necessarily be an accurate portrayal of the men’s sentiments at the time these things were happening of course. They are remembering and perhaps unconsciously rationalising such events from their current positions. Nonetheless, the picture of a habitus ‘in tune’ with the habitat in which it has been constructed is surely contestable to some degree.

Bourdieu stipulated that geography had the potential to impact on social distances, which Paterson’s (1993) analysis would appear to support as it showed the availability of HE locally impacted on propensity to attend. With 3 universities in each city they lived in as adults, the influence of geographic location of the men’s likelihood of progressing to university seems logical. The research showed their familiarity with the local student population, although it was not always positive! However, with three different kinds of institutions in each city, the dynamics of choice need reflection as it has been shown in other research (e.g. Archer et al. 2002). The question to be contemplated is why did the popular discourse (linked to habitus) of elite spaces not being ‘for likes of me’ not occur here? Of note was the sense of pride in the local, historically significant institution (particularly among the Glasgow men). There was also a sense of, ‘if I’m going to do this I might as well do it at the best’ (i.e. an ‘in for a penny, in for a pound’ mentality). Of further significance is the fact that for those with graduate partners, most of those graduates attended the ancient institution. In Darren’s narrative, those he worked with in part-time temporary job also attended the ancient university in Edinburgh.
Bourdieu also suggests that luck has a role to play in explaining ‘divergences’ (although the kind of luck may be class specific). This research saw Edward explicitly state that it was bad luck that enabled him to return to education; he believes it was unfortunate that he was fired from his job and that he is now virtually unemployable because of the circumstances in which he left. Grant’s brother’s mental illness may be cited as another example of bad luck that may have prevented a traditional middle-class trajectory unfolding for him. Men also mentioned the luck of meeting other people who in the event, turned out to have some influence in assisting in their journeys to HE. For example, Alan’s relationship with a women who’d been on an access course, Ryan’s tutor massaging the attendance figures so that his course ran and he was able to get the A levels required for medical school. Whist the men themselves might also see their relationships with graduate women as being examples of good fortune, ‘being in the right place at the right time’, looking at those meetings with respect to Bourdieu would highlight the interplay of geography (there were higher concentrations of graduate women in both cities compared to the national average) and the changing occupational and educational structures highlighted in the earlier research question.

Ultimately, I found that there was an almost inevitable problem with looking at the lives of those with (seemingly) divergent trajectories using Boudieu’s framework. Should I expect it to be up to the job of explaining this, given that it is a framework that explains reproduction? But surely to be a useful framework it has to be able to explain the spaces where exceptions/divergences may be created, otherwise it would be truly deterministic. The accommodation of agentic action in structural constraints has allowed most of the men’s trajectories to be understood. In fact, it could possibly allow most of them to be explained with combinations of luck, geography and class fraction mentalities. And that is not necessarily a good thing. For if a framework is so adaptable that it is able to accommodate everything, then perhaps ultimately it is of little value. I remain locked in this contemplation.
What kinds of identities are evident in the men’s transitions to student and other key biographical moments, and how can these be understood?

**Reflexive identities**

Giddens’ (1991) proposition that traditional ties are increasingly meaningless in contemporary society was criticised in light of evidence that non-traditional students still prioritised communitarian motivations in their HE endeavour (e.g. reay 2003, Tett 2000). Communitarian motivations were expressed in this research also: law-standard Matt’s commitment to becoming a defence lawyer, to give voice to those who have been unheard; Nigel’s community education degree is precisely to enable him to have more input into youth groups to help him to deliver more appropriate services to young men who may be enduring the circumstances he endured as a child; Stuart’s community education to engage in a career where he can help people, Stephen’s, James’, Graham’s and Robin’s commitment to teaching so that they can help others in working-class communities to achieve the success in school that they never had. Other men also provided role model narratives for their children, and/or boys of their background which again does not fit readily with individualised subjectivities.

Hughes (2002) suggested that women were more socially pressured to give communitarian reasons for undertaking what was perceived by some as a selfish act that took them away from their children. But if men then have no such pressure, and the narrative remains, perhaps it could be seen as a genuine classed phenomenon.

Skeggs (2004) suggests that the individualisation concept is gendered because men are free to do this, whereas women are more often responsible for others which means they are less able to undertake such activities. Sadly, I think there were instances where men planned their future with their own interests perhaps over-riding the needs of others who (in my opinion) they should have felt more responsible for. A few men told of the financial impact their HE would inflict on the children they had previously had some responsibility for. Whether this is an
instantiation of a reflexively focused individual and an inconsiderate or selfish one is worth raising, for I fail to see a distinction in Giddens’ formulation.

Indeed this is implicit the critique of the individualisation thesis offered by Britton & Baxter (1999). They suggest that it is less applicable to women because of societal expectations whereby women are expected to be selfless and put others’ needs before their own. Therefore, if men do engage in it, they are inherently more selfish. Yet there were examples in this research where men did put others’ needs before their own. With the exceptions noted above, there were many instances where fathers told of putting the needs of their children before their own, of working excessive hours in low paid work, of remaining in unfulfilling jobs for years, in order to meet the financial needs of their families. Edward and Frank told of this happening early in their married lives, and it occurred much more recently in the lives of Michael and Stephen. All four men told of putting off their own (HE) ambitions to prioritise the needs of their families. Alan told how he was prepared to endure unemployment in order to ensure that he was always available to spend weekends with his children. Thus, whilst societal perceptions may be that women are selfless and men are less so, this study draws attention to the selflessness of men also. Indeed, Segal (2003) and McMahon (1993) are critical of broad statements regarding the lack of such characteristics in men. However, I suspect that, had this study been able to compare both men and women undertaking these trajectoires, narratives of constraint in order to accommodate the needs of others would be more prevalent among women.

Giddens (1991) has been criticised for over-looking the impact of class in the capacity to construct biographies in the way he proposes (e.g. Skeggs 2004). Such critique is validated here. For example, the men who ‘chose’ military service, who move away from their families and other communities can be seen as engaging in a biographical construction of the self. However, the fact that some of those decisions were taken as an escape from those communities for fear of what would happen to them if they didn’t, can hardly be seen as a move away from those traditional ties which are increasingly irrelevant. It was mediated by fear rather than by more positive agency. However, it appeared that the men’s separation from those
communities does lead to their detachment, emotionally and physically from them. However, I would question whether this is anything new. It is also worth noting that the military may be seen as an arena where communitarian attachments are re-engendered. For the duration of their military careers of course the narrative of individualisation has to be non-applicable. The men have little freedom to make such decisions. But does their decisions to leave the military constitute another act of reflexive life planning if the man does not relate to his former ties of natal family and working class community, or trade union etc? What about when the men decide on their civilian paths, are those decisions similarly examples of this planning in action? My point is that surely, any decision about the future is indeed an act of reflexive biographical planning, (unless they are taken on a whim). Therefore the issue of this narrative is not whether it exists, but whether it did not exist before Giddens named it. It would have been useful for Giddens to supply empirical evidence of the differences in biographical planning between the traditional and reflexive modern eras.

Where perhaps this research has found an emerging difference in the nature of constructing one’s future biography, it has been in the men’s accounts of the women they are in relationships with. In two cases, (Matt and Tony), female graduate partners were seen to be actively engaged in reflexively planning their futures. Whilst they did consider the impact on their partners, the reason I suggest that this may be a relatively new phenomenon is that it is the women who were making the demands on the partner. The men were being asked to follow the woman’s career and the domestic plans formulated by her. For example, Tony’s partner has relocated twice and will do so again in order to fulfil her career ambitions. Matt’s partner has been supporting his studies but she is now pressuring him to find employment because she intends to have a baby. So if the discourse of reflexive modernity has any substance, then it is as a gendered discourse in relation to women. That is where the break from tradition is occurring.

The main discourse of ‘risk’ found in this research related to ill health, and possibly the risk of future unemployment. The first risk has no place in Beck’s (1996)
analysis and it is hard to see how it could have. Some men's fear of becoming or remaining unemployed could be related to the nature of globalised market forces and its impact on the demands for flexible, knowledge-rich employees. Therefore, it could be suggested that the men are entering HE in order to protect themselves from future risks of unemployment that are increasingly prevalent in contemporary society. Yet for some men in this study, insecure employment has been a significant part of their adult biography already (Nigel, Darren, James, Stuart) and some men state their HE has very little to do with employment (e.g. Frank, Edward, Campbell, Michael, Stephen).

**Postmodern identities**

The concept of nomad was used by Hughes (2002) to emphasise the pleasurable aspects of HE, of returners to education experiencing the freedom of wandering over borders. There was some evidence for this in the PhD where men told of appreciating aspects of their working-class family or former community lives (e.g. Daniel, Frank, Matt, Nathan) and at the same time embracing the cultural distinctions that their HE endeavour had brought them. Indeed there was a relative weakness of instances of the less than positive forms of class hybridity as evidenced in other studies (e.g. Reay 2001, Walkerdine 2003). This could be because many men were not entering HE from within working-class communities, but had experienced mobility (geographically and/or socially) earlier in their lives. Skeggs (2004) identified men's greater capacity for travel, compared to women (who are more likely to travel as a man's companion), and this sample would support her position that the capacity to wander more freely may be seen as gendered.

It could be that, because men are more likely to move spatially (in this research it seemed via their employment), they have increased possibilities to lessen the distances between themselves and those in other spaces in other fields. It would be interesting to see how many female students of working-class origins are undertaking HE in traditional universities, to see whether prior travel is indeed a factor in explaining why some members of the working-class are less likely to perceive these very middle-class institutions as 'not for the likes of them'.
Matt, Graham and Tony presented interesting narratives in terms of the psychology of boundaries. Law student Matt could be seen to be ‘playing’ with the more diverse identities that he can now configure; he told of switching between professional lawyer, ancient university student, and working-class ‘scouser’ as he saw fit. Indeed the fact that he tells of being deliberately subversive is playful, is it not? Isn’t he avoiding fixidity, the motif of the postmodern era? I suggest such an interpretation misses the central point that Matt feels he has to be subversive in the first place. Matt’s narrative shows how he feels he is fixed by others as being in the working class and that that judgement is invariably negative. This is of course entirely congruent with theorisations offered by Charlesworth (2000) and Skeggs (2004). The ‘game’ that Matt is playing is of disrupting other people’s perceptions of him, and of the working-classes. Just as Segal (2001) proposed that cyborgs and drag queens emphasise boundaries rather than traverse them, I think that Matt’s actions serve to highlight class demarcations.

Graham and Tony provided useful narratives with which to contemplate the concept of exile. Seen positively in a postmodern guise, exiles are able to achieve critical insight from their new locations, something which holds transformative potential for the places from which they came. I suggest that Graham and Tony have exiled themselves from their former communities, and that the position from which they now speak again reveals the psychic aspects of class that ‘ludic’ postmodern theorisations overlook. The distain with which they view (or imagine) those who reside in working-class communities (i.e. those who waste life shopping, watching TV etc.) could be seen as a classed phenomena, splitting (c.f. Lucey et al. 2003, Walkerdine 2003) which shows how identities cannot necessarily be detached from their psychic anchors. By demonising those still within the working-classes in the way that they do, Graham and Tony could be interpreted as enacting psychic defences in order to distance their present educated and/or affluent and/or middle-class selves from their working class roots.
Male identities

This research has shown the dimensions of both power and powerlessness of being a man. I think in particular that has happened because of the life-history perspective, so it enables the men's opinions and action to be understood in light of what they told me about their childhood. Philipson (1990) called for the impact of those early family lives to be recognised. I began that exploration with an eye on the habitus originally, to see the influence of that upbringing on their educational development. However the insight soon became important for me in terms of understanding the men as gendered beings.

Previous questions have already documented how some men's childhoods were lived in the turmoil of industrial unrest and increasingly problematic paternal relationships due to unemployment and associated addictions. This illustrates the contradictory positions of power and powerlessness identified by Kaufman (1994). The men expressed sympathy for the perceived demise of their formerly strong fathers, but that often had to be negotiated in light of the brutality of those men as they became bitter alcoholics. The men themselves, as they were growing up, may be understood as holding power over others (this was evident in the public spaces of the estates), but they were also relatively powerless in the home. For some, their growth spurred them on to defend others in their families. So here they were violent, they were defenders and they were oppressed, all at the same time.

The men also expressed anger at the way they perceived their fathers (and other males) were betrayed and discarded by the government. Again, fathers embodied power alongside powerlessness at the hands of the government. There was considerable sympathy expressed in the interviews for such men. Indeed it seemed sometimes that during interviews some men were in the process of coming to terms with brutal and brutalised fathers. There was evidence that the men had thought about the causes of their father's behaviour before coming to the interview (some had spoken about it to their families). The process of coming to terms with their pasts may have been helped by the fact that a few men's fathers were in stages of quite severe physical decline at this time in their lives. They were seen as broken and
discarded men, in much the same was as Charlesworth (2000), Faludi (1999) and New (2001) represent that generation of exploited and ‘disposable’ industrial workers.

Indeed Coltrane (1994), Faludi (1999) and New (2001) suggest that men's violence needs to be understood in the context of male fear, insecurity and incomplete emotional repertoire, due to the socialisation of their sex. Campbell’s (1995) work shows little sympathy for men’s inarticulate responses (if that’s what they may be called), foregrounding instead the destructive consequences of men's emotional flight from their families in times of poverty. Both of these perspectives are important and it is indeed a ‘tricky balancing act’ (c.f. Coltrane 1994) steering an analytical course through the men’s behaviours. Any sympathy for their fathers had to be negotiated in light of the fact that the research has glimpsed the deep psychic scars that some men still attribute to the way their father treated them (Alan, Edward, James, Nigel, Graham). But again, it was not known whether the fathers’ realised the damage they were causing, they were seen as conforming to the way that ‘hands on’ parenting was done back then, they were presented not just as brutes but as having sensitive, caring and moral aspects to their character also, they were seen as not being able to cope with the consequences of injustice of their occupational demise. The picture of men and power/lessness was highlighted in these narratives.

Segal (1993) and MacMahon (1993) suggest that for men to be able to change they need to be given the spaces to change. This research placed some emphasis on the impact of estate life in the lives of many of these men. Youth studies such as those of MacDonald and Marsh (2005) highlight the importance of geography in restraining the possibilities of those from poor neighbourhoods, particularly for boys where territorial attitudes were seen as preventing progress. In light of this the military could be seen positively, as offering a means of escape from their earlier geographical and cultural boundaries. However, the wider issue is of the classed dynamics of that choice and the fact that some of these men recall being in such desperate circumstances that risking their lives in state sponsored combat seemed an
acceptable trade to make. Looking at it in this light, perhaps as New (2001) suggests, the military could be seen as intrinsically, an organisation based on injustice.

For those military men who encountered active service, aspects of that experience were only briefly mentioned during the interviews; they may have seen ‘shitty things’, but they did not embellish that with details. Yet Michael’s encounter brought him to think about the existence of God. He cited this example as the point at which his interest in Philosophy (the subject he pursued at university) began. For me, the importance of the moment lies not in its future orientation to study philosophy. Rather, it makes me wonder just how bad must that event have been if it made him think about the existence of God? I wonder also whether it is co-incidental that Robin bought himself out of his military service after his involvement in an unpleasant military campaign. In the interview he told that he left because he was presented with a plan of the next 25 years of his life mapped out for him by the military. However, that incident took place during a careers’ interview that he had requested on return from his involvement in the above campaign. This may suggest that Robin may have already been inclined to leave the military. I showed in chapter 3, the different presentations of Graham’s military service in the interview (where he ‘couldn’t even remember the details any more’) and the café where he revealed his psychological demise following his active service. The view of others’ military life from Ryan’s ‘elite’ squadron was also less positive than the men mentioned. I suspect therefore that the men may have portrayed a less harmful picture of military life in the interviews.

Such inconsistencies may mean that the men genuinely remembered their military life as mostly positive of course, that the travel counterbalanced the other aspects. However, the way they presented themselves during the interviews could be an example of a (stereotypical) ‘reserved’ form of masculinity, which assumes that men need to be seen to be in control of their emotions. The presentation of these events may have also been a reflection of the availability of cultural scripts around them (Lawler 2002, Goodson & Sikes 2001). At the time of these interviews the country was in the midst of an unpopular military campaign and perhaps the persona of
soldier is perceived as something to be mentioned rather than celebrated at this time. Had the men been telling their stories at other times, there may have been a ‘hero’ script for them to employ.

There were a few other signs of the hidden injuries of gender. There are two men who had been primary carers for their children, but whose wives had been given that responsibility when they returned many months later. The men told of then having to legally fight for access rights for their children and felt they were being treated unfairly because they were fathers and not mothers.

Nonetheless, the injustices of their gender also needs to be seen with the advantages that were evident in their narratives. Often though their advantage goes unrecognised, as it usually does among the dominant group (Tett 2000). For example, among the older men there were narratives of wives taking on extra paid work to help the family budget, and they also continued to maintain their house and their children, and they also became proof-readers and admin support for their studies. Yet there was no recognition that they couldn’t have done it without their wives. Their educational achievements focus on themselves. The taking of the patriarchal dividend (c.f. Connell 2002) was also evident in some of the men’s employment histories: where men work in female dominated areas they are in promoted positions. Alan was in retail and when he spoke of his fellow managers they were male, when he spoke of his employees they were female. Richard was a manager in the service sector company he worked for. When Frank entered into the area of mental health, he becomes a manager also.

Do I think that men are emotionally blunted? I perceived that some men were guarded. It took Nathan until the end of the interview to tell me he was gay. It took one man a whole other day and a more social setting to tell me about his former wife and their child that were not mentioned in interview. It took a more social setting and more time for Graham to tell me about the horrors of his military service. But just look at the things they told me about. They told me about beautiful mothers, they

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3 That data did not get included in this analysis.
were angry and they were sad when they told of the demise of those they loved, they lamented the loss of significant others, they told me about their depression, they laughed with me about their children or the idiosyncrasies of their brothers. They stared at me sometimes when they did not want to tell me more. So I would conclude that whilst some men may not have expressed emotion in the same way they we assume women do, the emotion is there.

This research saw men rejecting dominant forms of masculinity. In the sphere of employment James and Alan would not conform to what they perceived as the unethical treatment of their staff and/or customers. The research revealed men declaring never to a have been a ‘macho’ ‘man’s man’ anyway. I wonder about the extent to which some of this was chosen? For example, Stuart was incredibly shy. Could he have adopted a ‘macho’ form of hegemonic masculinity in order to reposition himself relative to others? And equally importantly, would he have wanted to? I suspect not, on both counts, which highlights a problem I have encountered regarding Connell’s (1996, 2003) masculinity framework based as it is on a logic of domination. The research has shown men being sensitive and caring towards one another. It has also shown them being brutal and thoughtless. What Connell’s theory cannot explain is why men might want to behave in the way that they do. For example, Graham’s brutality on the council estate during his youth could be understood as him asserting his dominance over others on the estate, which would concur with Connell’s assertion. However, adopting a perspective similar to that of Frosh et al. (2003) and Bourdieu (2001b), it could also be understood as a sign of his psychological injury due to the behaviour of his father and the demise of his mother. After having interviewed the man, the second explanation offers a much fairer and humane understanding of both his position and of his gender than Connell’s could. Masculinity has been shown on numerous occasions in this research to be both a privilege and a trap (Bourdieu 2001b).

It was difficult in practice to conceptualise the men’s adoption of different forms of masculinities using the framework of Connell (1996). At a micro-societal level, trying to decipher the relations between different forms of masculinity was difficult
given that any social context could contain a multitude of masculinities. For example, whilst it might be easy to see where Daniel’s stated ‘cosmopolitan gay identity’ stands in relation to forms of macho working-class masculinity, and how those relations may change according to the social context (i.e. so that in certain spaces gay masculinities may not necessarily be subordinate), how could we conceptualise his position in his familial environment or in his workplace? What would the hegeominic form of masculinity be in that space and how might Daniel reposition himself in relation to it?

Is it not conceivable that these smaller social spaces may not have a single, hegemonic masculine norm, but are more diverse than Connell’s framework would recognise? In this research there was indeed evidence that some men’s personal domains were shaped by the rules of hegemonic working-class masculinity. But it has also provided evidence of the complexity within those households, so that for example, fathers’ brutalities could be understood as signs of mental ill-health as well as a position taken in the way that Connell’s framework would stipulate. The research also revealed lots of other kinds of households; feminine, loving, distant, sad etc. and again it is difficult to understand the men’s actions therein in the positional way of Connell’s formulation.

I suggest (as does Whitehead 2002) that by examining the specifics of men’s intimate lives and daily routines, it becomes less easy to apply the more general framework that Connell has devised. However, perhaps my critique of Connell is slightly unfair, given that his framework was devised to help explain macro-societal processes of masculinity. Nonetheless, I feel it should still have substance when applied to the ‘real’ lives of individual men.

On reflection, and to conclude, I think that Connell’s framework, like Bourdieu’s appears logical for macro and messo-social analysis. But whilst I found that Bourdieu could be used to explain individual movements through social space, I could not do this with Connell’s gender framework. Perhaps my understanding of Bourdieu is intuitive, given my working-class existence, and that this helps me to
understand him. (Conversely, it could be that this invokes blind-spots and that I fail to see some of its flaws.) Perhaps it is because I am a woman that I could not have that same kind of sense of Connell’s framework that I can get with Bourdieu. There may be some truth in this.

However I think it is more the case that Bourdieu gives more substance to the dynamics of social demarcations. Connell’s men ‘choose’ a position according to the power of particular configurations of masculinities, whereas Bourdieu show us why social actors may or may not have desires to move, why they can or cannot do so. Bourdieu’s analysis is more focussed on the minutia of social groups and why they want to distinguish themselves. This leads me to suggest that the logic within Bourdieu’s framework is more complex than the logic of domination within Connell’s. But even so, and as this piece of PhD research has revealed, neither theorist makes any space for the operation of emotions in their analyses. Perhaps this is why my qualitative endeavour has raised so many questions about such theories that, I must confess, I did not anticipate at the outset.
Appendix 1

Table 1a. Household type, Scotland, Edinburgh, Glasgow, 2001

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Scotland</th>
<th>Edinburgh</th>
<th>Glasgow</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Own outright</td>
<td>23.4</td>
<td>27.3</td>
<td>15.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mortgage</td>
<td>38.6</td>
<td>40.7</td>
<td>32.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local authority</td>
<td>21.6</td>
<td>10.9</td>
<td>25.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Housing association</td>
<td>5.6</td>
<td>5.6</td>
<td>13.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private landlord</td>
<td>5.6</td>
<td>10.7</td>
<td>6.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No central heating</td>
<td>7.2</td>
<td>12.3</td>
<td>17.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Edinburgh Census 2001

Table 1b. Socio-economic classes as % of population age 16-74 (using NS-SEC classification), 2001

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Class</th>
<th>Scotland</th>
<th>Edinburgh</th>
<th>Glasgow</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.1 higher managerial</td>
<td>2.4</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>1.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.2 higher professional</td>
<td>4.4</td>
<td>9.0</td>
<td>4.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 lower managerial/prof</td>
<td>17.4</td>
<td>20.7</td>
<td>14.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 intermediate occupations</td>
<td>9.4</td>
<td>10.9</td>
<td>8.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 small employers</td>
<td>5.7</td>
<td>4.7</td>
<td>3.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 lower supervisory occupations</td>
<td>7.4</td>
<td>4.9</td>
<td>5.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 semi-routine</td>
<td>12.6</td>
<td>9.5</td>
<td>11.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 routine occupations</td>
<td>10.4</td>
<td>6.6</td>
<td>9.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 long-term unemployed</td>
<td>4.2</td>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>8.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>full-time students</td>
<td>7.1</td>
<td>12.1</td>
<td>9.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not classified</td>
<td>7.1</td>
<td>15.1</td>
<td>22.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Edinburgh Census 2001

Table 1c. Geographic origin as % of population, 2001

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Origin</th>
<th>Scotland</th>
<th>Edinburgh</th>
<th>Glasgow</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Born in Scotland</td>
<td>87.1</td>
<td>77.8</td>
<td>89.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Born in England</td>
<td>8.1</td>
<td>12.1</td>
<td>4.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moved into the area from other UK</td>
<td>11.6</td>
<td>17.8</td>
<td>13.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moved into area from outside UK</td>
<td>0.6</td>
<td>1.7</td>
<td>0.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Edinburgh census 2001
Appendix 2
MATURE MALE STUDENTS REQUIRED FOR INTERVIEWS

☑ Are you over the age of 26?
☑ Studying full-time? [undergraduate or postgraduate]
☑ Are you the first generation in your family to attend university?
☑ Have you lived in Scotland for at least 2 years?
☑ Could you spare an hour to be interviewed about your experiences of education?

Information required for PhD research about men in education. Interviews are informal, relaxed, confidential and conducted by an experienced researcher.

Think you might help / want more information?

Contact: mandy.winterton@education.ed.ac.uk
tel: (0131) 6516539

Thank you
Appendix 3

Mandy Winterton
Moray House School of Education
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EH8 8AQ

Dear Sir

I am researching the educational experiences of mature male university students (27+ years), and I am writing to ask whether you might consider taking part. I am looking for men who are the first generation in their family to attend university, and who are studying for a degree (either full time or part time, undergraduate or postgraduate) at either Edinburgh or Glasgow University. Does this apply to you perhaps? (If you are not sure, we can always discuss it). The research is part of a doctoral project, which is examining the factors that may influence participation in higher education among certain social groups.

Taking part in the research involves an individual interview (1-2 hours), in which we would talk about these sorts of issues;

- Your experience of school,
- Your history since leaving school,
- Your decision to return to education at this time in your life,
- Your choice of university/subjects.

The interviews are relaxed and informal and all information is confidential. If you think you might wish to participate, could you please forward your contact details to me (by email, phone or post) and I'll get back to you straight away. Leaving your details in no way obliges you to take part of course. It simply means I can contact you to answer any questions/clarify any issues etc.

Whether you decide to take that step or not, I would like to thank you for taking the time to consider this request. I am very aware that I am a complete stranger asking you to give up some of your time for something that may be of little direct benefit to yourself. However, I would like to emphasise that there is a need to understand the educational experiences of groups of ‘non-traditional’ students, as they increase their presence in the university sector. I hope you can help.

Sincerely,

Mandy Winterton
Doctoral Researcher
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Appendix 4

MEN'S EXPERIENCES OF HIGHER EDUCATION
(INTerview guide)

CURRENT DETAILS:
Name + age
Domestic situation
Course + Year
Current Employment
Route to HE

YOUR FAMILY BACKGROUND
Parental occupation / education
Brothers / sisters occupation / education
 Anyone in family with university/HE/trade qualifications?

YOUR EDUCATION / WORK HISTORY
How was school? Certificates?
Since school: types of employment, qualifications/courses, outside interests
Your decision to come to university: How did it come about? Why now? Why this university? Why this course?
What did you think of University prior to attending? And now?
Any preconceptions about benefits/drawbacks of having a university-level education? And now?

YOUR EXPERIENCES OF HIGHER EDUCATION:
Relationships with others - students, tutors, family, others generally....
How have your family / friends reacted to your decision to attend university? Particularly to this University?
Would you recommend it to others? Why, why/not?
Do you think it has changed you in any way? For better or worse?

TO CONCLUDE:
Looking back, are there aspects of your experience you would change/do differently now?
Why do you think it is that you went to uni - rather than family/earlier social group?
Plans for the future...


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UCAS (2001) [www.ucas.ac.uk/figures/eng/index](http://www.ucas.ac.uk/figures/eng/index)


