Everyday Class Distinctions in Higher Education

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August 2012

Acknowledgements

There are many people who have acted as sources of support during the completion of this research and final thesis that I wish to acknowledge and thank. Besides the warmth, generosity and good humour of close friends and family (especially my wonderful parents) throughout my studies, I owe a great deal of gratitude to my supervisors. To Yvette Taylor, without whom I may never have embarked on this research and path of development, and who has remained a source of support and inspiration from the initial stages of developing my research proposal and beyond her departure from Newcastle University after 3 ½ years as my PhD supervisor. Next, to Robert Hollands for his support and guidance throughout the remaining 6 months of thesis completion; whose positivity and professional expertise were gratefully received in such an important period. Finally, to Steph Lawler without whom I may never have finished this thesis; whose patience, support and encouragement throughout difficult periods will never be forgotten as well as the continuous insight and expertise, which has both inspired me and helped me to develop academically. To all of these people, thank you.

EVERYDAY CLASS DISTINCTIONS
IN HIGHER EDUCATION

1. Introduction

More than a decade of enormous changes in government policy (and power), funding and fees has transformed the scope, breadth and value of higher education in England (Featherstone, 2011). At the time of writing, the system of higher education in England is undergoing further substantial changes with funding cuts and vastly increased tuition fees that represent a further step in the neoliberalist marketisation of higher education (Collini, 2012; Holmwood, 2011). Such transformations in higher education (HE) bring further threats to social equality despite being hailed as the answer to upward social mobility (Reay, 2008b; Archer, 2007). This study was set up partly in response to the Widening Participation agenda promulgated by New Labour from 1997 onwards and under which, all of the students involved in this research were enrolled. Whilst the premise of the agenda – to open up university opportunities for groups of young people who previously would have been excluded - is undeniably a positive advancement, the significance (and naming) of class in the life trajectories of these (potential) students is largely absent. This research problematises the effacement of class in favour of educational discourses of social inclusion/exclusion, diversity and choice, and seeks to show how class is a real and active force in the lives of today's students. Not only that, the dissertation shows that HE represents a social space in which class inequalities are perpetuated and which serves to disrupt and cause tensions in the experiences of some students as they navigate new and unfamiliar territory and occupy different relationships to normative student identities.

Widening Participation should not just be seen as increasing the enrolment of non-traditional students into university, but also concerns the 'disadvantages…students face once they are in HE' (Greenbank, 2007). A significant body of work has emerged that focuses on the experiences of the working class student and in particular, instances of disadvantage and/or exclusion within education (Archer *et al*, 2003; Bowl, 2001; Greenbank, 2007; Hutchings & Archer, 2001; Longden, 2004; Reay, 1998, 2001, 2004; Skeggs, 1997b; Reay *et al*, 2010; Clayton *et al*, 2009; Crozier, 2008 – *inter alia*) but middle-class students' experiences are relatively unexamined and thus risk

further being silently reinforced as the 'norm'. For example, non-traditional student participation is routinely characterised as a struggle (Leathwood & O'Connell, 2003) where issues of 'finding or losing' a sense of one's self (Reay, 2001) and the idea of identities in transition prevail. However, as Reay (2001: 333) emphasises, 'working class relationships to education cannot be understood in isolation from middle-class subjectivities' and 'unconscious aspects of class that implicate both middle-class and working-class subjectivities' are important to this research. This research seeks to problematise the normativity of middle-class students and their experiences (Gillies, 2005: 837). This research is concerned with exploring how privilege is maintained and challenged, how privileged identities are performed, recognised, upheld and/or challenged; and it holds such discussions in contrast to the discourses of meritocracy surrounding HE. Also, as Archer (2003: 14) argues, 'any analysis of class inequalities in relation to higher education must take into account not only people's shifting class identities but also the role of the educational institution itself in creating and perpetuating class inequalities'. This research offers potential for forwarding this type of analysis within the context of two university sites, of differing university status (Russell Group and post-1992) situated in close proximity to each other in the north of England. This qualitative research project involving semi-structured interviews and focus groups with working-class and middle-class undergraduate students centres on the experience of HE. Their experiences of participating in not only a learning environment but also a social one are central to the interests of this research. These wider experiences are interpreted as offering insight into the performance and operation of classed identities in the minutiae of everyday university life. As such, this research seeks to contribute to an expanding body of work on identities in HE.

The first chapter aims situate the research within a particular political and social context. Whilst concerned primarily with 'classed' student experiences of HE, it is important to understand the implications of broader government educational policies and transformations of higher education in the recent past. This chapter problematises notions of student and institutional diversity present in the policy discourse, and the positioning of 'the student' as 'consumer' and/or 'active citizen' and the model of social mobility that underlies them both. The main challenge to existing policy discourse rests on the silence of the role of class as a barrier to entry; as affecting choices and decision-making relating to

HE participation; and, by extension, affecting experiences of HE and differential outcomes. By critically examining government rhetoric we can begin to understand how class is muted and becomes something of an unspeakable term – the dreaded 'c' word (Sveinsson, 2009). Outlining these challenges highlights the premises on which this study was based and finds meaning; a desire for social justice. This desire for social justice takes the form of uncovering the existence and persistence of class and class inequalities pervading (higher) education, of naming class and exploring its manifestations in the everyday of HE as well as more broadly in society. However, part of this task of challenging such discourses involves attending to their individualist premises. Individualisation theorists challenge conceptions of class on the grounds that it cannot account for the impact of global and societal changes that characterise late modernity (Beck, 2004). However these challenges rely on a static, categorical conception of class and thus, the remaining part of the chapter is devoted to documenting the ways in which contemporary research allows for more 'intricate theorising of social identities and inequalities' (Archer, 2001: 42) and how this opens up the scope for research of class identities in HE. One of the most prominent theorists in recent sociological work on class is Bourdieu and his conceptual apparatus for understanding the operation of class (practice) is given space here in order to comprehend how social structures influence HE experiences and trajectories. His theories and research offer promising terrain for sociologists researching class identities in that his focus on the minutiae of the everyday (Moi, 1991). In connecting the micro-processes of social life with the macro-levels and therefore wider social inequalities, Bourdieu's work provides scope for exploring the everyday of university life as an element of broader societal inequalities.

Chapter 3 builds on these challenges to existing educational discourses, and seeks to capture the essence of an expanding body of work on inequalities and HE that have shaped this study. As well as charting some of Bourdieu's main contributions to the study of class and (higher) education, I examine both Bourdieusian inspired studies as well as other non-Bourdieusian research, to think through class processes, in HE and beyond. The aim of the chapter is to provide an overview of advances made in this field of study in which I situate my research. Themes of choice and risk and negotiations of value are prevalent in much research, which shows the different relationships classed students have to

the initial processes of accessing university (Archer *et al*, 2003; Reay *et al*, 2001; Reay *et al*, 2005). These differences in negotiations of value effect the strategies differently classed students employ when they form their expectations of university and the potential gains to be had. Research on class identities in relation to HE tend to be based on working-class experiences of disjuncture (Archer *et al*, 2003; Ingram, 2011; Reay, 2001; Reay *et al*, 2010) and whilst these contributions to sociology of education are crucial, this research aims to add to this by examining both working-class and middle-class identities within experiences of higher education. This chapter will further provide an account of literatures regarding sociological conceptions of identity, embodiment and affect as they relate to the focus on class identities this research endeavours to explore.

Chapter 4 will focus on the methodological implications of this research and the research design. As such, it seeks to justify the use of qualitative research; utilising semi-structured one-to-one interviews as well as focus groups methods. Methodological issues and concerns that were prominent during the research endeavour will also be given space in this section. This is followed by a summary of the research participants in the form of short profiles, which feature before data analysis chapters so as to provide a key and a background to each participant.

Chapter 5 looks in detail at the processes of identity work exemplified by the research participants. These data provide compelling examples of the ways in which students construct their classed identities in the everyday experiences of university life. This chapter sets out many of the main themes for the following chapters, via examples of the ways in which students perform identity work and the elements of university life they deem important. Of note, are the techniques for establishing the 'normality' and 'ordinariness' (Savage *et al*, 2001; Savage, 2005) of middle-class identities; therefore highlighting the techniques for establishing normative student identities. Working-class differences in relation to these identities are also noted. The chapter introduces the term 'rah'; a pejorative class term for white, upper-middle-class students and the data regarding the use of this term provides fascinating evidence of meritocratic discourses operating in the negotiations of value and normative student identities. Identity/boundary work of 'us' and 'them' continues to operate throughout this chapter and those that follow, demonstrating ideas of and relationships to the

identity of 'student' that are constructed via normative and performative statements in the everyday of university life.

Chapter 6 brings together a significant wealth of data obtained from speaking to students about how they negotiate embodied difference within university. Research participants discussed visual and auditory signifiers relating to identity at length suggesting they are key to the ways in which identities are managed within HE. Class is repeatedly elided with intelligence suggesting a naturalization of class differences. The visual aspects of identity discussed in this chapter present fascinating examples of everyday distinctions made by the students in this research. Much of the data refers back to the figure of the 'rah' and relates to the different interpretations of the 'look' they are seen to embody, whereby differently classed students interpret the look as inauthentic but with different emphases. This chapter therefore contributes to understanding of the complex processes involved in negotiating identities in the context of HE.

Chapter 7 focuses on student experience in terms of notions of choice and value. This chapter builds on an established range of literatures that challenge the class neutrality of government educational discourses regarding choice and value with HE. In addition, I take note of the changing nature of value with regard to HE participation, exploring the different types of investments negotiated and expectant gains using Bourdieu's notion of 'hysterisis'. Implicated in the initial choices are the different conceptions of the value of HE, which determine the kinds of investments and strategies for accruing value that students are likely to make/employ during their student experiences. Both class and gender are implicated in this process and work to limit the scope of choices available in different ways. This chapter shows that there is no uniform working-class or middle-class experience of university but this is not to suggest that class is not part of the ways in which their experiences differ. Structural constraints mean working regular part-time hours can limit social experiences and different pathways into HE (prior schooling) often impact on choices and resultant experiences. Participation in all aspects of the 'student experience' set the boundaries for normative student identities and the 'choices' to study locally and live with non-students are key differentiators in this respect. This chapter highlights class strategies of participation in HE and the special significance of the social aspects of university life.

Chapter 8 chapter focuses on elements of the 'student experience' that are characterised as the 'social' side of university, an area that is relatively lacking in research data in the literature (although see Crozier *et al*, 2008; Clayton *et al*, 2009, as examples of work emerging in this area). These elements of the 'student experience' and the opportunities it provides for the exchange and accrual of capital are differently accessed according to a range of social factors. Imagined boundaries of 'us' and 'them' are constantly redrawn between Halls, residential areas, institutions and leisure spaces (such as bars) on economic, social and cultural bases and via social interaction. Here, distinctions are made in the everyday of student life that are picked up and repeated via interaction as new students are inducted into the (re)constructed (imagined) boundaries in student life and the spaces and places it involves. The chapter further has something to say about the way in which cultural class distinctions circulate in interesting ways between the two university institutions and its students, via seemingly harmless fun and 'banter' and via particular 'disparagement humour' that contribute to the remaking of class in the everyday.

The aim of this research is to reclaim class as a central concern in education (Reay, 2006a) by highlighting the significance of class and exploring how class operates *within* HE experiences, student identities and identity-work. In short, the aim is to highlight the significance of class that is largely absent from government discourses and policies and explore how it affects students directly and not just in policy. In order to understand how class perpetuates in HE, this research aims to explore the mechanisms by which normative student identities are constructed within everyday experiences and different relationships to such normative identities. As such this study aims to explore the ways in which privilege is sustained and replicated across all areas of social life and thus, the ways in which social inequality perpetuates in the context of two closely situated university institutions.

2. Reclaiming Class in Higher Education: Challenging Neoliberal and Marketisation Discourses of 'Diversity' and 'Choice'

2.1 Introduction

…education systems are the products of particular cultures at certain times and they evolve and develop along with wider social, economic and cultural changes in society. At the same time it is important to remember that as well as being shaped by society, education also plays a part in shaping society. That is why various governments and political systems have attached such particular significance to education.

(Hayton & Paczuska, 2002: 255)

The interdependence of society and education and the effects of social policy in the evolution of education in England is a crucial contextual starting point for this study. Higher education (HE) in UK has evolved beyond all recognition over the past century (Featherstone, 2011: 5). Traditionally the domain of a privileged few, HE has evolved from 'elite higher education' into 'mass higher education' (Martin, 1973; Smith & Bocock, 1999; Williams & Abson, 2002), promulgated further by the New Labour Government's target of 50% of 18-30 year olds to be enrolled in HE by 2010. There are problems associated with such expansion and rapid growth that impact on every part of HE – particularly in terms of finance and student recruitment (Martin, 1973). These changes have unsettled definitions of the student and the university 'towards a range of possibilities that reflect and create much greater uncertainty' (Ozga & Sukhnandan, 1998: 319). The neoliberal political culture driving it has created a 'paradigm shift' (Newman & Jahdi, 2009), whereby HE is repositioned from a social institution to a sub-system of the economy; as an industry (Gumport, 2000; Morley, 2001).

This chapter provides an account of the neoliberal political culture shaping the mass HE system in contemporary Britain, through which the marketisation and commodification of education has taken place and class repositioned (Ball, 2004a, 2004b, 2005a, 2005b; Morley, 2001). Discussions highlight Widening

Participation (WP) policy and problematise the rhetoric of 'diversity' and 'choice', it's first objective is to challenge pervading discourse that constructs students and university institutions as different and diverse, rather than classed and as part of a stratified system. The individual in the neoliberal education market, is fully responsible for their own choices and futures; WP provides the opportunities for individuals to 'Aim Higher' and develop their own potential, reaping the economic rewards and contributing to society as an ''active' educational' citizen (Leathwood & O'Connell, 2003: 599; Reay, 2008). Such discourses of classlessness are actually ironically discourses of class as Reay (1997) suggests; they hinge on a particular (middle-) classed self and those that differ are positioned as deviant without recognition of the unequal positions people occupy. Whilst individualisation theorists such as Beck see class as a 'zombie category' (Beck, 2004) this relies on a limited conception of class that blinds 'the real experience and ambiguities of the second modernity' (Reay, 2006a). Nonetheless, individualisation underpins the dominant philosophy of neoliberalism in government, which replaces the language of class with one of social inclusion/exclusion. Such discourses of social inclusion/exclusion are charged with masking what are essentially still class inequalities (Bowring, 2000; Burchardt *et al*, 1999; Levitas, 1998). Like Reay (2006a: 288), this research is concerned to 'reclaim social class as a central concern within education… as a powerful and vital aspect of both learner and wider social identities'. In short, a second objective of this chapter is to highlight the significance of class and explore how class operates *within* HE experiences. 'Inclusion' is about being economically and socially included and this depends on agreeing to the conditions of membership (Loxley &Thomas, 2001; Hutton, 1996). However, what exactly does 'inclusion' for those previously 'excluded' entail? What are the 'conditions of membership'? Does 'inclusion' via admission act as a condition of membership or are there other ways in which 'inclusion' works beyond entry? By outlining the challenges brought to the rhetoric of HE discourse and the efforts of class theorists to conceptualise class beyond static categories, this chapter serves to highlight important issues and raise questions pertinent to this research on class identities in higher education.

2.2   Neoliberalism, Widening Participation and expansion of HE

Neoliberalism, according to Harvey (2005: 2) is:

> …a theory of political economic practices that proposes that human well-being can
> best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within
> an institutional framework characterized by strong private property rights, free
> markets, and free trade.

Harvey (2005: 2-3) charts a turn to neoliberalism since the 1970s, which has resulted in the withdrawal of the state from many areas of social provision and instead the market and market exchange is pitted as 'an ethic in itself'. As Hardy further adds, the 'cultural consequences of the dominance of such a market ethic are legion' (Hardy, 2005: 4). Neoliberalism became the dominant force in education via the Thatcherite, Conservative administration from 1979 (Gillard, 2010). This Conservative legislation entrenched neoliberal principles in public policy, thus creating a form of governance infused with market principles (Jones, 2003: 107). Such repositioning of HE as industry is encapsulated in the now well-established term the 'marketisation of education', whereby the increasingly competitive nature of institutions for students and scarce resources, is constructed along the lines of the market economy. The political culture of neoliberalism and the valorisation of the market contribute to the increasing individualisation of society, which in turn brings new threats to social equality (Leathwood & Hayton, 2002: 139). The effect of neoliberalism on HE is that it has 'introduced a new mode of regulation or form of governmentality' (Olssen & Peters, 2005). This entails elements of classical economic liberalism that include the idea of free market economics as a superior mechanism for greater social freedom, which includes the reduction of state support and intervention; and the primacy of the 'self-interested individual', making rational and economically motivated choices based on personal interests and needs. Liberalism, according to Foucault (1991) is a constructed, political space whereby the reduction in state control marks a form of governmentality that stands in contrast to a regime of total control; instead, individuals are centralised as the bearers of responsibility of their conduct and life decisions. This is very important to consider when

understanding the implications of the changes in HE (and broader society) on the idea of the self-selecting individual.

'Education, education, education' was to become the overarching, topmost priority and promise of the Blairite government who succeeded Conservative power in a climate of an already expanding HE system. The consecutive New Labour governments made higher education a policy priority (Blunkett, 2000). However, although New Labour's election campaign headed by the D:Ream hit 'Things Can Only Get Better', promised great change, their succession of political power from a Conservative rule of 18 years did not radically do so. As Reay says of Tony Blair, the Prime Minister at this time, his legacy has been one of consolidating Conservative policies and New Labour is accused of entering 'into a Faustian pact with the forces of neoliberalism' (Reay, 2008: 638; reference to Beck, 2008). The 'Third Way' of New Labour; the attempt to reconcile right-wing economics and left-wing social policies (Bobbio & Cameron, 1997) in their pursuit of neoliberalism, has been accused of subverting and compromising the 'radical/egalitarian potential of WP policy and practice...to the extent that WP is rendered more a tool for social control than social justice' (Archer, 2007: 635). Archer here makes a refreshingly bold statement and one that is premised on similar arguments this research makes in that the rhetoric of WP is such that it legitimises certain constructions of 'the student' and institutions and creates a system whereby the privileged remain so and inequalities persist. Whilst the construction of the HE 'market' positions the student as consumer, the constructions of the student as an 'active educational citizen' (Reay, 2008) are equally problematic; both rely on a model of participation equals social mobility, albeit with different (yet interlinking) emphases and rest upon classed notions of value.

The marketisation of HE couched in neoliberal individualisation and discourses of meritocracy position the individual as free, rational and self-selective, competing in a system in which each person has potentially equal chances of success. Here, the neutral 'consumer' buys the product/service of HE as an investment for economic returns (social mobility); making choices to serve their interests. As Morley (1997: 234) argues, '[u]nder the guise of political neutrality the market economy poses as a technology, but represents a range of values which confirm and reinforce the established social order of wealth and privileges'. Institutional and student 'diversity' are set in such a way as to

reproduce existing inequalities. Furthermore, the positioning of participation as 'inclusion' in HE relies on a much deeper transubstantiation (Bourdieu, 1986) of the language of class and is premised on a particular individualist model of the self and of social mobility. Moral assumptions of working-class deficit are implicit in WP discourse, where non-participation reflects a lack of appropriate attitudes; 'New Labour have adopted a deficit model that universalises middle-class values' (Leathwood & Hayton, 2002: 141). One of the key New Labour Government's WP targets of 50% of 18-30 year olds to be enrolled in HE by 2010[i] promulgated the expansion of HE further and such policies placed emphasis on the 'inclusion' of non-traditional students (Bowers-Brown, 2006; Greenbank 2006; Greenbank, 2007). Whilst these 'non-traditional' students are constructed as 'other' against who are implicitly defined as 'normal' (Williams & Abson, 2001: 11), it also signifies a change in student populations. Of this, Leathwood and O'Connell (2003: 599) state:

> Whilst changing student populations have an impact on who a student is, or can be, 'the student' is continually constructed through discourse. Within the recent policy discourses of the New Labour government there has been an elision from 'student' to 'learner', with learners constructed as active consumers of educational services, taking responsibility for their own learning as independent, autonomous and self-directed individuals.

The ways in which 'the student' is constructed through discourse shall be addressed in more detail in the following section, which focuses on the positioning of the student as a neutral consumer. This will highlight the inconsistency of such individualistic conceptions of choice and value with differently socially located students in a 'market' of institutions that are part of a historically stratified system.

2.3   *Diverse Students-Diverse Institutions*

The rapid expansion and marketisation of HE has resulted in many structural and economic changes. Discourses circulating in educational policy naturalise these shifts and changes, which are simply yet another extension of the processes of capitalism, whereby new markets and sources of profit are needed for its survival (Ball, 2005: 4-5). Such a reconceptualisation of the education system has been

described as a process of 'commodification of education' (Ball, 2004a, 2004b, 2005a, 2005b; Morley, 2001). Of such a process Ball (2005: 5) warns that in, 'fetishising commodities we are denying the primacy of human relationships in the production of value, in effect erasing the social'. The rapid expansion and marketisation of education and its rhetorical treatment through educational discourses and policies engenders such processes of commodification whereby the universal value of HE is implicitly assumed. In this mode of thinking, the 'values of the consumer society are…embedded in educational relationships' (Morley, 2001: 131) whereby the universal educational product/service is bought into by the neutral student consumer. This however, as warned by Ball above, excludes much of the social meaning invested in the notion of value and in education. This focus on student and institutional 'diversity' will include the increase of tuition fees and the ways in which this incites the idea of the student as a consumer, as well as the HE marketplace of institutions from which the consumer selects their degree course. This positioning of the student as a consumer rests around neutral, rational and universal notions of both 'choice' and 'value' that involve an erasure of the social. The major structural changes and reforms of HE that were part of New Labour's engagement with higher education were elaborated in the White Paper *The Future of Higher Education* (2003) which introduced 'Top-up fees' (Brown, 2003b). The main themes of this White Paper that will be examined here are student and institutional 'diversity'.

In their first term, the New Labour government had introduced an annual fixed tuition fee of £1000 with some exceptions made for students from low-income households. However, in 2003, universities were granted the 'freedom' to charge students variable fees of up to £3000[ii] as a contribution to the cost of their tuition; again, with some allowances made for students from low-income households. 'Top-up fees' were to 'top-up' the reduced amount of government financial support. Students were being asked to 'contribute' to the cost of their education rather than the whole of society. In the HE market students are positioned as consumers 'buying' into HE, with universities, positioned as the 'producers' of educational products and services. The 'top-up fees' system was introduced whereby institutions were given the 'freedom' to charge the maximum fees to create market competitiveness. This was used to encourage universities to diversify and 'locate themselves within the HE 'market' as distinctive providers of services and products...targeted towards specific consumers' (Archer, 2007:

638). These 'specific consumers' were positioned as having differential needs in an expanded and more diverse customer base (Archer, 2007: 638) and universities were required to diversify, market and brand themselves in order to meet these needs and compete with each other in the education market place. In writing specifically about education markets, Marginson (1994: 4-5) states, 'the capacity to consume is ranked in units of money, and producers are ranked in terms of value. Hierarchy and inequality of outcomes are necessary conditions of educational markets.' Hierarchy and inequality of outcomes are justified by the logic of the market, or as Marginson puts it, they are deemed *necessary.* If the capacity to consume is ranked in monetary units and producers in value terms, this shows how the system or 'market' has been created hierarchically and to perpetuate inequality. Yet hierarchy and inequality of outcomes are not the way that the WP agenda promotes HE participation. The WP agenda utilises a more neutral perspective around greater 'diversity' and 'choice'.

In the terms of the education market that Marginson above outlines, the 'market' in place is questionable. As noted, the 'top-up fees' were variable and institutions were given the freedom to charge *up to* the £3,000 cap. According to Foskett *et al*, 'students tend to become more consumer oriented when they have to pay fees' (2006: 106). In light of the additional financial investment expected from current students, 'value for money' is worthy of exploration. What is being 'consumed' is an education product/service by a specific provider; an institutional brand of that product/service. If students are more consumer oriented (and this is the way in which the marketised system portrays them), it follows that they will be shopping around for their preferred course/ institution/ brand, however whether this is necessarily an issue of cost and therefore value construed in monetary terms is questionable. The distinction between 'old' (pre-1992) and 'new' (post-1992; ex-Polytechnics) universities still persists (Williams & Abson, 2002) and this impacts on notions of value for 'producers'. A report published by Universities UK (2009) state that, 'Foskett and colleagues found that most institutions charge the maximum fee, which implies that the previous announcement of an upper price limit had failed to create a market' (reference to: Foskett *et al*, 2006). With this in mind, it is notable that the 'choice' given to universities to charge the full 'top-up fee' could not (in the face of depreciating institutional brand value if not charging the maximum fee) be a plausible 'choice' for most institutions to take. However, as is reported to be the case and, with the

majority of institutions charging the full fee[iii], this in effect fails to create a market (Foskett *et al*, 2006). In these terms, although operating under the guise of a HE market (Morley, 1997), it is not. If it is not the differential fees or monetary value that attracts the 'consumer oriented' student, then it suggests that other conceptions of value must be involved. Archer (2007: 636) critically examines New Labour policy discourse around WP and HE and claims:

> 'diversity' is mobilised in two key ways: it is elided with 'choice' in the context of institutions (institutional diversity), and it is used to signify 'equality' and/or 'social inclusion' in relation to students (student diversity)…..a diverse student population is positioned as requiring a diverse choice of institutions in order to meet a diversity of interests and needs.

More will be said regarding 'student diversity' in terms of what this poses for student 'choice' and experience, however as Archer above proposes, both student and institutional diversity are interrelated and this section will attempt to break down the implications of this policy. One of the key 'dilemmas' the White Paper *The Future of Higher Education* (2003) in effect created, was one between 'institutional diversity and hierarchy' (Brown, 2003b: 240). Themes of 'diversity' and 'equality/inclusion' are key forms of rhetoric in the WP agenda, which, in reality, contain conflicting interests and motivations (Archer, 2007: 637). As Brown notes, 'diversity implies some parity of esteem' (2003: 242). Indeed as Archer (2007: 638) suggests, institutional diversity has been 'constructed as desirable in both 'business' and 'equality' terms, with the two agendas being framed as mutually compatible. However, by means of encouraging institutions to use their relative resources to 'play on their strengths' and provide a range of options for prospective students, such 'diversity' is regarded as actually further entrenching a hierarchical system.

The hierarchy of university institutions evolved (in part) from the identification of elite research departments[iv] and the formation of The Russell Group[v] of universities, which in their acquisition of additional research funding (in already relatively well resourced and well-established institutions), places other institutions at a disadvantage in terms of funding and arguably, prestige. Greater amounts of funding are awarded for research rather than teaching (Williams & Abson, 2002); therefore specialist research universities receive greater funding

than those who are not part of these elite groups. Other institutions, effectively excluded from such valuable research funding would, in order to obtain extra funds, be more likely to recruit 'non-traditional' students in order to receive additional resources for WP; however, the more prestigious institutions, each having a WP 'quota' to fill, 'so as to keep the access regulator happy (Brown, 2003b: 243), would still access some of these additional resources. Thus, the gap in funding is extended even further. Archer (2007: 239) recognises this element of diversity rhetoric as 'vertical diversity' where, 'diversity is invoked as a means for driving up standards and 'quality' – rewarding the 'best' (and by implication punishing the 'worst')'. In the competitive education market place, institutions must vie for resources, which are specifically and unequally targeted. Although institutional diversity is positioned as suggesting 'parity of esteem' (Brown, 2003b: 242), disproportionate funding further creates hierarchy rather than investing a strategy of funding equally across difference (Archer, 2007: 639).

Funding has a profound impact on the success of institutions. The differentiation and successes of institutions is of course a complex area of discussion. The differential prestige accorded to various institutions includes their history; their award of university status; research; funding and finance; academic success rates; links to commerce and much more; the subject is itself perhaps worthy of an in-depth study. Therefore although at risk of over-simplifying, this discussion will be relatively brief. For instance, all of the 20 Russell Group Universities were ranked in the top 25 of research funding recipients in 2008[vi], and in the same year 13 of those same universities were ranked in the top 25 in the University League table[vii]. The existence and prominence of University league tables represents an example of the way in which 'vertical diversity' is met with 'horizontal diversity' operating within policy discourse identified by Archer (2007). Here, 'horizontal diversity' is where 'a plurality of institutional forms are valued for appealing to different customers' needs and preferences' which again is, 'embedded within a discourse of individualisation, whereby new audiences are assumed to require 'tailor-made' provision to meet their specific needs' (Archer, 2007: 639). It is, however, in the spirit of these 'new audiences' otherwise termed as 'the masses' that such diversity is seen as required; it is implied the masses have different and specialised needs. Indeed as Leathwood and O'Connell (2003: 599) argue, '[w]ithin this discursive framing, mass equals lower standards and 'dumbing

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down''. To use policy terminology, 'traditional' universities and courses are levied as perhaps unsuitable for 'non-traditional' students.

A plurality of university 'types' emerge through the process of differentiation and diversification. Charles Clarke (the then Secretary of State for Education) constructs a tripartite system of university diversification in 'the great research universities, the outstanding teaching universities and those that make a dynamic contribution to their regional and local economies' (THE, 2000)[viii]. Ainley (2003) according to Archer (2007: 638), takes up this point and produces an 'explicit form of stratification' using 'the evocative terminology of 'gold', 'silver' and 'bronze' universities' from this tripartite construction. The levels are represented respectively from Charles Clarke's quote wherein the remit of 'gold' universities is to undertake internationally recognised research, silver to provide outstanding teaching on a national level and bronze to provide more localised, regional training '(predominantly catering for 'non traditional' students)' (Archer, 2007: 638). Archer goes on to explicitly identify the problem with these two modes of diversity operating in HE discourse:

> …the two forms of institutional diversity (horizontal and vertical) are inherently conflictual. Both are delivered via the market yet it is questionable whether a horizontal model of 'different but equal' universities catering to a full spectrum of needs and interests is sustainable or viable within a market in which hierarchically-positioned institutions are competing for scarce resources. Furthermore, the notion of horizontal diversity fails to recognize that some forms of difference are valued more highly (or attract a higher status) than others (e.g., research tends to be associated with higher status and additional income). Hence, the rhetoric of diversification might be better called a discourse of stratification.
>
> (Archer, 2007: 639-640)

Through the championing of 'diversity', inequality and hierarchy are positioned as neutral and 'necessary conditions of educational markets' (Marginson, 1994: 5). However as an examination of the issues of funding and differential status has shown, this negates the idea that institutions are 'different but equal'. This sentiment of 'different but equal' is one that is central to notions of meritocracy and individualisation that permeate educational discourse. The point that Archer makes here is powerful in explicitly naming 'stratification'; in one sense this might be thought of as merely another term for hierarchy (which of course still implies

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inequality) but it also has common use in the term social stratification, a concept closely related to class. Quite how institutional diversity can be seen as a classed system, can be supplemented further by an interrogation of the notion of 'student diversity', how 'the student' is constructed through educational policy discourse and what the rhetoric of WP implies for 'non-traditional' students and their counterparts who, by contrast, are persistently constructed as the norm (Leathwood and O'Connell, 2003: 599).

As with the topic of institutional diversity, there again, appears to be contradictions and conflicting constructions in the notion of student diversity. On the one hand a construction of the normative 'student' exists as a 'learner' or 'consumer' in a seemingly neutral, universal manner. Yet, on the other, there are highly differentiated students positioned as having different needs and requirements – as 'the masses', 'non-traditional', 'new student', 'WP student', against which of course exist 'the norm'. Both are equally problematic and are interconnected.

'Non-traditional' students are undergraduate students that have either one or a number of the following: students entering university after the age of 21 (labelled 'mature students'); working class; students who are the first generation in their family to attend university; part-time students; students following access routes other than A Levels such as HEFCs[ix] or GNVQs[x]; ethnic minority students; students with long-term disabilities (Williams & Abson, 2002). As Williams & Abson (2002: 18) point out, 'these groups are not discrete' yet they fall under the 'generic term 'non-traditional'; sometimes students will embody one or more of these types of differentiating factors but these multifaceted identities simply signify these students as 'other' from the norm i.e. white, middle-class, 18-19 year olds with A Levels. As shown above, the idea of institutional diversity is posed so as to fulfil the needs of the diverse student population i.e. institutions had to cater for 'the masses'; the participation of 'non-traditional' students, presumed to have 'non-traditional' needs. This discussion also higlighted the stratification of university institutions, with those lower down in the hierarchy as being presumably more suited to and catering for these 'non-traditional' students. Of course this is not always the case – as stated, the more prestigious, elite institutions, have WP quotas to fill so these 'other' students would also occupy places at these institutions alongside their normative student peers (and this of course could also conversely be the case) but not in equal amounts.

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If 'non-traditional' students are labelled as 'other' against the 'norm' via policy, it poses the question of how these 'non-traditional' students are then positioned *in* university; how their identities are managed and experienced. There are two main issues to consider here: the student as positioned against other student peers and (relatedly) how students identify with the institution (and its student body). According to Edwards (1997: 129), a 'student is part of an institution. This sense of belonging is important in establishing a sense of identity. It provides a certain status which can be important to us as individuals and in negotiating boundaries with others'. If certain institutions are more regularly populated with non-traditional students and others with normative students, then does the institution a student attends affect their sense of identity? This rests around the idea of whether the individual sees themselves as 'other' to the student population of a given institution and relies on a notion of individual identity and social identities as interlocked and interdependent (Jenkins, 1996; Lawler, 2008). As Williams and Abson (2002: 13) state:

> ...if an individual can identify with the normative categorisation of 'student', then 'students' become 'people like me'. If the individual cannot identify with that categorisation, students cannot be 'people like me' at all or the individual must be able to locate themselves within a non-normative category, as another 'kind' of student'.

This is one of the main issues this research takes up; in the face of institutional and student diversity ushered in via WP policies, how does this impact upon students' identities? Do differently positioned students experience and identify themselves differently? How is difference felt in the everyday life of HE students? As mentioned earlier, the issue of student diversity is fraught with its own contradictions; as has been shown students are differentiated by their social factors upon entry into HE and it is the aim of this research to explore whether these premises of differentiation impact on their experiences and identities whilst *in* HE. However, there are also aspects of policy discourse that constructs students as equal under a neutral category of 'student' via notions of student 'choice'; especially with regards to institutional diversity. For example the *Widening Participation in Higher Education* (DfES 2003: 5) refers to students as:

Knowing enough about the alternative universities and courses to put in an application to an institution which can satisfy the potential students' aspirations, and for which the student has the appropriate qualifications and qualities.

Such a statement implies equal availability of knowledge about universities and courses and moreover is saturated with the ideal of institutions as 'different but equal' that has been contested as outlined above. The notion of 'choice' and decision-making circulating in the above statement and throughout policy discourse, positions students also as 'different but equal'. However,this does not account for different social positions or the significance of wealth/poverty in students' life choices (Leathwood & Hayton, 2002: 140). Ball *et al* (2002: 53) comment further on the relationship of wealth and poverty in choice making and name other factors of class stating, 'in important respects, choice of university is a choice of lifestyle and is a matter of 'taste', and further that social class is an important aspect of these subtexts of choice'. Wealth/poverty, 'lifestyle' and 'taste' are all part of the class subtext involved in choice, that remains absent in policy discourse.

The notion of 'rational' choice undermines the structural effects of class and gender and the psychic and emotional processes involved in situated decision-making (Woodin & Burke, 2007: Reay *et al*, 2005). In government rhetoric, 'choice' is constructed as a neutral, equal process for all prospective and current students. However, this 'individualist market paradigm...is, at best, a dangerous rhetorical illusion' (Hodkinson and Sparkes, 1995: 200). 'The 'choice' of official discourses operate as a rhetoric of justification for social inequalities' (Reay, 1996: 594); that is, by implication, 'bad' 'choices' are a matter of the individual, negating the social, cultural and material processes involved in decision-making. It is this final point made by Reay here that uncovers one of the most pernicious elements of the neo-liberal individualism under which these (and other) government policies are cloaked; the blame for inequality stops with the individual. Moreover, there exists something more fundamental in the model of social mobility that WP espouses regarding the value of HE and the significance of class and class identities. Whilst the explicit naming of class is largely absent in WP discourse, the fundamental premise of social mobility is one of moving away from working-classness. The next section will examine the implications of this in more detail and how it poses several issues this research takes as central.

Furthermore, in order to rightly challenge the classless, individualistic educational discourse this next section will also provide a brief account of the advances class theorists have made, in defining and exploring the notion of class and its effects.

2.4   Mobilising and Reclaiming Class

Instead of acknowledging class as a vital factor in the operation of HE today and naming it so, another language of 'diversity' and 'inclusion' saturates policy discourse. The adoption of discourses of social inclusion/exclusion is charged with masking what are essentially still class inequalities (Bowring, 2000; Burchardt *et al*, 1999; Levitas, 1998). 'Inclusion' is about being economically and socially included, and emphasises the rights and responsibilities of citizens, although as Loxley and Thomas (2001: 297) note citing Hutton (1996), 'if you want to be included you have to 'agree' to the conditions of membership'. Such inclusion operates around consumption, production, social and political activities (Burchardt *et al*, 1999). In terms of WP, the opportunities for 'membership' as Leathwood and O'Connell (2003: 599) stated above, are offered by the government (for those previously 'excluded'), 'to aspire to greater things….to strive for economic and other benefits' so that 'opportunities are opened up for all in a socially inclusive society' (Leathwood & O'Connell, 2003: 597). However, it is precisely this notion of 'inclusion' of those previously 'excluded' and the 'conditions of membership' on which 'inclusion' rests that pose consideration of what this entails. What does it mean to be included and how might this be experienced by students from different social backgrounds? Just as the rhetoric of educational policy regarding 'institutional diversity' is charged above with carrying the values of the wealthy and privileged, so too are the constructions of 'the student' that refuse to name class; the norm, against the 'included' i.e. previously 'excluded' 'non-traditional' other.

The special place of education in the social sphere (Reay, 2008: 643) was stated by Tony Blair in a speech addressing schools and academies: 'education has the unique ability to correct the inequalities of class or background' (Blair, 2006). Although primarily stated in relation to the school system (which was also significantly changed and affected by New Labour policies) it is noted here in order to demonstrate the special emphasis placed on education as the answer to

social mobility, allowing a 'correction' of class inequalities. Reay (2008: 644) contrasts Blair's assertions with those of Bernstein, who famously stated 'education cannot compensate for society' (Berstein, 1970). 'Rather', Reay (2008: 644) states, 'under Blair, education was to compensate for, and make good, the ills of society and the economy'. Although Reay's (2008) study is based around the impact of Blairite policies on schooling and the centralisation of parenting in such discourses, she identifies a political space in which 'the production of neoliberal rationalities and technologies concerned with active and responsible citizenship' (Reay, 2008: 644-5). She further documents a quote made by Blair's successor, Gordon Brown, in which New Labour's doctrine of empowerment and responsibility of the individual via education is purposely elaborated:

> … the empowerment of each individual, and the idea of responsibility comes alive in new forms of active civic engagement. Out go old assumptions of individuals passively receiving services; think instead of the…active citizen…who—with an extension of choice and voice, individual and collective—are taking control and driving change forward.
>
> (Brown, 2006)

Active citizenship, and social mobility (correcting class inequalities) is achieved, in part, according to these discourses, through full, active educational participation whereby HE is the culmination of many years of hard work, academic ability and raising aspirations. This idea of HE as a passport out of working-classness via education is not a new one. The idea that education is a solution to class has a strong history in UK education; the grammar schools and the 'eleven-plus' examinations were an example of selective education which promised upward social mobility for working-class children via a grammar school education. As Walkerdine (1997: 5-6) states, 'with the tripartite system of secondary education installed with the 1944 Education Act in Britain, children of the working class could, in principle at least, be selected for an academic education in a grammar school'.   She further documents the tripartite system of 'academic Grammar School, the non-academic Secondary Modern School or the Technical School. The latter two types were for those who 'failed' [eleven-plus exam]' (Walkerdine, 1997: 6). Not only does this immediately hark back to the

tripartite system of HE institutions discussed earlier in the chapter, there are other elements documented of this historical tendency for selection of 'clever' working-class students for social mobility, that are worth bearing in mind in the context of this research. This requires thinking through the idea of class identities within these processes. Bourdieu (2010: 119) helps make sense of the implications of selection of 'clever' working-class people:

> Max Weber said that dominant groups always need a 'theodicy of their own privilege', or more precisely a sociodicy, in other words a theoretical justification of the fact that they are privileged. Competence is nowadays at the heart of that sociodicy, which is accepted, naturally, by the dominant – it is in their interest – but also by the others. In the suffering of those excluded from work, in the wretchedness of the long-term unemployed, there is something more than there was in the past. The Anglo-American ideology, always somewhat sanctimonious, distinguished the 'undeserving poor' from the 'deserving poor', who were judged worthy of charity. Alongside or in place of this ethical justification there is now an intellectual justification. The poor are not just immoral, alcoholic, and degenerate, they are stupid, they lack intelligence.

The 'theoretical justification' of privilege via intellectual justification is part and parcel of the 'doxa' or symbolic power of HE. That intelligence features in the 'sociodicy' of the privileged locates the educationally successful working-classes as the 'deserving poor' of 'inclusion' in HE and the promises of upward social mobility it entails. However, such 'inclusion' of those previously 'excluded' and the opportunities that offers, in terms of mobility, involves a moving away from working-classness, without due consideration to the potential disconnection from family and peers (and the negative representations of these people) and the emotional, social and psychological effects of this.

Educational success for working-class students implies the assumption they will move easily and readily between classes (Saunders, 1995); however, many accounts document emotional and pyscho-social disjuncture via such experiences of 'moving away' from their natal class whereby they were positioned as 'other' to both their working-class peers and middle-class school peers (see: Walkerdine, 1997; Walkerdine & Lucey, 1989; Steedman, 1987). Quite simply, the 'solution' to working-classness required leaving working-classness behind, provided of course you were academically bright; presumably those who weren't at the eleven-plus stage would exist happily in their own more

practical work. Andy Green (1990) looks at the rise of the educational system in UK, noting that strong middle-class ideals constructed the system. He radically argues that the way the education system was originally expanded was that '...it was rather a way of ensuring that the subordinate class would acquiesce in their own class aspirations' (Green, 1990: 248). Noting this, Reay goes onto argue that 'the contemporary educational system retains remnants of...past elite prejudices' (2001: 334). The stratified HE system is one element of this; the classed idea of 'the student' is another. However, despite such stratification and bases of class in the model of social mobility tied into HE, all of this is absent in the individualised and marketised system that overlooks the significance of lasting class differences in students and institutions. However, this perhaps rests on the general idea of a classless society.

Diane Reay evokes Ulrich Beck's (2004) figurative notion of class as a 'zombie category' using it somewhat ironically in the title 'The Zombie stalking English Schools: Social Class and Educational Inequality' (2006). Beck's use of the term, according to Reay, is one whereby old conceptions of class 'still mould our perceptions and blind us to the real experience and ambiguities of the second modernity' (Reay, 2006a: 288; reference to Beck, 2004: 19). Reay's concern in this particular article (and her broad spectrum of work with education) is to 'reclaim social class as a central concern within education, not in the traditional sense as a dimension of educational stratification, but as a powerful and vital aspect of both learner and wider social identities' (Reay, 2006a: 288). However, in order to rightly challenge the idea that class is a 'zombie category' and the individualistic notions of the policies and practices outlined so far, a brief reflection on the developments in class theories and studies may be helpful.

The study of class and of capitalism is almost as old as the discipline of Sociology itself. However, vast developments in the structure of modern society and resulting social theory have shaken these foundations, causing some to herald the 'death of class' (Pakluski & Waters, 1996) and others since, to develop class analysis in new and fruitful ways. Early studies of class, particularly with regard to geographical location, moved beyond academia when Charles Booth's (1903) mapping of poverty in London became the schema (involving 8 classes) that was adopted in the 1911 census. This was replaced by the Registrar General's Classification schema that proposed a five-class model, which was used in the census up into the 1980s to measure social mobility, class

and educational attainment and health (Savage, 2000: 5; including these examples: Glass, 1954; Goldthorpe *et al*, 1980; Halsey *et al*, 1980; Crouch and Heath, 1982)[xi]. Class became a significant measure of society that Halsey *et al* (1980) refer to as the 'political arithmetic tradition' (which involved the development of survey methods to classify and measure social inequalities). Additionally, almost as early as the discipline of sociology, the debates around class transcended academia and the 'idea of class was a rallying cry as much as a concept' (Savage, 2000: 5-6). Class became a political force that engendered mobilisation of communities sharing common inequalities. As has been shown then, class, since the early origins and proliferation of the concept had enormous and wide-ranging uses and impact. However, as Skeggs (2004c: 41) points out, such broad usage is ultimately implicated in its depreciation (for many) in value:

Class is being used to do many things: provide academic legitimacy, frame an academic discipline, speak to 'the people', measure social change, stand in for the social itself. It is hardly surprising then, that some people respond to class in ways that they try to refigure it, dismiss it, trivialize it and decentre it.

Not only this but the tendency to see class as a matter of measurement rather than one of political struggle (Skeggs, 2004b: 41), further limits and confounds the value of the concept. The 'political arithmetic' of class fails to capture the ways in which class is lived by people in the everyday of society; it fails to appreciate the scope and effects of class identities. Similarly, the approaches to class theory that dominated academia in the last half of the twentieth century, were unable to satisfactorily address the cultural and embodied experience of class and classed identities (Reay, 2011: 1). For example, the work on class produced by Marx and Weber was extremely influential from the early development of Sociology as a discipline and continued to shape class debates (Savage, 2000; Crompton, 1998), yet such grand theories that focussed on macro-processes of society began to be challenged. One example of the challenges brought came from feminist movement who began to mobilise to fight for equality and 'women's liberation'. However, as bell hooks (2000) details, class differences and struggles were inherent within these women, which crucially impacted on their vision of liberation from gender discrimination and sexual oppression. Different relationships to working out of necessity and the

type and conditions of work available to differently classed women as well as relationships to the home and the family highlighted stark differences. This not only identified difference and similarity within the same identity category of 'woman' (and varying levels of oppression), it also emphasised issues of class beyond money, occupation and production. bell hooks (2000: 3-4) addressed this issue, quoting a passage from Rita Mae Brown's essay 'The Last Straw':

Class is much more than Marx's definition of relationship to the means of production. Class involves your behaviour, your basic assumptions about life. Your experience (determined by your class) validates those assumptions, how you are taught to behave, what you expect from yourself and from others, your concept of a future, how you understand problems and solve them, how you think, feel, act. It is these behavioural patterns that middle-class women resist recognising although they may be perfectly willing to accept class in Marxist terms, a neat trick that helps them avoid really dealing with class behaviour in themselves. It is these behavioural patterns which must be recognised, understood and changed.

Not only did existing conceptions and measures of class effectively ignore women and their contribution to labour (both paid and unpaid), focussing on relationships to the means of production, but they also overlooked the cultural, social and embodied aspects of class; the way that class works in the everyday of social life. Moreover, understandings of social class, broadly conceptualised as a collectivity and being structured by occupation and location were unsurprisingly called into question and challenged in the face of huge societal changes. Such narrow conceptions of class (Woodin, 2005) and measurements based on quantifying peoples based on occupation (favoured by political arithmetic tradition) in a society in which the labour market changed so radically impeded understandings of class. Via the displacement of communities and collectivities and the transformative impact of technological and communication advancements - resulting in a seemingly infinite range of lifestyle choices - individualisation theories emerged.

Prominent theorists of individualisation include Ulrich Beck and Anthony Giddens. The former, as has been detailed, has gone so far as say the likes of class, family and neighbourhood are all 'zombie categories' (Beck and Beck-Gershiem, 2001: 203) that have no place in a dynamic, reflexive and globalised world (Savage, 2000: 101). Individualisation 'implies a de-coupling of the self

from the weight of the group, community and tradition' (Hey, 2005: 855). The groups and structures that organised people in modern societies are assumed to have all but disappeared in light of the restructuring of the labour market and the new dynamics brought about by rapid globalisation. Increased mobility, displaced communities and access to an extraordinary array of consumer goods and communication mediums engendered the idea that lifestyles are 'freely chosen' (Giddens, 1991: 542). Both Beck and Giddens assert that individuals 'reflexively construct their biographies and identities in 'late modernity'' (Savage, 2000: 101) whereupon more 'local idiosyncratic and syncretic trajectories are now said to structure 'biographies of choice' (Hey, 2005: 855). Moreover, according to Giddens, individuals are 'forced to negotiate lifestyle choices among a diversity of options' and that we 'have no choice but to choose' (Giddens, 1991: 81). In this mode of thought, everyone is forced to adopt reflexively-constructed lifestyles to sustain his or her self-identity (Shilling 1993). For Giddens, lifestyles involve 'a cluster of habits and orientations and hence has a certain unity – important to a continuing sense of ontological security – that connects options to a more or less ordered pattern' (1991: 82). So in this view the choices we make and the resultant lifestyles we sustain are patterned and based on utilitarian needs and aesthetic desires such that we carve and sustain our self-identities. Choices are here made rationally and decisively, according to what best fulfils our needs and wants and reflexively on the basis of knowing and being able to shape our identities and lifestyles. Each person in this mode of thought is individually a nexus of boundless possibilities of choices; a free individual; an agentic self.

The notion of a 'free individual' with equal access to these boundless choices overlooks the unequal positions people occupy and the limits and restrictions faced in their daily lives. The focus on rational choice making and reflexivity is flawed on the basis that it is constructed around a particular classed notion of the self – a middle-class self (Strathern, 1992; Skeggs, 2004a, 2004b, 2002: 349; Adkins, 2002). The notion of 'choice' is projected as neutral and universal with equal access however, as Skeggs (2004c, 139) notes, choice 'is a resource, to which some lack access and which they cannot see as a possibility; it is not within their field of vision, their plausibility structure'. She further asks, 'what about those who have no choice?' Indeed. The problem with this universal, neutral view is that certain choices will be privileged over others and those who

do not make the 'right' choices will be assumed as failing, inadequate and/or morally reprehensible and deficient. Notions of 'active citizenship' and 'social inclusion' are equally problematic on these bases; failure to adhere to the 'right' forms of civic participation pose risks of 'exclusion', and is constructed as social/cultural/moral inadequacy. It is precisely these issues that underlie the individualistic neo-liberal rhetoric of government education policy, which presupposes a middle-class self and middle-class values and ideals.

Identity is not a matter of choice but is inescapably intertwined with the effects of existing social structures. Giddens and Beck actually radically misconceive the idea of class and identity in seeing identities as something that stands outside of social life (Savage, 2000: 101; Hey, 2005: 855). Class is not just about collectivity; in thinking about class and class identities it is necessary to appreciate the individual as a social being and thus of the structures of society as inherent within those individuals: 'the collective is deposited in each individual in the form of durable dispositions such as mental structures' (Bourdieu, 1995: 18). Identities are not fixed but are capable of being altered or reaffirmed and moreover they are contextual – the individual and the social are locked together and gain meaning in particular social contexts (Jenkins, 1996; Williams & Abson, 2001). They are, however, primarily social and thus whilst identities are capable of change in some respects, they are principally limited by social position and structural location.

Our social and cultural norms have had a profound effect on the way we conceptualise identity and indeed our ways of viewing our own selves and each other. The tendency, in Western cultures is to view identity as an internal, individualised state; something that is unique to ourselves that only we can 'know'. Such tendencies, according to Elias (1994) can be mapped to the 'civilizing process' around the Renaissance in Europe that promoted ideas of 'self-control' and thus a need to manage internal states, which led to a notion of our 'true' identities as contained within. This perception of identity as an internal state thus results from the historical and cultural specificities of that social world; as do our identities. The history and culture of the Western social world at once emphasises these internal states, whilst also being part of various collectivities, producing two ways of viewing identity.

Western notions of identity hinge 'on an apparently paradoxical combination of sameness and difference' (Lawler, 2008a: 2). It is paradoxical

because whilst definitions of the term 'sameness' and difference' stand in opposition to each other, each of us embody both sameness and difference at once. We all share common identities but at the same time we recognise ourselves as individuals who are different to one another. One way to conceptualise how this works is by thinking about identity categories. Categories are cognitive devices that help us to organise the world in our minds (Pickering, 2002: 1), which involves potential membership to a range of categories simultaneously; joining a collective of others in the same category who then also personify other categories. For example, one of the broadest categories we can all lay claim to is that of 'human' in which we can all share a sameness (Lawler, 2008a: 2-3); we all identify with being human but we also see that we are different to each other in different ways. We can identify ourselves differently to others along various methods of distinction and categorisation including gender, nationality, ethnic origin, sexuality and social class etc. However, we will at any one time embody a number of these different category positions. For example, white, heterosexual, working-class, woman, mother, student, wife, nurse; may all be categories one person embodies at any one time.

However, identification with several categories is not an additive process; these different aspects of personhood are dynamic, interactive and mutually constitutive (Lawler, 2008a: 3). That is, one aspect of identity cannot be seen as distinct from or in isolation to the other identity categories to which a person belongs or that make up the person; nor is it a simple case of adding oppressed social positions/categories to decide who is worst off. Such additive tendencies implicitly rank difference (McCall, 2005; Valentine, 2007). Instead, as Valentine (2007: 19) argues, a focus is necessary on the 'dominant spatial orderings that produce moments of exclusion for particular social groups' (Valentine, 2007: 19) this is central to conceptualising identities beyond static category membership and as enacted in and affected by differences in spatiality and temporality. As Lawler (2002: 254-5) argues, externally imposed identity categories do not necessarily tell us much about the kinds of identities people build for themselves and their interpretations of the world 'cannot be assumed from these categories'. So whilst categories and different identifications are useful to think through the paradoxical qualities of sameness and difference in identity and indeed, structural positions, there are limits in what they can tell us about how people interpret and experience their being in the world. Categories and certain

identifications can imply a sense of fixity that does not capture the ongoing process of *being* (or indeed becoming) anything. They do however, remind us of their social significance, which is that they are shared and thus necessarily bear similarities; our individual identities are inherently social and relational.

Beyond and with the idea of category, identities are also construed in terms of social 'roles' and often entail competing and complex demands that require us to act in a certain way. For example, referring back to the list of categories one may embody at any particular time, the role of 'student' may be very different from that of 'mother' or 'nurse' yet we may embody all three at any one time; it is often the context that determines which category or 'role' is most prevalent. Taking that latter role further, a nurse is expected to wear a uniform and embody particular characteristics and behaviours that are culturally and socially expected of a nurse such as caring, compassionate etc. Goffman (1959) thought through such matters via the perspective of a dramatic performance in *The Presentation of the Self in Everyday Life*. Such a perspective highlights the 'front stage' where social actors perform (their roles) their 'front' and set about 'convincing' their audience of their suitability of the part, always in particular 'settings' or scenes. (Goffman, 1959: 55-6). Using Parks' (1950: 249) unpacking of the term 'person': 'the word person, in its first meaning is a mask….It is in these roles we know each other; it is in these roles we know ourselves'; Goffman states, 'we come into the world as individuals, achieve character, and become persons' (1959: 30). The roles are therefore our person, not an acted role. What is at stake then, in the context of this research, is how the role or category of 'student' may (or may not) be in conflict with other aspects of a person's identity and how this sense of conflict may be generated through the relational processes of identity formation. Moreover, what is central here is not just a case of trying to understand how identities are claimed (or indeed, contested) but also how they are bestowed.

We exist within a 'network of interdependencies' (Lawler, 2008: 8) that bind us together and which are necessary for our sense of self. The process of claiming an identity cannot be done in isolation – it is a relational process. Identity involves the gaze of the other upon the self and Taylor (2007: 8) here provides a neat summation of this:

Identity is constructed in interactions and institutionally, continually informing understanding of who we are and who other people are...Our identifications also require validation from others. It is not enough to assert an identity, as we cannot see ourselves without also seeing how others see us; interpretations, readings and understandings are negotiated in social encounters. The presence of class reveals itself in everyday judgments and interpersonal interactions – informing not only the type of person we declare ourselves to be but also what we are seen to be and the structuring of this identity.

The revealing of the presence of class in everyday judgments and interactions is based upon the 'type of person we declare ourselves to be' and mediated via the positioning of the self against that which is seen as other. Class identity is just one aspect of personhood however and moreover, one aspect of social inequality; a notion that figured heavily in sociological debates that arose, which challenged the prominence of class in social theory. Contemporary class theorising addresses the complexity of class identities and debates regularly feature Bourdieu (Savage, 2005: 930; Reay, 2011), whose work provides a conceptual toolkit many writers have since appropriated, developed and utilised to address social inequalities in a plethora of areas of social life, not least in education.

Contemporary work, benefiting from the outstanding body of writing regarding identity that emerged from the 'Cultural Turn' (Chaney,1994; Foucault, 1977; Geertz, 1973; Hall 1997) attempt to reconcile considerations of gender, sexuality and race as part of class identity analyses. However, as Reay remarks, this 'turn to culture too often became a process of leaving the material and economic behind' and although gender and race theorising was invigorated somewhat, this led to what she describes as an 'impasse in class analysis' whereupon social class increasingly became 'the lost identity of identity scholarship' (2011: 1). Nonetheless, as she further comments, '[t]he cultural turn has simultaneously been a Bourdieusian turn' (Reay, 2011: 3); and as such contemporary theorising benefits from consideration of strong emphases on cultural, social and economic inequalities and systems of value.

Bourdieu's extensive collection of works has been incredibly influential in the study of class and education, and beyond. Whilst his work on higher education has obvious significance with this research, his major contributions lie

in the attentions to the everyday and the mechanisms by which class inequalities perpetuate both within and alongside the education system. One of the key achievements of his work, particularly in *Distinction* (1984) was the conceptualisation of class as dynamic and relational, operating in the everyday and mediated via distinctions of taste. Such insights have provided promising terrain for contemporary class theorists working on understanding the operation of class identities and examples of these works will feature predominantly in the next chapter and beyond as they interweave and connect to issues of identity in higher education.

The conceptual toolkit Bourdieu offered for understanding class was developed out of the desire to overcome the dichotomous opposition between objectivism and subjectivism that he characterises as being 'the most fundamental, and the most ruinous' (1990a: 25). As Bourdieu states, 'all of my thinking started from this point: how can behaviour be regulated without being the product of obedience to rules?' (1994d: 65). Whilst we experience the world as free agents, there also exists a certain predictability and regularities regarding human behaviour, characteristics and actions despite there being 'no *explicit* rules dictating such practices' (Maton, 2008: 10; my emphasis). Our behaviour is not dictated to us however patterns and similarities exist that affirm us as primarily social beings.   Bourdieu developed what he called a 'theory of practice' which was intended to show how structure and agency; objectivism and subjectivism are mutually affective; and would allow social scientists to understand the practices of social agents as structuring but also structured by social structures. He developed a conceptual toolkit for understanding practice, summarised in the following equation:

$$[(habitus) (capital)] + field = practice$$

Using the concepts separately without due consideration of their combinatory power and significance risks misrecognition and misuse of them; 'these constructs function fully only in relation to one another' (Naidoo, 2004: 457). The logic of practice is the way in which habitus, capitals and field work together. Habitus is 'an open system of dispositions that is constantly subjected to experiences, and therefore, constantly affected by them in a way that either reinforces or modifies its structures' (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992: 133).

Bourdieu describes 'habitus' as 'a socialized subjectivity' and 'the social world embodied' (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992b: 127-128); the habitus is an internalisation of the social world, which whilst unique to the individual, is also shared because of its internalisation of objective social structures to which we are all (albeit unequally) positioned. Habitus 'designates a *way of being, a habitual state* (especially of the body) and in particular, a *predisposition, tendency, propensity or inclination*' (Bourdieu,1977b: 214). For Bourdieu, an individual's history is ongoing: 'Habitus, as product of social conditionings, and thus of a history (unlike character) is endlessly transformed' (Bourdieu, 1994: 7). Dispositions, Bourdieu says, 'are long-lasting: they tend to perpetuate, to reproduce themselves, but they are not eternal' (2005: 45); they are capable of change but only within the limits of its originary structure rather than radically so, or 'wholesale conversions' (Hillier & Rooksby, 2005: 38). Moreover, habitus is a 'complex interplay of past and present' (Reay, 2004a: 434); it is 'embodied history – internalised as second nature and so forgotten as history – [it] is the active presence of the whole past of which it is the product' (Bourdieu, 1990a: 56). Thus, people, their behaviours, actions and dispositions are produced by structurally conditioned circumstances and experiences but are rarely conceptualised or consciously remembered as such. Furthermore, because people experience life in groups, they share *similar* habitus: '*each individual system of dispositions* may be seen as a *structural variant* of all other group or class habitus, expressing the difference between the trajectories and positions inside or outside the class (Bourdieu, 1977: 86). Habituses are also (social and cultural) capitals.

Capitals are the key mechanisms by which class processes work and inequalities of differently valued capitals are the premise on which inequalities perpetuate. The notion of capitals opens out the operation of (classed) systems of value and exchange beyond money:

> ….by reducing the universe of exchanges to mercantile exchange, which is objectively and subjectively oriented towards maximisation of profit i.e., (economically) *self-interested*, it…implicitly define[s] the other forms of exchange as non-economic and therefore *disinterested*. In particular, it defines as disinterested those forms of exchange which ensure *transubstantiation* whereby the most material

types of capital – those which are economic in the restricted sense – can present themselves in the immaterial form of cultural capital or social capital and vice versa.

(Bourdieu, 2006: 105-6)

Social capital refers to a network of social relationships that is 'the product of investment strategies, individual or collective, consciously or unconsciously aimed at establishing or reproducing social relationships that are directly usable in the short or long term…' (Bourdieu, 1986: 249). Cultural capital on the other hand encompasses a vast array of qualities, practices, knowledges and competencies. The most transubstantiated and disinterested form of capital is a fourth type, symbolic capital, which refers to these capitals when they are recognised as legitimate by the dominant members/groups/fractions of society. That is, they are routinely regarded as superior or standardised/normative ways of being or acting. Symbolic capitals are recognised as conferring social advantage such as particular values and tastes and more explicitly, educational qualifications (Maton, 2008: 102). Social class membership alone doesn't translate to symbolic capital in any straight-forward way for all its members. Neither is it a case of distinct working and middle classes in conflicts of interest and simple mathematical differentiation, in terms of level of cultural capital for instance; Bourdieu instead talks of 'class fractions'. Bourdieu, argues that classes are merely 'classes on paper'; classes for Bourdieu involve collective action and identification that individuals who are proximate in social space do not necessarily do (Crossley, 2008: 92). A better understanding of how Bourdieu's work helps to conceptualise class will be achieved via attending to the third relational concept, field.

Within social space, or 'fields', capitals are accrued and exchanged; capitals 'are both the process within and the product of, a field' (Thomson, 2008: 69). Bourdieu (1998: 40-1) defines a field as:

…a structured social space, a field of forces, a force field. It contains people who dominate and people who are dominated. Constant, permanent relationships of inequality operate inside this space…individuals...bring to the competition all the (relative) power at their disposal. It is this power that defines their position in the field and, as a result, their strategies.

The field is the social space in which the habitus and capital are situated, dependent and operationalised. There exists a 'complex ensemble of social fields' (Nairoo, 2004: 458) whose relative autonomy are varied (Bourdieu, 1993) but between which there are likenesses and often inter-dependencies. As Thomson asserts, the 'patterned, regular and predictable practices within each field bear striking similarities, as do the kinds of social agents who are dominant in each social field' (2008: 70). That is, each field has its own distinctive 'logic of practice' but exchange occurs between fields and relative power within fields tends to be replicated across all. For example, 'what kind of schooling people receive in the educational field can make a lot of difference to how they are positioned in the economic field' (Thomson, 2008: 70-1). Put simply, those who do well in one field tend to succeed in others. The extent to which one's habitus bears similarities to the structure of the field dictates how much one has what Bourdieu calls a 'feel for the game'; if the habitus is structured in similar ways to the field, then so will their logic of practice be akin to that of the field. Thus the 'feel for the game' is likened to the game itself (Bourdieu, 2000: 151). Moreover, 'the relation to what is possible is the relation to power' (Bourdieu, 1990a: 4). The regulatory power or structure of institutions structures the habitus and the degree to which the structure of the habitus is akin to that of the field regulates the success of that individual in the field. For those whose habitus is not similarly constructed to that of the field, whose logic of practice does not concur with that of the field and those sharing the same social space, a sense of disjuncture will occur. Here the subject will be in Bourdieu's analogy, a 'fish out of water' (Bourdieu, 1999: 495); those occupying the same social space will not be 'people like me' (Bourdieu, 1990).

The main field in question in this research is the educational field, and Bourdieu suggests that institutions within fields such as universities operate as subfields (Bourdieu, 1983: 324). Other writers view university education as a field in itself; as a 'field with a high degree of autonomy in that it generates its own values and behavioural imperatives that are relatively independent from forces emerging from the economic and political fields' (Naidoo, 2004: 248; references to: Grenfell & James, 1988; Robbins, 1993; Delanty, 2001). However, the education field is one that encompasses higher education as an element of it; it is not a distinct field in its own right. Furthermore, in light of the recent changes in the higher education system, the field is perhaps less autonomous than it once

was. Looking at the field, or the HE system itself, the power circulating in the education system is one that works via the way in which middle-class ideals are entrenched in the system. This is to the degree that they are not routinely questioned or identified as being particularly classed; those ideals are its symbolic power, or as Bourdieu also terms it, Doxa. Doxa is central to the notion of symbolic power; doxa *is* a form of symbolic power as embedded in recognised institutions. Doxa, according to Bourdieu, (1997: 16), is a 'set of fundamental beliefs which does not even need to be asserted in the form of an explicit, self-conscious dogma'; the power of the values, practices and ideals inherent in the HE system is that they are misrecognised as part of a legitimate, meritocratic system. This veil of legitimacy is its strength: [t]he adherence expressed in the doxic relation to the social world is the absolute form of recognition of legitimacy through misrecogniton of arbitrariness' (Bourdieu, 1977b: 168).

How to conceptualise class then? As Bourdieu asserts, 'classes exist in some sense in a state of virtuality, not as something given but as *something to be done*' (Bourdieu, 1998c: 12, emphasis in original). 'Taste classifies and it classifies the classifier' (Bourdieu, 1984: 6); it is in this very statement that the enormous potential for analysing how class operates as process, as dynamic, as relational and in occurring within interaction; in the way we relate to one another, is apparent. Bourdieu's work and the toolkit he bequeathed have been employed in this study both as sensitising concepts and as explanatory tools for the research data but 'within limits' (Skeggs, 2004a: 31). That is, although Bourdieu's work is incredibly useful in helping to explain the way that class processes operate, his concepts must be used carefully and this research does not position itself as inherently Bourdieusian; other empirical and theoretical work is also used to help think through the research data.

Bourdieu's work continues to offer potential for researchers via his emphases on classed embodiment and the special significance of the everyday. Bourdieu is good 'to think with' (Lamont, 2010: 138). As Moi (1991: 1020) points out, Bourdieu is not the 'only thinker to take a theoretical interest in everyday life', but this and the successful appropriation of his conceptual toolkit by many well respected contemporary class theorists, adding to his own substantive work on school education, as well as many other cultural arenas, affords the special significance of his work in this research. As a result of the impact of his work and the thought it has since generated, contemporary class theorists:

…conceptualize class as *dynamic*; as a system of inequality which is being
continually re-made in the large- and small-scale processes of social life: through the
working of global capital and the search for new markets, but also through claims for
entitlement (and of non-entitlement), through symbols and representations, and in
the emotional and affective dimensions of life.

(Lawler, 2005a: 797)

Habitus (and its interlinking concepts of capitals and fields) is particularly useful
in understanding how the body is in the social world and the social world is in the
body (Bourdieu 1977); the habitus *is* a socialised body (Bourdieu, 1998a: 81).
Habitus is the social inscribed on the body and is expressed through ways of
'standing, walking and thereby of feeling and thinking' (Bourdieu, 1990: 70). This
concept is thereby incredibly useful when researching identities. Bourdieu did
not write specifically on 'identity' and whilst the concept of 'habitus' helps to
understand embodied identity (and therefore the bases on which people make
judgements of each other's persons) as will be discussed shortly, his emphasis
on the relational, processual nature of class is tied in to his usefulness in a
project focussed on identity. It is the process of 'identity-work', that is, the 'doing'
of identity that is akin to the 'doing' of class that Bourdieu writes about. In the
process of identifying others these performative statements/actions at once
identify the social actor. The bases on which the judgments/statements of others
are made are effected by and through the habitus.

Habitus is a way of understanding how the social world is embodied, that
is, embodiment refers to the ways in which structural locations are literally worn
on the body – 'the corporeal consequences of social structures' (Shilling, 2007:
3). The body has been used to 'interrogate some of the longstanding
culture/nature, action/structure, and subject/object dualisms' (Shilling, 2007: 2).
The body provides the means to bridge individual and social dimensions (Shilling,
2007: 3) that 'erupts onto the surface…(manifested via form of marking,
decoration and dress)…enabling individuals to recognise others as participants
in a common culture' (Durkheim, 1995 [1912]: 125) – culturally different, as the
case may be. Bourdieu's work and his concept of habitus as embodiment, offers
enormous potential for class and gender theorising:

In theorization of social action as always embodied (of the social as incorporated into the body), of power as subtly inculcated through the body, of social action as generative, and in his emphasis on the politics of cultural authorization, recognition and social position taking, Bourdieu's social theory offers numerous points of connection to contemporary feminist theory.

(Adkins, 2004: 5)

Yet despite these numerous points of connection, Bourdieu's work does have limitations, as explored in some feminist critiques. For example, as Skeggs (2004a:31) notes, there are 'many things for which he is very useful, such as understanding the middle-class, their authorization, exchange and use of distinction', there are (arguably) also 'many things he can't account for, particularly gender and sexuality' (Skeggs, 2004a: 31). Yet despite this, his work continues to offer potential for feminist researchers via his emphases on classed embodiment and the special significance of the everyday.

Moi, in her work on 'Appropriating Bourdieu' (1991) expresses views in accordance with those of Adkins' in the above statement. Moi adds that the originality of Bourdieu's work 'is to be found in his development of what one might call *microtheory* of social power' (1991: 1019). She praises his work which shows 'it *is* possible to link the humdrum detail of everyday life to a more general analysis of power' and this element of his work alone 'ought to make his approach attractive for class and gender theorists looking for a mode of social analysis which seeks to undo or overcome the traditional individual/social or private/public divide' (Moi, 1991: 1020). That Bourdieu finds seemingly banal, everyday practices as analytically interesting is for Moi, a great advancement in the study of social life. She says of this:

Refusing to accept that distinction between 'high' or 'significant' and 'low' or 'insignificant' matters, Bourdieu will analyse various ways of chewing one's food, different forms of dressing, musical tastes...the kind of friends one has and the films one likes to see, and the way a student may feel when talking to her professor. In one sense, then, some of my interest in Bourdieu is grounded in my basic conviction that much of what patriarchal minds like to trivialize as *gossip*, and as women's gossip at that, is in fact socially significant.

(Moi, 1991: 1019-1020)

Such championing of the everyday concerns and experiences as worthy areas of analysis that both Bourdieu and Moi share, is also incredibly valuable in this research. Bourdieu's work allows analysis of everyday life in which the *process* of class and performance of class identities occur and thus, allows study of the minutiae of everyday experiences that contribute to student life. One of the most compelling aspects of Bourdieu's work, especially *Distinction* was its focus on the middle classes; it is a work that takes as its central aim to explore the ways in which privilege is sustained and replicated across all areas of social life and thus the ways in which social inequality perpetuates. This aim is also very close to that of this research. Using Bourdieu's work, or in Moi's terms 'appropriating Bourdieu' therefore is especially useful, theoretically and conceptually, in research aimed at exploring the perpetuation of privilege and operations of class and class identities in higher education.

Bourdieu highlighted that class is something to be done (1998c: 12), just as identities are. Talking to students and analysing their accounts of personal experiences, relationships and interactions with others and various student spaces and places, their motivations and expectations, choices and sense of value, alongside their personal circumstances offers a way of seeing how class and class identities are continually being done. Whilst the academy is said to define and regulate what a student is (Morley, 1997: 33) how such definitions are taken up, resisted or challenged is likely only to be enriched from the accounts of undergraduate students themselves. Analysing their accounts however, needs to be sensitive to and appropriate the achievements and analytical techniques employed in contemporary class identities research. Psycho-social and emotional aspects of class identities contribute to the way class circulates. Reay (2005: 913) describes several emotions that 'contribute to the affective lexicon of class' including pride, shame, envy, contempt, embarrassment and pity. These emotions, Sayer (2005: 948) states, are 'not just forms of 'affect' but are evaluative judgements of how people are being treated as regards what they value'. Moreover, emotions 'are not irrational or 'merely subjective', but are often perceptive and reasonable judgements about situations and processes' and are key to understanding 'our normative orientation to the world' (Sayer, 2005: 951).

Here then, what is important are the 'moral aspects of the experience of class and the concerns that people have regarding their class position and how others view them (Sayer, 2005: 947). Although the way that power works through

these positional views is such that 'what gets to count as tasteful is simply that which is claimed as their own by middle-class people' (Lawler, 2008a: 126). Class judgements are interconnected with emotions, morality and taste and analysing the judgements people make in the everyday involves grasping the processes and the spaces within which normativity is established, via the making of class judgements. There is a relative lack of sociological attention to middle-class emotional responses to social class inequalities' (Reay, 2005: 919) and thus research of this kind needs to be sensitive to the psycho-social and emotional dimensions of class, researching this with students from a variety of social backgrounds. Class is 'experienced in multiple, divergent ways according to a range of factors' (Woodin, 2005: 1014) and is not just about objective conditions:

> 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...Class is something beneath your clothes, under your skin, in your reflexes, in your psyche, at the very core of your being.
>
> (Kuhn, 1995:117)

Building on this notion, Reay (2005: 911) adds, in 'contemporary British society social class is not only etched into our culture, it is still deeply etched into our psyches, despite class awareness and class consciousness being seen as a 'thing of the past'. Class is not something that is always consciously considered in the everyday – it forms our unconscious as well as often being emotionally mediated. Therefore although research participants may not actively and consciously construct their lives and opinions about others in class terms, it is possible to infer from their accounts of everyday HE experience, the way that class operates in HE.

2.5   Summary

This chapter has aimed to introduce the premises on which this research was founded and the political significance of the research; in the challenges it proposes to the constructions of students and institutions in recent educational discourse. Namely that the 'horizontal' and 'vertical' 'diversity' of institutions (Archer, 2007) in discourse, masks an essentially stratified system that is so

constructed as to confound notions of equity espoused via WP policies. Equally, the 'diversity' of students and the constructions of 'non-traditional' students as previously 'excluded and now being 'included' bringing with them special needs, tends to imply their otherness to 'traditional' students who therefore exist as the norm. Furthermore, the notions of 'choice' negate the role of structural inequalities and class identities in participation and decision-making. Moreover, the model of social mobility that underpins 'inclusion' and participation in HE, relies on the logic of middle-class values and overlooks the complex and emotional pathways of 'non-traditional' students in the potential disjuncture from their class backgrounds and identities.

Whilst the educational policies are saturated with discourses of individualism that relate to a theoretical forgoing of class based on anachronistic and limited notions of the concept, developments by social theorists have focussed on identities and the idea of class as a relational process involving economic, social and cultural bases and mediated via emotion and affective experiences of social life. Like Redmond (2006), Bourdieu's 'organising concepts' were central to the development of this study's research questions and ways of understanding 'the ways in which social structures can be seen to 'interweave' with students' experiences (Reay 1998)' (Redmond, 2906: 121). Therefore this qualitative research, exploring the everyday experiences of HE (middle- and working-class) students, seeks to demonstrate the presence of class in HE relationships and as such, say something about power more broadly. Although the study was based in a time of New Labour governmental power in which WP policy prevailed, the research will equally be able to address issues that are pertinent to the future situations of HE students and the policies of the current Coalition government. As such, I will reflect on the findings of this research and the implications for the future of HE and its students in the concluding remarks of this research. In order to situate this research in a growing body of academic study on the sociology of education and class identities, the next chapter is devoted to charting some of these important contributions and some of the questions that they raise, which will be attended to in the course of this study.

3. Class Identities and Higher Education: Themes and Issues

3.1 Introduction

Education and social class have been major concerns in British sociology since its inception. Early works such as Hogben (1938) utilised a 'political arithmetic' of population analysis and was followed by the likes of Glass (1954), Floud *et al.*, (1956) and Halsey *et al.*, (1980), who like Hogben, were concerned to chart the relationships between education and social class and social mobility. Such measures and emphases continue to have influence. Archer *et al* (2001: 42) document that policy makers have been engaged in building a database of useful educational research findings for field practitioners but that 'criteria for inclusion seems to privilege more positivistic research, with a tendency to deal in 'provable givens' rather than more intricate theorising of social identities and inequalities'. Theoretically speaking, quantitative educational and sociological research tends to be 'dominated by modernist and 'grand' theories, in which class is conceptualized categorically…and share a perception of class as objectively definable and largely fixed/unchanging' (Archer, 2003: 7; Williamson, 1981; Crompton, 1998). Recent sociological work has focussed on attending to the complexity of class in the context of education and beyond where (classed) subjectivities and identities are central (Reay, 2001; Reay *et* al., 2002; Reay *et* al, 2008; Maxwell & Aggerton, 2010; Ingram, 2011; Crozier *et al*, 2008; Clayton, *et al*, 2009; *inter alia*). Many are Bourdieusian inspired, such is the influence and usability of his conceptual apparatus and lexicon of work for understanding the operation of class in the micro- and macro-levels of social life (Moi, 1991). Bourdieu's contributions to understanding class inequalities in education (particularly higher education) will serve to open out some of the ideas more contemporary researchers have been working with. More recent approaches take account of class as dynamic; as a relational process and of shifting inequalities and identities differentially affected by the structuring structures of class, gender, ethnicity, sexuality (etc). There are a number of issues raised by such works and this chapter is devoted to giving an overview of recent developments and how they relate to the themes of this research.

As noted in the previous chapter, the scope of higher education has changed dramatically in recent years and an incredible amount of work in this area has emerged in response to the many issues arising from such change. The purpose of this chapter is to provide a synopsis and critical evaluation of the wealth of empirical and theoretical research around what is clearly a vital aspect of social lives and sociological study. In doing so, I aim to situate my research within a vast and meaningful body of sociological work on inequalities within education and broader society highlighting the strengths as well as the absences that this research seeks to address and the contributions it hopes to make in building upon this area of study. In the previous chapter I provided an overview of Bourdieu's conceptual apparatus and the first section in this chapter will provide an overview of Bourdieu's work specifically relating to HE. The second section will focus on the theme of choice and value in relation to HE. There is much literature regarding processes of choice and negotiations of value with regard to accessing HE (Archer *et al*, 2003; Reay *et al,* 2001; Reay, 2005; Woodin & Burke, 2007; *inter alia*), which challenge government educational policy discourse and raise important issues about the different structural restraints some students face. How this then impacts beyond access is very much the concern of this research. The next section will then look at work emerging about the actual experience of HE and specifically notions of fitting in and a sense of being 'in place'. Whilst I maintain that research on student spaces is a relatively under researched area, other research on space and place helpfully draws attention to issues to be considered in the context of this study, particularly as they relate to issues of identity. The section that follows involves a detailed examination of western notions of identity before going on to provide an account of some of the recent work on student identities in HE. This will then lead on to a discussion around identity and embodiment; an important theme in this thesis. Overall, the aim of this chapter is to provide an account of the literatures that have both informed the direction of this research and provided ways of understanding the data collected.

3.2   *Bourdieu and Higher Education*

Bourdieu's extensive collection of works has been incredibly influential in the study of class and education. Whilst his work on higher education has obvious significance for this research, his major contributions lie in the attentions to the

everyday and the mechanisms by which class inequalities perpetuate both within and alongside the education system. One of the key achievements of his work, particularly in *Distinction…* (1984) was the conceptualisation of class as dynamic and relational, operating in the everyday and mediated via distinctions of taste. Such insights have provided promising terrain for contemporary class theorists working to understand the operation of class identities and examples of these works will feature predominantly in this chapter and beyond as they interweave and connect to issues of identity in higher education.

Bourdieu's own array of works as well as those utilising his concepts in sociological studies of education and matters relating to it have argued that the middle-classes are more equipped for educational success via socialisation and stocks of cultural capital and linguistic capital. These studies emphasise the differences in stocks of capital and in terms of learning (see – Bourdieu, 1977; 1988; 1993; 1996; Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977; Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992; Devine, 2004; Power *et al.*, 2003; Reay, 1998; 2005; Vincent & Ball, 2007). This study contributes to this body of work and whilst the focus is not on learning differences and degree success in that sense, the experiential differences and the logic of class operating within these everyday experiences highlights further ways in which class inequality is perpetuated in the field.

In Bourdieu's work with Passeron (1977; 1979) he shows how class impacts on higher education. In these works they address why individuals from middle-class backgrounds are more likely than those from working-class backgrounds to enter university. They argue that middle-class individuals are socialised and brought up with access to the resources and practices similar to that of the field of (higher) education, making their relation to HE one of ease whereupon they encounter university as a 'fish in water'. They are more likely to have family who have been to university and they have an affinity or a 'feel for the game' that conversely their working-class counterparts do not. Such is the result of different socialisation and opportunities to accrue particular resources. Working class individuals (or 'non-traditional' students), according to Bourdieu, self-regulate themselves out of the university system seeing it as 'not for the likes of me'. That is not to say that all working-class people self-exclude from university; there are some 'lucky survivors' (Bourdieu, 1988) who achieve student status despite coming from backgrounds/categories where this is 'improbable'. These kinds of students 'from the disadvantaged strata differ

profoundly...from the other individuals in their category' (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1979: 26); these 'non-traditional' students are 'the least disadvantaged of the most disadvantaged'.   Bourdieu and Passeron's studies were based on the French HE system and its 'grandes écoles', which of course differs profoundly from the English system that has been outlined in the previous chapter. Nonetheless, the peculiarity they draw attention to, of working-class students in HE differing from their more 'traditional' or middle-class counterparts presents a notion worth exploring further in the context of English HE with the recent push to 'include' more working-class students. How working-class students may differ from other students is very much the concern of this research and how differences are felt or experienced are issues of (class) identity. Bourdieu's concept of habitus is central here. Recent research making use of and developing Bourdieu's concept in studies of identities and education will be attended to shortly.

Bourdieu's notion of 'hysteresis' is also useful in the context of the changes undergone in the education system. Hysteresis' is the term Bourdieu used to describe a situation of disruption between the habitus and field and therefore represents a crisis whereby dramatic change in the field requires the habitus to respond and adapt, such are their mutually generative relationships (Bourdieu, 1977; 1996). Simply put, '[a]s objective structures change, new habituses arise to fit in with the emergent reality' (King, 2002: 428). Drawing on the term 'hysteresis' as a thinking tool is useful according to Hardy (2008: 148) as it 'provides specific links between the objective nature of systematic change (*field* transformation) and the subjective character of individual response to that change (altered *habitus*)' (original emphasis). In *Homo Academicus* (1996) Bourdieu writes of the changes in HE system in 1960s causing a 'hysterisis effect', which occurs 'when the habitus lags behind the objective material conditions which gave rise to it and with which the habitus has to catch up' (King, 2002: 427). Academics were met with the demand to adapt anachronistic habituses to respond to the new realities of HE caused by structural change of the HE system (Bourdieu, 1996). Whilst Bourdieu's work focussed on the response of academics to the changing nature of the HE system, this research is concerned to explore the tactics students use in response to the changing nature of the HE system. Positions of privileged 'habitus' – that is the positions from which they are produced generationally - cannot be seen as fixed; changes in

society and the competition prevalent in employment and the market place alter the idea of fixity and 'actualisation' can be seen as necessary:

> The diversity of conditions, the corresponding diversity of habitus and the multiplicity of intra- and intergenerational movements of ascent or decline mean that habitus may, in many cases, be confronted with the processes of actualization different from those in which they were produced.
>
> (Bourdieu, 2000: 160-1)

Reflecting back on the challenges to policy discourse rhetorically constructed around the terms of institutional and student diversity, it was highlighted that the number of universities had grown and thousands more students are attending university. Not only are institutional types made more distinct (and stratified), many more students are graduating with qualifications, thus the relative value of obtaining a degree between the old elite system and the new mass system effectively changed. The prestige once accorded to this educational capital, in its mass appropriation decreases in value and therefore the privilege it once bestowed is destabilised. Thus, students from more privileged backgrounds must find ways to adapt and respond to such change in order to maintain and claim their privilege/advantage.

Bourdieu saw the educational system as perpetuating inequality. His critical focus on the French schooling system was one that challenged the notion of meritocracy, instead highlighting that the students most successful in the system were those that were already socially and economically advantaged. His work specifically on higher education (1996, 1998b) extends such a view and focuses on elites whose entry into elite universities is made possible via the influence of a 'classical' school education and a highly educated family. These elite universities then condition these individuals for dominant positions in society such as government for example; the elite universities imbue their students with the necessary cultural capital for such positions. This demonstrates Bourdieu's notion of the interconnectedness of fields whereby the structures of the fields of the family and education then relate to the economic field. Elite positions transcend and successfully navigate each of these fields. Access to university and the notion of 'choice' involved in educational pathways has been the subject of much contemporary educational research, which challenges constructions of

choice in government discourse. These challenges work to problematise the notion of the 'ideal student' and as such, ideas of student normativity.

3.3   Choosing University; classed pathways into and out of HE

As the previous chapter showed, the role of 'choice' in HE is constructed alongside 'diversity' of students and institutions and is posited as promoting ideas of equity via the market. 'Choice' with regard to HE, includes choice to participate at all, where and what to study. These choices necessarily involve (classed) perceptions of value of HE as well as notions of risk involved (for some more than others). Such notions involve a Bourdieusian sense of the structures of possibility and decisions are impacted by negotiations of whether HE is for 'the likes of me'. Reflecting back on the previous chapter when in the context of HE it was highlighted that WP was strongly premised on the notion of 'inclusion' of 'non-traditional' students; this 'inclusion' was of those previously 'excluded' from participating in university. Inclusion/exclusion to HE is about notions of achievement and what counts as such; equally, it is premised on notions of consumption and social activity, whereby 'buying into' HE and investing in the future is positioned as equally profitable and attainable to all students. Alongside the notion of students as consumers is the idea that people should 'embrace their individualised citizenship and become 'responsible risk takers'' (Gillies, 2005: 837; Reay, 2008). There is a moral dimension to such decision-making. The implicit assumption is that those who do not 'choose' to participate are irresponsible citizens making bad choices (Reay, 2008). Again, here, as mentioned in brief in the previous chapter, WP rhetoric is saturated with the notions of 'choice' and 'diversity'; problematic in their tendencies to overlook and negate class inequalities, whilst simultaneously imbuing particular class notions and practices.

I argued in the previous chapter that the HE system and the discourses and rhetoric surrounding it are inherently classed whilst refusing to fully recognise the impact of class in the everyday lives and decisions or 'choice' that its students undertake. As Skeggs (2004b: 139) notes, 'Goldthorpe (1996) maintains that the rational capacity for making choices is a marker of class, in which the middle-class utilize their choices most effectively, assuming that the working-class have choices that they utilize less adequately'. Such a view on choice ignores the material, social and cultural bases, upon which, decisions are

made and implies working-class choices are relatively irrational and by contrast lacking. Research into working-class choices calls for recognition of the notions of 'risk' into university participation (Archer & Hutchings, 2000; Brine & Waller, 2004; Reay *et al*, 2005; Clayton *et al.*, 2009 *inter alia*).

Appreciation of the risks involved for differently classed students is crucial according to Archer and Hutchings (2000) who research the choice process of working-class students and who they say 'cannot make choices regarding participation in the same way as relatively 'protected' middle class students' (2000: 569). Their working-class participants constructed their ability to participate on notions of economic and social risks, which linked to the notion of 'value' based around costs and benefits (2000: 569). This challenges the ideals behind HE choice as a meritocratic issue of ability to participate (i.e. gaining formal entrance qualifications), as a negotiation of citizenship and consumerism. The findings from Reay *et al's* (2005) study on HE choice further supports Archer and Hutchings' (2000) findings. They also draw attention to the notion of risk that underpinned the decision making of differently classed students whereupon they note, 'the middle class students were more tempered in their expression of emotions and...this is because there was less at risk for them in the choice process (2005: 921). A significant contribution this study makes here is to how we can conceptualise risks and the emotional dimension as part of situated decision-making. Emotions are powerful aspects of 'choice'; Reay *et al* (2005:923) name fear, anxiety and also shame and 'fear of shame' which 'haunt working-class relationships to education'[xii]. With a historical tendency for working-class people to 'self-exclude' from university as Bourdieu and Passeron (1979) assert, such feelings are perhaps tempered by a generational lack of experience of HE. Reay *et al's* (2005: 922) study supports this as they found that research participants 'from established middle-class backgrounds, where there is a history of university attendance, far more often have a coherent story to tell about university choice.' In a Bourdieusian sense, these middle-class students are able to draw on their social and cultural capital i.e. their 'network of 'contacts'' (Moi,1991: 1038) and cultural knowledge of HE drawn from their family. The cultural capital of middle-class parents in understanding the education system is inculcated in the 'choice' process of where to send their children (Reay, 1996). Although Reay's research is with school choice, others show how parental influence is involved with HE decisions (Reay *et al,* 2005;

Pugsley, 1998). Pugsley (1998), for example, argues that middle-class parents 'decoded the rhetoric of equality' (1998: 11) in educational discourse and guided their children to better universities.

The decision to participate is one element in the choice process, however what to study and where to study is also involved. One of the elements of 'risk' one may consider is the type of course versus outcomes from studying in HE (Reay *et* al., 2005). Reasons for attending university in the first place as well as where to study go hand in hand with this. Research by Bowl (2002) and Archer *et al* (2003) suggests that this is indeed often the case, with 'non-traditional' students often opting for the 'safer' (in terms of more definite outcome paths or 'exchange capital') prospects attached with studying a vocational course[xiii]. It is also suggested that working-class students opt for post-1992 universities because they offer more vocational courses (Smith & Bocock, 1999). However, in addition to these findings and significantly, studies such as Archer and Leathwood's (2003: 178) show that 'non-traditional' students in their research tended to opt for (local) post-1992 universities on the basis of desire to 'fit in' and 'belong or at least, not stand out'. Institutions along with courses and modes of study with the non-traditional students in this study were part of the subversion tactics for the prospect of damaging or changing identities as a result of HE participation (Archer & Leathwood, 2003: 178). Clayton *et al* (2009: 157-8) further report that working-class students tend to opt for *local* post-1992 universities (Ball *et al,*2000; Reay *et al*, 2001; MORI 2004), due to the relatively low entry requirements, where they perceive more people 'like them' and 'reducing the financial implications of moving away and providing a culturally and geographically familiar learning environment'. This idea of 'fitting in' or 'standing out' and changes to identity or identities in transition via HE is central to the concerns of this research and will be attended to in more detail in the next section. What these findings emphasise however, are the very personal and emotional processes involved in (potential) students' decision-making. Furthermore, whilst different social/cultural/material constraints 'limit spaces of choice' (Reay *et al,* 2001a), there are arguably other potential restrictions that serve to disadvantage 'non-traditional' students.

The universities included in this research are one example of many instances of two different types of institution (post- and pre-1992/ 'old' and 'new') in close proximity occurring in England; for example, Manchester, Newcastle

upon Tyne, Sheffield, Birmingham, Bristol and Leeds are examples of cities with this feature. Power *et al.* (2003) and research by the Sutton Trust (2000) demarcate institutional type as attracting differently classed students, with post-1992 institutions attracting more 'non-traditional' (working class, minority ethnic, mature) students than pre-1992 universities which attract more middle class students and which tend towards more elitism (Crozier *et al*, 2008; Power, *et al*, 2003; Sutton Trust, 2000).

Even when all of the constraints on choice are taken out of the equation, there is much to suggest that even if young people from working-class or 'non-traditional' backgrounds *do* apply for better institutions, they face disadvantages in the application/entry process. Featherstone's (2011) study represents one of the most recent challenges to the admissions system and looks specifically at entry into elite institutions. She states, 'the degree to which elite universities engage with widening participation is seen to have significance not just for the higher education sector but for society as a whole' (2011: 5). Students from advantaged backgrounds are over-represented in the more prestigious institutions (Boliver, 2006; Sutton Trust, 2007; Vignoles & Crawford, 2009) and such institutions confer further advantage on their students in terms of success in the labour market (Sutton Trust, 2005a; Sutton Trust, 2006; Milburn, 2009; Sutton Trust, 2010). Therefore the inequity in terms of representation from 'non-traditional' students in such prestigious universities is an important consideration in terms of the success of WP policies and broader society. Attaining the necessary entry qualifications is still regarded as the primary factor in accessing HE (Galindo-Rueda *et al,* 2004; Vignoles & Crawford, 2009); and access to prestigious institutions is well regarded as an application rather than a selection matter (Sutton Trust, 2004, Sutton Trust, 2005b; Vignoles & Crawford, 2009; Sutton Trust & BIS, 2009). However, whilst Bekhradnia (2003) found that students from more privileged backgrounds are more likely to obtain higher grades in post-compulsory education (pre-university), Boliver's (2006) and Zimdars *et al's* (2009) studies found that unequal access to Russell Group universities according to social class and ethnicity was present even after controlling for attainment. Although the admissions process is based on prior educational achievement, other factors are also taken into consideration such as personal statements and performance in interviews. The Schwartz Report (DfES, 2004) advocates a 'holistic process' for treating university applications whereby

achievements, talent and potential are measured in relation to background and context. The same report also states that 'a legitimate aim for universities and colleges [is] to recruit the best possible students regardless of background' (DfES, 2004: 6). Featherstone here points to a 'significant linguistic ambiguity…which leaves the recommendations open to interpretation' (2011: 6-7). She goes on to propose that the admissions processes in elite institutions, particularly the use of contextual information about the candidate's personal background, cannot, in reality, produce fair and consistent outcomes for candidates as they are based on individuals making individual judgements about individual applicants (Featherstone, 2011: 17). Individual chances of success are dependent on the powerful institutional gatekeepers (Zimdars, 2010: 308); the primacy of academic judgements remains (Featherstone, 2011: 17).

The concept of individual choice, then, is problematised in terms of life circumstances. Reay (2004a: 435) envisages the habitus as a

> …deep, interior, epicentre containing many matrices. These matrices demarcate the extent of choices available to any one individual. Choices are bounded by the framework of opportunities and constraints the person finds himself/herself in, her external circumstances.

Yet despite this, the assumption is that by 'adopting a rational economic approach, individuals should decide to "invest" in HE because of the high "returns"' (Greenbank. 2007: 368 – drawing on Greenaway & Hayes, 2000). The notion of 'high returns' is also inherently problematic; graduate returns are uneven and have been shown to differ according to social class, gender and ethnicity (Moreau & Leathwood, 2006; Brown, 2003a; Brown *et al.*, 2002;). Bourdieu and Boltanski (1979) also highlight this factor, noting the salary differences between people who have equal cultural/educational capital (qualifications) vary on the basis of economic and social capitals; those with higher economic and social capitals prior to employment go on to earn more than those who had lower levels pre-employment. However the type and value of capitals needed to succeed may not always be straight-forwardly the case anymore in light of the recent expansion of the HE system. The notion of 'hysteresis' helps to conceptualise why the actualisation of privileged habituses is not straight-forward and social actors therefore must adapt to the field

transformations. This is acknowledged as a 'crisis' of 'legitimation' whereupon middle-classes are theorised as employing strategies to maintain their social position and that of their children, particularly in terms of education (Reay, 2004b). This surely involves getting in to valued HE institutions as well as beyond, in the labour market. Competition for entry into more prestigious i.e. elite institutions and courses of study has been strengthened (Heath, 2007; Forsyth & Furlong, 2000; Zimbars *et al.*, 2009; Featherstone, 2011) and prior levels of capitals have been included as differentiators in entry to these institutions.

The changing culture of 'mass' HE education, and middle-class anxieties to legitimate, maintain and reproduce social privilege, have spurred the notion that new tactics in addition to education are needed and are employed, responding to market requirements for experience, for example the 'gap year' (Heath, 2007). According to Heath (2007: 91) the gap year has recently grown in popularity and 'coincides with the rapid expansion of higher education'. She draws attention to research highlighting the importance of 'successful mobilization of various forms of economic, social and cultural resources in order to gain distinction' (see: Ball *et al.*, 2002; Power *et al.*, 2003; Brown & Hesketh, 2004; Brooks, 2005; Reay *et al.*, 2005). Heath employs Brown *et al*'s (2002) study in her analysis, the main points of which also throw up important considerations for this thesis. Central to their analysis is 'how 'the self' is packaged by labour market entrants, and how prospective employers decode these personal qualities as indicators of productive potential' (Brown *et al.*, 2002: 24). They assert that the value of educational credentials declines in light of mass expansion, and personal qualities are therefore 'emphasised in an attempt to legitimate the reproduction of inequalities' (Brown *et al.*, 2002, 19). According to them, the 'personality package' is part of the 'economy of experience' which is valued more than 'the denomination of academic currency' alone (Brown *et al.*, 2002: 27).

The packaging and promotion of the self is something students have to 'engage in if they are to secure elite opportunities, whether those opportunities be specific degree programmes or graduate career openings' (Leath, 2007: 92; Brown *et al.*, 2002). The term 'economy of experience' is one that will prove central in this research. Investigating the different motives and rationales students provide for entering higher education and the prior experiences they

bring with them are important; their expectations and sense of possibilities as well any sense of entitlement are likely to at least in part, structure their resultant experiences and accumulation of capitals. The work featured above raises the issue that there are other gains to be had aside from educational qualifications and how these are conceptualised and operate/are accrued (if at all) by differently classed students via the experience of HE is an important consideration in this research. If, as the research above seems to suggest, middle classes can get further on 'less educational capital, simply because they have access to large amounts of other capital' and students from 'disadvantaged groups require all the educational capital they can get if they are to advance in society' (Moi, 1991: 1024), how does HE experience impact on the 'economy of experience'? This is just one of the questions this research seeks to address. Whilst this section has focussed on the choice process, it poses that initial 'choice' is just the first step in the process of participation. It raises the issue of how class impacts on and operates in the lives of HE students to those who were previously 'excluded'; as 'outsiders' within/on the inside (Williams & Abson, 2001; Redmond, 2006; Taylor & Scurry, 2011), and equally, for those who are considered the 'norm'.

3.4   Student experiences; space and place

In this section, attention is focussed on research that looks at elements of what happens beyond the initial choices that are made and what happens after students enter HE. Research is now rapidly emerging regarding HE participation 'beyond the gate' (Ingram, 2011), where university and the spaces of interaction it involves are sites in which identities are performed, developed and/or challenged.   Aside from learning, common elements of student experiences include living arrangements and participation in university social life (for example, clubs and societies, student 'nights' and nights out with other students). As was highlighted in the previous section on choice however, there are the differences perceived between different types of institution. As Archer (2003: 14) argues, 'any analysis of class inequalities in relation to higher education must take into account not only people's shifting class identities but also the role of the educational institution itself in creating and perpetuating class inequalities'.

Humphrey's (2006) study, for example, looks at the differences between Newcastle University and the University of Northumbria at Newcastle. This

quantitative piece of work establishes class differences between the institutions via measures such as prior schooling (with attendance at independent fee-paying schools denoting more privileged students) and also considers locality/living arrangements as indicators of class differentiation on the basis that:

> The cultural tradition, in England at least, of university undergraduates travelling away from their homes and out of their regions is still strong among more privileged families, who can afford to pay for private schooling and also send their sons and daughters away to live in another part of the country while they pass through their education.
>
> (Humphrey, 2006: 279)

As such, Humphrey identifies several bases on which experiences of HE may vary for different students; including his focus on the differences between the two institutions and its students in terms of the take-up of part-time paid employment. From his questionnaire study and use of enrolment statistics, he identified that Newcastle attracted more students from fee-paying schools (32%)[xiv] and more students who were from outside the region (74%) with only 13% of its students living in the parental home whilst studying. This was compared to Northumbria, which attracted more students from the region (46%) and more of its students living with their parents whilst studying (26%). Similar differences in the make-up of 'old' and 'new' institutions situated in close proximity to each other, such is the case with Newcastle and Northumbria here, are likely to be the case elsewhere. However, what is worthy of note certainly in discussions of the class make-up of different institutions (in proximity) is the potential for medical and dental schools at institutions like Newcastle for example, to inevitably skew the percentages of students from fee-paying schools that Humphrey notes. Nonetheless these differences represent an important starting point from which this research is premised; the study of class in different 'types' of institution in close proximity allows exploration of the potential differences in the operation of class in each institution. What is further interesting are the interactions that potentially occur in and between these institutions and thus how experience of university is further structured/effected by the differing make-ups of these institutions.

In terms of addressing the need to recognise the disadvantages students face whilst in university and thinking through the 'economy of experience',

Humphrey's (2006) study helps to uncover some pertinent issues. His focus on part-time work during term-time with students in Newcastle and Northumbria universities showed a higher percentage of students at Northumbria working during term-time. Taking on board his assertions of class differences in the students attending these different institutions, one might go further to question whether the life circumstances requiring part-time work during term time may be a factor in determining the experience one has of HE. Reay *et al* (2001) found that more working-class students work part-time alongside their studies to support themselves than middle-class students do, which therefore suggests that class position affects the experience of HE. Certainly as Humphrey suggests, 'experiencing university becomes even more dependent on social class background' (2006: 284). Furthermore, the class dimension he draws attention to in terms of economic status and the 'choice' to live away from home and/or out of the region suggests that experiencing university will differ according to living situations. However helpful the quantitative results are here to setting the scene of differences in university institutions, the data cannot give us any sense of the lived experience or the social meanings involved in the 'choices' made to study at particular institutions. Enrolment of and success/failure rates will clearly be important to government policy as a simple means of measuring the success of WP initiatives. Although studies such as Humphrey's can 'suggest' factors relating to experience, actually studying the experience of students in the current climate require methodologies altogether different from quantitative survey research. Further qualitative research is needed to address this and my research seeks to contribute to answering such need.

A recent, extensive, qualitative study conducted across different types of institutions with working-class students was carried out by Reay, Clayton and Crozier (see Crozier *et al.*, 2008; Reay *et* al., 2009; Reay *et al.*, 2010; Clayton *et al*, 2009) that involve a combination of interests in student life and student identities similar to those of this research. The authors highlight the 'influence of widely differing academic places and spaces on student identities' and find a 'range of experiences of fitting in and standing out in higher education' (Reay *et al.*, 2010: 107) across the different institutions they research. This study complements and builds on their research by recognising that participation in student life goes beyond the academic involvement and the need to attend to the different spaces and places of student life is central. The social involvement and

the areas in which it is played out are crucial to understanding how identities operate in the lives of those participating in HE; what is made normative and who and what stands outside of that is central.

The differences in experience of HE via the 'choice' to live away from home and/or out of the region are picked up by recent studies by Clayton *et al* (2009) and Crozier *et al* (2008). Applying for university involves for many, the choice of whether to live in student halls and different price/facilities packages therefore also offer potentially classed spaces to research and importantly, these sites will be key for many, in terms making friends, socialising and solidifying a collective sense of identity (Clayton *et* al., 2009; Crozier *et al.*, 2008). Universities often offer a range of halls of residences (Halls) with different facilities and locations, which often impact on rental costs. Making the decision about which Halls to apply to then, involves weighing up needs and costs and as such may offer potentially classed spaces. It begs the question of how affordability in financial terms impacts on choices of accommodation. Do limitations in economic capital limit spaces of choice in accommodation and what are the social and cultural effects of these (potentially limited) choices? Does financial affordability then perhaps serve to class/segregate these different spaces? How does a 'mix' of students from different/similar backgrounds impact on students' sense of identity and their early experiences of HE? Early experiences of HE in Halls and what they involve will be attended to in this study.

Similarly, the 'student' residential areas also offer potentially fruitful sites for exploring the ways in which classed identities operate socially. Hubbard highlights 'Studentification' as a 'recognised phenomenon in many British cities….[as] the process by which specific neighbourhoods become dominated by student residential occupation' (2008: 323); an 'historically constituted relationship between 'town and gown' (2008: 328). He notes Smith's (2002) coinage of the term that was aimed at capturing the 'contradictory social, cultural, economic and physical changes resulting from an influx of students within privately-rented accommodation in particular neighbourhoods' (Smith, 2002: 6). However, Hubbard reports that the term 'is generally used pejoratively, being woven into a media narrative in which students are deemed responsible for neighbourhood decline' (2008: 323). Hubbard (2008: 324), in a more positive sense, suggests that the phenomenon of Studentification 'produces distinctive urban landscapes whose social and cultural dimensions demand to be explored'

and that part of this exploration look at 'how particular student spaces emerge from specific networks'. Although Hubbard's (2008; 2009) research focuses on issues of gentrification and tensions regarding community cohesiveness and thus is somewhat different to this research in many ways, it does open up many questions for further exploration within the context of this research. For example, whilst the idea that 'studentification' is at odds with community cohesion in terms of the broader local community, the idea of community cohesion *within* the student community via identification and belonging with particular spaces and places is highly interesting. How do students' experiences relate to these spaces of 'studentification'? How do different identities operate in particular spaces of 'studentification'? Is 'inclusion' in these spaces of 'studentification' straight forward for all students? Savage (2008: 152) talks about the 'power of an alternative orientation to place, especially from the well-educated and affluent middle-classes', that stands in contradistinction to discourses of the loss of community in late-modern societies. This 'alternative orientation to place' is termed as 'elective belonging' (Savage *et al.*, 2005), which he posits as having more contemporary significance – 'at least for the more privileged' (Savage, 2008: 152). He notes that from a 'Mass-Observation' study in 1995, their correspondents provide 'evocative accounts of how the location of their home is the central feature of their life and vital to their sense of personal identity' (2008: 152). Although the accommodation situations for many students are temporary whilst they are studying and often held under 12-month leases, these places of transient habitation, of 'studentification', may involve instances of 'elective belonging' and be highly significant to sense of identity, particularly 'student' identity.

Taylor (2004: 1.1) argues that 'space is constitutive of identity in terms of where it places people, both materially and emotionally'. Thrift (1997: 160) highlights that places 'form an important source of meaning for individuals which they can rely upon to tell stories and thereby come to understands themselves and their place within wider society'. Taylor uses this to reflect that 'little consideration has been given to the possible challenges, limitations or negotiations in identifying with stigmatised spaces or 'communities' (2004: 1.4). Equally, little consideration has been given to the negotiations in identifying (or perhaps disidentifying) with spaces of 'studentification' and the impact of such places and spaces on (normative) student identities and feelings of belonging

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and notions of 'inclusion' in the student community. Southerton's (2002) ideas on place in the constructions of class identities and the boundary work of constructing notions of 'us' and 'them' suggests student residential areas may well play a part in the operation of (classed) student identities. Thus, exploring the 'place' of residential spaces in students' lives and experiences would prove fruitful in research on class identities in HE. The concept of 'boundaries', according to Lamont & Molnár (2002: 167) can be used to focus on the 'relationship between social and symbolic boundaries, cultural mechanisms for the production of boundaries, difference and hybridity, and cultural membership and group classifications'. Pachucki *et al* (2007: 331) further note that 'recent scholarship on symbolic boundaries and how these interact with social boundaries…highlight key mechanisms…[addressing] the strategic management of collective identities, cultural classification, the construction of authenticity, [and] moral boundary maintenance'. The boundary work that the students engage in with regards to notions of space and place therefore open up interesting avenues for exploration into the operation of classed identities in HE.

Students navigate several different types of spaces and places within their time in HE. Nightlife spaces, for example, are likely to be key in many student experiences. These may present spaces for student cultures and segregation according to lifestyle factors (or what could be seen as classed divisions), which Hollands' work outlines (1995; 2002; Hollands & Chatterton, 2002). For example, he argues, there exist 'nightlife provision that exploits existing cleavages in the youth population, and segregates young adults into particular spaces and places' (Hollands, 2002: 153). Analyses of these spaces he argues, should 'address questions of inequality, segmentation and spatial segregation amongst differing consumption groups' (2002: 153). Attention therefore needs to be paid to the different cultural spaces in which student identities are operationalised and how this may affect their experience of HE. Additionally, of course, there are the social aspects of university life on campus to consider: participation in university sports and societies provide more outlets for socialisation, and which may also uncover a classed sense of membership and/ or belonging from induction onwards.

Much research suggests that 'non-traditional' students experience higher education as a 'largely marginalizing and fragmentary experience' (Redmond, 2006: 125; Ball *et al*, 2002; Brine & Waller, 2004; Britton & Baxter, 1999; 2001;

West, 1996). Reay *et al* (2001) found that working-class students tend to opt for the 'new' post-1992 type of institution specifically for the necessity to 'fit in'. This concept of fitting in, of belonging, of the opportunity to ''be myself', feel valued and generate worth within the system' (Archer *et* al, 2007: 234) relates specifically to the sense of ones self and relationships to perceived 'others', and places identity and emotions as central to understanding the many students undergo when entering and progressing through HE. The degree to which these students fit in and socialise with other students would, in this sense, affect student identities in terms of belonging to the collective; the degree to which other students are 'people like me' would impact here. Furthermore, a sense of change or moving away from existing peer groups is likely to be an emotional process, however this will be attended to in more detail in the following section. One instance of these kinds of transitions are with regard to making friends and socialising with other students in these differently classed institutions which can result in what Baxter and Britton (2001) term as a compartmentalisation of students' social lives. In the case of non-traditional students, as with Clayton *et al*'s (2009: 168) research, they detail that 'multiple simultaneous demands result in the construction of boundaries between established social lives at home and the often more limited social relationships enacted within the spaces of university'. Redmond (2006: 125) reports that the participants in his study 'lived two parallel lives: one in college, one at home'. Further,

> …participation in non-academic aspects of college-life was always minimal. Few
> participated in extracurricular activities or sought to socialise with other students
> beyond their own intensely homogenised circles. Not only did this isolate them as a
> group, to some extent it served to reinforce their own perceptions of not being
> 'proper students'…

That participation in non-academic aspects of student life was minimal was a point highlighted by Crozier (2008: 174), who stated that the more that students withdraw from the field at the outset, 'either intentionally or not, the less access they will have to the means (habitus and cultural capital), or opportunity to acquire it, to compete for scarce resources'. Participation in HE very much relates to whether people claim the identity 'student'. As Williams and Abson (2001: 13) note, 'the label 'student' is itself a differentiator which is not only

intelligible (has particular meanings) for others, but forms part of an individual's sense of her/himself'; Reay *et al.*, (2010: 107) note that some students 'only partially absorb a sense of themselves as students'. Therefore we need to ask what are the key signifiers of 'studenthood' and what the differences between students are (Williams and Abson, 2001: 107). Furthermore, we need to uncover the 'range of creative adaptations and multi-faceted responses' (Reay *et* al., 2009: 1103) to claiming studenthood; what is made normative and what stands out. This is one of the main aims of this research.

3.5 *Student Identity and identity/boundary work*

Qualitative sociological research is continuing to emerge in response to the need to understand social identities and inequalities within the field of education. Reay (2005: 922) states that the 'class culture of the old universities' can be problematic 'for working class students' in that 'powerful negative emotions [can be] evoked by confronting a strange and alien environment. Their essentially 'outsider status' contributes to feelings of not 'fitting in' (Ainley, 1992; Ainley *et al.*, 2002; Lynch and O' Riordan, 1998; Skeggs, 1997a). Reay *et al* (2001) found that working-class students tend to opt for the 'new' post-1992 type of institution specifically for the necessity to 'fit in'. This concept of fitting in, of belonging, of the opportunity to ''be myself', feel valued and generate worth within the system' (Archer *et* al, 2007: 234) relates specifically to the sense of one's self and relationships to perceived 'others', and places identity and emotions as central to understanding the transitions many students undergo when entering and progressing through HE. As discussed in brief in the previous chapter, the model of social mobility surrounding HE involves moving away from working-classness and becoming more middle-class; as a shift in identity (Reay, 1997). There is the assumption that students will move easily and readily between classes (Saunders, 1995). Lucey *et al* (2003: 283) note that:

> Discourses of social mobility and social capital tend to hold denials of the losses that are fundamental to and unavoidable in change, even when those changes are desired; of the enormous amount of psychological work involved in transformation; and of the costs of that work.

Lucey *et al* (2003) look at the identities of educationally successful (female) working-class students, without the use of Bourdieusian theories. They examine and use the concept of 'hybridity' to understand the 'shifts in the constitution of contemporary feminine subjectivities' and noting that 'in this psychic economy there are no easy hybrids' (Lucey *et al*, 2003: 285). Originally developed to 'understand new patterns of ethnic identity in a 'post-colonial' context of globalisation' (Lucey *et al.*, 2003: 286; reference to Bhabba, 1984, 1990, 1996; Gilroy, 1993), hybridity is used by Lucey *et al* (2003) to think through the notion of 'doubleness' or 'border existences' of working-class girls' identities. They discuss the 'losses as well as the gains involved in educational success and upward social mobility' and interestingly the requirement for 'an internal and external 'makeover' (Lucey *et al*, 2003: 285). The notion of an 'external makeover' is fascinating and surely relates to issues of embodiment that will be discussed shortly. The internal 'makeover', however, refers to what is at stake in the transitions working-class girls make into HE which involve 'the loss of identity, control, status (within the family perhaps), the community, belonging, safety' (Lucey *et al.,* 2003: 295). Of the working-class girls they note there are 'no structural reasons why they should succeed and therefore they have to rely on their own inner resources… they are also moving out of their class sphere, beyond the wildest dreams of anyone in their families, into clean, professional, interesting jobs' (Lucey *et al.*, 2003: 297). They compare this to middle-class girls' educational pathways which 'were so smooth and similar it was almost as if they were on educational 'conveyor belts' (Lucey *et al.*, 2003: 289).

Recent educational research makes use of Bourdieu's conceptual apparatus and brings fresh empirical evidence to work with and beyond Bourdieu's ideas such as Ingram's (2011) focus on young, educationally successful working-class, male identities, utilises the concept of habitus to think through the uneasy and often conflictual identity relations. According to Bourdieu, 'where dispositions encounter conditions (including fields) different from those in which they were constructed and assembled, there is a "dialectical confrontation" between habitus as structured structure, and objective structures' (2002: 31). The result is the creation of 'structural "double binds"' (Bourdieu, 2000: 161). Whilst the habitus may then adapt to accommodate the structures of the new field it encounters, it may equally be 'constrained by the forces of the field of origin' (Ingram, 2011: 290). The result of this process may thus lead to

an 'internalization of conflicting dispositions' as was the case in Ingram's young, male working-class research participants. She suggests three typologies for the effects of these 'dialectical confrontations' including ''habitus tug', 'destabilized habitus' and 'disjunctive habitus'' which are compatible with Bourdieu's theory of habitus, 'which stresses a constant interaction between habitus and field, resulting in habitus fluidity' (Ingram, 2011: 300).

Whilst Ingram's research is carried out with boys attending grammar schools, her rationale for conducting research into educationally successful working-classes is well grounded. She places her study within an array of work around working-class educational success via experiences of working-class academics (Hey, 2006; Mohoney and Zmroczek, 1997; Nainby and Pea, 2003; *inter alia*), whereupon accounts of negotiating identities from the perspective working-class boys is a neglected area of research' (Ingram, 2011: 288). Likewise there is a need to enrich this area of study further by seeking accounts of negotiating identities from the perspective of higher education students. These students are all, by way of their entry into this level of education, academically successful. However, as Bourdieu says, some are 'lucky survivors' (Bourdieu, 1988); 'the least disadvantaged of the most disadvantaged' and thus the field of origin and the (sub)field of HE may encounter conflict and produce a 'dialectical confrontation' (Bourdieu, 2002; Ingram, 2011). In addition, and importantly, focussing solely on the accounts of working-class students and their ongoing identity work, although important, neglects a significant proportion of other students whose identity work may be just as telling about the ways in which class processes operate within HE. So, whilst middle-class students may not encounter such disjuncture as working-class students exploring the mechanisms by which they assert their normativity is crucial. Savage (2005: 530) argues that 'the unacknowledged normality of the middle-class needs to be carefully unpicked and exposed.' The *ways* in which their habitus and exchange of capitals works within the (sub)field of HE needs to be carefully unpicked and exposed so as to recognise the doxa constructed via 'normative and performative statements (Deer, 2008). Only then can one appreciate how different students relate to student identity and the ways it is normatively constructed.

In *Strangers in Paradise…* Reay *et al* (2009) focus specifically on nine of their working-class participants attending an elite university and argue that 'when

habitus encounters a field with which it is not familiar, resulting disjunctures can generate….disquiet, ambivalence, insecurity and uncertainty (Reay, 2005)' (2009: 1105). Whilst Reay *et al*'s (2009: 1105) sample provided accounts of such feelings, especially of their first year, where they had 'what appeared to be a 'out-of-habitus'/'out of field'' experience, they also equally displayed 'the ability to successfully move across two very different fields, combining strong connections and loyalties to family and home friends with what are seen to be classically middle-class academic dispositions, a versatility that most had begun to develop in early schooling'. The disjuncture from family and cultural/social backgrounds documented in other studies (Wentworth & Peterson, 2001; Jetten *et al*, 2008) was rarely the case with Reay *et al*'s (2009) study. Further, participants documented experiences of being a 'fish out of water' among their working-class peer group in their schooling experiences so had developed strong learner identities and acute self-conscious reflexivity (Reay *et al*, 2009; McNay, 2008). Their strong learner identities also work as assets for them in coping with their new environment whereupon it was precisely these aspects of their identities that marked them out as other in their previous educational relationships. The students of Reay *et al's* (2009: 1106) study demonstrated culturally recognised working-class traits to cope with their situations:

> Resilience and coping with adversity are all qualities that are far more associated with working rather than middle classness but in working-class contexts are taken for granted and often read as stoicism, 'making the best of a bad situation'. However, such qualities of resilience and coping with adversity become productive resources for the working-class students in the middle-class contexts they have moved into – they help in dealing with the strange and unfamiliar.

As much of the literature and indeed the educational discourse problematised in the previous chapter has served to point out, students are anything but an homogenous group. However, Harrop *et al* (2007) start out by outlining that much of the research in HE has tended to treat students as homogenous groups with neglect of their gender differences (2007: 385). Their research seeks to redress this neglect and focuses on gender in the context of approaches to learning and academic performance. They measure the importance differently gendered students place on different aspects of their learning experiences

including relationships to course aims, skill acquisition, course activities, and sources of support. Whilst Harrop *et al* (2007) commendably draw attention to gender as a challenge to the homogeneity of the category 'student', one could just as easily challenge the homogeneity of gender categories and call for consideration of the ways in which class identities impact on gendered preferences or relationships to learning. Out of their sample of Psychology students they noted that the ratio of females to males was 5:1, and thus supposed that the males were making a 'more difficult commitment than the females in… not taking a traditional gender path….[and] it might be reasonably predicted that they would show more enthusiasm for the subject…' (2007: 393). Despite this not being the case in their findings, the connections that they suppose are extremely interesting in the context of students for a 'non-traditional' path suggesting they show more enthusiasm for the endeavour. Such a supposition is worth bearing in mind for the potentially different emphases differently classed and gendered students place on their university courses. Robson *et al* (2004), noted gender differences in social interaction were apparent when they examined the perceptions academic staff had of their students. Social interaction and use of support networks between male and female students differ, with more female students accessing support from faculty, friends and family overall (Drew & Work, 1998; Schuller *et al*, 1999; Heiman & Kariv, 2002). Again, the differentiation when the class position of these students is considered would resist the homogeneity of gender differences. Moreover, the findings from these studies were mostly quantitative in nature and thus, again, cannot tell us much about the experience of class identities and how they are lived.

Looking at both classed and gendered identities in the context of HE, Archer *et al* (2003), suggest that working-class men in higher education more easily identify with their class backgrounds, and are more critical of the middle-class 'field'. Skeggs' (1997b) work with working-class women (albeit it outside of HE), however, proposes they dis-identify from their class of origin and are reluctant to be named or known through class. Inside of HE, however, documenting her own experience of being a working-class woman and being 'classified' in a particular 'upper/middle-class' kind of university, Skeggs (1997a: 130) recounts:

I had been recognized as common, authentic and without much cultural value. For the first time in my life I started to feel insecure….I entered a world where I knew little and felt I could communicate even less. I was delegitimated…I became afraid to speak in case I gave myself (that is my classed self) away. I did not want to be judged and found wanting. Being the object of the judgement of others, whose values are legitimated, is a very uncomfortable position to occupy.

Skeggs here recalls a point in her student career in which someone identified her in a seminar class as working-class; as different to the other students. This clearly had an emotional impact, which no doubt affected the remainder of her student career (and possibly her outstanding contributions to the study of class). That she felt negatively 'judged' by people deemed in a position to do so – those 'whose values are legitimated' – raises interesting considerations about the ways in which students relate to each other in HE. Whilst the majority of studies on identities in HE focus on the pain and disjuncture of working-class students, this research is interested in the maintenance and negotiation of student and all class identities. Relating back to the sociological model of identity discussed earlier in this section, means thinking through the ways that people relate to each other. The mention of 'speak' here is relevant to my research considerations; for example, in thinking through the embodiment of class, of class identities, the way people speak and the accents they speak with may be one such marker of identity important within HE. The final section, then, will concentrate on the theme of identity and embodiment, and propose issues worthy of consideration in the context of this study.

3.6   Identity and embodiment

Embodiment refers to the way in which our identities are literally, inscribed and carried on the body, interpreted through a complex ensemble of continually reconstructed signifiers. Embodiment of identity in HE is not a heavily researched area, however much literature exists which can be usefully employed to think through the ways in which embodied class identities are significant in HE and in this study. Bourdieu's concept of 'habitus' helps to understand what embodiment consists of. He maintains that habitus is 'the social world embodied' (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992b: 127-128); a 'system of dispositions' that includes values, mannerisms, the way we dress, speak, and hold ourselves. The body,

therefore, is a vessel of class manifestation. Via a sociological understanding of identity, then, the way we relate to one another involves relational interpretation of bodily signifiers.

As noted above, Skeggs draws attention to what can be thought of as audible signifiers of class identities via accent, dialect, idiom etc. The way we speak may well have significance in the ways in which class identities are performed and managed within HE. Bourdieu refers to this as linguistic habitus/capital. Whilst linguistic capital is a form of cultural capital, linguistic habitus he asserts, 'is the product of social conditions and is not a simple production of utterances but the production of utterances adapted to a 'situation' or, rather, adapted to a market or field' (2002: 78). In terms of the 'linguistic market', he goes on to say, that there is a 'linguistic market whenever someone produces an utterance for receivers capable of assessing it, evaluating it and setting a price on it' (2002; 79). The idea is, then, that different ways of speaking have different values. This is particularly interesting given the special significance of Received Pronunciation (RP) as institutionalised in education (Honey, 1989; Mugglestone, 1995). The way one speaks and the degree of deviation from RP may thus be one of the ways in which embodied (class) identities are distinguishable.

In addition to audible signifiers of identity, Skeggs also argues that class and gender can be tied up in issues *about* your clothes, and the notions of morality and respectability (2004a; 2005) are tied into your appearance. She states, 'all the moral obsessions historically associated with the working class [are] now contained in one body...a body that signals class through moral euphemism, rarely naming it directly, hence relying on the process of interpretation to do the work of association' (2005: 965). Much literature exists that supports these claims, particularly with regard to the pathologisation of working-class femininities (Lawler, 2005; Tyler, 2006, 2008, 2010) that utilise a Bourdieusian conceptualisation of 'taste' as classed judgements. Skeggs' mention of clothing above however, is particularly interesting when thinking about HE.

In a study about clothing and identity in an educational context, Archer *et al* state, 'urban working-class young people's performance of embodied identities – as enacted through practices of taste and style – are played out in the educational field' (2007: 219). How students perform these practices of display

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are central considerations to my research interests: these 'performances might be understood as agentic practices that aim to generate value and resist derisory discourses that position working-class identities as 'worthless'' (Archer *et al*, 2007: 233). Archer *et al* (2007: 221) consider how the investments young people make in 'classed identities and enactments of 'style', as an additional element within the habitus that (partially) shapes the formation of the habitus and its interactions within the educational field'. Maxwell & Aggerton's (2010) study of privately educated young women also exemplifies participants who link clothing to classed identities. Although both of these studies involve young people of school-age, the points they make about the contributions of particular 'styles' and clothing brands and items to the performances and distinctions of classed identities, indicate this as a significant area of exploration in this thesis. Important questions arise with regard to the practices of taste and style in HE; for example, do the same markers of taste and identity apply during experiences of HE and in what respects? Is there a student 'look'/ 'fashion'? Are identity distinctions made visible within HE experience as is theorised in other parts of social life? Embodiment of class identities in the setting of HE provides fascinating scope for this research, particularly in focussing on the ways in which differently classed students interact, how they feel a sense of fitting in or standing out.

3.7   Summary

The literature has highlighted important themes and issues to be explored and considered in this thesis. Interest in class identities and how they are performed in the everyday of HE involves attending to the ways in which students position themselves relationally against others. Part of the way in which we relate to each other, is through embodied signifiers, which are constructed, reproduced and interpreted by classed actors in the everyday. How this works in the research context at hand therefore, will contribute to a relative absence of research focussing on this theme in HE. Although there is a wealth of literature about the classed choice process of accessing university, this research also takes this as a theme. In conducting research with students who were enrolled in university shortly after the introduction of 'top-up fees', notions of choice and value are worth revisiting. However, what is especially of interest in this study is

exploring how these negotiations of value and choices made, then impact on the different student experiences of university. In terms of student experiences, a further theme of space and place emerges, as interest into the different spaces navigated by students during their time at university are the sites in which interactions occur; feelings of being in (or out) of place, are also central here. What it means to be included and how students negotiate their classed identities and feelings of 'inclusion' in (as argued in the previous chapter) an essentially classed 'playing field' is the key concern of this thesis. This chapter was intended to provide an overview of the empirical and theoretical literature that both shaped this research and which provide useful tools with which to think with, in the analysis of research data. The next chapter will provide an account of how the data was collected and analysed in more detail, as well as providing an account of the research process undertaken in this study.

4. Research Methodology

4.1 Introduction

My research takes place with undergraduate students across two university institution sites in a city in the north of England. The sites are in close proximity of each other and include one pre-1992 (Russell Group) university (referred to as OLD) and one post-1992 university (referred to as NEW). There are several instances of different status universities in close proximity to each other occurring in cities in England; for example Bristol, Manchester, Newcastle, Sheffield, and Leeds are all examples of cities with neighbouring, different status universities. Commentators on the expansion and diversification of HE institutions, such as Brown (2003: 243), warned that the hierarchical tripartite system that was identified in chapter 2, across the UK could be replicated in each city or region. These cities go some way to demonstrating Brown's warning as a reality and provide convenient sites for exploration of student experiences in two different types of institution and the interaction that occurs between the students, within and between the institutions. Furthermore, conducting research across two university sites that have a close geographical relationship yet a differing hierarchical relationship also allows the exploration of the concepts of choice and value of university with the students participating in HE. The central concern of the research is to explore the operation of classed identities in HE and I was interested in speaking to students from both universities, male and female, as well as from a variety of class backgrounds. Obtaining such a sample has its own set of challenges that will be covered shortly. I will begin by discussing the methods used in this study and their rationale, followed by a critical reflection on the fieldwork experiences, successes and limitations. Beyond this, I will detail the epistemological and theoretical perspectives in this research, which is critical in order to present what is taken to be knowledge and who are the 'knowers' in such an endeavour. This entails a critical reflection on the process and analysis of research that lead to knowledge production; this discussion will include problematising notions of experience and reflexivity.

4.2   Research methods

The methods chosen to gather data for the research include semi-structured interviews and focus groups. Each method brings with it the opportunity of collecting different data and thus will be dealt with separately, beginning first with the interview method. Whilst it is true to an extent that methods other than those I have chosen (such as a survey for example) would be able to provide some data relevant to the research topic/question, the detailed perspectives and interpretations of the students, around prominent themes and issues and interactions that occur would be lost. Indeed, these 'interactions are often extremely complex and nuanced and would be difficult to access through other means' (Lawler, 2002: 242). Interviewing is defined by Enosh and Buchbinder (2005: 88) as a 'conversation with a purpose'; the conversation is guided around specific issues and aims to understand the perspectives and interpretations of the interviewee (Enosh & Buchbinder, 2005; Bogdan & Biklen, 1982; Kvale, 1996; Patton, 2002; Taylor & Bogdan, 1984; Warren, 2002). Interviews are used by sociologists to investigate experiences as told from the interviewees' point of view and in their own words (Kvale, 2006: 481). How the research participants' representation of their life situations is then interpreted by the researcher in the analysis will be discussed in more detail later as this is an important part of understanding the uses and limitations of this methodology.

The methodological rationale for semi-structured, open ended interviews is that they allow for a 'rich, deep and textured picture…locally produced in and through the 'simple' method of producing topic-initiating and follow-up questions' (Rapley, 2001: 315). This means that the interviewer imparts a structure to the proceedings, to a certain extent, in designing questions on topics they wish to explore but it is equally the responses of the interviewee that ultimately drive the interview direction. The interview schedule provides a range of topical questions, which act as initial probes and some follow-up questions, which are most likely to occur according to the participants' response. Doing so makes an interview more productive to thoroughly explore all 'fruitful' comments the participant makes (Hoffman, 2007: 330). A degree of flexibility with the interview schedule to ensure the participant is able to discuss aspects of their experience that meaningfully link up for them is very important. However, in addition, it is likely (and indeed, hoped for) that the interview may 'produce insights into topics the researcher never considered asking' and to 'share information that might not

have been directly solicited' (Hoffman, 2007: 343). The value of the interview method for this research then was to enable an informal conversation to take place around a set of topics pertinent to student life. I had to draw up an interview schedule that would enable me to cover all of the topics I needed to in the course of the interview but this was used flexibly so to allow for a conversation to flow between myself and the participant and to allow room for them to introduce topics or issues I had not previously considered.

This style of interviewing is also particularly useful in providing the flexibility and thus opportunity to unpack the meanings of the students' experiences and how they conceptualise social class. Topics such as social class and identity *can* be difficult to talk about. Class is extremely complex and shifting, owing to the different ways in which it is lived in the everyday (Reay, 1997: 225). Class is linked to morality and there are difficult emotional aspects of dealing with class; the associated 'sentiments' of 'pride, shame, envy, resentment, compassion and contempt' (Sayer, 2005: 948) make researching aspects of (class) identity often difficult and unpredictable. Sayer's (2002) work for example, discusses class as an embarrassing topic and notes the relationship between the researcher and the researched, where answers to questions about class could be mediated/affected according to that relationship.

Direct questions about class can be met with ambivalence (Savage *et al,* 2001) yet it is precisely this ambivalence that can be fascinating, as it may often demonstrate a conflict in terms of the ways in which class is conceptualised and understood. For example, disidentifying from class can be equally seen as a marker of class and of the power of class (Skeggs, 1997b; Charlesworth, 2000; Lawler, 2000; Savage *et al,* 2001). It is also important to understand is that participants might be working with different conceptions of class than those of the researcher. Savage's (2005) work revisited *The Affluent Worker* studies carried out by Goldthorpe *et al* (1968a; 1968b, 1968c) and argued for the importance of understanding the salience of class and the way that power works and is articulated. He advocates a deeper reading of qualitative data to understand the relational aspects of class identities. Specifically he points out that Goldthorpe *et al*'s (1969a, 1969b, 1969c) 'reliance on an analytical distinction between money, power and status prevented them from recognising the close links between these in the mind of the respondents' (2005: 936). Equally this type of analytical critique has been made of Savage *et al*'s (2001)

work on 'class ambivalence'. Payne and Grew (2005) further argue for a deeper analysis but also that it is crucial to be rigorous in the way data is collected. They call for an 'alternative frame of reference which recognises that respondents operate with an incoherent model of class relations' and the importance of understanding 'what *they* mean by class' (2005: 893. Original emphasis). Savage *et al* (2001) adopted a style of interviewing that avoided direct and loaded questions on class in order to be able to measure the salience of class in their respondents without the influence of specific class terms. They deferred direct questions about class in order to allow for more natural responses about class to emerge.

However, it may not be the case that some people have difficulty talking about class. Other researchers have shown that some people have no difficulty talking about class and using class terms (for example: Lawler, 2001; Tyler, 2008; Bottero, 2009; Taylor, 2004). Not knowing how the participants felt about or indeed conceptualised class was of key concern in the planning stages and indeed, throughout the fieldwork and I thus had to consider different techniques of data collection (and analysis) in order to explore the presence and operation of class in HE. I decided not to begin with questions about class as I wanted to encourage an informal conversation about their university experiences. I did always make a point of asking about their class position and understanding of class at some point during the interview however; this was usually towards the end of the interview unless the participant drew attention to it first. In addition, even if someone is not asked directly about class there are other means of exploring their opinions and interpretations as I will discuss shortly.

The interactive formation of focus groups allow for exploration of social attitudes of and amongst students, which make it a useful method for my research purposes. One of the main reasons for using this method as well as the interview method according to Puchta and Potter is that 'a group allows you to access a variety of different opinions' (2004: 119). It offers a situation in which to explore several and perhaps diverse viewpoints at once. Focus groups encourage deeper discussion of particular issues where not only positive interaction and agreeing on particular topics is useful; 'conflict' in focus groups (Barbour and Kitzinger, 1999) could be even more valuable in a study such as this. Morgan and Krueger (1993) advise encouraging participants to express their disagreement in discussions from the outset. This way, participants are

provided a space in which they are encouraged to express their opinions, even if they conflict or contrast with those of others. This is not to say that every participant will be comfortable with doing so however. Some participants may exert a more dominant personality than some others, which may result in resistance and confrontation on the part of some and refusal to contribute their viewpoint on the part of others. Participants may be less willing to impart personal information and 'controversial perspectives' and thus the data may result in a more normative discourse, containing social desirability biases (Smithson, 2000). This is, however, particularly in light of the topics under investigation, all valuable data.

Lawler's (2008a) work on identity provided a useful way of overcoming the potential difficulties of talking about class, particularly regarding participants talking about themselves. She asserts that what is often telling is how identities are '*conferred* on people' (Lawler, 2008a: 124; author's emphasis). There are two elements that I took from this insight: in terms of analysing the data, what someone identifies as is often framed along the lines of what – or who – they are not; and (more pointedly in this current discussion) using techniques that allow participants to talk about their relationships to other people, or indeed to pass comment on other people and situations is just as useful as asking them to talk about themselves. In order to contextualise discussions, whilst at the same time bridging the potential difficulty of talking about identity and conceptions of the self, the vignette technique can be valuably employed. This is particularly useful in focus group situations where participants may not necessarily know each other and thus be sensitive to the opinions of others i.e. engendering a social desirability bias[xv].

The vignette technique is often favoured for its moral and ethical sensitivity when researching difficult topics (Mason, 2002b: 230) and for allowing rich, yet focussed, responses from participants who comment or respond to questions about a particular scenario designed to depict relevant issues[xvi] (Schoenberg & Ravdal, 2000: 63). Participants are invited to make normative statements about the scenario, rather than directly divulge their own circumstances and beliefs. The technique further allows acknowledgement that 'meanings are social and that morality may well be situationally specific' (Finch, 1987: 105-6). The scenario concerns hypothetical others and in doing so, provides the comfort of social distance, which can break down the limitations

often imposed by the participants' own circumstances or relationships (Finch, 1987: 110). I decided that the vignette technique would be incredibly useful in the focus group situation and also as a back-up for interviewees if particular topics seemed to provoke discomfort or hesitation to reflect on their own personal circumstances.   Another positive feature about the vignette technique is that it allows for minimal interaction of the researcher in the focus group and encourages participants to concentrate on each other during discussions, rather than the researcher (Kitzinger, 1994: 106-7). Essentially, it is the data in the discussions of how the group agrees (or disagrees) on social meanings that is so valuable with focus groups; it is the interaction between the participants that is so interesting. Getting a sense of the language and frameworks used by the participants is crucial to this particular study and the potential for unearthing data, which might not otherwise be captured by singular accounts gained from the one-to-one interview method, justified a mixed methods approach.   Focus groups are about interaction (Wilkinson, 1998; Kitzinger, 1994; Barbour & Kitzinger, 1999). Whether or not participants in a focus group know each other ahead of the focus group situation it is still the plan that they interact with *each other* rather than the researcher; this may involve questioning each other, highlighting contradictions, disagreeing/ agreeing etc. This is advantageous as often a researcher may feel inappropriate challenging statements as directly as a participant might (Wilkinson, 1998: 115).

Although both interview and focus group methods are aimed at providing an opportunity to obtain rich, detailed data, these data should not be conflated with each other and treated as the same, with no discussion of the relationship between the two data sources (Wilkinson, 1998: 113-4). To do so would counteract the reasons for using the two methods. In order to overcome this potential flaw/difficulty, the data gathered from focus groups is explicitly presented as so in the analysis chapters. Each method has its specific uses in this research as detailed above. To summarise however, the use of interviews are for the purpose of exploring related topics and gaining an insight into the personal experiences and identity management of students. By doing so, it allows exploration of the interactions they encounter and the meanings they attach to different aspects of their experiences and identities in higher education and beyond. Focus groups offer a different emphasis on interaction. The interaction that occurs, as part of the research situation, has less active

involvement of the researcher and greater prominence on what occurs between student peers. It offers an opportunity to explore similar topics but with an emphasis on the co-construction of meaning, with the possibility of analysing agreements and conflicts.

4.3   The research encounter

In this section, I will attempt to record how I approached the research during fieldwork; the difficulties I encountered and the practicalities and considered that go some way to explaining the 'mess, confusion and complexity of doing research' (Kelly *et al*, 1994: 46). This will entail also a reflection on ethical practice in my research and progress onto providing a consideration of the 'researcher and researched' relationships inherent in this process. This is necessary in order to give as full and as honest an account of the process as possible (Reay, 1996: 443).

My priority with regard to sampling was to recruit a sample of current undergraduate students at varying stages in their university careers and studying at either OLD or NEW Universities. My concern with class (taking into account gender within class) in my project however, was to make sure my sample consisted of an equal amount of male and female students from different class backgrounds.   As the research was premised on the notion that students from different (gendered) class backgrounds may encounter university differently, the sample was necessarily mixed so as to gage the views of differently positioned students. Ideally, I hoped for an even proportion of students from working- and middle-class backgrounds and due to the distinctive nature of the British class system, I decided to focus only on British undergraduate students. On the basis that I was keen to explore the experiences and interpretations of students who were non-traditional as well as those who were considered 'the norm', a mixed class sample was required. However, due to the difficult nature of the topic of class and identifying in class terms that I referred to earlier (see also Savage *et al*, 2001; Sayer, 2002; 2005) I did not want to feature class identification in my initial recruitment strategy i.e. on posters, fliers etc. I therefore had to adopt a different strategy to ensure I got a mixed sample. My research fliers and posters[xvii] instead focused on the different experiences of students from different backgrounds and asked them to contact me by e-mail to request further information if they were interested in participating. At the point of their contact I

asked them to complete a short 'Participant Profile'[xviii] to return to me, along with details such as their course and stage of study and whether they would like to participate in a one-to-one interview, a focus group or either. The purpose of asking them for their course and stage of study was to try and engage with students with a variety of interests and experiences[xix]; this knowledge would enable me to narrow down the sample, in the event I was inundated with responses.

The participant profile allowed me to gather information on their gender, age, nationality and ethnic origin as well as social class. I asked them how they would define their social class and provided a space to enter this in their own words and then asked them to select options that they based this on. The aim of this study was to explore the operation of class and how it was interpreted and made meaningful to the participants and thus, this part of the profile was not used to answer this as such. However, it was useful to get an idea of the bases on which they premised their ideas of social class; I was able to use these later to generate conversation around what they took class to mean. Nonetheless, it is notable that asking participants to self-identify their social class can be problematic. As previously discussed, there is an inherent complexity, ambiguity and often reluctance to identifying in and using class terms (Savage *et al*, 2001; Sayer, 2005). Savage *et* al (2001: 875), for example, found ambivalence and defensiveness to class terms in their research sample, whereby claiming 'ordinariness' was located as a 'defensive device' to avoid being labeled in class terms. All of the participants in this research *did* identify in class terms via the initial participant profile and although they indicated from a checklist what this was based upon, the method is not without challenge. Not only are class identifications based upon complex histories and signifiers, they are likely to vary from person to person and may well be objectively challengeable. Because I used this method to obtain my sample i.e. relying on the participants' self-identification, I also tried to obtain as many other indicators of class (such as parental occupation, previous schooling etc.) from the participants as possible (Skeggs, 1997). This was far easier to achieve during interviews than with focus group participants, since the emphasis of the focus group was not directly on their own, personal experiences or backgrounds. Despite these issues, the data I deemed most important concerned how each participant related to other people;

how shared meanings were negotiated, identities performed, based on a conceptualisation of class as a dynamic and relational force.

The most successful method of recruitment was via sending e-mails through the university networks via school secretaries and departmental staff; however, this method was harder with NEW University, where I encountered much resistance from staff to publicising via this method. They were however, happy for me to use posters and fliers around their campus sites, as were OLD University, however this method had little response, with only one OLD University student responding to a poster. I also utilised Facebook groups for both universities; including general university groups as well as various clubs and societies and sports teams. Unfortunately, I had no success whatsoever with this method[xx]. Due to the difficulties I encountered sending e-mails to NEW students as easily as I did with OLD, I found it harder to obtain the neat, equal sample of male/female, working/middle class students I had hoped for[xxi]. Out of all of the responses I received from OLD University students, working-class respondents were disproportionately low. Furthermore, those (OLD) working-class students I contacted for interview did not respond further and in some cases did not turn up to the agreed meeting time. I tried to follow them up in each case. However, after no response, I decided it wasn't ethical to pursue them further and risk annoying them. The class ratio response was conversely the case with NEW students, whereupon out of the responses I gained, there were relatively few self-identified middle-class students. The same issues arose when contacting them further or meeting. As a result, my sample was disproportionate in terms of class at each university, a feature of institutions more generally. The profiles of the two universities were majority white and whilst I had hoped to attract participants from different ethnic origins, the entire sample was white apart from one student who claimed Chinese ethnic origin (and British-Chinese nationality).

As the table below shows, there were some inconsistencies in the balanced gender/class/university sample that I had originally hoped for. A more detailed description of the participants in this research is featured in Appendix no. 4. The sample included a total of 25 participants, out of which 7 were focus group participants and 18 were interviewees (8 from NEW, 10 from OLD). The interviews lasted between 1 ½ hours and 2 ½ hours each, thus providing

extensive, in-depth accounts to analyse. Both focus groups lasted a little over 2 hours.

Figure 1: Actual research sample: Participants according to institution, gender and (self-identified) social class

BLUE = Focus group participants

	OLD		NEW	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
WORKING CLASS		SIOBHAN AMY	CRAIG COLIN RORY	JAYNE VANESSA
WORKING-MIDDLE CLASS	ALAN	CHARYS	ADAM	
MIDDLE-CLASS	GRAEME TIM ROD	JOY IMOGEN FAYE JENNY GERALDINE		NADINE ELSPETH LINDSEY SOPHIE
UPPER-MIDDLE CLASS	PATRICK	ELEANOR NATALIE		

Organising focus groups was by far the most difficult part of the fieldwork due to the 'messiness' of finding suitable dates and times to suit all those interested. This was an even greater challenge with NEW students who were harder to recruit. Having previously (unsuccessfully) attempted to rearrange a focus group with NEW students when three of the participants cancelled, a new one was arranged and only 1 of the 6 students who agreed to attend this did. Thankfully, he brought another participant, who happened to be his partner, with him and thus we went ahead with the focus group, which was, due to the numbers, more of a paired-interview. The data gathered from this research encounter however, was equally valuable to that gathered from the OLD focus group and entailed just the kind of interaction data that I specifically used the focus group method for. It also enabled me to ask direct questions to the pair about their personal experiences, that I would not have had the chance, nor felt it ethical to do in a larger group.

Upon reflection, however, the location of the interviews and focus groups may well have influenced participation from NEW students, particularly in light of data collected that suggested feelings of differentiation from OLD students in most cases. All interviews and focus groups were conducted on OLD University campus which was in easy reach of all participants and provided scope for meeting places as free from distractions, outside noises and interruptions as possible (Wengraf, 2001: 191). In the case of arranging a meeting space with interviewees, there was more scope to offer a location of the participants' choice; nonetheless, all agreed they were happy to come to OLD campus. When arranging the NEW focus group I booked a similar space on OLD campus, owing to its ease of access and it having been agreeable as a meeting place with NEW University interviewees. However, especially in light of the data gathered regarding perceived notions of difference between the institutions and its students, attending OLD University may well have been a factor in the low participation and attendance for focus group attempts with NEW students. When carrying out the NEW focus group/paired interview the participants (Adam and Sophie) commented on their journey to the research site and noted they felt strange and out of place. This is an important consideration to bear in mind for future research endeavors of this nature.

Each research encounter began with me providing and explaining a 'Research Agreement'[xxii], which allowed me to gain informed consent but also to provide participants with information on how I would be practising the research ethically; in compliance with British Sociological Association Code of Ethical Practice. This, however, is not all that I take to be ethical practice. In designing the research, there were particular things to consider ahead of focus groups and interviews. For instance, reflecting back again on the potential difficulties talking about class; I had to carefully construct an interview schedule that would avoid value-laden or leading questions and which would hopefully encourage them to speak about the topic with as little input as possible (Smith, 1995: 13–15). The interview schedule I constructed[xxiii] was based on a number of topics (such as housing, funding, working and leisure) I had identified through personal experience of being a student and from my research into different aspects of student life. Like Savage *et al* (2001) I did not ask direct questions about class until the end (unless the participant brought it into conversation first). However, I did ask questions about how they perceived similarities and differences between themselves and others as well as commenting on issues of value and affordability. Payne & Grew (2005:905) argue that the idea of class may be indirectly and inadvertently introduced by the interviewers' questions, so stimulating a later 'class answer'. Despite leaving direct questions about class until later in the interview or until participants talked about it themselves as a way to encourage participants to talk of differences and their experiences in their own terms, the questions asked are implicated in the data collected. Therefore the questions I used may well have produced 'class answers' in this research. Good research is about making clear the mechanisms by which we produce knowledge (Skeggs, 1997) and thus a copy of the interview schedule is available in Appendix No.1 in order to make clear so it is clearer how a 'class answer' may be produced. These mechanisms by which we produce knowledge will further be attended to in more detail when looking at issues of power and reflexivity in research.

When it came to designing vignettes for the focus group I also had my input in mind. Mason (2002b: 230) suggests using real-life examples from existing interview data. This method was also employed by Spalding (Spalding and Phillips, 2007), who wanted to ensure the validity and trustworthiness of the vignettes she was using in her research. Rather than construct a situation

herself, she used real-life examples as generated from her research participants. As I had conducted a small number of initial interviews in the last stages of the final semester of the academic year and my focus groups would not take place until the following academic year, I decided this would be possible. It did bring another set of ethical issues to consider however, in using elements of the accounts people had provided me with. In order to protect anonymity, I decided to construct two different vignettes using a combination of the accounts of four people I had by then interviewed, rather than present a synopsis of two different people[xxiv]. As well as protecting anonymity this also allowed me to gather interesting elements from four people and thus provide thought-provoking examples of topics for discussion in the focus group, whilst also being realistic and using terms other students had themselves employed. It helped to avoid the possibility of my drafting a hypothetical situation or profile that would risk using terms that were not in their common usage too. However, as with the interview schedule, the vignette and its contents as well as the questions posed in the focus group are worthy of consideration in the research encounter. The process of selection of what was included in these vignettes was based around the early stages of coding and analysis from the initial interviews conducted. This meant that focus group participants were being asked to comment on scenarios in which class and class terms were made more explicit from the early stages and thus differed from the interview[xxv]. However, as mentioned earlier, these vignette scenarios and the terms they contained were based upon earlier interviews and so generated from the research itself. Therefore, this method was a particular strength of the research which provoked commentary on terms in circulation.

The process of analysis I undertook involved close reading of the interview and focus group transcripts, producing thematic coding. repeatedly read the transcripts and assigned codes until satisfied that each had been coded and considered as thoroughly as possible. I used an electronic filing system of code files, which then were filled with quotes/excerpts from the participants' dialogues and any relevant notes. I repeatedly read and reviewed these coding files to facilitate recognition of the most significant themes emerging from the data. Here, further ethical responsibilities lie in the production of knowledge – in the analysis and the finished product of the study.

The power of the researcher in the research encounter, particularly in the data collection process and production of knowledge, has been a major concern

in feminist research (Wilkinson, 1998; Stanley & Wise, 1993; Skeggs, 1995a). The next section will address such ethical responsibilities and the epistemological and theoretical premises of this research.

4.4   Researching experience; Power and reflexivity

As noted above, there were several steps taken to ensure ethical practice in the research design and implementation process. This final section focuses on the processes of doing research and of producing research via analysis of qualitative data of the students' accounts. As Lawler (2000: 6) argues, 'it is not just the "doing" of empirical work which is significant, but the ways in which we do it'. To side-step making this information clear means, as Skeggs (1997a: 19) says:

> … the mechanisms we utilize in producing knowledge are hidden, relations of privilege are masked and knowers are seen not to be located: therefore the likely abundance of cultural, social, educational and economic capitals is not recognised as central to the production of any knowledge.

Making clear the mechanisms involved in the production of knowledge involves 'giving a full and honest account of the research process as possible, in particular explicating the position of the researcher in relation to the researched' (Reay 1996:443). It also involves attending to the social locations of the researcher and the researched and the socially constructed nature of the 'knowledge' produced, as part of the research encounter as well as the power of the researcher and the researched.

In conducting research, it is not uncommon for experiences of inequalities to motivate research, methods and theories; ontologies link to epistemological understandings of knowledge production and links into wider feminist understandings (Skeggs, 1995a: 14-15) as well as more general concerns with power in the research relation (Hollands, 2003). However, it is important to stress the 'links' here; these research elements are *related*. Stanley and Wise regard ontology, epistemology and ethics as 'entirely substitutable for each other' (1993: 226), in feminist research. However, this risks making a 'simple correspondence between our circumstances and how we think' (Skeggs, 1995a: 9). Yet, equally, it must be acknowledged that our positioning in the social world

i.e. our 'historical, economic, socio-political and discursive locations', whilst they do not 'determine us' (Skeggs, 1995a: 9), can be shown to affect the way we see the world and thus contribute to our choices of research and identification of research topics. This research may be said to have been born out of my own experience of being a student, however, it is not my experience; nor is it a simple case of repeating the experiences of the participants in this study, which risks being 'locked into descriptions of experiences' (Skeggs, 1995a: 15).   The task, as an ethical researcher, is to examine the accounts of the experiences of the researched and produce an interpretive analysis of their own interpretations. In doing so, however, it is crucial to state my experiential motivations in order to rightly and ethically practise reflexive research; this also includes stating that my own social position (as a young, white, working-class, female postgraduate student) is inseparable from the research process, yet it does not prevent the practice of research objectivity. Rather it is a case of overcoming false notions of neutrality (McDowell, 1992).

My research topic itself can be read as expressing something of my ontological and epistemological position (Mason, 2002a: 17). For example, it points to an assumption that inequalities do exist in the social world (specifically that of higher education) along multiple lines of difference; that the bases of differentiation and of these inequalities can be knowable through social research. The ontological position is that people (students) hold attitudes and opinions about the social world they inhabit, which can inform knowledge about social inequalities and how they operate in those environments. By exploring the accounts of current students, the research rests on the epistemological position that it is possible to learn how inequality exists and that these 'distinctive dimensions of the social world (for example, attitudes, actions, discourses) are knowable – that it is possible to generate knowledge about and evidence for them' (Mason, 2002a: 17).

Such privileging of students as the 'knowers' of their experiences of higher education situates the research subjects not just as 'vessels of their experience' (Skeggs, 1995b: 199) but also recognises that that experience is part of a process that produces and continually shapes identity. Moreover, those experiences and identities may not be consciously perceived as significant or connected to wider social forces and discourses by participants and thus our responsibility as social researchers is to make such connections (Maynard 1994:

23-4). An interpretive and synthesizing process must connect experience with understanding (Maynard, 1994: 24; Cain, 1986: 265). The students I spoke with offer their own accounts of their experiences, which are necessarily partial and incomplete via their own memory retrieval and layers of interpretation. Their interpretive accounts of their own experiences are socially situated and are not social facts about the world. Rather, it is the interpretations they offer of the social world they perceive, that act as the data with which the researcher then applies another level of interpretation. The social meanings participants discuss are their own personal and contextually specific constructions as they engage with the social world (Crotty, 1998). As the researcher, I then interact with the research participants, thus again producing further social constructions. The researcher must be as clear and open about the conditions of their research as well; making clear that no opinion or construction should be taken as a 'representation of 'reality' but rather treated as a motivated construction or version to be subject to critical feminist analytical enquiry' (Stanley & Wise, 1993: 200).

As a working-class, female, local, 'mature' undergraduate student at a Russell Group university I encountered unfamiliar territory; I felt marked as 'other' by my 'local' status and by a whole set of other signifiers, my local accent, appearance and residential status being predominant ones. As such I felt highly differentiated from the majority of the student population and I experienced disjuncture between old work-colleagues and family and friends, to a certain extent, because of my new status as student; acquiring the skills to 'get ahead' meant in some ways a sense of 'leaving behind' aspects of my life as I knew it. I can describe how these differences became apparent to *me*; I can recollect how in certain situations discomfort was brought about – how it felt, what coping mechanisms I used and in reflection, how these experiences and interactions shaped my identity. Of course, by way of my studies in sociology, I was also brought into contact with the work of social and cultural theorists who at different times and in different ways helped me to understand and theorise some of the areas of social life I had experienced. It enabled a sense of political motivation to explore further how the different social, cultural and structural locations of different students (re)position them throughout their university careers and enable/constrain them in terms of the resources and opportunities they have access to. In my final year of undergraduate study I became aware of changes

in government funding and increasing targets for university attendance under the now well-known initiatives of 'widening participation' and 'top-up fees'. As I reflected on my own experience and in light of the rhetoric of the proposed changes, my political project of conducting research into how inequalities exist and are managed in higher education began. It was part of a political project to show that increasing university attendance is not necessarily the solution to decreasing social inequality and improving social mobility. I wanted to name class and explore some of the social and cultural as well as the real, material issues that differently positioned students encountered in their experiences of HE. I was critical of the production of masses of quantitative research, to monitor entrance figures to prove policy successes and felt exploring what happens to students beyond entry, would give a better account of some of the issues they encounter in their everyday student careers.

Clearly my personal encounters as a university student and my access to sociological theory position me in a certain respect, as do other factors of my identity including class background, gender, age, race etc. However, I wish to stress these as 'ontological moments of recognition' (Probyn, 1993: 4) that stretch beyond the 'merely personal'; to investigate how different selves experience higher education; how different subjectivities are continually located and (re)positioned and identities are formed, developed, upheld, maintained/refused etc. My experiences as a student and the literature with which I have familiarity, in my position as a sociologist, directed the areas of social life that made up my research sub-questions and topics. At the time of designing the research I had not encountered any other research projects similar to mine in its emphasis on the different elements that make up the student experience. I relied on my own knowledge of experiential factors of student life as well as ideas and issues raised in many of the other research projects featured in the previous chapter. Bourdieu's work was extremely influential and provided sensitising and organising concepts for the research data. Although my experiences and literature research guided me initially, the analysis has been led by the empirical data. I carried out extensive thematic coding and analysis and then used literature to help compare and make sense of my analyses. This involved close reading of the transcripts and moving backwards and forwards between theory and empirical data.

By offering an account of my own position as a recently graduated student, I do not wish for this inclusion to be read as a simple 'insertion of *my* self' into the research', which early feminist researchers are accused of doing in the name of reflexive research; such versions of reflexivity neglect the recognition that the concept of the self is classed (Skeggs, 2002: 349, 355; Adkins, 2002: 345). Reflexivity in this understanding of these conceptions of the self and 'putting the self' into research, must be treated with caution. Skeggs states that the 'demand to put one's self in the research was ironically a technique to expose the power, positioning, privilege and complacency of those (usually male) researchers who claimed objectivity' (2002: 355). However, simply inserting one's 'self' into the work does not equate to ethical, reflexive practice; in Probyn's (1992: 80) words, the problem lies in 'tendency to think that the problems of power-privilege and perspective can be dissolved by inserting one's self into the account and proclaiming that reflexivity has occurred in practice. Telling and doing are two very different forms of activity'. However, I draw attention to it as I locate myself within the research as an active proponent of the knowledge construction. Furthermore, that my own social position and experiences are embodied and thus part of the relationship and encounters with the research participants and their own embodied identities.

Oakley's (1981) suggestion that in order to reduce hierarchical power relations, a reciprocal relationship should be aimed for was taken on board. In order to put participants at ease from the outset I took care to explain the basic premise of the research and the types of topics it would involve discussing, highlighting that they didn't have to discuss anything they didn't feel comfortable doing so. Thankfully, none of the participants at any time expressed their discomfort and asked to change topic. I also chatted to them before starting the interview, making small talk about their day or plans after seeing me and that usually helped to set-up the interview as conversation between acquaintances. I deemed it important to clarify that the research was my own and that it wasn't on behalf of the university; the participants were also aware through prior contact with me that I was a postgraduate student and I hoped this would overcome issues relating to the perceived power of the researcher. Besides my identity as 'student' however, I was also aware of other aspects of my embodied identity that would contribute to issues of power in the research. My age was one factor; I was in my late twenties at the time of the fieldwork and thus unlikely to have

been considered old by the majority of participants, and would be read as young by the oldest participant. My ethnicity was another, being white meant that I was also similar to the majority of my participants in that respect, yet my local origins were also a factor to consider. As stated above, my working-class background and my accent were embodied aspects of my identity that had marked me as 'other' in my own experience of HE and I was unsure how this may affect the ways in which participants offered their own opinions and experiences. I felt as though there was only really one occasion when I noticed my accent was implicated in the ways in which the participants discussed different embodied aspects of identity and class markers. One participant began to state that a particular accent (that I embody) is often read as 'stupid' and working-class, which she then quickly added to by saying that it depended on the type of vocabulary used which suggested 'educatedness'. Whilst it was not directly aimed at me I did sense that my presence perhaps provoked the additional comment. Such assertions are part of a wider 'powerful complex of ideologies and cultural practices which splits cleverness from working-classness/northernness' (Hey, 1997: 142). Moreover, despite the presence of my accent being implicated in the research process in this example, there is every possibility my accent worked to align me other students who had northern accents.

There were also several other moments when participants appeared to be concerned that their statements may be perceived as judgemental; when participants hesitated I reminded them that I was interested in what they thought and what they had to say. Their concern over my interpretation of them and what they said was clearly present however. An explicit example of this included one interviewee, who had negatively discussed a particular educational institution and when I asked at the end of interview if she had any questions, she asked if I had attended that particular institution. When I informed her I didn't she expressed relief as she hadn't wanted to offend me. By her asking me that question and the associations she had made with the institution in question, it did suggest that she perhaps read me as being working-class.

Whilst I was keen to establish common ground with participants to help put them at ease when talking to me I was also very aware that discussing my own experiences of university before or during the interview may influence the information they gave to me. I did however, always ask the participants if they

had any questions before starting the interview and no one ever did, however it was quite often the case that participants would ask me why I was conducting the research afterwards. When participants asked me about my reasons for the research I was open and honest about having studied at undergraduate level recently and being interested in the different experiences of students from different backgrounds. Quite often I was able to relate elements of my own experience with stories they had told me and places they had talked about and on a couple of occasions I was able to provide information about the ESRC funding I had obtained for my studies and signposted them to their website for more information. Four of the participants asked if they could receive a copy of the finished thesis and I confirmed I would be happy to do this. This is just one part of the ethical responsibility to my research participants beyond the research encounter.

The researcher has a political and ethical responsibility in the research that she carries out (to analyse class and to disseminate those findings) as well as primarily to her research participants. After all it is we, as social researchers, that have the skills and resources as well as the time and interest to 'make sense of experience and to locate individuals in historic and social contexts' (Kelly *et al,* 1994: 37). Yet, qualitative research is routinely criticised for the 'power' the researcher wields in the writing up of qualitative research (Glucksman, 1994; Kvale, 2006; Stanley & Wise, 1993). In order to answer this criticism, some researchers have tried to include research participants in the process of writing up the interview data and attempting to introduce a sense of co-authorship or 'membership research' (Kvale, 2006: 485). This method is fraught with difficulties and issues however and it is not to regard the researcher as 'intellectually superior' (Stanley and Wise, 1993: 200) but to argue that it is the researcher's project and not a collective one (Glucksman, 1994: 163). Participants are unlikely to have interests like that of the researcher and as Gluckman adds, '[e]ven if they were interested it's not normally for the *knowledge* of it' (1994: 154). The responsibility the researcher holds is to demonstrate a clear awareness of the many forms of inequality and oppression in the social world in their analyses. Clearly, the researcher plays a 'powerful' role in the writing up of research data, as they make sense of the collection of data into a finished analysis but there is no method or technique of analysis that can overcome social interpretation – all aspects of research involve layers of

interpretation. The best researchers can do is to try and make clear the bases of their 'selective interpretations' and which entails, as Maynard and Purvis (1994: 7) point out, 'acknowledging complexity and contradiction which may be beyond the interpreter's experience, and recognizing the possibility of silences and absences in their data'. However, it is the interpreter's 'experience' that often dogs feminist debates around qualitative methods and certain notions of reflexivity. For instance, Stanley and Wise make the claim that because men and women have embodied differences, they experience things differently which cannot be communicated across gender divisions (1993: 199). For instance they 'reject the idea that men can be feminists' (Stanley & Wise, 1993: 31-3) owing to social positioning. Such a view has 'anomalous implications' (Crotty, 2004: 161) particularly in thinking about the position of the researcher and the researched. Maynard confronts such an issue:

> ...to imply that matters of class are significant to the experience of the working class alone, that 'race' is important only for some ethnic groups (for to be 'white' is also to have ethnicity), or that sexuality is relevant only to lesbians and gays is to miss the point. For all these things structure *all* our lives, no matter how invisible they might be in experiential terms, and we are not excused from confronting them because we are not members of a particular oppressed group....It is not always necessary to include women who are white, black, working-class, lesbian or disabled to be able to say something about racism, classism, heterosexism and disableism.
>
> (Maynard. 1994: 24)

My position as a researcher but also as a white, working-class, female student that has experienced HE as an undergraduate student recently, does not necessarily make me any better qualified to conduct this research than a researcher without such experience. Whilst my experiences equip me with a certain sensitivity to issues in student life, my personal experience no better equips me to understand the experiences of others given the multiple and fragmentary nature of different life experience. Each person occupies several different subject positions and thus it would be impossible to match experiences and subjectivities (Hollands, 2003). As researchers we must be careful to not to rely on simplistic resolutions to researching across identity and difference – it is impossible to match interviewees and interviewers (Nairn *et al*,

2005: 236). Similarly, (as Maynard points out) just because a participant may not signal experience of a particular form of oppression, this does not mean that their interpretations of the social world cannot tell us more about the way such inequalities operate.

4.5   Summary

Throughout this chapter I have described and provided a critical analysis of the methods I chose to conduct this research and the experience of doing so, demonstrating both the 'mess, confusion and complexity of doing research (Kelly *et al*, 1994: 46) and the 'mechanisms we utilise in producing knowledge' (Skeggs, 1997: 17). This has entailed a justification of the use of interviews and focus groups in this research in order to properly research the complexities of everyday experiences. A focus on the identities of the HE participants involves attending to the meanings and interpretations they give to their everyday lives in HE; in and through the experiences they describe and comment upon. Their experiences and interpretations are not simply presented as fact or reality throughout the analysis chapters to follow; they are processed through another layer of interpretation and analysed in sociological terms. By making clear the foundations on which the study is premised and the role perspectives and interpretation of socially-constructed knowledges, the aim is to produce reflexive, ethically sensitive research that aspires to contribute to a growing body of sociological work that investigates the significance of class in education and the everyday.

5. Claiming and conferring Identity in Higher Education: Introducing the 'rah'.

5.1   Introduction

This chapter brings into focus the overarching aim of the research, which attempts to understand the ways in which university students manage and perceive difference through interpretations of their experiences in higher education. Such aims implicitly entail a focus on the concept of identity and examination of the identities involved in the everyday of university experience of the research participants. A significant amount of data collected from the research involves discussions that entail use of the term 'rah'.   The students in the research discuss the 'rah' in relation to a number of areas of student life including residential and leisure spaces, studying and finance, making friends and 'fitting in' and most frequently, in the naming and making of distinctions between students in the everyday.   As a result, the term 'rah' will feature heavily throughout this and the remaining analysis chapters. It also means that throughout this chapter there will be references to areas of student life covered in more detail in other chapters; this will necessarily involve much signposting. This chapter provides an introduction into the meaning and significance of the term 'rah' as it is involved in the identity work of the students in this research.   As such, I discuss the way it is used by the students in the making of distinctions.

Most notably, the 'rah' is used to make distinction of classed 'ordinariness' (Savage *et al*, 2001; Savage, 2005) but which, interestingly, also construct ideas of student normativity and different relationships to that. Ordinariness, according to Savage (2005: 938) 'is a means of refusing both a stigmatized, pathologized identity....at the same time that it refuses a privileged position'. Claims to ordinariness in this manner are therefore also claims middle-classness and are established in main by differentiating from upper-class elite. The 'rah' serves the purpose of representing elitism and so by positioning themselves against the 'rah' the participants are able to claim ordinariness, authenticity and normality.

The participants in the research use the figure of the 'rah' in multiple ways, exemplifying some of the complexities of class identities and the ways in they are continually constructed and reconstructed in the everyday.   These (re)constructions are processes through which symbolic systems of value are

played out and generate worth; whereby everyday distinctions are judgements of taste and morality, but which involve the 'transubstantiation' (Bourdieu, 2006) of economic capital as social and cultural attributes. Furthermore, the distinction-making inherent in these dialogues, particularly in reference to the 'rah' rely, in part, on a discourse of meritocracy that circulates in (higher) education. This discourse operates in this context to position students as having achieved their (HE/class) status via hard work; an imperative of individualistic subjectivities to claim entitlement via having achieved positions and not merely having them bestowed upon them. As such, the naming of the 'rah' and the position taking, in relation to these figures, is demonstrative of performative statements that suggest what student normativity consists of. The identity category of 'student' involves claiming membership and therefore a sense of belonging to the collective. However, different relationships to student normativity suggest such identification is problematic and often only attainable for certain classed actors.

Moreover the circulation of the term 'rah' and its particular usages demonstrates some of the ways in which class 'circulates socially while being unnamed' (Lawler, 2008: 126); or rather in a sense, 'renamed'. It shows that class is being continually remade in the everyday within a 'network of multiple, unequal power relations' and is 'differently constructed and enacted across time and context for different individuals and groups' (Archer, 2003: 14). Very simply put, a 'rah' is a classifying term and signifies a status system. Its currency is therefore largely pejorative as a term for a person or persons seen to be embodying a particular (young, white, upper-middle class) student identity and is implicit in the operation of class fractions and struggles to claim legitimacy within HE. The term 'rah' becomes a blanket term for 'posh people' and all that they are imagined to represent. The application and use of the term 'rah' is demonstrative of the culturally specific processes of boundary formation involved in class distinctions and quite often, is demonstrative of the displacement and individualisation of distinction making. As such, this chapter argues for more complex, dynamic, relational and processual understandings of class than those circulating in conventional class theory and educational discourse outlined in chapter 2. The data suggest that the term 'rah' is quite particular to education, although, it may well have broader uses outside of university; nonetheless, its circulation in HE demonstrates ways in which class identities are continually and contextually being (re)produced and are materially and symbolically constructed.

5.2   Identity and defining the 'rah'

Students' descriptions of what a 'rah' is vary only very slightly in content, with most bringing out the same types of visible, behavioural and auditory associations; the same kind of cultural acknowledgements of privilege; the same kinds of unfavourable perceptions. Moreover, these descriptions of the 'rah' are such that they are not only indelibly linked to class but are also racialised, sexualised and gendered. In short, the term Rah was used to refer to white, upper-middle/upper class members of both sexes: however, accounts of a (hetero-normative) female body predominate. In the majority of cases, the figure of the 'rah' is brought into discussion through questions on and conversation topics around what kind of student 'looks' are identifiable at university; how different 'types' of student are distinguishable, and how class is perceptible within everyday university life. The descriptions selected below are reflective of the general consensus of definitions provided by the participants:

> I think it's just posh people from what I've gathered from it 'cause I've never, never used it or heard it before [I came here]
>
> (Siobhan, 18, working-class, OLD University)

> There are some people that dress like that at NEW but then they get called Rahs cos that's what erm NEW call OLD's girls...a Rah wears their hair in those messy ponytails and they wear the hoody and the Ugg boots and erm carry around the big handbags and their parents pay for their education and erm they go to OLD University and they live in Greyville – that's pretty much what a Rah is (laughs)
>
> (Lyndsey, 19, middle-class, NEW University)

The definitions speak to significant and interrelated aspects of class identities that include embodied signifiers (including appearance, accent, values and mannerisms); space and place (university institutions and residential areas/halls of residences and leisure spaces); and educational backgrounds/circumstances (prior public schooling and full parental financial assistance at university). All of these ideas speak to notions of class; 'posh people' affording a particular style and lifestyle. The term 'rah' becomes a blanket term for 'posh people' and all that they are imagined to represent. As such, these definitions exemplify the ways in which

economic capital is converted into cultural capital; that class identities are materially and symbolically constructed; and they are contextual and subject to ongoing negotiation. The three broad, interrelated aspects highlighted above, each entail complex histories and meanings and require detailed exploration, which will be provided in the following three chapters. What is noteworthy at this juncture however, are the classifying premises of the term 'rah' and its educational contextuality.

The term 'rah' was discussed by the majority of participants as one that they had learned only when they came to university. Furthermore, as highlighted above, the currency of the term, according to the participants, is one that operates to perpetuate symbolic boundaries *between* different university institutions as well as *within* the students themselves. As Lyndsey's quote demonstrates, older, more prestigious institutions (like OLD in this study), are coded as being more 'rah'; and especially in her example, OLD University students are conferred with the term 'rah' *by* NEW University students. The influence of the institution in structuring identities and perpetuating class inequalities (Archer, 2003) is evident here and will be explored in detail in chapter 8, in terms of the particularity of and relationships in and between two different university sites. Adam and Sophie below highlight the significance of rahs in the university population; they see rahs as belonging to each university site but also thinks (like others) that there tend to be more 'rahs' at OLD University:

> ADAM: ...it's like you can tell instantly – like it's just the same as like an Emo or a Goth and a Chav and then a Rah – it's just another one of those erm classes really – like social class... I think (clears throat) people from like a higher class background they do different social activities to what I would do and things like that; but then in the same respect...I think like many people think that Rahs stick together more so than other classes.

> SOPHIE: I think the same, yeah they just seem very cliquey
> NEW University focus group/paired interview:
> (Adam, 21, working-middle class); (Sophie, 23, middle-class)

Adam and Sophie, like most other participants, perceived 'rahs' as a subgroup of the student population; an exclusive clique; a collective of students from a higher

class background who do deliberately segregate themselves from most of the student population. It is not just that they have different interests i.e. 'social activities', but that they are perceived as purposely excluding others with different circumstances to their own. Explicitly stating 'rah' as a class term; it is construed as a classification, a category. Adam interestingly juxtaposes the term 'rah' not only with 'chav' but with other cultural terms of 'emo' and 'goth'. This implies they are relatively unproblematic terms of reference but ones which are set against each other as comparative categories, and to that effect, without any particular political significance. However, whereas the descriptive categories of 'Emo' and 'Goth' rely heavily on (one might say are born out of) musical genre taste and associative dress and behaviours to indicate categorical membership, the same cannot be said unproblematically about the terms 'Chav' and 'Rah' (although of course issues of taste, dress and behaviour are implicated in the latter two). It is not to say that similar types of (mis)representation may be at work through the claiming (or indeed imposition) of 'Emo' or 'Goth' identities but that they are without the political significance of 'Chav' and 'Rah' as the former two are less *directly* determined by class. What is of further note is the way in which Adam arranges the categories as 'Emo'/'Goth'[xxvi] and 'Chav'/'Rah' - as set against each other – much like man/woman, black/white; that is, they represent a sense of dualistic categorisation. So one may read that the terms serve as two opposite ways of making cultural class distinctions, creating a 'middle space' where 'normality' and 'normal' identities exist.

      The term 'rah' does appear to have gained currency in popular culture, with several definitions to the term being listed at websites such as 'Urban Dictionary'[xxvii], and 'Wikipedia'[xxviii], and the term being invoked in a recent article on Newcastle University (part of the Russell Group and therefore recognised as a prestigious institution) students in *The Times*[xxix]. The descriptions offered by the students in the research concur in large with those listed in the 'Urban Dictionary' – a 'rah' is typically associated with wealthy, privileged background circumstances, privately educated. Visually they embody a certain style that involves a messy appearance but with particular clothing brands visible and are thought to live extravagant 'party' lifestyles and signify their wealth also through their level of disposable income and manners of consumption.   Importantly, they highlight the links between the term and (higher) education. The 'definitions' offered in various media sites denote a rise in its usage and currency – one that may well develop in its popularity and

significance as has happened with the term 'chav'. The term 'chav' is repeatedly contrasted with the term 'rah' in many of the students' dialogues; however, such links are problematic given the educational currency 'rah' has and 'chav' has not. The term chav has, according to Tyler (2008: 17), 'become a ubiquitous term of abuse for white working-class subjects'. The 'chav' as a 'social type' is represented as unemployed, living in poverty, lacking in morality and taste and 'publicly imagined…in excessive, distorted and caricatured ways' (Tyler, 2008: 18). There are obvious links here with the ways in which 'rah' is used. However, the bases of social exclusion on which the 'chav' rest signify exclusion from HE participation, which of course is not the case with 'rahs'. 'Chav', of course, is not identical with working-class(ness) but it can become so in its usage. What is further interesting about this representation of (working/under) class are the ways in which the students in the research often collapse 'chav' with 'working class' and this point will be returned to later in the chapter. The way in which 'chav' is mobilised is to effect (implicit or explicit) class differentiation from white middle- and upper-classes (Tyler, 2008). This process of differentiation is part of the identity-work undertaken by the students in this research in different ways. This revealing of the presence of class in everyday judgements and interactions is very much the point in the next section whereby the 'type of person we declare ourselves to be' is mediated via the positioning of the self against that which is seen as other. The context of higher education in the current climate and the discourses surrounding it provides a way of conceptualising the identity work in process by the students in this research, particularly those self-identifying as middle-class.

5.3   Identity work – using and refusing identities

Our sense of ourselves is only knowable socially and relationally; our selves are constructed in relation to others, through sameness and difference. Difference is a particularly fruitful way of exploring identity as we stand in relation to what we are not or by varying degrees of (dis)identification. Stuart Hall (1996) describes this as 'the constitutive outside'; the notion is based around dispelling the view that identities are homogenous and natural unities, but rather 'function as points of identification and attachment only *because* of their capacity to exclude, leave out, to render 'outside', abjected' (Hall, 1996: 5; emphasis in original text). To be anything, then, relies on an implicit (and often explicit) on-going (re)positioning of our selves against that which is other. Identities and identity categories are neither natural, nor

homogenous but are instead socially constructed 'within the play of power and exclusion' (Hall, 1996: 5). That is, they are constructed in the social world, which encapsulates the cultural and social norms and the effects of these historically and discursively generated 'norms', as well as the structural effects of economic positions and capacities. Faye provides an example of how the figure of the rah serves as the 'constitutive outside' to her identity:

There is like in a way a student look but it's very like stereotypical of like private school people... you can tell 'rahs' a mile off…(laughs) it's like they all wear like Jack Wills and like Abercrombie and Fitch and stuff like that - which I really like personally. So, like before I came here I was like, you know – but they wear it like, religiously! They have like, they're quite lazy in the way they dress like, they'll have like tracksuits with Ugg boots – you know, like Jack Wills tracksuit with like a hoody or something and then like the girls tend to like really, you know, like they *do* look down on you and like they won't speak to you if - they'll just walk past you and stuff like that or anything yeah…...and they do genuinely have an impression that they're better than you and that's just like, that's just from, you know, like, seeing them. And you know, I speak to a few of them and they are – like, they're still kind of, you know, high and mighty and up themselves....but erm, yeah they all have like, messy hair that's on top of their head as well (laughs) and like 'rah' lads always have like long, floppy hair and are really like – they all speak like *perfect* you know like the Queen's English as well…

(Faye, 18, middle-class, OLD University)

Thinking relationally and with the concept of the 'constitutive outside', it is possible to examine the identity work Faye (like others) undertakes in the example provided above. Broadly speaking, the passage above with this approach to identity in mind could be paraphrased as: ''Rahs' went to private school – I did not go to private school, I am not a 'rah'; 'Rahs' wear these clothes – I wear these clothes but not 'religiously', I am not a 'rah'; 'Rahs' are 'messy' and 'lazy' in their appearance, I am not, I am not a 'rah'; 'Rahs' look down on people – I am not a snob, I am not a 'rah'. In every element of her descriptions, Faye is relationally positioning herself as 'normal', as 'ordinary', against the rah's elite schooling, embodied 'rah' style, and unfavourable social values i.e. snobbishness. Middle-classness is a relational formation (Archer, 2011, Lawler, 2008b; Gunn, 2005). It is widely documented that

middle-class identities are produced in resistance/reaction to working-class identities; whereby their embodied middle-classness stands in contradistinction to vilified working-class bodies (Lawler, 2005; Skeggs, 2007; 1997; Tyler, 2006; 2008; Savage, 2000 *inter alia*). However, the distinctions made here are against what are proposed as upper-middle/upper class identities. Faye here, like many of the students in the research, positions herself as a normal student, in distinction to other extremely privileged students, through disidentifications premised on taste (Bourdieu, 1984) as will be discussed in more detail shortly. The normativity of middle-classness and (middle-class) student identities are constituted via disidentifications with 'rahs' and thus are constituted via a range of material and symbolic struggles (Archer, 2011; Wacquant, 1991). However, the data present evidence of the further complexity of these struggles, whereby it is not a straightforward use of 'rahs' as the 'constitutive outside' to normative, middle-class, student identities. The interview excerpt above from Faye holds further evidence of the complexity of the identity strategies at work. Just as Faye mentions that rahs speak '*perfect* ...Queen's English' and thus positions herself against this, in the same dialogue she continues to then position herself against another category:

> …and I found like you know I'm from Manchester but I'm not like from the horrible
> area or anything but like straight way 'cause they know I'm from Manchester they're
> like 'aw...it must be hard living in a council house'.
>
> (Faye, 18, middle-class, OLD University)

Rahs' speak 'perfect' English – I speak with a Mancunian accent, but it is not strong, I am not working-class and I am not a 'rah'. Elaborating on the above statement further she states, 'they just assume that you're more...I suppose, common in a way and that you're not as well educated and you're poorer as well'. The associations of 'poor' and 'common' and less educated and Faye's defensive reaction to these associations, as part of her embodied identity, demonstrate complex disidentifications with both the 'rah' and vilified working-classness. Associations of the working-classes as distasteful and lacking in intelligence, are part of the mainstay of their vilification against which middle-classness is positioned (Bourdieu, 2010). However, it is evident that middle-classness is not as simple as disassociation from working-classness; factions *within* the middle-classes are also

apparent in the disidentifications from rahs. It is possible to say then, that Faye's (and others like her) middle-classness is premised on a complex middling between 'rah' and 'working class' which signify the 'constitutive outside' or the 'constitutive limit', in Skeggs' (2004) words. Skeggs (2004) uses this term with regards to the constitutive limit of taste and morality, and the gendering of this in relation to working-class hen night displays and the propensity of the dominant classes to propertise working-class culture. Her work will provide useful reflection in the gendering of embodied class identities at work that follows in the next chapter. However, here, the idea of 'constitutive limits' can be applied *within* the middle-classes as part of the grounds for student normativity. These limits are also premised on notions of taste and morality.

Eleanor provides an interesting example of the uneasy relationship she (and others) have to being named as 'rah' or being misinterpreted on the basis of certain signifiers. Interestingly, this rests largely on the inference of private schooling that Faye uses as the core of her distinction with 'rahs'. Her response is to the vignette from the OLD University focus group:

> Erm looking at her [character in vignette] description she says its dress sense, accent and private school background well I went to a private school background and my accent is pretty much south and what you'd classify as public school, dress sense – do I look like a rah? (laughs) No I don't think at the end of the day you (sighs) I don't know it's really hard to – yeah I went to a public school but my parents had to work hard for me to go there so I think within a public school there are different levels of social class anyway and like I remember being at those schools and there were parents who, you know, 'oh I live in a massive mansion and I've got six horses and daddy does this and mummy does', yeah there's that but then there's also people who manage to go to public school or private school or whatever and they…I think when you come to university everyone just judges on the fact that you went to public – erm private school, so I think within that then you've got to sort of break it down a bit…
>
> (Eleanor, 21, upper-middle class, OLD University)

This excerpt provides an example of the ways in which common signifiers and constructed meanings around the term 'rah' are contested and the difficulties involved in being assigned with such an identity. Eleanor challenges most of the signifiers to the extent that she ends up finishing her statement with an admission

that after doing so, she does not quite now understand what a 'rah' actually is. As well as contesting the interpretation of 'rahs' given in the vignette, Eleanor challenges what she sees as the judgements/assumptions of others at university on account of previous schooling. The identity work present in this excerpt is similar to that undertaken by Faye (and others), where she positions herself against 'rahs' and the elite that she encountered during her experience of private school.

Her first distinction from the 'rah' is very explicit in her question 'do I look like a rah?'. Her laughter here could be read as nervous laughter in response to the possibility of being recognised as a 'rah', that she then goes on to deflect quite vigorously. To take on their dress sense is, to her, something that is ridiculous and conspicuously implies membership with the category 'rah'. She adds to the idea of the visual signifiers as challengeable also:

> ELEANOR: I think people do generalise sometimes like…of how people dress I'd say there are 'rahs in disguise' sometimes as well…they seem to want to be but aren't …

> ROD: Some people just maybe sort of want the look so they maybe-

> GERALDINE: Wannabe rahs?!

> (All Laugh)

> ELEANOR: Yeah, wannabe rahs

The point Eleanor addresses is that the visual signifiers associated with being a 'rah' may fool the observer of their 'rah' status, as some students, the 'wannabe rahs' dress like 'rahs' but do not embody other characteristics. The way in which these people are labelled, 'wannabe rahs', signifies that they are trying to be something they are not; they are positioned as pretentious and as even more laughable than the 'rahs' themelseves. The intricacies of these associations and notions of the 'wannabe rah', tie in with ideas around embodiment and consumption that will be drawn out in more detail in the next chapter. What is important to highlight, however, are the premises on which these distinctions rest; ideas around taste and morality are again bound up in the initial distinction Eleanor makes between herself and the 'rah', implying her distance from the distasteful appearance commonly agreed as the archetypical 'rah' style. She demonstrates

unease at being labelled in such a way owing to her previous education and invokes a comparison based around the 'undeserving rich' against her 'hardworking parents' – it is not privilege through inheritance of privilege *per se* – her parents made the 'choice' for her to be educated in this way and had to make the sacrifice of hard work in order to achieve it. Such distinction-making speaks to a discourse of meritocracy in which achievements of privilege (private schooling) are accomplished through hard work (even if it is the hard work of preceding generations). This resembles in part the notion of the Weberian Protestant work ethic (1934) whereby, 'wealth was not to be spent on leisure, personal indulgence, or consumption of luxury items and other non-necessities; instead it was to be saved or invested wisely without undue financial risk' (Hedenus, 2011: 28). Further evidence suggests the Weberian logic is inherent in this distinction making. Eleanor positions herself against the indulgent, excessive and luxurious consumption practices and lifestyles (e.g. 'six horses' and 'massive mansion') of her former schoolmates. As such her middle-classness is framed against the elite, upper classes she schooled with and the signifier of private schooling with associations of being a 'rah' is contested. The distinctions position her middle-classness and 'ordinariness' as well as a sense of entitlement gained via meritocratic notions of having earned privileged status in relation to the 'undeserving rich'.

Each aspect of the (dis)identifications at work in the passage from Faye and Eleanor's interview can be attended to in more detail (and will be done in the remaining data analysis chapters), to provide an analysis of the historically and discursively generated cultural and social norms that shape the 'play of power and exclusion' (Hall, 1996: 5) involved. The particularity of these identity struggles taking place within HE are highly interesting and rely on discursively generated cultural norms with regards to education. The 'rahs' are positioned as lazy, ostentatious and highly privileged; their material wealth is aligned with unearned privilege; they principally offend notions of meritocracy. As Archer (2011: 135) argues, middle-class 'identities are produced and reproduced within relations of contestation, uncertainty and anxiety'. These data provide ways of showing how, contextually, the positioning against the rah allows middle-class factions to assert legitimacy in HE in a time of great uncertainty and anxiety - owing to the massification of the HE system - thus allowing them to generate value and worth. The significance of these 'internal divisions' provide a way to 'understand and

conceptualise the nature and formation of this social group' (Archer, 2011; 134), particularly with regard to normative student identity. There is also much to lend to this argument that will be discussed in detail throughout the remaining data analysis chapters.

Not one of the students in the research claimed the identity 'rah'. However, nearly all of them were able to discuss what a 'rah' was and how it applied to different (groups of) students[xxx]. The refusal of the term 'rah' was explicit in all cases and yet the usage of the term has its own particularity beyond that stated above in its use as middling identity work demonstrative of class fractions. In interviews, I did not introduce the term 'rah' until the participant mentioned it: however, in focus groups 'rah', I used the term 'rah' as part of the vignette scenario and participants were invited to discuss whether they knew the term and what it meant. The term 'rah' and others used in the research dialogues, constitutes a renaming of what is essentially class; a deflecting of explicitly naming social class. The next section will deal with the ways in which 'rah' is used to displace the judgements being made and the circularity of the terms, which act as tools for distinguishing sameness and difference.

5.4   Classifying terms: rahs, chavs, stereotypes

The OLD University focus group provides further examples of the 'middling' identity work undertaken by those wishing to assert student normativity and middle-class identities within HE:

> JENNY: ...I think there's just more of a divide between the rahs and everybody else –
> I wouldn't say there's that much of a difference between someone who's come from
> a really working-class background and someone who's from a middle-class
> background... I don't think you could tell really

> GERALDINE: No 'cause like the stereotype for the working class is like the chavs but
> I wouldn't say – I don't know any chavs at uni

> ROD/JENNY: Yeah

> GERALDINE: I don't know if there are any at NEW
>
>   OLD University Focus Group:

For these middle class students, there are 'rahs' and then 'everyone else'; however this 'everyone else' is then further broken down into middle- and working-classes. They deny any distance between them and the working class students who have made it into university, who are presumably also there because of merit and hard-work. That a 'chav' is a stereotype for working-classes doesn't quite fit with the idea of a 'student' and implies that by entering HE, working classes move away from the risk of being associated with the 'stereotype' or 'chav'. This excerpt from the focus group above further lends itself to the argument of the 'middling' identity work at play but done so in a particularly culturally specific way – they position themselves between the 'rahs' and the 'chavs'. Such middling allows them to assume a position of normality and 'ordinariness' (Savage *et al*, 2001), that contrasts with the caricaturing of the unearned privilege and undeserving poor that constitute the figure of the 'rah' and the 'chav'. Presumably, the working-class students in HE are more deserving of their place in HE (having undergone struggles and hardship to get there) than 'rahs', owing to meritocratic discourse that codes academic merit and self-sufficiency against unearned privilege. Furthermore, the grouping of 'everyone else' against the rahs taken to include both working-class and middle-class students above will be problematised shortly in the next section. What is striking in the excerpt above, at this stage, is the use of the terms 'rah' and 'chav' themselves and what they are taken to represent, how they are used, and what this can say about the language of class and thus essentially how it operates, in HE and beyond.

Both 'rah' and 'chav' are pejorative class terms and what is particularly striking about the way they circulate, is the manner in which they are used as 'a bit of fun' or as 'banter' as it is commonly described and interpreted by the participants. I will elaborate on this point further but 'rah' and 'chav are not the only terms in circulation; the OLD University focus group suggested more when asked:

ROD: Pikey
(All laugh)

GERALDINE: Emo – it's not really a class though

ELEANOR: They're just stereotypes aren't they?

JENNY: Commoner – that's what my housemate calls me, yeah.

This example shows that class terms are casually circulating and the students' agreement on the terms, no less their amusement at these terms, suggests it is done so fairly unproblematically and more so, in a playful manner. What is significant here is the invocation of the term 'stereotype', which was extremely common in many of the students' dialogues. Another example from the OLD University focus group provides further evidence of its use and the ways it and the term 'rah' are mobilised:

JENNY: There's a lot of stereotyping…there's a lot of stereotypes like I remember last year there was some sort of bar crawl and it was known as Headingly Halls versus Shields Halls

ROD: Oh yeah

JENNY: And it was Rahs versus Chavs

(All laugh)

JENNY: And it was Shields Halls who were the chavs and that's what the poster said 'Rahs vs Chavs' so it was just kind of feeding off the-

PATRICK: I think the Student Newspaper had a 'Hug a Rah' day

(All laugh)

PATRICK: And on that day you had to find one and hug them so if it pays to use the stereotype well...

(All laugh)

PATRICK: I mean you can't ignore that there isn't the stereotype – it is there

GERALDINE: I would like to add something like if they would describe themselves as rah?

REST: Yeah

GERALDINE: Cos I dunno

PATRICK: Or whether it's just a case of like you [Jenny] said with Shields Halls and Headingly Halls – [the stereotype] it's there

Their discussions serve to highlight the term 'rah' as one commonly used across many spaces and places in university, including Halls of Residences and across campus, through organised activities such as that propounded by the student newspaper and organised bar crawls. Again, there is a wealth of data to explore regarding the spaces in which this distinction work operates and in which the term 'rah' circulates, which will be dealt with in Chapter 8. By far the most prominent aspect of the conversation outlined in the passage above is the repeated reference to the term 'stereotype', which is commonly evoked by a number of participants throughout the research and is done noticeably so when talking about the 'rah' or in the process of making distinctions. The use of the term seems to serve two different (but yet interlinking) kinds of function which firstly, serves to distance the speaker from the judgements being passed on rahs and secondly, correspond to what Pickering (1995; 2002) calls 'the classical' view of stereotypes and thus reveals the ways in which the participants tend to view identity.

That 'the stereotype exists', that 'it is there' and it can't be ignored, is repeatedly stated by Patrick in the excerpt above. Initially, it appears that what they are saying is that the 'rah' (and indeed a 'chav') is a stereotype. When Geraldine poses the question, 'would they describe themselves as 'rah'?', and is met with a unanimous 'yes' by the other focus group participants, her uncertainty is only really tacitly agreed with by Patrick, who implies that perhaps she is right and that the stereotype exists and is enforced upon people rather than claimed themselves. Whether the term 'rah' is an identity 'the rahs' are aware they embody, is a question that is seldom (explicitly) considered by the participants. On a number of occasions, it is implied through comments that 'rahs' deliberately assume a 'rah' identity 'play up to it', thus denoting an awareness of the 'rah' identity they are observed with.

Joy's statement here employs a very Goffmanian view of the self; the 'rahs' are putting on a performance:

> I suspect that some Rahs couldn't avoid the fact that they're a Rah but I think the more they know they're a Rah then the more they'll play up to it and the more exaggerated and ridiculous they become. I think they think it's funny but I don't think – well, I hope they're not insulted but I think they just think it's amusing and that they play up to it like a character....Some people are quite aggressive about it - I think they just really hate rich people, I think but on the whole it's just like 'look at you with your dirty hair' (laughs) 'you rah!'...
>
> (Joy, 21, Middle-class, OLD University student)

Joy here represents the sentiment expressed by many of the participants when discussing 'rahs' – that they perform the identity of a 'rah' consciously, deliberately, and playfully as a demonstration of 'rah' status and group membership. Interestingly, she also suggests that those who are 'aggressive' and dislike 'rahs' are unfairly judgemental. What I also wish to highlight from this excerpt, however, is the involvement of humour; the way that Joy implies the distinction making between the students ('non-rahs') and the 'rahs' is one of friendly 'banter', where the naming of the 'rah' is implied as a light-hearted gesture that the 'rahs' are both au fait with and which is essentially harmless fun. What she also seems to suggest is that 'rah' is just a term that can be used to label 'non-rahs' as a form of playful teasing. I will return to this point later as I will argue humour this is one of the mechanisms, alongside the repeated invocation of the 'stereotype', in 'deflecting the tendency to be normatively judgemental' (Pickering, 2002: 69).

The following excerpt from Tim's interview provides a particularly vivid example of explaining how the term 'stereotype' is used by some of the students – the way it is applied and the purpose the invocation of the term serves. Tim mentions the term 'stereotype' three times with a similar (but not identical) usage in the following excerpt, which represents a part of a conversation that begins with me asking if he can identify a student 'look':

> I think in general, yeah…you probably couldn't pick out a student 'cause most young people dress in a similar way – you have got your – kind of like your stereotype groups so you've got your like Rahs if you like, so you've kind of got like the 'Jack Wills brigade' who all wear the same kind of tracksuit bottoms and stuff so I'd say

yeah you've got the – like if you're in a group that has the kind of, well not uniform but kind of like a stereotype of type of clothing then you're more likely to stand out as a student...well it is a stereotype but you kind of…well I'm just basing this on what we've experienced but erm……I think that…...a lot of it is personal appearance…...especially initially……so you've kind of got like the big, back-combed hair and you've got the gilets and whole kind of like Jack Willis or Abercrombie and Fitch, flip-flop wearing that kind of thing ……and I do think that does come hand in hand with the kind of perception that they're gonna be a bit snooty or like money focused and like proud of, proud – like impressed with a lot of money but then the majority of the time when you actually speak to them then you find out they're just like normal people so you kind of think to yourself – why did I let myself have that conception of someone without knowing them?...like sometimes it's correct but then that's the same with everything like when you look at someone then obviously you're going to make a snap judgement but you have to think to yourself well you can't stand by that if you don't actually know the person or have spoke to them, so…

<div align="right">(Tim, 20, middle-class, OLD University)</div>

The purpose of using an exceptionally long excerpt from Tim's interview above is to try to show the difficulty he has communicating his thoughts about rahs; more specifically on making judgements of others, generalisations based on embodied signifiers. Tim places the 'rah' quite firmly as a stereotype and uses the term to engage with it a 'stereotype clothing' and stereotypical behaviours, which can be roughly translated to what may be better referred to as a 'stereotype' of upper class or elitism, thus including connotations of snobbery and perceived superiority. This is similar to the usage of the term above in the focus group and earlier by Faye when she positions rahs as 'stereotypical of private school people'. He seems to be using what Pickering calls the 'classical view of stereotypes' common in media research and education, which sees stereotypes as:

…rigid, simplistic, overgeneralized and erroneous. They have been taken as damaging misrepresentations of people's 'real' identities …Stereotypes have been viewed as necessarily deficient; they distort the way in which social groups are characterized, and obscure actual group particularities and subjectivities. They are deficient either because they encourage an indiscriminate lumping together of people under homogenizing group-signifiers, or because they reduce specific groups and categories to a limited set of conceptions which in themselves often contradict each other.

In addition to Tim's quite uneasy account of making judgements, the comments from Jenny, Eleanor and Patrick in the excerpts from the OLD University focus group above, express a level of anxiety in their discussions about 'rahs' that appear to circumvent the introduction of the term 'stereotype' (as is the case also with Joy's account below). In the focus group, until Eleanor begins to challenge the signifiers pertinent to the Rah in the vignette, the group had quite comfortably and affably discussed the 'rah' but the undoing of these terms in the conversation generated by Eleanor is then continued with reference to the term 'stereotype'. Tim says directly (but this is implied by others elsewhere) that the 'stereotype' does not account for individual difference; individual identities. There is clearly differentiation and contradictions at work in the way that 'rah' identities are assumed to operate. They repeatedly use the term stereotype in the fashion of the classical view i.e. to assert that they refer to an indiscriminate lumping together. Using this term implies a particular view of identity that corresponds with Western notions of there being a true inner self, and an individualised sense of self whereby stereotypes represent grouping together and silence different subjectivities. Contradictions arise when they assume that people deliberately assume the 'rah' identity – it is their exclusionary subgroup, their style, their readiness to display their wealth and privilege and look down on others in the process that they interpret as deliberate performances.

The term 'stereotype' does a significant amount of work by placing the judgements being made by each person in the realm of collective judgements – while the term is being used to describe an 'indiscriminate lumping' together of group characteristics, the way it is used is so it deflects the judgement from the individual. As Patrick says earlier 'you can't ignore the stereotype, it is there': it is there then, existing independently of the judgements of the students themselves; they do not make the stereotype and therefore cannot claim responsibility for the potential of misreading/misjudging someone. Pickering's later work on stereotyping, which involves rethinking stereotypical (mis)representations and reworking it with the concept of the Other provides a rationale for this analysis. As has been noted, Western notions of identity rely on negotiations of sameness and difference and alterity; they are relational and ideas of the self are constructed against the other,

the constitutive outside/limit' to the self. Stereotypes exist as forms of otherness but also as processes of othering in identity work:

> The concept of the Other takes us some way beyond the limitations of the stereotype by bringing more clearly into the frame both those involved in the process of othering as well as the object of this process, and by grounding stereotypical misrepresentations more firmly in the structures and relations of power which give them their binding force. It does not displace or supersede the concept of the stereotype but renders it rather more complex, opening up for interrogation its ambiguities and contradictions of meaning and effect. Analysing stereotypicality through the conceptual lens of the Other allows us to understand more fully how it is implicated in identification as a field of cultural encounter and interaction, how it operates strategically in that field as an 'arrested fetishistic mode of representation' and provides both a desire for and a disavowal of what it commands (Bhabba, 1997: 75). Compared with the concept of the stereotype, this more complex understanding is a fruit of the fuller theorising of Otherness. While it does not provide a magic wand for solving in their entirety the critical problems of the politics of representation, one of the values of engaging theoretically with questions of the stereotypical Otherness is that of deflecting the tendency to be normatively judgemental.
>
> (Pickering, 2002: 69)

In positioning the 'rah' as Other and referring to it as a stereotype, the students deflect the 'tendency to be normatively judgemental', often employing the term strategically in their distinction-making as asserted above. This is exemplified further in the extract from Joy's interview below, when she uses the phrase 'stereotypically awful' and which she then follows up with a declaration that she has nothing personally against 'them':

> Yes well there is a sort of 'us' and 'them' divide in the sort of Rahs and non-Rahs because there's a facebook page called 'Overheard at OLD University' and all of them tend to be insulting remarks about posh people – it seems so unfair and I imagine some of the people writing them are probably incredibly well-off...it's just incredibly stereotypically awful really...I think I'm probably...not around enough at university really to notice I mean you see them in lectures but I wouldn't necessarily see them otherwise erm – they're quite – they're alright – I've got nothing against them (laughs) – them! (laughs)
>
> (Joy, 21, middle-class, OLD University)

This excerpt from Joy's interview is representative of the way 'rahs' are discussed by a lot of the participants – particularly those claiming a middle-class identity/status. The tendency is, when setting out what a 'rah' is (or interpreted as being), to situate 'rahs' as 'them' against 'us' or 'the rest of us'. This separation between 'us' and 'them' and indeed the idea of who the 'us' is, is interesting and will be re-examined below in the discussion on 'student' identity. The 'facebook' page[xxxi] that Joy mentions is another example of the many sites in which the 'rah' becomes the focus of difference. Furthermore, it is an example of the ways in which the 'rah' is mocked but this is repeatedly used and insinuated as playful banter; as harmless fun.

According to Raisborough and Adams (2008) 'mockery creates spaces of enunciation, which serve, when inhabited by the middle class, particular articulations of distinction' and as such, 'mockery offers a certain strategic orientation to class and distinction work' (2008: 1). Their work is concerned primarily with the circulation of the term 'chav'; however it has currency with the ways in which 'rahs' are discussed through spaces of distinction created through mockery – portrayed as harmless fun. Examples of this in the data presented so far, include Joy's 'oh you rah!'; the laughter shared in the focus groups when 'rahs' and the signifiers of 'rahs' are discussed; and these all lend to the idea that humour and mockery are being used to make class distinctions. Pickering (2008) shows how humour and 'humorous' media portrayals of difference should be examined critically. Writers such as Tyler (2006; 2008), who deal with the term 'chav', also point to the representations existing in the media and popular culture, such as the character 'Vicky Pollard' from *Little Britain*. One might just as easily highlight examples such as 'Tim Nice but Dim' from *Harry Enfield and Chums* or the characters 'Patsy and Eddy' from *Absolutely Fabulous.* These are comedic portrayals of upper/upper-middle class figures; characters that serve to contrast with the middle-class ordinariness and normality. The 'rah' in effect is represented as a caricature of the elite and all that they are taken to represent in contradistinction to middle-classness, normality and ordinariness. Tyler (2008: 1471) argues that a 'new vocabulary of social class has emerged in Britain'; 'rah' may well be one of the new editions to such vocabularies.

The circulation of the term 'rah' in this research but also its increasing currency in popular culture and media examples such as 'facebook',

'urbandictionary', 'Wikipedia' and 'YouTube', may suggest that the currency of the term is stretching beyond that of education, and thus some comparisons may be taken from a lot of sociological work that is emerging that deals with the circulation of the term 'chav' (Nayak, 2006; Tyler, 2006; 2008; 2010; Gidley and Rooke, 2010; Raisborough and Adams, 2008). The comparison and opposition constructed between the category 'rah' and 'chav' is referred to several times throughout the research as middling devices in middle-class identity work. However, it must be noted that despite its apparent rise in usage, the definition of rah as it stands, is very much tied to education and thus is strikingly different from the currency of the term 'chav' and thus the context of the sociological studies exploring this highlighted above. Furthermore, as the following data analysis chapters will make plain – (particularly Chapter 6) the label 'chav' differs profoundly from 'rah' in terms of the fixity of being a 'chav', a 'spoiled identity' (Goffman, 1963) in relation to what is alternatively seen as an identity performance of privileged (mobile) students, presumably one they can leave behind beyond university. The 'rah' is used to legitimate middle-class, normative, student identities, via establishing claims of entitlement via meritocratic practice, whereas the 'chav' has much wider, and arguably more damaging applications and social consequences.

Drawing on the term stereotypes repeatedly, however, the students in this research invoke the term 'chav' as a working-class 'stereotype' and a 'rah' as an upper/upper-middle-class 'stereotype' without apparently giving consideration to the currency of their uses. As the excerpt above from the OLD University focus group at the start of this section mentioned, there is the feeling that it is 'rahs' and then everyone else, whereby working-class students were (in the absence of any 'chav' signifiers) 'non-rah' and thereby, normal. In Joy's words there are 'us' and 'them'; 'rahs' and 'non-Rahs'. What was also interesting about that particular focus group excerpt was the statement that Geraldine didn't know anyone at university who was a chav but she didn't know about there being any at NEW. The perceptions of the two university sites repeatedly stated through invocation of the term 'rah' (and 'chav' to a lesser extent) as well its circulation within the university sites (intra-institutional differences), demonstrate the complex ways in which the students interpret their surroundings and the relationships to others. With the 'rah' being held as the antithesis of student normality, a consideration of student identity will now follow; exploring different relationships to 'rahs' and different processes of identifying students as 'people like me' to those accounts stated above.

5.5 'Student' identity: insiders and outsiders

Social class and locality (as well as institution to a certain extent) seem to have particular bearing on the extent to which participants identified as 'student'; as 'us' against the 'rah' 'them'. What is often the case with the 'local students' in this research, is that the term 'student' is replaced with 'typical student', which is often synonymous with the term 'rah' via the similar descriptions made. Because they disidentify with these 'typical students', they define themselves as 'atypical' students and it is interesting that, by in large, these are the students who would be otherwise described as 'non-traditional'. They present themselves as 'outsiders within'; atypical because of their circumstances and by contrast to 'rahs' or 'typical students'.

Furthermore, a striking proportion of these students were NEW University students. The idea of insiders/outsiders then is not just about being or feeling 'inside' or 'outside' the university and the student population, but also resonates with the idea of being 'inside' the locale or having come from 'outside' (see Taylor & Scurry, 2011). Using Newcastle and Northumbria Universities in his study, Humphrey (2006: 275) highlighted that there is a strong cultural tradition in England for students to move away from their family home to study. However, he notes that the differences in levels of students staying at home differed dramatically between the institutions with double of the amount of students staying at home who attended Northumbria (26% compared to 13%); 74% of Newcastle students were from outside the region compared to 46% in Northumbria. The differentiating factors of staying in the region (not always at the parental home but certainly within the same close network of friends and family), against the different institution type, interplay in the participants' sense of identification as 'student'. Identifying with the category 'student' is about a sense of belonging to the collective student community. However, as has been shown, different 'types' of student exist in educational discourse ('non-traditional', 'new', 'rah', 'typical student') and the interplay of class with locale and institution complexly intercedes with the participants' sense of self and ability or desire to claim the identity 'student'. The sites and contexts in which knowledges about students are *produced* then inform identities.

This idea of the 'typical student' is common to some of the participant dialogues that reside in the local area. Sophie, a first year student at NEW, who grew up in the popular (affluent) student residential area of Greyville (one that is

elsewhere confirmed by herself and the majority of participants as 'rah central') constructed 'rahs' as 'typical students' via this locality:

> …I've grown up in Greyville and there's always been loads of like Rahs in Greyville and so that was like my little – that was like my opinion of what a [typical] student was but obviously I grew up a bit more and I realised that everyone's not like that…
>
> (Sophie, 23, middle class, NEW University)
>
> (NEW Focus group/Paired interview)

Sophie's idea of 'typical students' were as 'rahs' with who she disidentified and thus did not see 'typical students' as 'people like me' (Bourdieu, 1990); despite her living in an affluent area and growing up in a middle-class household, she disidentified from what she then saw as 'typical students'. This local knowledge structured her decision to go to NEW instead of OLD; where she sees more of a 'rah' population. This bears similarities with Reay *et al*'s (2005) study which found that students were less likely to opt for universities where they felt much difference with the types of other students there. Whereas Sophie once aligned 'rahs' with 'typical students' prior to achieving student status, she now, however, distinguishes clearly between 'rahs and 'non-rahs' (to use Joy's terminology) existing within and between the institutions. This knowledge is thus constructed via her experience of being 'inside'.

This theme of 'rahs' as 'typical students' continues with many of the local NEW University participants and also show gender differences in relationship to the category 'student'. There appears to exist a relationship between social class and locality, that implicates the bonds of existing social networks and those made within university as facilitating a sense of student belonging and identity. The constructions of knowledge of what is a 'typical student' inside and outside of university and the feelings of insider/outsider status constructed via the experience of university, differ between the gendered participants. Vanessa and Jayne, like Sophie, also make comments about 'typical students' that are closely aligned to the image that is given of the 'rah'. In Vanessa's interview she discussed how this image of a 'typical student' resides with people in the local area outside of the university:

...like the people I know who haven't even been to university who are like my friends and that; we'll be on a bus or something or in the car and they'll be like 'student' (laughs) so, and you know straight away.

(Vanessa, 23, working-class, NEW University)

Vanessa's non-student friends engage in 'student-spotting', and these 'typical students' or 'rahs' are easily identifiable from other young people, who aren't as clearly identifiable as 'student'. Whilst the students in the research make careful differentiations between different student 'types', the embodied characteristics of the 'typical student' or 'rah' identify them as 'student' in the local community. Both Vanessa and Jayne discuss knowing people who went to NEW University before they went and so their perception of NEW as a university where 'people like me' go was also constructed prior to university. That they already knew people within the institution prior to attending themselves is important; their existing social networks had a place both inside and outside of university. Both the young women discuss friendships with students on their course (however, it is noteworthy these are mostly other local students) and spending time in student leisure spaces. Additionally, both women discussed working part-time, putting in long hours outside their study and thus reducing the potential for leisure time in student spaces. Their roles as workers were cited by them as limiting the time they had in their student lives and thus they differentiated themselves not just from 'rahs' (otherwise known as 'typical students' in the local community) but from a large amount of the student population at NEW.

They did not therefore disidentify as strongly as from the category 'student' as did Colin and Craig. Both these young men assume very 'outsider' status *within* university. In line with Jayne and Vanessa they worked very demanding hours (Colin especially reporting working full-time hours in addition to his studies) thus reducing their ability to participate in student leisure time/spaces. However, in both cases they were the only one of their close circle of friends who had chosen to go to university, with the majority of their other friends occupying manual work; 'trades' and 'apprenticeships'. Both of them mentioned other local students whom they were friendly with inside university, but not socially on a regular basis. Both talked of having few friends on their course with whom they identified, the rest falling into a mass of 'typical students' from which they saw themselves removed. For both of them the idea of 'typical students' or 'rahs' became synonymous with the category

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'student'; not that they didn't appreciate there were other students like themselves who didn't fit the same description as 'rahs'/'typical students' but that they saw these as being in the minority. Colin and Craig both discuss attempts to integrate socially in their early experiences and then abandoning such attempts.

> Well for me a rah is just a student – a typical student – a one who is narrow minded, particularly narrow-minded you know, doesn't want to communicate with anyone outside of their little world, their little community, mammy and daddy pays for everything, even if like....the whole like, living this student lifestyle I've been describing erm so for me they're all rahs – but for NEW, a rah would be like someone whose *farth-ar drives a jag-u-ar* – you know, like really well off... I think a 'rah' is...a word used nationwide.......NEW would say that there are rahs at OLD only – there are only a few at NEW but for me they're everywhere. Last night I was working… and these girls I was working with, they were talking...I didn't say anything I just sat and watched them and I mean the way I was even sat like I was further out – like I didn't quite fit – watching them, listening to them, and they were saying '...who are these rahs?' and they started explaining how they'd never seen a rah and apparently they're all over... they don't know any 'rahs'...Before, they'd been talking about how they'd been to private school and how they had friends who went to private schools and some of them haven't and the first thing that went off in my head (but I didn't say it to them) erm was, 'have you ever thought that you can't see the wood for the trees? You are the rahs – that's why you can't see them – you *are* it'; you know, and for me I would describe them as rahs.
>
> (Colin, 23, working-class, NEW University)

Archer *et al* (2003) argue that working-class men in higher education more easily identify with their class backgrounds, and are more critical of the middle-class 'field' and this is a class-gender distinction that is prevalent in the data in their cases. In terms of thinking about 'us' and 'them', Colin's example shows a distinct difference to that posited by Joy earlier. The 'us' that she speaks of refers to her sense of belonging to the student community that Colin does not feel; his class status, as he perceives it, renders him unable to feel part of the 'us' that Joy speaks of. What I find especially poignant about Colin's interview excerpt is the statement 'like I didn't quite fit', which is what may be summarised from his whole experience of being at university that he expresses throughout his interview. What he says here though also adds to the discussion that Geraldine attempts to engender during the OLD

University focus group, which was shown in the previous section. That is, when Geraldine questions whether a ''rah' knows they're a 'rah'', she seems to suggest that the term 'rah' is one that is conferred and not necessarily claimed. The other students counteract that and posit 'rahs' as consciously and playfully taking up and performing the identity. Colin, however, here presents a contrasting example to these claims. He identifies them as 'rahs' when they themselves are unaware that they could be positioned as such.

Although Colin says that most people within NEW would distinguish the 'us' and 'them' of 'rahs' and non-rahs' according to material wealth and that there are only 'rahs' at OLD; his view is that the majority of students live the student lifestyle and embody the characteristics usually shared with 'rah'. He strongly disidentified with the middle-class field and saw its internal differentiation on the basis of who has more material wealth. His lack of 'fit' with the student identity and student community he perceives, entails him positioning all of 'them' as 'rahs'; all students are in his eyes, 'rahs'. His student status is atypical in that he does not agree to the conditions of membership; he doesn't (in his words) 'subscribe to the student lifestyle'; he doesn't share the same sense of humour; he doesn't act the same way. In a Bourdieusian sense, Colin's habitus is mismatched to the field and the social, cultural and economic capitals he possesses do not have valued currency within HE; his refusal to 'subscribe to their lifestyle' is his form of resistance to their domination within HE. This is an extremely basic analysis however. There are a lot of aspects of Colin's (and others') circumstances that have been mentioned in brief above that require fuller analyses; Bourdieusian analyses may be fruitfully employed with many of the participants but they are mentioned in brief here only to signal their significance; they will be dealt with in more detail in the remaining chapters.

Although, as I have shown, locality is a prominent feature in the (dis)identifications with the category 'student' and the differing sense of insider/outsider status, as explained earlier the interplay of locality and social class is extremely complex. The inside and outside of university are both prominent in shaping and producing knowledge, as are the extent to which one feels and negotiates insider/outsider status. As in Southerton's study (2002: 171) 'the relationship between class and identifications is not straightforward' and the idea of 'us' and 'them', between 'rahs' and 'non-rahs' shows that class impacts on complex, internal differentiations of occupying the identity category 'student'.

5.6   Summary

The data from this research provides compelling examples of the ways in which the students in this research construct their identities in the everyday of university life. Most notably, the 'rah' is held as figure of distaste and subject to mockery, via which the students position themselves as ordinary and normal. The 'rah' becomes the 'them' against which the normal, ordinary, deserving and entitled HE students are 'us'. However, what has also been highlighted are the challenges to the assumed 'us', most notably provided by the local, working-class students from NEW University. It has been suggested that middle-class students use the 'rah' as a framing device for their own entitled, middle-class selves; occupying a 'middle-ground' between the 'undeserving rich' ('rahs') and the deficient working-classes stereotypically held up as 'chavs' and 'non-students'. However, whilst working-class students are perceived as part of their ideas of 'us' against the 'rah' 'them', this relies on the basis of their not being identifiable as 'chavs'. The ways in which (normative) students and 'rahs' are identified and distinguished, depend on interpretation of embodied signifiers. The next chapter will take this as its central theme, thus building on the arguments set out in this chapter. Identity/boundary work of 'us' and 'them' continues to operate throughout this chapter and those that follow, demonstrating ideas of and relationships to the identity of 'student' that are constructed via normative and performative statements in the everyday of university life.

6. Embodiment of (classed) Identity in Higher Education

The body is in the social world but the social world is in the body.

(Bourdieu, 2000: 152)

6.1   Introduction

As Bourdieu notes, our experiences of being in the social world are literally inscribed on the body; we are vessels of signs of our social positions. Embodiment is therefore the 'corporeal consequences of social structures' (Shilling, 2007: 3). That is, elements of our social positions are contained corporeally and are implicit in the relational identities we form. The body, containing within it the social world, '*enacts* the past', bringing it back to life. What is 'learned by the body' is not something one has, like knowledge that can be brandished, but something that one is' (Bourdieu, 1990: 73). Whilst it may be that certain embodied aspects of identity may be read as contrived, it is also likely that they are unthought-of and more as a kind of second nature. We embody, simultaneously, multiple signifiers that are constantly being read, interpreted, their meanings constantly being (re)constructed and (re)negotiated in everyday encounters with others. The way we speak (idioms as well as accent), the way we dress, our hairstyles, ways of moving and holding ourselves, our behaviours and mannerisms, are all signifiers that are constantly being read and interpreted by our relational others. There are ways in which the habitus is manifest and 'consists of a series of dispositions, attitudes and tastes...habitus is a concept that cuts across conventional mind/body splits' (Lawler, 2008a: 130).

Notions of the self, identity and the body are as inseparable theoretically as they are physically, despite many analyses 'conceiving of the 'I' and the 'body' in terms of two separate entities' (Fraser & Greco, 2005: 1). As the previous chapter went some way to arguing, our identities are social and similarly our bodies represent signs of our being in the social world. However, that is not to say that embodied class identities are merely 'reflections of objective social positions' (Skeggs, 1997: 94); an essentialism that overlooks the complexity of identities and the ongoing processes of identity formation. Rather, my argument is that through the claiming and conferring of identities via embodied signifiers, it is possible to interpret class subjectivities as one of the real social effects of broader 'large scale' class inequalities (Fraser, 1999: 120).

A significant proportion of the data collected from the students who participated in the research, particularly when commenting on how difference is felt and negotiated within university related to embodiment. Furthermore, as the previous chapter set out to highlight, a considerable amount of these data involve the use of the figure of the 'rah' from which the speaker is distanced and therefore claims of ordinariness and normality are implicitly made. These data

entail the identification of different accents and ways of speaking, deportment and values, and most commonly in the appearance of people that entails dress sense and style, including the presentation of bodily features and the visibility of consumption practices in the wearing of branded goods. Distinctions are premised on judgements of taste; they are part of the fashioning of the moral self. 'Taste classifies and it classifies the classifier' (Bourdieu, 1984: 6) and as such, analysis of the research dialogues in this chapter, offer opportunities to understand how judgements of taste, routinely practised in the everyday of HE, are class processes and exemplify the operation of class identities.

The chapter is roughly divided into two main sections, one of which focuses on the auditory signifiers of everyday distinctions and the other on visual signifiers. This is not to hold them as separate – they are often interrelated as the initial section will show, before looking at the data on visual and auditory signifiers in separate sections. The distinctions relating to embodiment include more regular invocation of the explicit distinctions between 'middle-class' and 'working-class'. Interestingly, this is much more the case when discussing accent than with appearance. The same mechanisms of displacement that are involved in the invocation of the term 'stereotype' by the students in the previous chapter also apply here; as judgements already existing 'out there' in the social world and thus they deflect tendencies for them to be seen as being normatively judgemental. In addition to discussions around others however, there are moments of self-reflection in the data, particularly when experiential accounts of embodying a devalued/delegitimised identity via these signifiers are offered e.g. broad regional accent. The perceived judgments upon them contribute to their sense of worth in these spaces of HE and as such often effect the extent to which they identify as students. This chapter provides further insight into the grounds on which 'non-traditional' students sense disjuncture from 'typical students' and therefore contributes to understanding of the operation of class identities in HE.   When an emphasis on 'fitting in' or 'standing out' in HE is increasingly of importance in emerging research, the contributions of these findings serve to highlight the complex ongoing identity work and the negotiations around the identity 'student' that make claiming this identity more difficult for some than others.

6.2   Classifying codes

Embodiment of class, despite being the most common way in which recognisable differences were vocalised, was met too with uncertainty and with hesitations, ambiguities and often contradictions. Both Sophie and Imogen below exemplify the shifting, uneasy and often ambiguous ways in which attempts to explain class distinctions are experienced:

...it is so hard to define what is class but sometimes if you sit on a bench and watch people go by and it sounds really, really off, but you can look and can tell if people are- or make a judgement about whether you feel people are working-class or middle-class by looking at them. And I don't even know, without even hearing them speak, their accent - or anything, and I don't know what it is because they might be dressed in expensive clothes but there's [some]thing about them that separates them from each other…...and I really, really don't know what it is.

(Imogen, 49, Middle-class, OLD University)

I think accent maybe – you can really tell where someone's from like if they've got a proper strong Geordie accent then you would kind of associate that with working class – but not necessarily, I mean, I guess if you're quite educated then the way you speak and the way you put your words together is quite intelligent then it's sort of middle class as well. And I mean there's a lot of factors as well...you can't really tell how much someone earns just from their appearance and just from their accent and looks – you can judge on it but I know quite a few people who you would think have a lot of money and a lot of intellect just 'cause of the way they talk and the way they dress. So, I think it's quite hard to judge.

(Sophie, 22, Middle-class, NEW University)
(NEW focus group/paired interview)

Class, as Skeggs notes, is 'difficult to pin down, leaking beyond the traditional measures of classification' (2005: 968-9) and these women's comments demonstrate such complexities. What the women point to is reminiscent of a comment made by a young, white middle-class girl in Walkerdine *et al*'s (2001) study who stated, 'You can spot it a mile off even though it's not to do with money' (Walkerdine *et al*, 2001: 38). Their analysis of this statement was that 'class is in everything about the person, from the location of their home, to their dress, their body, their accent' (Walkerdine *et al*, 2001: 39). The excerpts from Imogen and Sophie above, demonstrate that there is something about class that

is recognisable in '*everything* about the person'; that it is not 'solely' about money to buy 'expensive clothes' – other factors must be present. The signifiers of class are not intelligible exclusively but rather, via their combinatory value.

Whereas Imogen begins to discuss the distinction she makes around class on the basis of appearance, the way she discusses it is as if hearing the accent would serve to allow her to confirm or challenge the initial assumption. Sophie does this to a certain extent in her claim that you can't judge someone *just* on their appearance or *just* on their accent. Both women here also speak to the notion that class is perceivable through the acts of both listening to and seeing someone. However, specifying these signifiers becomes troublesome and contains ambiguities. This is particularly evident when Sophie explains that accent can denote class (which involves, for her, income and level of education – she equates intelligence/intellect with middle-classness) but that this can also be potentially misleading. Each signifier contains classed codes but their meanings are shaped through recognition of their combinatory codes. Each person is being read and interpreted through a complex combination of signifiers that serve to contribute to the overall reading or judgement. These judgements are premised on morality and taste and are part of a classed habitus (Bourdieu, 1984). The tendency to talk of visual and auditory signifiers side-by-side (as separate and also combinatory) exemplified above with Sophie and Imogen, was common throughout the dialogues with other participants. The visual and the auditory signifiers will be presented in detail in separate sections but this is not with the intention of disengaging them from their contributory significance in the role embodiment plays in the making of class distinctions. Quite the contrary, complex interpretations of class identities involve multifaceted levels of understanding.

6.3   *Accent and linguistic habitus/capital*

Every research participant discussed accents [xxxii], whether this was to discuss their own feelings of discomfort and anxiety with 'owning' a (strong) regional accent and/or using accent as a means to distinguish class and difference. Honey makes an impassioned statement that 'accent differences are one of the greatest obstacles to genuine social inequality in this country' and that they are

used to 'discriminate against others and belittle them' (1989: 174). His book, *Does Accent Matter?: The Pygmalion Factor,* concludes that accents do indeed matter and as the brief example above shows, he makes quite fervent and passionate attempts to argue the notion that accents operate to perpetuate social inequalities. The claims Honey makes regarding the infallible influence of education and social class, as the two most prominent factors in the ways in which accents are coded and perceived, has strong links with the interpretations and analyses pertinent to the research data.

6.3.1 Posh/Common; North/South; NEW/OLD

Making the link between class and accent, 'is well established in the UK setting', according to Maguire; where ''posh' and 'common' are set against one another without question' (Maguire, 2005: 932). Certainly it is a common, broad perception in the participants' accounts but it is certainly not without question and is not at all as straightforward as Maguire presents. Furthermore, although it is the 'UK setting' under discussion, that in itself is problematic when quite often divisions between north and south that are vocalised refer largely to England. Here the tendency is for north and south to be aligned to common and posh respectively (albeit largely by students with an identifiable regional accent), and such distinctions are bound up in socio-geographical distinctions and ideas shaped by a 'standard language ideology' (Milroy, 1999: 173). Speakers of British Standard English (SE) or Received Pronunciation (RP) are often set against those with easily identifiable regional accents, which again, is often set up as a distinction between north and south; common and posh. This is highly interesting as two of the participants in this study self-identified as 'British/Irish' (Charys – from Northern Ireland) and 'British/Scottish' (Natalie); despite being from other parts of the state where there are, of course, similar accent distinctions operating, neither spoke of these but instead indicated 'posh' accents as pertaining to (English) RP; coded as Southern English.

Participants commonly refer to 'no accent' or 'standard English accent' or 'posh' or 'southern' and what that they are actually referring to what is termed as RP or SE. Here, Milroy (1999: 174) makes sense of what RP is:

In Britain, it seems to be RP speakers who are typically described in this way [as having 'no accent']….RP is saliently marked for class and in no sense is nor ever

has been a mainstream accent….In Britain where consciousness of the special status of RP as a class accent is acute, spoken standard English may be…described as what is left after we remove from the linguistic bran-tub [of] Estuary English, Brummie, Cockney, Geordie, Scouse, various quaint rural dialects, London Jamaican, transatlantic slang and perhaps even conservative RP as spoken by older members of the upper classes. What remains is sometimes described as English spoken with 'no accent'.

RP is, as Milroy says 'saliently marked for class' with 'special status' and the origins of the preference for RP or SE can be traced back to the eighteenth century 'in creating conditions under which an 'ideology of linguistic prescriptivism' became the dominant conceptual framework for setting up the motion of national standard language (cf. Smith 1984; Watts 1990, 1996; Mugglestone 1995; Leith 1997; Milroy and Milroy 1998)' (Watts, 1999: 40). Watts further argues that it was the power of social institutions such as government, schools and universities 'through which dominant social values were not only constructed and diffused throughout society' (1999: 40); the most prominent of those being 'public' schools, that allowed for SE/RP to become entrenched. Utilising Berger and Luckman as well as Bourdieu's work, Watts demonstrates that it was through such powerful institutions that SE/RP became the dominant, and therefore symbolic/linguistic capital. The distinctions made in the research on the basis of auditory signifiers are discussed primarily in relation to accents but come to include other aspects of language including dialect, idiom, vocabulary, and grammar; all of these aspects can be discussed together in Bourdieusian terms as linguistic capital (1990; 1993a). I will return to the notion of 'linguistic capital' and indeed 'linguistic habitus' below.

Tracing the idea of the north/south divide historically, Blackaby & Manning state, '[t]he concept of a gulf between a prosperous, high-wage low-unemployment South and a depressed, low-wage high-unemployment North has a considerable history' (Blackaby & Manning, 1990: 510). This idea of the north/south divide still has prominence today with Office for National Statistics and Department of Health regularly publishing statistics which divide the north and south of England according to factors such as earnings and prevalence of health problems, with the north still coming off worse. However, as well as the north-south divide presented via statistical data, there also exists an imaginary

divide whereby representations of the north as poor, working-class and the south as rich and middle-class endure and serve to blur distinctions, particularly when one includes non-English states of the UK.

The coding of OLD University as 'south' and NEW as 'north' was raised by several students and such differences are expressed in various ways, one key one being through identification of accents. The differences between the two universities and the invocation of the north/south divide between them feeds into wider discussions over the broad class differentiation between the two institutions, which will be covered in depth next two chapters. However, what is noteworthy at this juncture is the way that accents serve to signify and mark out 'north' and 'south', loosely coded as 'common' and 'posh' respectively and how these signifiers not only denote class but that they are not always straight forward. For example:

I don't know for 100% but it seems to be the kind of general thing of the uni – just like the main accents you tend to hear at NEW uni are kind of Northern ones...and maybe a few Scottish people... it seems to be like a North thing really.

(Jayne, 24, working class, NEW University)

Siobhan stated that she did not hear any northern accents at OLD University and likened the accents to 'standard English':

Yeah like you don't really know where they're from (laughs) because you'll say like, 'are you from London?' And they're not; they're from like Northern cities.... it's just like standard, like posh accent but you can't really place it because it could be from like any private school or anywhere - but I'm not posh, like I sound really common, like when they speak I sound like a right commoner (laughs)!

(Siobhan, 18, working-class, OLD University)

What Siobhan here draws attention to is the recognition that OLD University may indeed be just as 'north' as NEW, but that there is less recognition of distinct northern, regional accents. Siobhan interprets her student others at OLD university as speakers of 'standard' English, whilst also highlighting the tendency to code these speakers as 'south' (and 'posh'), in the absence of an identifiable regional accent, which may of course be misleading. Siobhan herself is from southern England but her accent is that of a 'commoner' in comparison to the

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('rah') speakers of 'standard' English she encounters. This group of students become the reference group from which her 'commoner' status is made possible, whereas when she discusses her accent in her place of work, she is simply 'southern'. Quite what this 'standard' is and the inferences of education shall be unpacked shortly. However, what she exemplifies is a kind of 'south' that is not 'posh'. Northern regional accents tend to be alluded to as more easily identifiable in comparison to a broad grouping of 'southern' accents:

> ...accents are so different cos I mean when you go like down south I mean you can obviously tell a few different [accents] but they are generally the same whether you look at someone from Newcastle as opposed to like someone from...maybe like Middlesbrough or like Yorkshire....[they're so different]
>
> (Sophie, 22, middle-class, New University)
> (New focus group/paired interview)

> Mm…you see it's hard because I grew up in the north so it's hard to separate southern accents – I just hear southern accents...
>
> (Patrick, 20, middle-class, OLD University)
> (OLD Focus Group)

With the participants from northern England (and also Charys, Northern Ireland and Natalie, Scotland), there is a common tendency to distinguish easily between different northern accents and to lump all southern accents together. A 'southern' accent is often described as 'no accent' or 'standard English' by the participants; that is, the specific region is unidentifiable/unrecognisable. However, when Faye was asked if she thought the differentiation in accents was a north/south thing, she replied:

> It's just strong accents – yeah strong accents 'cause I know someone who's like proper cockney and then there's like – well there's tonnes of strong accents but then ...the posh people can come from up north or down south - they can come from anywhere.
>
> (Faye, 18, middle-class, OLD University)

That it is more difficult to ascertain north/south or indeed where the 'posh people' are from is an assertion commonly made in this research, as is the influence of (private school) education in engendering such accents:

> I was like, 'ah, are you from London?', and she was like, 'No I'm from Leeds'…...and I was like, 'with that accent?!', and she was like, 'yeah, I went to private school', and I was like, 'oh my god you can't even tell where they're from!'
>
> (Siobhan, 18, working-class, OLD University)

RP accent serves to disrupt the links of accent to space and place to a certain extent then. That is, they are not recognisable and because RP is held as the dominant accent, associations with privilege, or indeed being 'posh' follow. Honey (1989) is also concerned with mapping out the historicity of language and accents in the UK, not only charting the ideology of linguistic prescriptivism through formal institutions such as education and traditional broadcasting media but also the geographical representations involved in ranking regional accents and their associative characteristics. He notes that '[a]ll British accents have less prestige than RP, but they are not equal in their relative inferiority to it' (1989: 58); he charts a hierarchy of accents with 'educated' Scottish, then 'educated' Wales and Northern Irish. After these, a 'broad cluster of provincial accents' are hierarchically placed and preferences are based around qualities and characteristics associated with that accent (Honey, 1989: 58-9). As Hey states, 'accents carr[y]...these sedimented and constantly reactivated meanings linking the demography of class to the geography of accents and their place in the hierarchy of social positioning' (1997: 140-1). Also, and importantly in this context, some accents carry connotations of intelligence, and some regional accents with a lack of intelligence. According to Honey (1989), these cultural meanings vary, but not significantly so. Various associations between place and accent, between that accent and class via dispositions, operate within the research data and operate on several different bases including material and social/dispositional connections and characteristics. For example:

> I don't know I think like accents helps a lot like if people have a rougher accent and just kind of like their manner, just like the way they talk and just their personality really, I think people are a lot more relaxed and just a lot more open if like money

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has been a bit of a problem, if that makes sense? I don't know, just it seems like they're a lot more relaxed and just easy going.

(Natalie, 18, middle-upper class, OLD University)

You associate a really sort of southern-Windsor-esque accent with someone who's got a lot of money compared to like broad, northern accent over someone who might not have as much money...

(Tim, 20, middle-class, OLD University)

Both Tim and Natalie associate accents with material wealth to some extent, where a 'broad' or 'rougher' accent equates to lower class status. In Tim's example, the words he chooses are quite distinct and makes reference to a very elite, royal association in 'windsor-esque' and this entails a further distinction within RP. Honey's (1989) work again helps to understand how RP can be further distinguished according to associations of privilege, particularly relevant to a private school education. In his work he draws the distinctions between 'talking proper' and 'talking posh', which he aligns to the difference between 'unmarked' and 'marked RP' respectively:

   Unmarked RP suggests a fairly high degree of educatedness, although the social
   class of its speaker need not be very exalted….The *marked* RP speaker definitely
   sounds as though he or she has had a privileged kind of education, at a leading
   public school for example, although not necessarily to a high level...As to social
   standing, every syllable of the marked RP accent seems to assert a claim to a
   special degree of social privilege.

(Honey, 1989: 38-9)

To accept this distinction in RP speakers is also helpful in making sense of the distinction work made between students in this research, who clearly speak with an RP accent but who are able to distinguish elite Others – such as 'rahs' – as 'talking posh'; they are in this sense identifying a marked RP. What Tim appears to be doing then is an example of the 'middling' identity work that was discussed in the previous chapter. Whilst Tim clearly codes 'marked' RP with elitism and privilege/wealth and broad northern accents with a lack of wealth/privilege, Natalie goes further to suggest dispositions linked to 'broad accents' and more generally, people from lower classes. That people are 'more relaxed' and 'more

open' if they have struggled financially, is similar to other expressions of relating classed characteristics and dispositions to accents. Embodying an accent (or indeed what is often described as 'no accent', or RP) denotes the embodiment of (classed) characteristics and dispositions. However, what is crucial is to understand that the value or currency of these particular characteristics/dispositions rely on the context, or field.

6.3.2 Linguistic capital/habitus; value in HE

Erel (2010) draws attention to three states of cultural capital identified by in Bourdieu (1986): 'embodied, institutionalized and objectified' (Erel, 2010: 643). Like Erel, the 'former two are of interest here'; in the embodied state, cultural capital, specifically linguistic capital, is 'perhaps best expressed in the concept of habitus, which includes ...speaking as markers of distinction' (Erel, 2010: 643). Institutionalized capital refers to formal (and often informal) education and this bears most relevance to the idea of 'standard language ideology' (Milroy, 1999: 173) referred to earlier. Institutionalized (linguistic) capital is especially relevant to thinking through the value of linguistic capital in particular fields, the education field being most prominent in this research.

Thinking about accent and ways of speaking as linguistic habitus allows consideration of the socialised nature of language and accent. The linguistic habitus, as Bourdieu defines it here, 'is the product of social conditions and is not a simple production of utterances but the production of utterances adapted to a 'situation' or, rather, adapted to a market or field' (Bourdieu, 2000: 78). As Honey says, we have little control over vocal features but accent is different in that 'although we do not choose the accent which we grow up speaking, we can alter it to a considerable extent...in relation to the degree of formality or informality of the occasion...[and] in relation to the accent of the person to whom we are speaking' (Honey, 1989: 57). This may be true in some respects and to certain extents for different people, however what Honey proposes here has distinctly Bourdieusian undertones; the (in)formality of the occasion and the people to whom we speak are particular to the field or market in which the individual is interacting. With accent and indeed with linguistic habitus it should be recognised that '...indeed, the *habitus* is a capital, but one which, because it is embodied, appears as innate' (Bourdieu, 2000: 86). The notion of linguistic habitus/capital is useful in understanding the embodiment of class identities via

auditory signifiers specifically in the sub-field of higher education. RP has symbolic prestige because it is legitimated by the power operating in the field; therefore those with similar linguistic habitus will adapt easily. Those whose linguistic habitus does not match the field may thus encounter disjuncture. The crucial thing about the habitus, according to Bourdieu, is that it is only at points when the habitus is disrupted or fractured, that is, it does not match the field, that it becomes conscious. Bearing this in mind, it is possible to analyse Craig's story of his accent complex as being brought about by his experience of HE:

> ...these people around us were so clever and I mean in college I was clever but, but when I got to this place and I knew it was to such a degree and I knew these people were listening like to every word I was saying it really made me doubt myself and I started developing a massive complex about my accent which I still have now actually.
>
> (Craig, 23, Working-class, NEW University)

Craig actively charts the distinction between his experience of being at his local college and then studying at university. His belief in his intellectual ability at college is fractured when he begins studying at university and he recognises his accent as being part of this difference. Explaining the idea of linguistic capital/habitus further, Bourdieu (2000: 79) says:

> There is a linguistic market whenever someone produces an utterance for producers capable of assessing it, evaluating it and settling a price on it. Knowledge of linguistic competence alone does not enable one to predict what the value of a linguistic performance will be on the market. The price that the products of a given competence will receive on a given market depends on the laws of price formation specific to that market.

Whilst Craig's linguistic habitus was similar to others at his local college, it suffers disjuncture at university where this is not the case. His accent loses value in relation to others who 'fit' better with university (sub)field; those who have an RP accent. It is not to say that his linguistic habitus has no cultural value within HE but that it is differently valued intellectually and certainly in relational terms to the students he compares himself with. He goes further to detail how his accent troubles him now:

I still feel like these people are clever[er] than us, probably more wealthy – and I don't know...why I think that.....when I'm listening to them other people speak it just…...well that's......so easy to understand and I think I imagine them trying to understand me…now I'm so concerned about you know, fully pronunciating ... I'm so conscious about that-that I feel as though I'm kind of – like they can't understand what I'm saying and it does me bloody tits in.....[I feel] Like inferior to be honest like when you're in a room with them type of characters like intellectuals – you know what I mean, you're like kind of trying harder but because you're trying so hard you get really nervous and you kind of clam up and everything.

(Craig, 23. Working-class, NEW University)

Craig identifies cultural codes aligned with RP as signifying wealth and intelligence, that he, by contrast, sees himself as lacking. His awareness of the differences between his accent and that of others causes a significant amount of distress and it presents additional challenges to him when speaking in class, as he is not only having to formulate his argument/point, but also constantly monitoring his accent and adapting it to what he deems as more acceptable and easier to understand.

Faye also presents an example of how the conditions of the field present challenges to her linguistic habitus; she also studies Law:

Yeah I think it is like you know, 'cause I'm in the Law profession and I'm doing [armed forces] officer training and like,...you know it's like expected of you just to be really posh so I always find myself - and like I've been to loads of interviews...- and I'm like trying to so hard to speak, you know, quite poshly and I've not got a really strong accent anyway but like I find myself like trying really hard but erm like most of the time they can tell I'm from like Manchester (laughs)...but I think, you know, but they just assume that you're more...I suppose, common in a way and that you're not as well educated and you're poorer as well and I think where I am from, people don't have a strong accent but as you know, people from the centre of Manchester who have like a really strong accent are related to erm scallys...

(Faye, 18, middle-class, OLD University)

Noting the difference between Faye's assertion that her accent is not a strong accent, and Craig's admission that his accent is quite broad, it is also possible to

conclude that the strength of the accent and its degree of deviation from RP is significant, as well as the cultural codes inherent in different dispositions and characteristics. Both Craig and Faye however, address the same kind of cultural values in terms of wealth and intelligence; of class. The prospect of interviews and the performance of his accent in this situation was also discussed by Craig, who is aware of his accent being judged (as Faye does). This suggests that, not only has their university experience fractured their habitus and their sense of self by way of their accent and its value in different fields/markets both within university but also in fields beyond, having real and lasting consequences. Whilst each field has its own distinctive 'logic of practice', exchange occurs between fields and relative power within fields tends to be replicated across all fields; with the education and economic field being one such example (Thomson, 2008: 70-1).

Whilst the fractured linguistic habitus of the students above are related to regional accents, distinctions between 'marked' and 'unmarked' RP are also involved in the distinctions in HE in this research. Previous schooling is regularly invoked as many of the examples above demonstrate; with private school education being linked to the distinctions between the 'rahs' and 'everyone else', disjuncture can also occur in this respect. Eleanor's comments in the focus group show how she is concerned about being labelled as a 'rah' because of her public school accent:

I think when you come to university everyone just judges on the fact that you went to public – erm private school, so I think within that then you've got to sort of break it down a bit 'cause like yeah I do have an accent – well it's kind of changed a bit I hope (laughs) yeah but you do sort of – I think people do generalise sometimes
(Eleanor, 21, upper-middle class, OLD University)
(OLD focus group)

The focus group at OLD University provided particularly interesting data on the subject of accents and the role they play in differentiating between students and the issue of their links to class discussed by others. The focus group was made up of five middle-class participants, none of whom had what sounded to me like an identifiable regional accent – all of them spoke with what I would describe as an RP accent. During the focus group they were asked to respond

a vignette that was compiled from anonymised elements of the interviews from Faye and Craig around their discussions of accents. The vignette includes a narrative of a working-class student who admits that he feels his accent makes him seem less intelligent and makes him feel inferior. Jenny responded first by relating it to a friend of hers:

…I know someone who has got – she's got quite a strong Leeds accent, and she's erm she doesn't like speaking in like lectures and seminars because she feels like she said she feels like a bit of an idiot… I think she feels like - she doesn't feel inferior, but she just feels like on our courses I guess there's quite a lot of people from the south who have quite – well they're very well spoken and she says 'ah I feel really kind of-', well, not inferior but she feels a bit silly next [to] talking after someone who's got a really good accent – but I disagree with that completely – I don't think it should be an issue

(Jenny, 21, middle-class, OLD University)

The other respondents in the focus group then agreed they don't think accent should be regarded as an issue. Although Jenny's friend has anxieties about how her accent is read, and emphasises how this is felt relationally to her course mates, who have got 'really good accents', she dismisses these feelings, saying it shouldn't be an issue. Rodd agrees:

Erm……….I dunno like it's a bit stupid to – it does sound a bit stupid to link social class with [accent] I suppose to an extent, intelligence or you know articulation cos I'm sure lots of erm upper class people are complete idiots

(ALL LAUGH)

And erm you know, to be fair, and er I think with the accent thing like it seems bit of a silly thing to worry about like everyone sometimes has a bit of banter between them erm you know, you know, I'm the southern one and you know that's a thing between all my friends – it's not something that anyone gets particularly down about but, you know

(Rodd, 21, middle-class, OLD University)

To claim it is 'stupid' to link accents with intelligence is quite significant. This is odd when comparing these data to the rest of the data that identify accent as a marker of social class and education in some way and poses the question as to why these participants are reluctant to make that connection when everyone else has. Not having a regional accents themselves and having an RP accent, they have as Bourdieu would say, the 'easy relation [to language] of those who are in their element, who have the laws of the market on their side' (Bourdieu, 1993a: 85).Yet again there is evidence of framing middle class position against upper class, some of whom Rodd casts as 'complete idiots' to which the rest of the group acknowledge agreement by joining in with the joke and laughing. Such mockery and 'disparagement humour' (Ford and Ferguson, 2004: 79), again, serves to frame their middle classness, their normality and ordinariness against the exalted upper class and comedic cultural representations of the upper classes (e.g. see previous chapter – 'Tim nice but dim'). The refusal to link accent with social class or stigmatism attached to accent is explicitly discussed:

I think it's something that maybe people think about and register but they don't hear social class and things in your accent ...it's just something that you think about for that split second but I think nowadays we've just sort of been brought up to just accept everybody equally so I don't think people still have these issues but ultimately I don't think anyone really judges on that anymore....well I'd like to think so (laughs)

(Eleanor, 22. middle-upper class, OLD University)

… in reality, I don't think there's a stigma or discrimination happens any more, but like in your first year and even in your second year as well, because my close friends are all from the north yet if you look in my year group, and especially first year in particular, it's really cliquey and the cliques were all from London and they are from the south west or south east so I don't know if it's a case of you know, birds of a feather, or whatever it is but it happened – there was a north-south divide on our course

(Patrick, 20, middle-class, OLD University)

There are contradictions operating in the dialogues of the research participants however. Whilst they are claiming that stigmas attached to accents are 'a thing of the past', they do also recognise how accents serve as ways of making

distinctions. Eleanor, whilst claiming that people do not judge on accent anymore, also mentions how she hopes her public school RP has changed and Patrick, whilst agreeing stigma and discrimination with accent are a thing of the past, says that there continue to be distinctions operating in university that according to him, affect the formation of friendship groups and 'cliques'. The tendency to see class and the bases on which embodied class differences are perceived as a 'thing of the past', is part of a tendency to deny the existence of class in today's supposedly 'classless society'. In short, to deny the existence of class in society is quite a classed thing to say; the tendency to see things marked as 'negative' as belonging in the past is a feature of modernity; a 'conceit of modernity' (Adonis & Pollard, 1997; Lawler, 2005a). The students say there are distinctions but they refuse to locate them in class.

6.4   *Visual identity: (in)authentic students; class transvestites*

Research participants had a great deal to say about visual displays of identity in university. As in the previous chapter, the 'rah' is often in focus during these discussions; the 'rahs' are consistently described as embodying a style which is unkempt but always accompanied by very specific and expensive branded clothing. Whilst the particular take-up of a certain 'look' or 'style' and the associations of particular brands are often the foci of students' accounts, the ways in which they interpret the performance of such a look, the deliberate and reflexive attempts to perform 'student' identities are the source of much critique and amusement. Interestingly, there exists something of a class distinction *in* the different interpretations of this look. Although all interpretations involve a critique around authenticity, perspectives on the meanings generated by the look differ between differently classed participants: most middle-class students read the look differently from the focus of interpretations made by working-class students. The former read the look as one of ostentatious wealth, but one that is specifically engineered to perform indifference and nonchalance. Further, this is read as a pretentious display of effortless assemblage; purposefully performing (inauthentically) an image of academic success, despite hedonistic and flamboyant social lives. Again, as highlighted in the previous chapter, such distinctions can be related to discourses of meritocracy circulating, whereby unearned privilege or unearned success offends such ideals. In contrast, the

working-class students read the look slightly differently. The focus above is often implicit in their descriptions but the emphasis of inauthenticity is structured around the affordability of such a look, in an interconnected material and cultural sense. Their interpretation of the look is as an exaggerated 'penniless student', deemed inauthentic owing to not only their relative material wealth but as deliberately engineered with the juxtaposition of expensive, branded goods. Here, their ostentatious and spurious look of poverty is read as a 'cynical' performance (Goffman, 1959: 31).

As with the previous section's foci on auditory signifiers and distinctions, the critical descriptions of what the 'rah' embodies involve contradictions. Whilst the image of the 'rah' is repeatedly denigrated, the brands and styles are also posited as being extremely influential, creating trends that are imitated by other students. This suggests that there are complex negotiations of meaning circulating whereby the style, the brand, and the (classed) body are implicated in the making of distinctions. Further, whilst it is not possible to provide an analysis of the motivations behind the wearing of some of the widely named brands in the research dialogues[xxxiii], a brief analysis regarding the significance of these particular brands to the field *is* possible. Using brands through practices of style and identity performances, raises issues of equity within the student community; the exclusivity of particular brands and the material investments required to participate in these performances, highlight ways in which power and privilege operate to exclude those more restricted financially.

Archer *et al* (2007:219), in their study on practices of taste and style in the educational field, argue that 'young people seek to generate worth and value through their investments in style'. They further argue that 'these practices may also play into oppressive social relations and contribute to fixing people within marginalized and disadvantaged positions' (2007: 219). Whilst the subjects of their research are working-class and of school age, their work is similar to this aspect of the research in the recognition that the practice of style and use of particular brands within the educational field, is one way in which class identities are performed. Further, it follows that certain practices necessarily implicate exclusions that are present in this research context also. Through each of the dialogues about visual identity, there are examples of the ongoing conversion of economic capital into cultural and symbolic capital; the 'rah' display is certainly only affordable to wealthy students and yet there exists a complex struggle over

the legitimacy of these student looks and the particular capitals involved in everyday exchanges. As Chaney (2002: 81) states:

…concern with fashion for everyday life lies in the opportunities it provides for more complex vocabularies of social identity…fashion is better understood as semiotics of inclusion and affiliation that has provided the basis for new modes of social grouping called lifestyles (Chaney 1996)….If lifestyles are concerned with the representation of identity then a theme of dramatisation of the self should not be puzzling.

The student lifestyle is quite the matter in hand and the semiotics of inclusion and affiliation central to the way student identities are visually mediated. In Chaney's 'Dramatising the Self in Everyday Life' he takes the topic of fashion indicating the importance of stylisation i.e. 'treating material goods as symbolic markers' and the recognition of the 'greater significance of fashion in later modernity' (2002: 77). That fashion 'has stimulated a pervasive relativism'; that 'norms are historically contingent' and 'relative to the social group in which they are grounded' (2002: 79-80) as well as the notion that 'an ironic consciousness creates opportunities to subvert traditional associations' (2002: 80) are notions central to the analyses that follow. A brief capturing of the significance of student fashion, in the performance of classed identities in HE, will be followed by an examination of brands as symbolic markers and data exemplifying where 'symbolic prestige' overrides 'functional efficiency' of the leisure wear worn by differently classed bodies. What one wears and how one wears it; that is, brands and particular assemblages are implicated in the distinction work students undertake. The differing interpretations of the 'rah' or 'student' look are then covered in detail and demonstrate the ongoing constructions of identity as well as the significance of different structural positions and relationships to the identity 'student'.

6.4.1 Student fashion, brands and assemblages

...it's all a bit relaxed with student fashion – it's all like 'I don't care what I look like' kind of thing

(Joy, 21, middle-class, OLD University)

The student fashion, the laid-back, 'cool' look, is epitomised through leisure wear whereupon too much effort or dressing too smartly is deemed inappropriate for the setting. However, there exist many contradictions and distinctions between the extents to which one 'doesn't care' about how one looks, that suggest a complexity in notions of authenticity of 'not caring'. This is particularly so in descriptions about 'rahs'.

One of the key focus points when describing the 'rah' are the brands of clothing that are referred to, with some brands being identified more than others. Designer brands like Chanel and Vivienne Westwood and Mulberry are mentioned in reference to the types of bags that the girls carry but the most commonly-mentioned brands include Ugg, Abercrombie and Fitch, Canterbury and most prominently, Jack Wills. Far more than any other clothing brand mentioned, Jack Wills is identified as the 'rah' brand of choice, with some saying that is all they wear:

> (laughs) it's like they all wear like Jack Wills and like Abercrombie and Fitch and stuff like that - which I really like personally so like before I came here I was like, you know – but they wear it like religiously…
> ...'cause they're all really rich you know 'Rahs' and they have a tracksuit on with like big Prada earrings and like Chanel bag or …but like, I think they're doing it as a statement – you know like wearing what they wear as a statement with like, you know like they're doing it a bit subtly like I think it's a bit conscious really... they think they look cool

> (Faye, 18, middle-class, OLD University)

> ....so you've got your like Rahs if you like so you've kind of got like the Jack Wills brigade who all wear the same kind of tracksuit bottoms and stuff
> (Tim, 21, middle-class, OLD University)

It is not the brands *per se* that are worn according to Faye but the amount/how often they wear it that is emblematic of the 'rah' although she concedes that she does really like them.   Tim's comments confirm that 'Jack Wills' in particular has become something of a 'rah' emblem. The brands themselves, their noticeable display and knowledge of their material value, are frequently commented on

when 'rahs' are being discussed. As Siobhan remarks in her description of a 'rah':

> There's a girl on my course and she's like, she wears tracksuit bottoms but they're like branded and like really obviously branded…and then she'll have like a designer bag or something – like she wouldn't be coming in wearing any Primark.
>
> (Siobhan, 18, working-class, OLD University)

The prominence of brands then, their visibility and distinctions between brands are extremely important in the way they are displayed and recognised as valuable. The logo is held as the primary indicator of a particular brand – the way that a brand is recognised. Logos are examples of symbols 'established in relation to an interprant; and the interprant represents the logo as an argument' (Lury, 2004: 78). The 'argument' that the logo makes of the brand and its bearer, involves understanding what the brand is about or represents, which allows the attribution of value to become established. According to the websites for some of the prominent brands mentioned in the research data (particularly Jack Wills and Abercrombie and Fitch), there are some fascinating examples of 'brand positioning' that lend to the arguments regarding the 'student look' so far. According to Lury (2004: 80), brand positioning 'ensures that consumers in the target market can tell the brand apart from others…the brand becomes a specular or speculative device for magnifying...associations in the mind of the consumer'. The brand positioning on the websites for Abercrombie and Fitch and Jack wills are particularly remarkable in the context of their use in HE. Firstly, Abercrombie and Fitch state the following about the brand: 'Rooted in East Coast traditions and Ivy League heritage, Abercrombie and Fitch is the essence of privilege and casual luxury'[xxxiv]. The Jack Wills brand has similar things to say but they are ever more relevant to the discussions mapped in this chapter. According to their website:

> Jack Wills creates fabulously British clothes for the university crowd. Drawing inspiration from Britain's rich history and culture, juxtaposed with a heavy dose of the hedonistic university lifestyle, we create authentic and relevant clothing for today[xxxv].

Abercrombie and Fitch and Jack Wills have clear, strong links with university and middle/upper class 'heritage'. That 'rahs' are repeatedly identified with these brands (especially Jack Wills) is quite striking. It is not clear whether the students wearing such brands are aware of the brand positioning on the website or whether it is coincidental but the indication of Jack Wills as *the* classed student brand is highly significant. The 'religious' (Faye) wearing of the Jack Wills brand suggests a particularly vivid example of the dramatising of the self via fashion (Chaney, 2002). According to Renzo Russo, President and Founder of Diesel, 'For consumers, brands and brand values are a way to "feel" the product as part of their own personalities' (Pavitt, 2000: 64; quoted in Lury, 2004: 80). The bearing of the Jack Wills logo (amongst others) then in this sense, allows the bearer to 'feel' and to portray the image of their self as part of the 'university crowd' with 'a heavy dose of the hedonistic university lifestyle'. Brands act, in Chaney's (2002: 82) words, as 'symbolic markers' that;

> ...carry resonances and connotations for their local environments….they will be manipulations of symbolic prestige in the judgements of significant others and as such be continually drawing boundaries between what is and how it could be otherwise.

Certain brands, such as Jack Wills, are implicated in 'getting it right' with student fashion. For example, I asked Elspeth to provide examples of a student look noticeable around university and she replied:

> …..like the Canterbury tracksuit that they…Like, I've got one and lots of people have and would just wear that to the gym and that's like considered like even when its uni like just the trousers or something and like that's considered to be….I dunno fashionable I guess…but if you were to turn up in like a tracksuit from Primark – or something – I don't think that would really have the same effect – things like that.
>
> (Elspeth, 21, middle-class, NEW University)

That wearing Primark (a well known brand that markets itself on providing affordable goods) wouldn't 'have the same effect', is key in understanding who is able to take up this 'student' look and how exclusions operate. Even those who attempt to take on the student look may be at risk of getting it wrong if they do

not have access to the brands, or 'symbolic markers' that typify affiliation with the student community. The price of the brand is clearly implicated in their value.

> All commodities have a price-tag attached to them. These tags select the pool of potential customers…Behind the ostensible equality of chances the market promotes and advertises hides the practical inequality of consumers – that is, the sharply differentiated degrees of practical freedom of choice.
>
> (Bauman, 1990: 211)

The practical freedom of choice is at stake in the identity performances of students. Economic capital is required to purchase the popular brands such as Jack Wills that make this student look possible and the inequality in the pool of student 'consumers' prevents equal access to these brands. High stocks of economic capital are converted to cultural capital; as Elspeth says, brands like Primark won't have the same effect as the more acceptable student brands, such as Jack Wills and Canterbury she herself refers to. The latter brands are laden with symbolic prestige. Getting this 'right', she implies is part of student identity. Interestingly, Colin provides an example of an experience he has of wearing the 'wrong' brand:

> ...two days ago in university I decided to wear tracksuit bottoms...they're just 'Adidas' ones with stripes down the side and the instant reaction I got when I walked in the class – well first of all, it's not like me to dress like that...I usually dress quite smartly erm just because of my part-time job normally. But erm, it was like, 'Colin, what are you doing, you look like a charva?!'; 'cause I was speaking to Mandy and John about it and I was like, 'Hold on; all the other boys on campus wear tracksuit bottoms, yet do they look like charvas? No. So do I look like a charva?', and they were like, 'Well, yeah, you do'...it made me think because it's not Canterbury then maybe yeah or Kryki or something like that (it's another sports brand that they wear); could [it] be that or......? ...It had me thinking like, is it me?! Like, do they know that I'm from like a rougher background and it makes them associate something or, I dunno, but it made me think...
>
> (Colin, 22, working-class, OLD University)

The branding differentiation between a pair of seemingly similar items of clothing (tracksuit bottoms) are interpreted very differently and the class associations

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between the 'Adidas' brand and the 'Canterbury' or 'Kryki' are made abundantly clear. On the day that Colin hasn't dressed for work and has 'dressed down' in more of a relaxed leisure (one may say student) style, his performance is denigrated with the association of 'charva' (otherwise known as 'chav') rather than as 'student'. He gets the 'student look' wrong via clothing brands. Of course the mention of his normal manner of dress being dictated by his work commitments is relevant (and this will be discussed shortly) but his misrecognition of the significance of brands is part of the way that exclusion works. Student fashion here then, provides a 'means of affiliation that differentiates those who do not recognise the prestigious object from those who do' (Chaney, 2002: 78). Furthermore, in the previous chapter, Geraldine (OLD focus group) commented that working-class and middle-class students are not recognisable compared to 'rahs'; she doesn't see any 'chavs' at OLD but isn't sure about NEW. The association of 'chavs' in Colin's example links back to this comment and implicates brands in the processes of differentiation, both *within* and *between* institutions. Different brands work as prestigious objects in the two institutions, with Canterbury and Kryki being more prevalent in NEW and Jack Wills in OLD. However, Colin also includes a point that needs further consideration. He ponders whether their judgement of him is sanctioned by their knowledge of his having come from a 'rougher' background. It is not that the prestige awarded to different brands exists independently of the person but that the association of the brand and the wearer work in a combinatory form and are inherently complex and dynamic. The significance of the brand is relative to the wearer and the context and thus is part of the complex negotiation around meaning involved and visual identities. Colin's use of 'Adidas' leisure clothing is a cultural capital he employs in his student attire but it is not symbolically recognised as student and is instead read as classed; as 'chav' in the sub-field of HE.

The 'rahs', although denigrated repeatedly by the research participants and conspicuous by the brands they wear, do not suffer the same perils of getting it 'wrong' as students such as Colin, or perhaps not quite on the same bases. Charys's reflections on 'rah' style and mode of dress exemplifies how this is the case:

...it's weird because after a while you can't really tell who's who 'cause people like start to imitate them and like wear the same kind of things to maybe like erm……update their social status...Kind of like – well no one would ever like put on the accent or like act the way they are but like the dress definitely – they kind of like set the kind of standard of like what you should wear and what you shouldn't wear really... [I] tend to shop in nicer places than I did before because erm everyone kind of sets a higher standard over here than they did back home, do you know what I mean? (laughs)...[students] conform to the style but don't necessarily like copy, they kind of like take their own take on that style...so it's kind of like you take your inspiration (laughs) from Rahs and then make it your own

(Charys, 21, working-middle class, OLD University)

Charys's observation of the fashion trends in university being influenced or 'inspired' by 'rahs' is interesting in many ways. Firstly, it holds the recognition that this 'student look' has gained legitimacy and this cultural capital has been converted into symbolic capital, through its appropriation and adaptation by other 'non-rah' students. The remark she makes about how students do so to 'update their social status' is also significant. Wearing particular branded clothing is about assuming status, student status as well as status in a class sense. Charys points out that whilst being influenced by what 'you should wear and what you shouldn't wear', people do not take up the accent and behaviours that are usually combined with the descriptions made of 'rahs'. On this basis it is not as though they wish to imitate 'rahs' then but the kind of 'student look' that they achieve. Taking on this look then can be seen as a process of identification, with the subject position of 'student' and not 'rah'. The extent to which students identify with the subject position of 'student' then can be seen to effect whether they 'choose' to embody this look. I will expand on this point in the next section. The other distinctive signifiers Charys highlights include accent and behaviours and the reading of signifiers alongside others is a point repeatedly made in the distinctions of embodied class identities. There is something, instead, in the assemblage of signifiers that creates the space on which to make distinctions. Charys below provides an example of the ways that (typically middle-class students) interpret the 'rah' look, whereby the assemblage of visual clues combine with (classed) behaviours and values:

... you always see them outside the… library like smoking and just acting cool and then sometimes you get like the nice Rahs who dress quite smart and then some people are just really, really scruffy like student-like - trying to live up to some sort of expectation of what a student should be like - and they go to like lectures in their pyjama bottoms and...like pyjama bottoms with like beanie hats and just a bit like scruffy like 'oh I've been up all night like partying' - that kind of impression they wanna give - so they're standing outside the … library and like trying to give the impression of 'oh I've just rolled out of bed' but you can tell that they've spent probably quite a lot of time getting like that.

(Charys, 21, working-middle class, OLD University)

Charys's interesting distinction between the 'nice rahs who dress quite smart' (presumably those whose style is imitated and adapted), implicitly contrasts those that don't as the vilified 'rah' introduced in the previous chapter. The idea of the 'just got out of bed look' and the suggestion that this has taken some time and effort to achieve, is repeated in the majority of accounts of the 'rah' or 'typical student' look. For example:

... like they've got like the kind of dyed blonde hair and erm – well, sometimes it is natural – but like it's back-combed and really messy so it looks like they've just kind of woken up and flung it together but it's probably taken hours ...

(Natalie, 18, middle-upper-class, OLD University)

There's a girl on my course and ... she has her hair dyed blonde but it's always looking like a mess like 'oh I don't have any time' but it's obvious it has taken time to get her hair looking like it has taken no time (laughs)...

(Siobhan, 18, working-class, OLD University)

The idea expressed is that the look is deliberately engineered to give the impression of an effortless, relaxed 'just got out of bed' look, a look that depicts nonchalance and unconcern with university. The mention of pyjama bottoms by Charys is not unique, with a few others citing such occurrences and is significant to the 'just got out of bed look' often cited; the wearing of pyjama bottoms being associated quite literally with *being* in bed[xxxvi]. The interpretation of this look implicit in most dialogues is explicitly dealt with by Charys:

I think they want to give the impression that they do no work and they've been up all night partying and that's all they do and they're just like, you know, like lazy students and they don't need to work and then when they get their marks and they're really good they're like 'oh I'm just really clever' (laughs) and they must be doing it behind [closed doors in] their rooms – they just want to give the impression that they'll do nothing and just sail through university.

(Charys, 21, working-middle class, OLD University)

The 'cool', laid back 'student fashion' is presented in exaggerated form with rahs, according to Charys who are 'trying to live up to some sort of expectation of what a student should be like'. However, 'lazy students who don't need to work', who are living the party lifestyle and effortlessly succeeding at university, are guilty of an inauthenticity of studenthood. Thinking back to the previous chapter that touched upon the issue of rahs' unearned privilege, I argued that the discourse of meritocracy enabled some students to pathologise 'rahs' as 'undeserving rich', not having worked hard and therefore earned their entitlement. A similar thing can be claimed here in the way that the 'rah' is framed as desiring to portray the image of effortlessness and extravagant party lifestyle. The idea that a 'rah' can lead an extravagant party lifestyle, not put in any effort and still succeed, offends the idea of meritocracy. The suspicion of secret studying reaffirms this sense of inauthenticity and pretentiousness.

It is important to bear in mind here the bases on which the 'rah' look is denigrated by these students; the internal differentiations, the middle-class factions, are instituted on the bases of meritocracy and excessive privilege. The interpretation of the look is that the 'rahs' want to appear as naturally intellectually gifted, living hedonistic party lifestyles affordable by their excessive wealth and privilege. That they can afford excessive, flamboyant lifestyles and still achieve what others have to work hard for and make social/financial sacrifices for is unacceptable. By contrast, they position themselves as hard-working, frugal and morally just; earning their successes not simply claiming them as of right. As further contrast, however a sufficient amount of data exists, whereupon very different interpretations of these visual displays are made; significantly these are made by working-class or 'non-traditional' students.

6.4.2 Penniless student? Class Transvestite?

I only experienced a real student life when I was abroad because over there there's no funding for anything …the student body has no money and the result of that is everyone lives very 'student' lives… I really experienced that there but here erm, I mean I could be wrong but this is what I came to: students have too much money, right, not only do they have a student loan but their parents pay for them – they're lucky. They're lucky to have that and they want to like live like students and this whole kind of student look of being penniless and they convince themselves that they have no money and they're like erm scruffy looking but when I was in Spain the students were often like with clothes with holes in them and you know, keeping things and putting them together – a very dirty looking – well, not dirty, but a poor look………erm and with the students here they spend money like £70 on like Converse shoes 'cause they think that's kind of a student look. In Spain people wear shoes that look like converse 'cause you can buy them in a shop for €5, you know, it's 'cause it's the cheapest thing...

(Colin, 23, working-class, New University)

Colin here, of course, reaffirms his position that 'rahs' are, for him, just 'typical students'; something he stands outside from materially, socially and culturally in his eyes (see previous chapter). Colin's statement however, captures, in some detail, the sentiments expressed by other participants, most frequently, by working-class participants. The focus on material/financial lack/excess and the playful and deliberate subversion of this by the 'typical' students outlined by Colin is quite different from the interpretations of other (more middle class) students. This different emphasis can be described as 'class transvestitism' (Schockett, 1998); of appropriating visible, cultural markers of class selectively, to perform their interpretation of 'student' identity. These distinctions rest upon classed notions of respectability and authenticity, which are subverted by these 'typical' students, or 'rahs'.

Interestingly, Colin draws a comparison between his experience of university life in the UK setting and what he encountered when studying for a period of time in Spain as part of his course. By his own admission Colin has 'put a lot of thought into' this; his familiarity with two different student cultures has allowed him the opportunity to reflect on what he sees as both material, social and cultural differences in what is a 'student lifestyle'. This excerpt fits into a broader discussion Colin provides of the cultural class differences between the

two countries, whereby the UK system is comparatively unfavourable due to the hierarchical top-down lack of respect for the working-classes. The subversion of class on behalf of the wealthy students is for him, just another example of this.

Central to Colin's analysis of the UK 'penniless student' look, is the issue of choice. The students with whom Colin interacts are differently positioned in their 'choice' of what they wear; the Spanish students have no choice but to look 'poor', whereas the UK students actively construct the look of poverty as a 'student look', without necessarily suffering the conditions of poverty. As Colin points out, the UK students he encounters *convince* themselves they have no money (even though their actual relative wealth to the Spanish students betrays this). Their role as students typifies a particular lifestyle and a particular look that they purposefully take up. This sense of a purposeful transcendence or subversion of class via these 'cynical performers' (Goffman, 1959); a superficial mask to their privileged reality is castigated repeatedly by other working-class students. In this interpretation the 'typical student' or 'rah' equates to what Schocket (1998) refers to as 'class tranvestitism'.

Schocket evokes the term 'class transvestite' to refer to the ways in which writers, journalists and social researchers of the late 19th and early 20th century would 'experiment' with the visible cultural signifiers of class; by 'dressing down' in order to become more like the working-classes they were writing about. Schocket critiques such authors who presented their subject as 'exotic other' and 'spectacle', these writers attempted to traverse the distance between subject and object 'into one performative, narrational 'body' (1998: 110). By assuming the lifestyle of poverty that they were writing about, they sought the '"authenticity" of the misery' via experience of 'playing' the lower-class life and 'living' the lower-class life' (Schocket, 1998: 117); to become like the subject of this existence. Schocket's critique of these class transvestite narratives, provides a way of thinking through the issue Colin (and others) have with these performances:

…the presumption is both that these realms [of working-class life] are sufficiently exotic as to require a disguise, a journey, and an 'experiment' *and* that such difference can be effectively assimilated by sartorial means alone. Underneath the clothing and the sumptuary habits of the economic 'Other', according to the class transvestite, lies an essential sameness, a common humanity that requires only recognition and understanding for an inevitable amalgamation….The class

transvestite's journey "down" ultimately serves to echo and circumvent other journeys "up", reducing mobility to a mere play of cultural signs.

<div align="right">(Schocket, 1998: 111)</div>

Such constructions reinforce bodily signifiers and their political referents whilst the 'systemic relations between lived experience and historically specific economic exploitation' are erased (Schocket, 1998: 119-120). The 'transvestite logic' places the category 'class' in 'ontological crisis', reducing it to a 'mere play of cultural signs'; ignoring economic inequality and all of the suffering that ties into being from a lower-socio-economic position. Similarly, it is the students' ignorance of this suffering and unequal quality of life, that underpins Colin's critique of UK students in their attempts to get the 'student look' and claim they are penniless. Dressing up (or down as is the case) as penniless students, to perform what is deemed to be an authentic 'student' identity, is inauthentic and pretentious in Colin's view. Similar expressions are made with other working-class students in the research. For example:

> …what it seems to me is that someone who looks like a tramp but has got money to look like that! (laughs)
>
> <div align="right">(Siobhan, 18, working-class, OLD University)</div>

> I don't think pride in your appearance really matters. Like, I take pride in my appearance. Quite often like, if I don't get a shower then I feel like a proper tramp and like really like uncomfortable about it but erm……I think a lot of people in uni just didn't really care and they were usually the more upper class and I suppose if you were going to segregate then they were probably massively wealthier
>
> <div align="right">(Craig, 22, working-class, NEW University)</div>

Craig and Siobhan, like Colin, read the identity performances of 'rahs' or these 'wealthier students' as deliberately assuming a look of poverty, or in their terms as a 'tramp'. The word 'tramp' is a highly loaded term, as opposed to the 'penniless student' look that Colin refers to; it refers to abject poverty, to homelessness and squalor. They are all identifying a look of ostentatious poverty that is interpreted as pretentious and inauthentic because, they suggest, these students *choose* to look like that and are not simply victims of poor

circumstances. There are inferences that Siobhan and Craig make here that are slightly different however. Siobhan's comments echo Colin's that these students have 'money to look like that' - they not only *pay* to look this way but it is something they can *afford* to do, which highlights the issue of 'choice' and the idea of being able to play around with value symbolically. Being able to *afford* to look like that; to not care and not have to 'take pride' in their appearance as does Craig, is a slightly different (though not altogether separate) issue of class struggles for recognition, legitimacy and worth. However, I will attend to this shortly.

The adoption of this 'look' of contrived deprivation is interpreted as a temporary and purposeful measure, which they can afford to change and adapt at their will. Such experimentation is part of what Lury terms 'prosthetic culture', whereupon individuals are engaged in 'strategic-decision making' that have implications for 'recognitions of belonging, collective identification and exclusion' (1998: 1-2). The 'tendency towards experimentation' is something that Lury suggests has become a social and cultural norm in Western societies and it certainly fits with the picture that has been drawn of the 'typical students' or 'rahs'. The concept of 'mimesis' is central to Lury's argument, which is 'to become and behave like something else'; it is a relation of 'making oneself similar to the environment' (Lury (1998: 5). In this culture, she furthers:

> ...the subject as individual passes beyond the mirror stage of self-knowledge, of reflection of self, into that of self-extension...The prosthesis – and it may be perceptual or mechanical – is what makes this self-extension possible. In adopting/adapting a prosthesis, the person creates (or is created by) a self-identity that is no longer defined by the edict 'I think, therefore I am'; rather, he or she is constituted in the relation 'I can, therefore I am'.
>
> (Lury, 1998: 3)

By adopting the prosthesis then, the self-extension is achieved via appropriation of classed, cultural signifiers that can be dis-assembled and re-assembled at will. However, what is important to highlight here is the notion of 'I can therefore I am'. It warrants posing the question of *who* 'can' and likewise who 'cannot'. The students that Colin, Craig and Siobhan discuss above 'can' experiment; the Spanish students Colin talks of 'cannot'. Just as with the 'class transvestites' of

Schocket's study, of whom he surmised that they reduced [class] 'mobility to a mere play of cultural signs' (1998: 111) foregoing recognition of the real, materiality of working-class economic inequality; so too can this idea of 'prosthetic culture'. The experimentation and calculated risk-taking and decision-making that Lury highlights needs to be examined in terms of the conditions of possibility of classed selves.

The idea of 'I can, therefore I am' has to be understood within the field of education, or rather, the conditions of possibility of the subfield of higher education. The 'look' is only symbolically legitimate within the field. Skeggs' (2004, 2005b) appropriation and use of the idea of the 'prosthetic self', is done so in such a way that she argues that it is middle-class selves that are able to indulge in the process of prosthetic self-making, whereby people are engaged in a process of affect-stripping. Skeggs (2004a: 148) argues that middle-class status is partly achieved through display of one's knowledge and access to the culture and resources of others. To exemplify her point she notes that 'Black working-class culture, for instance, has long been plundered for its cultural attributes, such as music and fashion, that can be re-packaged to sell elements of it to a white audience that would otherwise not have access to it' (Skeggs, 2004b: 148). Importantly here, however, is the mention of 'elements'; in this example 'affects such as credibility and cool' are plundered for white, middle-class bodies, a distinct separation from the (historically racist) reading of 'cool and dangerous' on black bodies (Diawara, 1998). As Skeggs (2004b: 148) crucially points out, the 'value depends on to which body the affect is attached'. As such, affect-stripping is about the ability/entitlement and mobility to propertise desirable elements of culture without any of the negative consequences; without being fixed and/or restricted by it.

Affect-stripping is alluded to in Colin's statement, whereby the idea of students assuming a look of poverty is a deliberate measure, compared to the Spanish students, whose poverty is authentic. It is prosthesis exactly in the way that it is attachable and detachable – the students deliberately adapt and adopt the look of the 'penniless' student, without having to live that lifestyle. It is temporary; something they can readily detach, presumably upon graduation and certainly outside of the field. Their 'middle-class acquisitiveness' (Reay *et al*, 2007) of working-class, cultural, visual signifiers temporarily adopted as valuable to the 'student look' sits in contradistinction to working-class students, who are

comparatively unable to adopt middle-class, visual, cultural signifiers; their fixity and lack of choice stands in contradistinction to middle-class, mobility (Reay *et al*, 2007). Skeggs' (2004b) reading of the 'prosthetic self' as a middle-class self, is more appropriate than suggesting prostheticising culture is a process readily available to everyone. This self is a knowing self. The 'rahs' or 'other' students that are described as being in this process of experimentation, then, are able to transgress perceptions of being lacking in control or responsibility, that would otherwise be perceived of a working class body displaying signs of poverty.

The issue of affordability and (in)authenticity of the 'penniless student' or 'tramp' that Siobhan and Colin highlight, offers scope for consideration of who can afford to achieve this 'look' without being necessarily read as such. Whereas Craig is incredulous at the idea of someone dressing like a tramp when they can afford not to, Siobhan makes the statement that it is because of their wealth that they can afford to look like that; for the very reason that they will not be interpreted as a tramp. These students don't feel the need, as Craig puts it, to take 'pride in their appearance' and thus, maintain that level of respectability through appropriate dress and appearance as do the subjects of Skeggs' (1997) research. The working-class women in Skeggs' (1997) research make distinctions within and between them and others on the basis of respectability, which is known through an array of signifiers, a major one of these being through appropriate dress and appearance. The idea of maintaining respectability visually, through appearance, has historical gendered and classed legacies, whereby cleanliness and tidiness are central. The look and appearance of the students being discussed, offend such cultural norms of respectability and the Bourdieusian framework, being utilised in Skeggs' (1997) analysis, can be usefully applied to this research context. With the women of Skeggs'(1997) research, she argues that '[e]ven for those who draw distinctions…their cultural capital can only be increased at a local level. It is unlikely they can convert their competencies into a form of authority, into symbolic capital' (1997: 102). This is seemingly due to their lack of power to make the distinctions and judgements that they make on others' inappropriateness stick (1997: 102). The judgements being made on the students by the likes of Craig and Siobhan are similarly unlikely to stick; their working-class positions in the middle-class field of HE, renders them without the cultural authority to make their distinctions matter. Therefore as an important departure from the subjects of Skeggs' (1997)

research, these ('rah'/'typical') students *are* able to 'convert their competencies into a form of authority, into symbolic capital' and increase their cultural capital beyond the local level, although their performances are field/context specific. The performance is (penniless/typical) 'student'; as (middle-class) students within higher education; judgements of them as tramps, rather than 'penniless students' will not stick. The context, temporality or to use a slightly different terminology, the space and place within which these performances take place, prevent such associations; as do the adjacent symbolic associations of expensive, branded clothing.

The materiality of the look also adds further dimension to the issue of affordability. As Colin said, the students under discussion 'buy' into this look and he provides the example of Converse trainers that cost £70 – he uses it as an example of being able to afford designer/branded goods to make up the particular student look. Similarly, Siobhan states students have 'money to look like that' and she goes on to discuss expensive, branded goods, as do a vast proportion of the research participants. The obvious expensive, branded goods do not fit with the picture of the messy, scruffy 'tramp' look and disturb such an image. The role that the brands play in the assemblage of the student look, under inspection by the students, is crucial in considering who is (un)able to take up this kind of look:

It's just like big backcombed hair and a bright orange face, like a hoody or like a Juicy Couture...tracksuit, Ugg boots, wandering around you know trying to look all shabby but you know they're in a hundred pound, you know, tracksuit – that's what I would describe a rah as.

(Rory, 21, working-class, NEW University)

It just seems to be the students who are more funded by the parents maybe so obviously like if you're getting the government grants and stuff it's like – it works out like six grand a year or something like that and with six grand a year you can't really afford to buy brands like Jack Wills which is like £90 for a t-shirt so it seems to be more like the richer students generally who get that kind of look.

(Nadine, 20, middle-class, NEW University)

The look is 'shabby' as Rory says but there are obvious signs of branding that show the cost of the tracksuit, for example, is anything but poor. As Nadine says,

it is only the 'richer students' who have access to this look; only they can afford to buy the expensive, branded goods that make up the look. The significance and role of the brands in the student identities will be discussed in more detail shortly. The issue of who is able to propertise/prostheticise the student look is clearly central to 'recognitions of belonging, collective identification and exclusion' (1998: 1-2). Affordability has been highlighted in terms of the judgements of others as well as access to financial resources to buy branded goods, however another issue of affordability was raised by (local) working-class students.

The conditions under which different students experience their time studying at university, enable and restrict their access to the resource of 'choice' to perform student identity visually, in the ways discussed above. Undertaking paid employment during term-time, has the effect of exclusion from taking up this student 'look', as dressing so 'shoddily' (Craig) is incompatible with the required standards of dress for most workplaces. Colin, Craig, Siobhan, Jayne and Vanessa (all working-class students) all work part-time and say that their choice of attire for university is influenced by their need to work before/after being in university. To dress 'shoddily' and 'like a tramp' would be unacceptable in the workplace and thus the need to work during term-time affects the ability to take up this look/style. To do so would require additional effort; in order to then adapt this appearance so it is suitable for the workplace. According to Reay *et al,* '[e]xclusionary processes...operate within the field of higher education…with far more working-class than middle class students talking about undertaking paid employment in both term time and the vacations while studying for their degree' (2001: 862). The take-up of paid employment during term-time then, suggests that far more working-class students are excluded from being able to take up this student 'look' and thus the visual, symbolic associations of this 'student' identity. Working-class students are materially constrained both through the necessity to work alongside studying to finance themselves and through their lack of access to economic capital needed to convert to cultural capital, via embodiment of the student look. What is also noteworthy are the types of jobs that these students have that require them to dress differently. Walkerdine and Lucey (1989) for example, argue that working-class people draw a strong distinction between work and home, whereas in 'professional' jobs those boundaries are blurred. Therefore the type of job taken up may affect the types of clothing one could wear inside/outside work/university.

According to Skeggs (2004: 177-Emphasis in original):

> entitlement and access to the resources for making a self with value are central to
> how the middle-class is formed; they have access to others' culture as a resource in
> their own making… *The relationships of entitlement and exclusion establish the
> basis for cultural exchange, in which new forms of exploitation are shaped.*

There appears to be a distinct preoccupation with authenticity of identity in the distinctions that the students make. This relates in part to the conceptualising of identity as being related to a true, inner self that structures Western notions of identity (Elias, 1994). What has also been highlighted, however, is the notion of authenticity in terms of fashion and appearance – of wearing for assembling a look in such a way that performs a contrived performance, a 'cynical performer' (Goffman, 1959) seeking to pull the proverbial wool over our eyes. However, what has also surfaced from the research dialogues and the theoretical work undertaken by authors such as Skeggs (2004; 2005b) and Chaney (2002), are strong suggestions that visual identities and fashions are being selectively adapted and meanings played around with in these HE contexts. Chaney's argument that 'the languages of social life will be increasingly ironicised' where the 'semiotics of social identity...will be increasingly accepted as relative' (2002: 80) are appropriate here. This 'ironic consciousness creates opportunities to subvert traditional associations' (2002: 80) contributing to ongoing (re)constructions of (privileged) class identities:

> …there is a process of extreme sensitivity to, and yet comparative distance to,
> stylistic norms in everyday life. Although fashionable codes are capable of infinite
> gradations and internal differentiations within any particular group, it has been
> assumed that the demands of fashionable conformity work to create some sort of
> uniform. The very attractiveness of the metaphor of uniform and its implied
> expectations of conformity should not, however, blind us to the way that the
> relativism of fashion both individualises as well as communalises.

The student 'uniform' relies on shared recognition or shared meanings of the value of particular signifiers. The ability to take on this uniform also relies on

affordability, in the sense of the risk of being (mis)read, as well as being able to have the economic resources to invest and convert to cultural and symbolic competencies. Working-class students have commented on 'rahs' or 'typical students' as displaying a look of a 'penniless student', when they in fact are the students who are wealthiest. That is not to say that other students may not share similar ideas to the working-class participants presented here but that they were not vocalised. Nor are the working-class students absent from the ways in which the 'rahs' are differently interpreted elsewhere. It is, however, worthy of note because their material constraints and sense of otherness from these students, on grounds of wealth, is significant in the types of claims they make. I will consider material distinctions and the affordability for the student 'experience', to participate in the student 'lifestyle', and classed notions of 'choice' and 'value' in more depth in the next chapter.

6.5   Summary

This chapter has brought together a significant body of data obtained from speaking to students about how they negotiate difference within university. Every participant discussed visual and auditory signifiers relating to identity at length, suggesting they are key to the ways in which identities are managed within HE. Class is repeatedly elided with intelligence, suggesting a naturalization of class differences. Auditory signifiers such as accents, idiom, and vocabulary are highlighted as markers of class, whereupon RP is marked as intelligent and middle-class (with marked-RP as upper/upper-middle-class). Due to the classed codes of intelligence with RP, those who embody other accents are subject to identification with other cultural classed codes associated with different regional accents. In the context of HE however, a site of intelligent beings, embodying an accent that is not coded with intelligence, risks being marked out as other and lacking. If embodied by a student lacking in confidence or a 'fish out of water' (Bourdieu, 1999: 465), this can serve to (as has been exemplified) distance them from normative student identity and may cause further withdrawal. Accents also become the basis for identifying 'people like me' so can serve the function of forging alliances as well as creating barriers. Nonetheless, as has been shown, making distinctions on the basis of accents can be misleading and as highlighted at the beginning of the chapter, auditory signifiers are rarely interpreted alone but depend on a complex assemble of

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cultural codes that most often combine visual signifiers. The visual aspects of identity discussed in this chapter present fascinating distinction work in and between the students in this research. Much of the data refers to the figure of the 'rah' and relates to the different interpretations of the 'look' they are seen to embody, whereby the 'rah' is doubly interpreted as inauthentic in terms of class transvestitism and as ostentatious, apathetic student learners, who dress similarly for recognition of their wealth and status. Incorporated in these embodied styles were the assemblages of particular branded goods. Whilst some were labelled as 'rah' brands, discussions also highlighted that branded clothing was important to others and that getting the brands wrong risked being identified as other also. Finally, the structural differences in the students lives meant that some had to work to regular part-time hours and so dressing 'like a student' was not an affordable option for them, thus serving to further risk marking them out against the rest of the student population. As noted, the material conditions that structure these differences will be attended to in more detail in the following two chapters as a focus on the notion of the 'student experience' serves to highlight areas of student life in which the distinctions highlighted in this chapter also take place.

7. Student Identity I: Choice, Value, Investments and Gains

7.1   Introduction

Studying for a degree is just one element of university life and the way people experience their time at university differs profoundly, depending upon a range of personal circumstances and dispositions. This begins with the choice to participate at all; the different choices, motivations, and investments play into what people expect to gain and their sense of value of HE. Bourdieu (1986) proposes that degree qualifications act as symbolic capital – they are legitimate forms of cultural capital that are exchangeable in the economic field and as such, are routinely acknowledged as valuable, without considering the play of power that establishes them as such. However, as the expansion of HE is increasingly regarded as affecting the value of degree qualifications (Davis, 2002; Brown *et al*, 2002), students are encouraged to add to their degree in order to secure better futures (Brown *et al*, 2002; Heath, 2007). In a culture whereby educational discourse of 'Aim Higher' (DfES, 2003b) locates aspiration for success as the key determinant and posits the idea of the rational self-selecting individual as the 'ideal student', investigation into notions of choice and value and classed inequalities inherent in HE experience is crucial. The research data offer many compelling examples of experiences which suggest that the different levels of resources, with which participants enter HE, affect the subsequent exchange and conversion of capitals during university (and of course, upon leaving). They also show that choices, sense of value and experiences of university life, are affected by different structural constraints whereby class identities interweave with gender and differential attachments to people and place.

Participants often spoke of the fractured value of the degree due to mass HE expansion and the need to supplement their degree with other skills and experience; this is attended to during this chapter, utilising Bourdieu's concept of *hysterisis,* whereupon structural changes in the field of education (such as recent expansion) calls for habituses to adapt and respond to such changes. When discussing the value of HE, a highly significant amount of the participants, described it in terms of 'the experience'. Contributing to this experience was

largely versed around independent living, making new friends and socialising with the student community. The majority of working-class participants placed a lot of added value of their part-time work experience and their notions of value tended to be more framed around the exchange value of a high-level qualification on the job market and a sense of academic success. Other (mainly middle-class) participants emphasised softer skills to be gained through participating socially and living independently. The 'student experience' was championed by mainly middle-class students and by most of them who moved away from home to study. This take-up of the 'student experience' was used as a means of differentiating between students and of creating bonds, with 'everyone in the same boat'. Different habitus structured decisions and equally the judgement of others. Cultural idioms of 'confidence', as a significant resource in obtaining the value of the 'student experience', were prolific in the accounts of the participants, whereby those lacking are perceived to struggle and waste their experience. I have documented evidence of class fractions, showing that whilst class inequalities continue to pervade HE, it is not a simple case of working-class disadvantage and middle-class privilege, nor one of two distinct homogenous groups at stake. This chapter provides multiple examples of the complex negotiation of class identities via different circumstances that contribute to notions of choice and value within HE.

In a period of mass HE expansion, wherein the guarantee of success in the labour market from university participation is at best tenuous, much research suggests that middle-class students must employ strategies to maintain their positions via the acquisition and development of different capitals, qualities and dispositions (Brown, 1995; Brown *et al*, 2002; Power *et al*, 2003; Devine, 2004; Heath, 2007). This chapter introduces the notion of the 'student experience' as it is interpreted and valued by the students. Utilising the work of Brown *et al* (2002); Heath (2007) and King (2011), I will emphasise the special significance of the 'student experience' in student investments and interaction. The discussion on 'the economy of experience' will highlight the ways in which certain elements of student lifestyles are valued. The 'economy of experience' involves focusing on the exchange value of 'student experience' in and between the students in HE and beyond; as such, 'experience' is involved in the making of everyday distinctions between the students. The notion of the 'economy of experience' also engages with the exchange of particular capitals/resources, to

which some lack access. Additionally, structural constraints disrupt 'the student experience', primarily the necessity to work (often long) part-time hours was considered, by most, to dislocate one somewhat from university life. Experience in HE means negotiating study, leisure time (including socialising with student peers) and for some, part-time work. Being able to sustain all three is unthinkable to most and depends very much on what is considered possible, which also feeds into the differential notions of value of HE. The value of HE is interwoven in the initial choice process and these initial choices and notions of value feed into the resultant experiences of university. Often structural constraints limit these choices and therefore whilst the 'student experience' and the social side of university life are regarded as choices each student makes, outside constraint and relationships/journeys into HE in the first place, often influence the subsequent exchange and accrual of capitals within and beyond university. Whilst the next chapter will provide a detailed analysis of the different parts of 'student experience' (aside from studying), this chapter focuses on issues of value and choice in relation to the 'student experience'.

7.2   The 'economy of experience'; hysteresis in HE expansion

Heath's (2007) study employs the term 'economy of experience' and highlights the work of Brown *et al* (2002), that is useful when analysing the ways in which the 'student experience' has value. Her work on the 'gap year' and its recent enhanced profile, 'raises important questions concerning the processes by which certain groups of young people are able to gain advantage over others during a period of educational expansion' (2007: 89). She argues that the rise in popularity of the gap year is in parallel with HE expansion and thus places 'gap year' as part of the strategies of middle-classes to gain the edge over other students. Not only is this notion of adopting different strategies for gaining advantage useful to thinking through experience within HE, the conscious use of 'experience' in the development and promotion of the self, provides further fruitful considerations in the management and performance of identities.

Concerns that middle-class families are no longer able to secure their advantage via HE and have to work harder to protect and maintain these positions (Devine, 2004; Power *et al*, 2003), suggest that students have to 'find new ways of gaining distinction in a world where educational qualifications no longer guarantee success' (Heath, 2007; 92). Instead, students are expected to

complement their qualifications with other desirable skills, qualities and experience (Brown *et al*, 2002). The issue of graduate employability is taken up by Brown *et al* (2002: 6) who maintain that large employers are redefining 'the skills and the personal characteristics of the knowledge workers of the future' and these are 'ranking mechanisms' that stand aside qualifications. They argue that the rise of mass HE creates a mass market of 'potential knowledge workers' and that the recruitment processes employers adopt, will (re)produce social and occupational elites (Brown *et al*, 2002: 6). 'Productive potential' indicators are used by employers, and therefore successful graduates need 'the personality package' to succeed in obtaining these positions (Brown *et al*, 2002: 28). Brown's earlier work (1995: 42) discusses the idea that middle-classes are invested in the development of 'charismatic qualities of their children', including 'social confidence' and that interests and hobbies, outside of academic study, are now 'a matter of investment'. Such investments are part of the 'economy of experience' and 'the personality package', which according to Brown *et al* (2002: 27), is valued more than the 'denomination of academic currency'.   On this logic, the 'student experience', that is, the gains to be had experientially and the personalities cultivated in and through the 'experience', are increasingly valuable in addition to (or as Brown and colleagues suggest, more than) academic qualifications. The students in the research placed much emphasis on the value of the 'student experience' as a 'package', which suggests that they make valuable investments in their future potential beyond university. In this mode of thought, they are consciously engaged in securing 'experience' that they can capitalise on in the future; those by contrast who do not engage in this experience would be thus at a disadvantage.

Tim talks directly of the value of 'experience' or the 'economy of experience' in the way that Brown *et al* (2002) emphasise it:

Well...I try to get a balance of activities – well I'm not really into anything like organised sport or anything like that but I like to try and do voluntary work when I can - and not just for the record reason - but to try and do it to better myself anyway but I've got various voluntary work that I've done and erm I did some travelling during the summer. I did some 'inter-railing' 'round Europe with some friends...the important thing is, is to show you're a balanced individual so you've kind of got, well, you work hard but you've kind of got a good social life and you know, you're prepared to help

others so yeah, hopefully those things will stand me in good stead and I've got a really good part-time job at home which is, is always good to have to show you're a bit of a team player.

(Tim, 20, middle-class, OLD University)

Whilst not all participants talked so explicitly about adding value, such sentiments are routinely expressed by many students. This suggests that like Tim, many of the students who discuss adding to their degree do so in a conscious effort to demonstrate to future employers that they have the 'personality package'. They can capitalise on 'experience' of travelling, of voluntary work, of university social life and living away. What is further interesting are the ways in which Tim alludes to his self-development *not* being solely for further exchange; it's not just to 'show' his qualities – it is 'not *just* for the record reason – but to try and better myself'. Such reflexive work on the self is explicit here but the need to *show* he is a balanced individual (between work and social life), is extremely pertinent to the investment strategies in university itself. The value of a part-time job is recognised by many like Tim but there are stark differences between students in the emphases on part-time work. Whereas Tim (as with many students who live away from home during university) has a part-time job 'at home' (i.e. during vacation time), others depend on working during term-time for their survival. This is one of the main structural constraints for working-class students that affect the ability to capitalise on other elements of the 'student experience', which I will address shortly.

The participants acknowledged that HE has changed in recent years. When they reflected on how university may be different now from ten years ago, most responses involved discussing the expansion of HE and its change from an elite system to a mass one, whereby more people have the opportunity to go now. Interestingly, the emphasis on the social side of university, as a response to the massification of HE, was alluded to by a few of the participants, as Elspeth and Lindsey both comment here on how university has changed:

I think that it's probably become more about the extra things like you know like the societies have developed and the nights out have developed and the unions have

developed to become more about the whole package of university – not just about studying…

<div align="right">(Lynsdey, 18, middle-class, OLD University)</div>

…well where social life is regarded I don't think there was this 'let's go and get really drunk' culture……and I think that people were perhaps more studious in the past……and er university was seen as a thing for – you had to be privileged to go and that if you had a degree you were definitely like one step above everyone else who didn't but now because the government likes to kid people into thinking that anyone could go to university it's not such an exclusive thing now I think.

<div align="right">(Elspeth, 21, middle-class, NEW University)</div>

Elspeth and Lyndsey were two of many that recognised the importance of the 'social side of uni' and the 'package' that one has access to. HE is of course recognised as a place for study but the notion that it is not 'just' about studying is repeatedly invoked. That the government 'likes to kid people into thinking anyone can go to university' is quite a remarkable thing to say. Here Elspeth implies that the government's false premise that 'anyone' can go to university has resulted in its depreciation on degree value. The 'extra things' that have been developed, the 'social life' and the tendency to be 'less studious' are part of the fabric of HE today, according to these students.

The past exclusivity of university is no more and expansion has altered the (sub)field of HE. According to Bourdieu, all students are engaged in field struggles to assert legitimacy but the expansion has changed the field in play somewhat. Hardy (2008: 143) summarises how such changes impact:

Field structures are the direct result of the successful strategies deployed by field participants in their struggles to use their accumulated capital (*habitus*) to occupy desirable positions within the field. When state intervention changes, what is legitimate, the relative values of symbolic capitals is altered and the interactions between field structures and habituses are dislocated. The result is *hysterisis.*

'Hysteresis' is the term Bourdieu uses to describe a situation of disruption between the habitus and field. It therefore represents a crisis, whereby dramatic change in the field requires the habitus to respond and adapt, such are their mutually generative relationships (Bourdieu, 1977; 1996). Simply put, '[a]s

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objective structures change, new habituses arise to fit in with the emergent reality' (King, 2002: 428). Drawing on the term 'hysteresis' as a thinking tool, provides a way of thinking through change and field transformation such as the HE expansion, and the responses to that change (Hardy, 2008; 148). As Elspeth and Lyndsey note above, the nature of HE has altered and the emphasis has changed from the degree qualification itself and the requirement for 'studious' dispositions to obtain them, to a greater emphasis on social life; on the whole 'package'. However, what they perhaps don't consider here is the issue that in being 'mass' HE - whereby students are less uniformly privileged - the 'extra things' and the 'social life' are part of the struggles to gain legitimacy. The relative value of symbolic capital is altered. Furthermore, this suggests that the capitals and dispositions required to acquire and to capitalise on the 'package' is altered. Financial resources and dispositions of 'confidence' are the most notable of these prerequisites, according to the students in this research, as I will go on to discuss in more detail shortly. What is especially palpable here are the ways in which the differences in circumstances and backgrounds are understood and acknowledged, or in some cases are often, overlooked:

> ...well, now I think it's much better 'cause like everybody comes but then in some way that's devalued the degree itself but erm….. although everybody can get a degree I think it's still stacked in favour of [middle-class students]…..... if you're not born in the right place then it's really, really, really difficult I think to work your way through...[Working-class students] can't take anything for granted in the way that a lot of the kids that are on the course with me [do], you know, like they've always had everything on a plate and they'll continue to have everything on a plate. They can take – and do take - things for granted...
>
> (Imogen, 49, middle-class, OLD University)

Imogen here recognises that the issue of value in university participation is inherent in the ways students acknowledge it and that the expansion of HE (and therefore change in the field), has impacted on the value of the degree itself. Imogen's position as a mature student (who is much older than others in the sample and who has herself been through the university system previously, as had her children) very much comes through in this statement, whereby the 'kids' on her course are implied as being 'middle-class', 'traditional' students. The

distinction she draws here between the difficulties working-class students face, contrasted to the middle-class students who *can* and *do* take things for granted, is repeatedly invoked by other participants. What she draws attention to is the idea that working-students are atypical, whereas the 'kids' on her course are more the 'norm' in university. The use of the 'student experience' and the emphasis students place on studying as opposed to the rest of the 'package', are implicated in the constructions of normative student identities; and as a result, who are constructed as the 'us' and 'them' in the student community.

7.3 'Student experience' in identity work

The ways in which the 'economy of experience' is used in the studies mentioned at the start of the previous section, suggests ways in which different elements of experience have exchange value for students for entry into elite institutions (Heath, 2007) and graduate careers (Brown *et al*, 2002). The ways in which the 'student experience' is constructed by the research participants, are framed around specific spaces of interaction, including socialising with student peers (including being on campus, and most predominantly, nights out in bars etc.) and living independently with student peers (Halls of residences, followed by shared student residential properties). However, it is worth considering other uses of the phrase in a broader sense; to think through what is involved in the investment of experiences.

The expression, the 'economy of experience', is based on the upsurge of the 'experience economy' as it is referred to in business terms (Pine & Gilmore, 1999); that is, it is another progression of the economy wherein a market exists for 'experiences'. Typically, this mode of the 'experience economy' involves creating an 'experience' around a product or service and is part of the branding package. The 'experience economy' is about creating memories with people willing to pay high sums of money to take part in a memorable event (Pine & Gilmore, 1999: 99). Pine & Gilmore (1999:99) assert that whilst 'commodities, goods and services are external to the buyer, experiences are inherently personal'. Whilst they usefully draw attention to the economic investment required to access certain experiences, their distinction between internal/external experiences/commodities, misconceives the social nature of value in experiences. Furthermore, as shown in the previous chapter, certain goods (commodities) can be embodied and propertised in the making and performance

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of the classed self, like the 'rah' and Jack Wills branded clothing. Therefore, whilst they exist externally to the buyer prior to access, once propertised, they are part of the identity constructions and performances of students. In this example, students are converting their economic capital into cultural capital that has specific value within the field. In a similar way, students are converting their economic capital to access 'student lifestyles' or the 'student experience', that also has cultural value in the field. Furthermore, contrary to Pine and Gilmore's assertion that experiences are 'inherently personal' and are thus 'internal', experiences, whilst they are individualised to a certain extent, they also provide grounds on which commonalities are drawn and create new groupings; these groups share similar experiences. Many examples exist of this with regard to the 'student experience', as will be argued below and throughout the next chapter. The 'student experience' creates space for establishing sameness and difference, drawing boundaries of 'us' and 'them' between students who are able to capitalise on social experiences of university, against those who don't.

Again, using a focus on the gap year, King (2011) builds on and departs slightly from Heath's (2007) research but his emphasis, importantly, looks at the ways in which the gap year is used in identity work. That is, he uses the notion of the 'experience' of the 'gap year' as part of the ways in which students interact with each other and make social distinctions. His study looks at the identity work undertaken by students who had taken gap years. The students not only characterised these experiences as beneficial for their personal development of dispositions and characteristics such as confidence, maturity and independence, they also used these experiences to draw distinctions on the bases of these newly developed dispositions and characteristics. Their 'others' were by contrast, immature and lacking in 'life experience', which thus positioned them as more highly developed selves. Such distinction work is highly conspicuous in this research also. The notion of the 'student experience', particularly the social side of university life (which is predominantly about making friends and socialising with student peers but this almost always entails residing within the student community, in Halls or shared houses/flats), is central to the ways in which everyday distinctions between the 'us' and 'them' of normative students identities were constructed. The 'experience'/ the 'package' also constructed sense of belonging to the community. One of the most significant distinctions drawn between the students involved living arrangements and how they were

commonly associated with the decision to attend a local university or to move away from the area.

I think you're more part of the student life when you live in town and with other students, that's what it feels like...I would just sort of go to uni and then go straight home or then go straight to work so I didn't really take part in uni life...…and again, because a lot of my friends were older...they were more like acquaintances on my course…I think that would definitely be the difference of people moving away or staying here…from what I've seen it seems like you do just keep your friendship group that you've always had if you stay around here and whereas obviously if you're at a different uni and you don't know anyone and make loads of friends - like new friends – then maybe you'd make like closer friendship groups then…I sort of grouped together with sort of the local students quite a bit and 'cause erm like they already had their own friends and I already had mine and they [other 'non-local' students] kind of didn't know anyone so they wanted people to go out with and so I wasn't really wanting that really…I just thought well I'm not coming just to make friends or anything...I still find it a little bit daunting being there and stuff.

(Jayne, 25, working-class, NEW University)

Jayne highlights a number of issues that were commonly voiced by 'local' students, wherein living locally and not with other students, retaining existing friendship groups and maintaining a part-time job, affected participation in the 'student experience'. That she also mentions the element of university as 'daunting' is also significant and ties in to the discussion on social confidence as an investment capital below. The distinction here is largely drawn between the 'us' and 'them' of 'local' students and 'people moving away'. That Jayne's friendship groups result in alliances with other local students is interesting and the discussion of the bases on which friendships are formed will be discussed in more detail in the next chapter. What Jayne draws attention to here, is a sense of withdrawal from 'university life' (synonymous for the 'student experience' elsewhere) that is commonly discussed by other local, working-class students. For example, Colin talks of withdrawal from the 'student lifestyle' and from university spaces, when he speaks of 'local' students:

…you'll not find them on campus apart from the library…my brother who's three years younger than me, he hasn't gone to university but a few of his friends have

and I see them and speak to them sporadically and they don't spend any time on campus and one of them said to me a few weeks ago…I'm not a typical student' and I said, 'why don't you spend any time on campus like in the student union?' and he said, 'well I'm not a typical student – I'm from Northern City, I live here so I just come and go to the library and that's it'...

(Colin, 22, working-class, NEW University)

The distinctions carried out by the 'local' students above, contain within them a sense of not belonging or fitting in with their student 'others'. Colin and Jayne (and others like them) demonstrate 'socio-spatial compartmentalisation and resistance to integration' (Clayton *et al*, 2009: 170; also see, Baxter & Britton, 2001), whereby boundaries are constructed between established social lives 'and the often more limited social relationships enacted within the spaces of university' (Clayton *et al*, 2009: 168). Taylor and Scurry's (2011: 584) examination of the 'intersection between marginalised 'home' students and 'international' students' highlights the issue that 'local' students may be 'awkwardly placed as already being in place...yet still outside of this'. Their finding that 'some students have *always* been in the locale, while *never* feeling 'at home' in the university (Taylor & Scurry, 2011: 600), has clear resonances with the students of this research. As with one of Taylor and Scurry's participants (2011: 600; also see Archer *et al*, 2003), the students above and other local, working-class students like them, do not integrate into the student community; they don't access the 'student experience' of occupying students spaces (Halls, pubs). These spaces and places and the boundary work that is involved in aspects of inclusion and exclusion, is the theme of the next chapter and so will be attended to in more depth then.

Like Jayne, Colin and the friends he describes identify as 'local students' and as atypical, in the sense that they do not invest in the student experience of living away and making lots of new student friends, socialising on campus etc. Instead, they withdraw from university spaces and interactions, their university experience is focussed solely on studying and beyond that they do not engage. Crozier *et al* (2008) explore differences between middle class and working class students in 'diverse institutions' and draw on Bourdieu's concepts of habitus, cultural and social capital and field. They highlight that students have different levels of capitals and dispositions to operationalise them in the 'game' of HE; the

engagement with which 'is different depending on the resources students bring to it or subsequently accrue' (Crozier *et al*, 2008: 168). As they go on to state (2008: 174), the more that students withdraw from the field at the outset, 'either intentionally or not, the less access they will have to the means (habitus and cultural capital), or opportunity to acquire it, to compete for scarce resources'. The emphasis brought in around intentionality is interesting to bear in mind when considering some of the choices people make and the strategies they employ for successfully negotiating their time and investments in university. The resources students bring to the 'game' and the strategies they employ either intentionally or as constrained by structural factors, will be examined shortly in relation to the 'experience' and what they can hope to gain from this.

Equally, 'non-local' students make similar distinctions on the basis of elements of the 'student experience'. The 'them' in Faye's discussion below are those who stay at home and don't get the 'proper experience':

> ... a lot of them as well they're still living at home...so it's not really like......well yeah, I don't think they're *really* gonna get the proper university experience
>
> (Faye, 18, middle-class, OLD University)

Whether or not one decides to stay at home whilst studying is not constructed as a differentiating factor alone however. Certainly, it is considered to affect the student's involvement in university social life to a certain degree but it is also believed that the student must actively invest in the social side of university life, in order to be included and avoid any indication that they are not being a 'proper' student. Rory provides an example of the way in which accessing the student 'experience' entails living and socialising with students:

> ...one of the girls in erm one of my mates' flats upstairs goes, 'Yeah, personally I'm here to get a degree, not make friends, and that's my first priority - getting a degree - I'll meet you lot after', and I thought, at the end of the day you know, the academic side of it isn't just the point of uni...and I think coming here and saying that you're not going to make friends with people and you know, I'm not saying go out every night ...I'm just saying that's a big part of it and if you're not – you're taking up the place of someone else who could've taken it and enjoyed [it] and you know, getting all the benefits of it you know, and not just the academic ones. If

you're gonna do that, well then you shouldn't be here.

<div align="right">(Rory, 21, working-class, NEW University)</div>

What is particularly striking about Rory's example is the way in which he envisages those prioritising their studies as undeserving of their place at university; one which someone else could take-up. The distinction works on the basis of the 'us' as the students who socialise and are there to do more than the 'academic side', which is framed against the undeserving 'them' who focus solely on the degree. There are more 'benefits' beside 'academic ones' and the degree 'isn't the just the point of uni' was quite a significant thing to say, in comparison to the accounts of working-class students who had decided to study locally. This offers evidence that the distinction work ongoing between the students on the basis of access to the 'experience' is not about distinct, class groups of (dis)advantage in HE, but rather 'geography, materiality and temporality intersect' (Taylor & Scurry, 2011: 600) to produce unequal positions and different social relations. In making the decision to move away to study, Rory stated that he saw university as a way out of the 'absolutely awful' 'working-class town' where he had lived. This sense of 'getting out and getting away' from working-classness (see Lawler, 1999) explicitly structured his decision to move away and take advantage of academic and 'other' benefits of the experience.   It is not a case of distinct class groups, although class is present. It is more a case of, as Clayton *et al* (2009: 157) state, 'social relations inflected by class influence the experience of students as they adapt to new socio-cultural environments and negotiate the terms of their emergent identities' (Clayton *et al*, 2009). Adapting to the socio-cultural environment of HE however, may be more difficult for some than others, with working-classness framed as something to be left behind as with Rory above:

I think that it's probably like your stereotypical working class ideal like I think that people like that might struggle and it's a shame... if you come from a poor background then your education is affected... 'cause you need to work instead of getting qualifications...so I don't think that everyone's able to do it erm and especially the whole financial thing. I mean, I'm ok but I think that if someone who was from a poor background might struggle...like they'd get their money but they'd probably struggle to pay it back and you might find that they'd rather work while

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they're at university like to kind of support the family and that kind of thing so, yeah.

<div align="right">(Graeme, 18, middle-class, OLD University)</div>

I asked Graeme to expand on what he meant by 'working-class ideals' and he replied:

> Just like the kind of thing in the media where it's like someone from a council estate you might, you know, like teenage pregnancies and stuff like that – a bit like what they have on *Shameless*...

Graeme draws on a discourse of 'cultural deficit' that explain educational exclusion as originating in poor working class family expectations (Gerwitz, 2001). The 'stereotype' of the working-class likened to characters depicted in *Shameless*[xxxvii] reinforces such 'cultural deficit' discourses and positions working-class (students) as debased and immoral, lacking in the values suited for the HE environment. However, by becoming a 'student' the 'lower-class' student will go against the 'trend of their background'; it is their opportunity to 'get out' of their condition and therefore they will be more 'respectful' and strive to achieve a good degree that their upper and middle-class counterparts may, (in Imogen's words earlier) 'take for granted':

> I think some tend to think that because you're from a-a lower background that you erm can't do very well but I think that if you've got the opportunity I think they-they'll be able to do it...I think that like [if] a lower economic background [student] really want[ed] to go to university then they will do really well at it and I think they'll be more erm….what's the word, more erm…..respectful, I suppose, respectful of what they've got 'cause you know they've done so much to get to where they are...they've had to get their fees paid for or whatever and they've had to kind of go against the trend in their background and actually sit there in the lecture and be able to erm I suppose, you know, be part of the university, then I think that they'd probably do better than people from an upper class or a middle class background 'cause they know where they've come from and they know what they need to do whilst they're here...Yeah 'cause you know it's - they probably know what it's going to do for them in the long run rather than somebody else who might think, 'oh well, I can go to university and therefore I'll do it'.

<div align="right">(Graeme, 18, middle-class, OLD University)</div>

These students are very much 'other' to Graeme but he frames their 'respectfulness' of the value of the degree for social mobility, assuming that their 'struggle' to achieve HE status will propel efforts to succeed academically. The assumption is that by way of being previously excluded, working-class students will show more enthusiasm for their studies (see Harrop *et al*, 2007). It may well be the case that students from a working-class background place more emphasis on their studies (as is the case in this study); other research suggests that students from state schools will do better at university than students from independent or fee paying schools (HEFCE, 2003; Sutton Trust, 2010). Moreover, an assumption exists within Graeme's statement that accessing HE and performing well academically will endorse equality, or at least social mobility. The rhetoric of participation in HE equals social mobility however glosses over much of the psycho-social costs of going 'against the trend in their background' and the disruptured habitus/fractured identities that may result in a sense of belonging nowhere (Ingram, 2011; Reay *et al*, 2009; Taylor & Scurry, 2011). Graeme emphasises the importance of the degree and the study element of HE to working-class students, by contrasting this with 'people from an upper class or middle class background' who presumably in his perception are able to put in less effort. These more privileged students are also routinely made the subject of social distinctions between the students and the ways in which elements of the 'student experience' are emphasised. In these accounts, the more privileged students are positioned as caring little about the grade they receive and the university is their playground: a temporary measure before progressing onto already sought-after positions that they obtain through contacts (social capital):

...maybe it's just a one-off thing but there's a lot of people who I met on my course who were *lovely* but who didn't care about what they were doing – they were there primarily because they wanted to say that they'd been to university – they didn't want the degree – they weren't even bothered about their degree – they were there because they wanted the experience – they didn't need it because at the end of the day they were going to get a job at their dad's company or their mam's company so it didn't really matter what they did...

(Vanessa, 25, working-class, NEW University)

I mean there's lots of students there who came from like really rich families and there was one girl who already had a job set up for when she left uni and it was just her

parents got it for her through their friends and so she had to come along to uni and finish and then she'd be allowed to do this fancy job so there's all these different situations and then there's other people who like me who had no one who'd been in the family before and who had to support themselves and so then there's different people really...she wasn't really bothered as long as she passed, like. It didn't matter what grade she got. Her parents just wanted her to have a degree and so paid for her to come to [study] and when she was done she would just go home and work – I think she was working for a politician that was what was going to be her job... so she was already set up in a job and she just had to have a degree...and I know it sounds funny but I would say she was a typical OLD uni student – that's what I would think of her as so it was quite odd that she was at NEW erm but yeah she was dead posh and so she's got everything paid for and everything.

(Jayne, 25, working-class, NEW University)

Although both Vanessa and Jayne speak of their privileged others in NEW university, Jayne again, interestingly draws a sense of 'us' and 'them' across the institutions whereby OLD would be more likely to have such privileged circumstances, she believes. Because Jayne identifies more local students at NEW this suggests she makes the distinction on the basis of the 'student experience' as more of an OLD University student whom she identifies as more 'Southern', and thus from out of the area.

The relatively privileged students they discuss are perceived as going to university for the social experience and just 'for the sake of it', destined for unearned positions in the labour market without the worry of debt or funding their lifestyles, which is everything that their experience is not. Other students by contrast have invested in HE, taking the risk that it will secure better job prospects and prioritise their studies over anything else participating in HE may have to offer. Whilst they recognise that the students come for 'the experience' this is not recognised as a strategy but more as an extension of their privileged selves. They challenge meritocratic discourse surrounding HE that it will afford them the same opportunities as their privileged others. This is most explicitly stated by Colin:

…there's this façade that university is of equal chance but like everywhere there's division and it's, it's the division is always financial – not academic – 'cause I'm top of

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my class and I'm one of the poorest students at university like it's – all the division's financial.

<div align="right">(Colin, 22, working-class, NEW University)</div>

Key to exploring these notions is recognition of the discourse of meritocracy and equality that pervades government rhetoric, which is not, as is expressed by Colin above, the experience for all students – especially those labelled as 'non-traditional'. Colin (like others above) addresses this inconsistency with the meritocratic rhetoric of university value, as endorsed by the government and his real experience of material inequality. The notion of 'divisions' that Colin repeatedly invokes above, is rather significant; he speaks of internal divisions within university without the emphasis the girls above place on unequal outcomes. As top of his class, Colin recognises his achievements academically, but sees money as key in the lifestyles other students afford and crucially it is on this basis that Colin, and others from similar socio-economic backgrounds in the study, make distinctions. The 'student experience' of university, the different elements of gains to be had from embarking on a degree; the very reasons for making the decision to participate in HE, are parts of the ways in which the value of HE is constructed for differently classed students. The choices students make are complexly affected by numerous social factors such as class as well as gender, age and prior education; which will be demonstrated in the final section. Financial position and material constraints are perceived to structure the kind of investment possible, however social and cultural elements factor also. Social, cultural and economic capitals are needed to accrue and develop subsequent valuable capitals from the HE experience, despite not being routinely recognised in this way.

7.4   *Prioritising experience and investment capitals*

The focus so far has been on distinction work about the importance placed on academic study particularly by local, working-class students who stand in contrast to those who move away to study and emphasise the importance of the social side of university life. Living with other students is typically interwoven with the social side of university and the 'choice' to study locally will be covered in more depth in the final section of this chapter. However, what is also considered part of the 'student experience' includes studying, social life (typically

with student peers) and possibly part-time work. What was particularly telling about the importance of the social side of university life, was the way in which the OLD focus group responded to the vignette of a 'local' student who worked part-time (16+ hours). It generated discussion about part-time work and centred around the three possible aspects to juggle whilst at university: social/leisure, study, and (part-time) work. The responses from the OLD University focus group participants showed consensus that only two could really be handled at any given time:

> GERALDINE: I don't work but my friend... works quite a lot of hours but also does quite a lot of studying so she just says "I have no life"; so it's her social life what is going at the moment...I think to do all three well would be quite hard.

> PATRICK: I'd agree with that – there's no way I'd do that...and I mean… if I wanted to get a job it'd be pocket money. A job isn't a necessity and a job would have to be in the holidays if, you know, back home.

> ELEANOR: No I'd say it comes in three parts and one part has to give 'cause I had like, I gave like a campaign so it was a job but it was only 7 weeks of this term and the weeks I was doing it yeah, the social life goes out of the window pretty much that week but then I suppose it depends what's important to you...I think it's just sorting out...your priorities...and if you try and do all three every week is quite – its pushing it – you'd be pretty shattered by the end of the term

> PATRICK: But having said that I think if I was in the situation of living at home then I would maintain a part-time job just (I don't know why I say that but maybe it's an independence thing) that I've got something else going on that wasn't just living at home 'cause I don't know about you guys but I find living in my own house is almost like, well not a job in itself, but it's another responsibility to take on and so if I was living at home then I wouldn't really have that…my mum's a bit of a clean freak (laughs)

> (ALL LAUGH)

> JENNY: I think obviously study [comes] first 'cause you come to uni to study at the end of the day – although you came for the experience as well and because you chose a course that you want to do so you just have to put in the effort – but then I'd

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probably say erm ...study then leisure, 'cause you're going to be working for the rest of your life and so a lot of people say you meet the friends of your life when you're at uni – it's a bit of cliché but then I'd say you need a balance with study

ELEANOR: Yeah – pretty close behind though – I think they do kind of go – well not hand-in-hand but I do, yeah, I think they're pretty important both of them

That socialising comes 'hand-in-hand' with studying, is always part of the way in which HE value is communicated by the vast majority of students who have moved away to study. The value of socialising is clearly paramount. However, there are several interesting things that they say which reveal much more than this. First, if people need to work, then it is the social side of university life that suffers – the degree remains the priority in these accounts. Secondly, in Patrick's case, part-time work 'isn't a necessity', or a 'priority', in Eleanor's words. 'Just living at home' is devalued in favour of living independently, which involves taking on new responsibilities that students studying locally presumably don't undertake. The decision to work part-time is factored as a 'choice' that students make, which overlooks the fact that for some students, such work *is* a necessity. Many of the middle class participants in the research, who moved away to study, talked about part-time work but this work was usually sessional, occasional and often restricted to university holidays. Moreover, the wages gained from this were as Patrick says, 'pocket money'; not an income on which they depended for survival. The ways in which socialising is presented as one of the key elements of the 'student experience' denies any sense of being privileged to be able to access this. It is, in the way these participants frame it, a matter of sorting out priorities and recognising that university is a time to engage in experiences other than work, which is reserved for 'the rest of your life'.

The 'priorities' of managing a home and living independently, relaxing and socialising as well as keeping on top of study, contrasted starkly to the reports of 'priorities' and regular tasks that most working-class students spoke of. Access to the economic resources needed to focus solely on studying and socialising, weren't readily available to all students and formed distinctions and divisions in and between members of the student community. For instance, Colin here talks explicitly of the stark differences between students who were able to access ongoing financial support whilst at university:

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I remember one girl in particular in my class, she erm, she….would like complain that she doesn't have enough time to do things erm and...I said, "do you work?" and she's like "no, I don't work" 'cause she wants to like go home and get a bath and she can't do that if she has a part-time job, and most jobs are in the evening, and her parents pay for everything - that was like, common knowledge. She quite happily said that…and it just like, it really killed us 'cause like the one thing I wanted to do at university was just study - I just wanted to study - and these people who can do that who don't have to worry about money –their mam and dad pays for their accommodation, they've got their student loan for their social life, they don't turn up to class because they've got hangovers or they've been out all night partying and I'm like - you twats! I wanna do that and I have to work 25 hours a week, you know...to be able to just, you know, fund myself in life.

(Colin, 25, working-class, NEW University)

Colin, like many of the other students featured above and elsewhere in this research, perceive the relative wealth of students as not only creating distinctions and divisions but more pointedly, in terms of accessing the 'student experience'. As Colin states above, he wants to be able to go out and party as well as being able to fund his studies and not have to use both his loan and the wages he gets from working (long) part-time hours in order to survive. Reflecting on the logic that the focus group participants put forward, his survival is his priority (as is doing well at university) and therefore the social side of things suffer. Siobhan makes similar comments and suggests the degree to which students get involved socially depends much on their structures of opportunity and their ability to access the financial resources necessary to take part in the social scene of university. If students are lacking in financial resources and struggling to pay for the necessities, then their spending power for leisure pursuits is relatively little and thus restrictions on economic capital limit the ability to accrue the social and cultural capital favoured in academic culture:

I think that's the big difference in uni that really separates people – like, the money that you've got – 'cause I can't afford to go out – if I wanted to go out I couldn't afford it. The people who sort of live around me – they can afford it – and they can afford it like five times a week, but like I can only afford to go out like, once every two weeks

and even then I begrudge paying it 'cause I was like, you know,…I could actually buy stuff that I actually need! (laughs)

(Siobhan, 18, working-class, OLD University)

Siobhan was one of the working-class students in the sample to move away to study and her experiences of Halls (like Colin's in NEW Halls) served to instil this logic of separatism on the basis of financial differences. The intention to access the 'student experience' may be there but without the financial capital necessary to 'go out' with student peers, restricts this somewhat and creates feelings of isolation from the rest of the students that Siobhan talks of. However, it is not simply a case of economic capital; the reality is much more complex and involves the investment of stocks of capital other than money.

What it means to be a student is coded via dispositional qualities (habitus) such as '(social) confidence' that is seen as necessary to extract the optimal value from the university 'experience'. That participation is about having the 'right mental attitude' situates successful access of the 'student experience', at the individual level; implicitly, those who don't have the right attitude will struggle and won't 'fit in'. Above all, participation in the 'student experience' involves what Bourdieu terms as 'illusio', that is, the notion that the game is worth playing (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992: 98).

I think the best thing is just to be really confident even if you're not like you're not gonna make the most of it if you don't meet people and stuff like that ...I think you just need to have the attitude where you're willing to get involved in things erm and you will go to university and participate in wider things as well and be willing to make new friends and just get involved in everything… I think everybody can fit in as long as they've got the mental attitude – it's not about how you look or where you come from it's like the mental side of things.

(Lyndsey, 19, middle-class, NEW University)

...everyone's in the same boat and everyone's got to make friends cos you'll be there quite a while so I suppose you've got to just go for it and ... you might find that some people are just shy and ... they might either struggle or might not meet many people … they'll meet one or two people and then they'll just stick with them cos they don't have the confidence yet whereas some people who are quite outgoing then they'll

have like loads of friends and meet everybody so I think the key thing to fitting in at university is just to kind of go for it.

<div align="right">(Graeme, 18, middle-class, OLD University)</div>

The students here position cultural capital as highly significant and almost crucial to the success of the 'student experience'. The dispositions/cultural capital deemed necessary to make successful exchanges (most notably confidence etc) classify the classifier. In the first instance, such advantageous qualities/dispositions can be associated as 'cultural class artefacts' (Lawler, 1999: 7); that is, tropes of intelligence, confidence etc are often recognised as middle class cultural capital.   As mentioned earlier also, Brown (1995) argues that the middle-classes are invested in culturing charismatic qualities in their children such as 'social confidence'. However, these distinctions take a naturalised form, becoming a matter of individual personality. Those who are lacking in confidence are coded as shy, uninterested, and as not making the most out of university –not taking advantage of opportunities to socialise and meet new people and be 'included' in the student community. The naturalisation of such beneficial dispositions however, detracts from the social contexts in which such qualities are developed and in which they are expected to be deployed. The confidence, the sociability, the desire to get involved is a form of cultural capital that is symbolically legitimated; however, different students have different relations/abilities to access such capitals.

As the excerpt from Jayne's interview earlier in the chapter showed, non-traditional students can experience their time at university with much unease. Jayne said after several years of studying at NEW, that she still found it 'a bit daunting'. It is likely that starting university is daunting for all students to some degree however, 'non-traditional' students like Jayne are more likely to have habitus that encounter disjuncture with the (sub)field of HE. Bourdieu & Passeron (1977; 1979), in their work on HE argue that middle-class individuals are socialised in such a way that they enter HE equipped with resources and practices similar to that of the field and thereby encounter university as a 'fish in water' (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992: 127). They are more likely to have family who have been to university and they have an affinity or a 'feel for the game', that conversely their working-class counterparts do not. Such is the result of different socialisation and opportunities to accrue particular resources, working

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class individuals (or 'non-traditional' students), according to Bourdieu, self-regulate themselves out of the university system, seeing it as 'not for the likes of me'. However, the (working-class/'non-traditional') participants in this research *are* in the system. They are, according to Bourdieu, the 'lucky survivors' (Bourdieu, 1988), 'the least disadvantaged of the most disadvantaged' who nonetheless differ profoundly from their middle-class ('traditional') student counterparts (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1979: 26). The 'social confidence' that the middle-class students above possess and see as crucial to getting involved in the 'student experience', signifies their ease with the field, or in Bourdieu's words, their 'feel for the game'. Therefore, possession of the 'social confidence' to make many new friends and to socialise with other students and having the 'right mental attitude', that Graeme and Lyndsey mention, is in a sense, drawing on what are considered to be particularly classed capitals. As Crozier *et al* (2008: 175) say of the students in their research, 'structural differences interweave with the middle class students' capitals to perpetuate privilege and advantage them further'.

That the middle-class students have better ease of relation to the field of (higher) education, based around a history of family attending university and other factors of socialisation, are apparent in the discussions around university choice. Not just choice of institution but the reasons for choosing to participate at all, were notably different between 'non-traditional' students and their counterparts. The issue of 'choice' is highly significant to the ways in which distinctions are drawn and boundaries created. For example, the 'choice' to work part-time was signalled as one that would affect the 'student experience'; the notion of needing to get priorities right, implies a free sense of choice. Furthermore, the 'choice' to live locally and/or live at home during university, was also identified as impinging upon the 'student experience'. The following and final section of this chapter goes back to initial choices of considering university and will retrospectively reveal research data that demonstrates that the bases on which these choices are made, depend upon different structural constraints (including gender, class and age) and are therefore anything but neutral and universal.

7.5   Choosing university; values and expectations

'Choice' is presented as a 'lubricating fluid of Widening Participation' as argued in chapter 2, this notion of choice is based on rational choice theory, which positions a normative student 'making decisions on a level playing field' (Woodin & Burke, 2007: 120). However, much research contests the compatibility of rational choice theory with the lived experience of this notion of (university and course) 'choice', especially with 'non-traditional' students (Reay *et al,* 2001a; 2001b; Reay *et al,* 2005; Ball *et al,*2002; *inter alia*).   These choices involve 'psychic processes in which emotion, intuition and accident play a significant part' (Woodin, 2007: 120). Ball *et al* (2002: 51) examine the terminology of choice and state that while 'choice suggests openness in relation to a psychology of preferences, decision-making alludes to both power and constraint.' I use both terms interchangeably to mean the same thing: choices and decision-making are situated processes that are inseparable from power and constraint; 'choices' are not in any way neutral and severable from the social conditions in which they are made.

For all participants answering the question about why they decided to attend university, family, peer and institutional influence were commonly cited as key factors, albeit with different emphases. Middle-class students commonly drew on their social and cultural capital, with family members being university educated, having professional jobs and encouraging university as the 'next step', as well as the tendency of university participation amongst their peers. The emphases on peer and family influence were somewhat different for 'non-traditional' students. The phrase that university was 'never a question' was used by both middle-class and working-class students but with working-class participants, encouragement from their parents was framed very much in terms of 'making something' of themselves and 'getting away' from their situation. From the outset, their habitus structured their decision to participate in quite different ways from their middle-class counterparts. These students were recognised as being academically bright and encouraged to maximise their educational potential, in order to achieve social mobility. What was 'expected', 'instilled' and 'drummed into' them was a sense of the value of education, in allowing access to prospects for a better life. Their habitus was structured by a sense of responsibility to their families and to 'better' themselves. These students were acutely aware of their 'non-traditional' status, already marked as outsiders from the very point of entry into higher education – their choice to

participate was already framed in the knowledge that it was *not* the norm 'for people like us' (Bourdieu, 1990: 64-5).

> ...they all had high expectations of us even since leaving school...obviously coming from a single parent family - I mean we were raised in a rough erm estate and...kind of took it upon ourselves to prove the kind of 'known' of single parent families wrong... like, [to] get the best out of our lives we possibly could and I think our whole family's stood by that so it was kind of expected of us...
>
> (Craig, 22, working-class, New University)

> I'm the only person in my family on my mum and on my dad's side that have gone to university but always just like growing … I always tried really hard at school...my parents they left when they were young and just worked so I think maybe they just instilled it in me that I would be the one that would always kind of do well and things...
>
> (Jayne, 25 working-class, NEW University)

Such powerful expressions of otherness to the 'norm', contrast markedly with the accounts of middle-class participants. Their reasons for going to university were structured by a sense of HE being the natural and next step – the norm between their family and peers – an 'educational inheritance' (Edwards *et al*, 1999). Here, the 'transgenerational family scripts....exert a prospective and regulative influence on actual life chances and choices' (Cohen & Hey, 2000: 5). The social and institutional effects of the education encountered prior to university, appeared to also make significant differences in the ways that participants made their decisions. With most of the middle-class students, their pathway to higher education was set out before them through a combination of familial, peer and institutional influences.

> I've always had a lot of encouragement...to carry on with education...it's not ever really been questioned in that respect –not that they've forced me or pressured me to go on to furthering education but just that that's been encouraged and the erm social background that I've come from, the majority of my friends erm and the schools that I went to – the majority of people did go on to further their education – that's quite encouraged as well...so really it was never really a question of not going...
>
> (Tim, 21, middle-class, OLD University)

Erm well there's a lot of people from my school who went to university – there were very few people who didn't and so it was never really an option not to go to university so I just kind of never thought about not going.

(Natalie, 18, middle-upper class, OLD University)

Like the students in Ball *et al*'s (2002: 57) study, going to university was a 'non-decision' expressing more than rationality; it is as they say, the work of 'class wisdom' (Lauder *et al*, 1999); 'intentionality without intention' (Bourdieu, 1990: 108). These students 'move in their world like a fish in water' and 'need not engage in rational computation in order to reach the goals that best suit their interest' (Bourdieu, 1990: 108). These students do not embark on their university careers as 'the least disadvantaged of the most disadvantaged' (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1979: 26) as working-class young people do; their decision to participate is the next natural step. They express their entitlement and not, like their working-class counterparts, as an achievement and a difference from most of their friends and family.

Having the knowledge or even the confidence to apply for other universities, is often bound up with prior education and the amount of information and advice accessed regarding university options. For example, both Colin and Amy provided accounts of their having conducted research into many universities and courses to assess which met their interests and expectations. Both identified as working-class but had also attended grammar schools prior to university. In those environments, they both asserted the view that progressing on to HE was expected of them and was highly common with other pupils. They also both mentioned being able to access plenty of information, through their schools, to help them make their applications. It is not a straightforward case of working-class students making poor judgements but that the role of the (institutional) habitus and the 'quality and quantity of careers advice', can impact on notions of 'choice' and 'higher education destination' (Reay *et al*, 2001b: 1.7). Students such as Jayne and Vanessa, attended schools in economically deprived areas where they described educational standards as poor and lacking in good careers advice. Their entry into higher education was framed by 'emotion, intuition and accident' (Woodin & Burke, 2002). Both Vanessa and Jayne discussed how their decisions of what and where to study were done so

quickly and both of these students ended up dropping out of their first course, which they both deemed unsuitable. They both placed more emphasis on having made informed decisions on their return to university, learning from their mistakes. In Vanessa's case, she had decided on a career in teaching and so conducted thorough research into suitable courses and specific modules; however, this was markedly different from her first time around, which was very much of an accidental, last minute nature:

> I sound like such a moron when I say this but like I went into the careers office when I got my A level results and she went, "You should be doing something with English shouldn't you?" and I went, "Ok" and she said she'd have a look to see what courses they were applying for - for clearance - and she went away and then came back and said, "Ok they'll let you in for this one, this one, this one, this one or this one and they'll let you in straight away", and that's basically what I did!
>
> (Vanessa, 24, working-class, NEW University)

Interestingly though, despite having obtained the entry grades to gain a place at OLD, she opted instead to go to NEW primarily on the basis of 'hot knowledge' (Ball & Vincent, 1998) that informed her reticence to attending OLD:

> ... most of my decision was based on modules they were going to give…...but part of us was a bit scared to come to OLD 'cause I thought it would be too much – I think the whole idea that NEW used to be the polytechnic kind of made us go – it'll be easier or I'll not be as stupid (laughs), you know…I thought it would be maybe...too academic for us…erm and I also thought I might not get along with all of the people……I kind of thought of it in the...sense of erm possibly (laughs) this sounds awful, this sounds like I'm such a reverse snob…It was like I thought everybody would have more money than me – everybody would be from like better areas than me and everybody would look down on me. …Yeah it's something - a little thing in the back of your head that just eats away and says you're not good enough – for this.
>
> (Vanessa, 24, working-class, NEW University)

Vanessa says elsewhere that her otherness from the students at OLD University was based around knowledge of her peers and other local students attending NEW; people who she saw as more 'local' and like her. Because she knew of local students at NEW, she presumed 'well that means everybody else's gone to

OLD'. This powerful sense of desire to 'fit in' and not 'stand out', in a field from which she and other 'non-traditional' students are traditionally excluded (Bourdieu, 1984: 471), is vividly present in her account. It also involves a logic of 'us' and 'them', whereby NEW represents a space wherein she can feel in place and not as an outsider amongst the 'everybody else' at OLD, with whom she does not identify.   This is a sentiment that concurs with analysis of empirical data from a number of recent studies (Archer *et al,* 2003; Bowl, 2003; Read *et al*, 2003; Reay *et al,* 2010; Crozier *et al*, 2008), whereby non-traditional students actively choose institutions where they think they have more chance of belonging. Vanessa places herself as 'not good enough for this'; she lacks the confidence and sense of entitlement to study at the more prestigious institution, where she feels like more of an outsider. Moreover, Vanessa limits her choice of institution between OLD and NEW – she didn't consider anywhere outside of the area and here, the effects of different structural positions manifest. Gender and social class interweave in her account, as will be exemplified shortly.

Choosing to study locally was perceived as a significant differentiating factor between students and here, gender differences were notable in the emphases the students placed on factors that influenced their decisions to stay local. Just as there are no homogenous 'middle-class' and 'working-class' groups, it isn't possible to talk of all 'local' students as a homogenous group, each 'local' student having their own set of circumstances that influenced participation. Elements of the analysis that Reay *et al* (2001a) provide of their student participants, resonates with the research data; where geographical and material constraints limited spaces of choice. They report that their transcripts 'of the working-class students were saturated with a localism that was absent from the narratives of more economically privileged students' (Reay *et al*, 2001a: 801-2). Such was the case in this study, particularly with the male, working-class students Craig and Colin. Both of them offered similar reasons for their choice of NEW as a university in sustaining strong ties with their peer group, placing little emphasis on any familial ties or relationships other than friends with whom they had grown up. Their decision not to pursue a course elsewhere, was primarily a financial consideration; staying at home meant being able to save money, that would otherwise be spent on rent and travel, as well as being able to maintain their part-time jobs.

I didn't go to Nottingham Trent or Wales for the simple fact of money erm I just – my parents can't financially support us and I didn't [think]...that the student loan would be enough for like – obviously for survival; but travelling back and forth 'cause once you get to Wales or Nottingham you're far away so I applied for these two [OLD & NEW] as well.

(Colin, 25, working-class, New University)

Erm money's been hard to come by me entire life...and I thought I've already gained like a really good group of friends erm, I'm local – I'm happy being local. I had a reasonable job and erm I was just – it was just a case of knowing I'd be getting into so much debt so had I chose to relocate, well, it was just the amount of money it would've cost for housing and accommodation and erm me fees so I decided to kind of stay local just to kind of- I was happy where I was so I decided not to move.

(Craig, 22, working-class, NEW University)

The acute sense of localism in Craig's justifications for studying locally, is found elsewhere in Colin's dialogues also. To 'stay local' is to maintain strong ties with their peer group which they had developed over a long time, often people they had grown up with and out of which very few, if any, had taken their educational routes. These friendships formed part of their masculine identities; people who they had a shared sense of humour with (unlike their university peers, as they note elsewhere). Woodin & Burke (2007: 120) analyse gender and social class differences, with a focus on masculinity and view 'choice' as 'inseparable from wider social relations, structural inequalities and identities'. Colin and Craig's structural inequalities were a huge factor in their emphasis that the financial investment required to move away to study, was simply not possible or within their means.

The female students in the research, who made the 'choice' to study locally, differed somewhat from their male counterparts in the emphasis placed on local attachments, which were framed much more in terms of providing and drawing on familial support and close relationships with partners. Whilst financial concerns were present, they appeared to be secondary to their relationships. Class, gender and in some cases, age, interwove in their accounts:

> Erm OLD's actually my closest university and I didn't really want to move too far away from home 'cause my mum lives by herself and I didn't really want to be too far away from her

<div align="right">(Joy, 20, middle-class, OLD University)</div>

Joy stated that she had also considered other universities further away, where she had cousins studying, therefore employing her cultural and social resources. This was supplemented by her school having good links with OLD University. Joy's decision to stay 'local' was, like Jayne's and Vanessa's (and Imogen's), based on staying close to her family and partner.

> I think it would be slightly different if I moved away and you have the whole experience of living somewhere different but then maybe you don't have the support you have when you're back at home...that was always my plan [to move away] and then I got a boyfriend (laughs)...I had such a settled life, erm, it just didn't even become an option after a while, which is a shame in a way because I wish I had moved away... it was just, the right thing to do was to stay at the time...

<div align="right">(Jayne, 25, working-class, NEW University)</div>

Jayne, here, reflects on her desire to access the 'student experience' of moving away but she had prioritised her close relationships and reconciled her access to support networks, as justifying her decision. Vanessa also spoke of the invaluable support she was able to access by studying locally. She explained that her mother had recently returned to education and had completed a degree:

> ... my mam had finished her degree by the time you know, I'd started – well she was finishing around the same time I started so there was a load of times I was going, "what does this question mean? I know it's not related to anything to do with you but can you just tell us what he wants?" and she'd be able to go, "I think it's either this, this or this" and then I'd be able to go, "right ok!'"…so it was an extra help.

<div align="right">(Vanessa, 25, working-class, NEW University)</div>

Gender, here, seems to have a real effect in terms of the ways that these women prioritise the support and attachments they have to family and partners, over a university and course that might be best to 'fulfil their aspirations'. Such priorities of significant others cut across class differences and demonstrate that choice of

university is often a complex process, in which different structural factors are interwoven (for example, class, gender, age, ethnicity). Evans' (2010:60) study had similar findings and theorised the female students' commitment to others as part of a 'feminine habitus', 'which involves prioritising family relationships and emotional and care-work which 'falls more particularly to women' (Bourdieu, 2001: 68)'. This commitment, Evans goes on to say, 'is part of a feminine orientation to *being-in-the-world* in which *not* producing oneself as a person for whom the other is central is almost unimaginable' (Evans, 2010: 61). The emphasis on maintaining family ties by the female students was about providing or accessing support. The support they talk of however, is not of a financial nature; all the women base their ties on emotional and practical support. The choices made by these students 'reflect different attachments to locality' (Ball *et al*, 2002: 55). The 'spaces of choice' were navigated in diverse ways and raise interesting ideas about the value of university as 'experience' and the different people able to capitalise on it.

7.6   Summary

Both class and gender are implicated in the choice process and work to limit the scope of choices available in different ways. Implicated in these initial choices are the different conceptions of the value of HE, which determine the kinds of investments and strategies for accruing value that students are likely to make/employ during their student experiences. Choosing where to study involves negotiating both the value of the university institution and the decision of whether to move away to study. This chapter has shown that there is no uniform working-class or middle-class experience of university but this does not suggest that class is not part of the mainstay of the ways in which their experiences differ. The different pathways into HE (for example, prior schooling) often impact on choices and resultant experiences may be further disrupted via structural constraints, such as the necessity to work regular, part-time hours for additional financial support. Yet participation in the 'student experience', which includes living and studying away from home, are drawn into ideas of normative student identities, thus marking out those who don't as different or non-normative. The ideas presented around the 'economy of experience', that students are required to add to their degree qualification, locates the social elements of the 'student experience' as part of class strategies to capitalise on within and beyond HE.

The different emphases students place on the value of HE are involved in the class identity performances of the participants and contribute to the argument that initial (classed) choices impact on the experiences of HE and ultimately, a sense of 'inclusion'. The next chapter will look at the social elements of university experience in more detail and how they are implicated in feelings of 'inclusion' in HE and some of the identity/boundary work involved.

8. Student Identity II: Inclusion, Space and Boundaries

8.1   Introduction

Contemporary higher education Widening Participation discourse is saturated with the terminology of 'inclusion' (Bowl, 2003: 121). All of the participants in this

research have been 'included' in HE via their entry to university. However, this chapter focuses on 'inclusion' and class identities 'beyond the gate' (Ingram, 2001); that is, how this broad sense of 'inclusion' translates into everyday experiences and feelings of 'inclusion'. The focus is on how classed identities and different relationships to the identity category 'student', contribute to feelings and experiences of belonging at university. The analyses so far, have broadly focussed around normative student identity, the ways in which such identities are (re)constructed in the everyday of HE and via embodied signifiers; their meanings subject to ongoing negotiation and contextually mediated. The previous chapter argued for the presence of class in aspects of choice and value related to university participation and this involved an introduction to the notion of the 'student experience'. The 'student experience' involves classed actors, engaged in a process of adding value via these experiences and are the subject of ongoing boundary work whereby everyday distinctions serve to facilitate notions of 'us' ands 'them'. The boundaries involved in this 'student experience' are (re)constructed interactionally, learned and developed between induction and graduation, through and between different student spaces and places. These elements of the 'student experience' guide the frameworks for inclusion (Southerton, 2002: 175).

Student experience (as noted in the previous chapter) can be largely divided into three parts: studying, socialising and living independently with friends. Everyone, to some degree, is engaged in studying although (again as shown in the previous chapter), participants place different levels of value on it. The subjects people study and the time people devote to it are clearly important aspects of studenthood, however other aspects of the everyday of university life are equally key areas in which class distinctions take place. The key aspects of the student experience that were contested and differed greatly between the participants, were socialising and living arrangements and these aspects will be examined in more detail in this chapter. These aspects of the 'student experience' are complexly negotiated and involve ongoing boundary work; navigating real and imagined boundaries in (student) places and spaces of interaction. For instance, 'socialising' broadly refers to making (student) friends and is mostly discussed in terms of 'going out', which involves specific leisure spaces (mainly bars). 'Living arrangements' involves living with other students, firstly in Halls of Residences (Halls) and then in different (student) residential

areas. Both of these broad aspects are often highly interdependent in establishing what the 'student experience' involves; for example, many students spoke of living with friends they had met in Halls in student houses from their second year onwards. Furthermore, organised bar crawls between Halls are one example of the ways in which living arrangements offered access to social events. In and between these broad areas, are the processes and mechanisms by which friendships are formed; by which sameness and difference are encountered and boundaries negotiated. Furthermore, these broad areas also entail the (re)construction of boundaries between institutions. The institutional sites in this research are in close proximity and the ongoing distinctions between them involve the use of highly loaded class terms and insults that are maintained as 'banter', but which serve to (re)construct class boundaries in the different spaces of HE.

The forging of friendships is crucial to the social experience of university and the bases on which friendship groups are established, involves recognising elements of sameness. The extent to which one identifies with the category 'student', affects the friendship groups one is likely to make and reinforces boundaries of 'us' and 'them'. Halls are repeatedly invoked by most as central not just to the 'student experience' but for the accrual of friendships. Here, being 'in the same boat' together engenders the development of friendships that 'local' students living elsewhere are assumed to lack. However, the experiences for 'non-traditional' students do not always translate in this way and their experiences of Halls often serve to establish (often painful) senses of difference, affecting their sense of belonging both to the (normative) category 'student' and the wider student community. Different Halls or properties in various residential areas, are often the basis of much distinction and boundary work. The meanings that are negotiated and assigned to different areas/Halls, serve as boundaries of 'us' and 'them'. These types of differentiation also exist in leisure spaces, both in terms of physical locations such as bars and venues for nightlife and also social events such as bar crawls and sports tournaments. As such, this chapter is about a complex interplay of space and place.

As space and place are interlinked terms, yet have particular sociological and conceptual currency, I will begin with exploring each before discussing some of the interactional elements of the 'student experience'. The chapter will look at the issues of space and place and the early experiences of university,

whereupon individuals in social space are brought together in physical/geographic space and issues of sameness and difference are brought to the fore. Specific spaces and places including Halls, student residential areas and leisure spaces in and between the two institutions in this research, are highlighted as sites/contexts in which ongoing boundary work takes place, whereupon feelings of 'inclusion' are negotiated. University and the 'student experience' are contexts constructed in which 'the everyday and the imaginary are intertwined' (Byrne, 2006: 1014), whereupon the everyday distinctions operating at the micro-level reflect greater macro-level structural inequalities.

8.2   Spaces, places, new faces

Place here has two interpretations: firstly, physical places such as the two university institutions and residential areas, Northern city and its nightlife areas are 'geographical context[s] for the mediation of physical, social and economic processes' (Agnew, 2011: 317).   As Geiryn (2000: 465) explains:

> ...place is space filled up by people, practices, objects, and representations. In particular, place should not be confused with the use of geographic or cartographic metaphors (boundaries, territories) that define conceptual or analytical spaces….Place is geographic location, material form, invested with meaning…

As such, place is not just about physicality, it is social and it is 'lived space' (Agnew, 2011: 317) and therefore involves relationships to that physical space, so is also interpreted in a second way, as a sense of 'being in place'. The distinction between physical and social space is important to bear in mind. In terms of physical/geographic space, Bourdieu (1994: 127) says:

> ...people who are close together in social space tend to find themselves, by choice or necessity, close to one another in geographic[/physical] space; nevertheless, people who are very distant from each other in social space can encounter one another and interact, if only briefly and intermittently, in physical space.

When individuals are 'close together in social space' they share social positioning, such as class and therefore a 'sense of one's place'. Bourdieu (1989: 17) explains:

...social space is so constructed that agents who occupy similar or neighbouring positions are placed in similar conditions and subjected to similar conditionings, and therefore have every chance of having similar dispositions and interests, and thus of producing practices that are themselves similar. The dispositions acquired in the position occupied imply and adjustment to this position, what Goffman calls the 'sense of one's place'.

Applying these two different ideas of space to the research, the physical/geographic space is the university and the sites in which interactions take place (the different places in HE and the 'student experience'); people who share similar social positioning as well as those who are quite different, share this physical/geographic space. Thinking through this idea of social space when considering the 'student experience' and the spaces and places in which this is practised, allows exploration of the types of interactions and identities operating to generate inclusions and sense of belonging.

For all students, the first few weeks cause levels of unease and anxiety 'irrespective of their social class' (Clayton *et al*, 2009: 161) however their 'engagement with the game is different depending on the resources students bring to it or subsequently accrue' (Crozier *et al*, 2008: 168). All of them experience adapting to a new learning environment, and for some, a new home environment and different city altogether. Even those 'local' students who may be 'awkwardly placed as already 'being' in place' are often 'still outside this' (Taylor & Scurry, 2011: 2); contending with entry into a new social milieu and who can be, arguably, at a disadvantage socially, in relation to those who leave their locale to study. However, as also highlighted in the previous chapter, the more that students withdraw from HE and the 'student experience', the fewer opportunities they will have to build on their stocks of (social and cultural) capital/resources (Crozier *et al*, 2008: 174). Furthermore, the relative value of particular capitals/resources differ in the context of HE. For instance, the value of 'social confidence', a classed cultural capital, as discussed in the previous chapter, was hailed as valuable and necessary for the success of socialising and making friends in university. Taylor (2010: 161) usefully expands on this issue:

While everyone may have access to social capital, for some more than others the 'pay offs' are greater… It is not just a matter of being 'in place', of accessing the right

network and forms of social supports, rather there is a more complicated story about the journey into such spaces and the respective classed accumulation and transference thereafter.

Social activities involve investment of economic, social and cultural capitals as well as the dispositions (habitus) to mobilise such capitals. The journey into such spaces is, for some (most notably 'non-traditional' students), often a troubled one, fraught with anxieties and tensions, of disjuncture and isolation from the middle-class field and the 'traditional' students who occupy it. Such feelings affect and restrict the accumulation of capital. Structural positions equip/restrict the levels of resources/capitals one brings to the processes of exchange in the HE field, which in turn, affects subsequent accrual and transference. Whilst 'confidence' is signalled as the most vital characteristic/disposition, the classed nature of this is overlooked by the students, whereby those lacking are perceived as uninterested or deficient; as students who will 'struggle' to profit from university life.   However, as exemplified by the accounts of the students in this research, elements other than 'social confidence' structure the formation of friendships and therefore the accrual and transference of social (and other) capital:

I guess like your personality's the biggest thing...'cause when you first meet people you've got a lot of questions like, you know, about their background anyway, but if you've got a common ground that makes it a lot easier to sort of develop a friendship quite quickly so I think that personality is a massive thing.....I just think that the level of confidence initially helps break down barriers because it is sort of awkward at first but if you can kind of like have some jokes with people - like private jokes or like I say, relating to people with films or something like that then it's a bit easier to kind of be comfortable talking to people straight away so, yeah...I mix with people of a similar up-[bringings] ...I've always tended to mix with people who have like a common background – like not exclusively but like, that's how it is...

(Tim, 21, middle-class, OLD University)

Yeah you have people from like different areas and regions...like the same financial backgrounds or like don't have too much money, or like, if they do have money they kind of group [together] – I think it's like people who have grown up in a kind of similar way that you tend to associate with – like, people I'm friends with tend to have

the same social background and like financial background – I think it's just about like shared life experience so you find it easier.

<div align="right">(Natalie, 18, middle-class, OLD university)</div>

That it is easier to form friendships quickly with people from a similar social and financial background or 'shared life experience', says much about the value and exchange of capitals involved in interactions in university. Shared backgrounds/experiences denote similarities in social space within the place of university and boundaries operate on the bases of tastes, dispositions and cultural capitals. Here, 'micro-level' discussions of 'common ground' were also about 'macro-level' differences of class i.e. of 'social' and 'financial backgrounds' (Byrne, 2006). Implicit in the tendency to opt for similarities or 'shared life experiences', is the notion that those who are very different in terms of social or financial backgrounds would not 'fit in' or make successful friendships with these students. Middle-class or 'traditional' students are more likely, because of their socialised habitus, to encounter university as a 'fish in water' and likewise, be with many other such similar 'fishes'. They come equipped with stocks of cultural, social and economic capital and the dispositions to mobilise them that allow them to 'fit in', make connections and exchange and accrue further capitals as a result. However, this is not the case for all students.

When asked what wouldn't be acceptable or who wouldn't fit in at university, Imogen, a mature (and therefore 'non-traditional) student responded with the following:

Me! (laughs) As if I fit in! Socially, I don't feel as though I fit in but that doesn't bother me really because I go home whenever I've done whatever I need to do here and then I have my life …I don't fit in there but I come in and I learn and I do whatever I do and go – I'm not actually part – well I mean I *do* do things, don't get me wrong, but I'm not actually a part of the group.

<div align="right">(Imogen, 49, middle-class, OLD University)</div>

Vanessa, also a mature student but much less markedly so by her relative age, also expressed concerns about being 'different' because of her older status:

...it wasn't like, right I have to go now and make new friends to get a social life – I already had that...ready-made....It was like being the new kid at school – especially

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with being older – although it was only four years but it was like....I sat there on the first day and I was like I know I'm only 22 but I'm looking 'round and you all look about 5!...I was going 'ah my God, I've made a mistake – oh my God', and then in walked through the door one of my friends and she'd not told anybody but she'd applied for a course and she didn't know what course I'd applied for and we ended up on the same course! Yeah so it was – I had a ready-made friend at university also! (laughs)…So we became 'the old kids'…

(Vanessa, 25, working-class, NEW University)

Both Imogen and Vanessa point to their lives and friendships 'outside' of HE, demonstrating a socio-spatial compartmentalisation (Clayton *et al*, 2009; Baxter & Britton, 2001) of these 'non-traditional' students' (social) lives. As with the 'local' students, who featured in the previous chapter, who tended to group with other 'local' students, Vanessa further exemplifies how notions of sameness tend to structure the accrual of social capital. Like Imogen, her age relative to the other students, framed her distinction between 'us' (the 'old kids') and 'them'; both she and her friend shared 'non-traditional' status and similar positions in social space.

8.3   *Maturing and mixing*

Both the focus groups in NEW and OLD identified a further element of temporality to the issue of forming friendships around sameness. The formation of friendships upon the basis of similarities is taken up in discussion in the NEW focus group/paired interview, whereupon a slight disagreement emerges:

SOPHIE: … you do tend to make friends with people that you see as similar to you so I mean like just looking through the people I know that have gone to university like they all make friends that have same interests and have a similar dress sense and similar kind of background cos it's similar and so they have something to talk about straight away I think.

ADAM: I disagree (laughs)

SOPHIE: (laughs) oh yeah?!

ADAM: I think er I've met like such a vast group of people since I've been at uni so like when I first started I'd only associate myself with people who I thought were similar to me but now as I've gone through uni and grown up I've met people from all across the world in all different countries and different parts of England and they all do different things, so...

The notions of temporality and maturity, as invested in the types of friendships and contacts made during university, were similarly discussed on the OLD University focus group:

PATRICK: ... in your first year and even in your second year as well because my close friends are all from the north yet if you look in my year group, and especially first year in particular, it's really cliquey and the cliques were all from London and they are from the south west or south east so I don't know if it's a case of you know, birds of a feather, or whatever it is but it happened – there was a north-south divide on our course

ELEANOR: Yeah I think it's also something that develops over your 3 years and maybe when you first arrive you're all fresh out of school or gap-year or whatever and ... maybe there are divisions and then as you grow up throughout the 3 years you've – you begin to...not care-...I think everyone does grow up and yeah there is a difference between first year and later on in your degree... and you just accept – you accept that everyone's different whereas before you were more sheltered – well some were!

Locality or sameness constructed in geographical terms is drawn into the idea of sameness influencing the formation of friendships – at least initially. Elsewhere discussions on north/south distinctions are often synonymous with geographical class distinctions and this therefore feeds into such discussions.

The 'divisions' that they talk of as existing in the early years of university, are implicitly premised upon embodied signifiers and the search for 'people like me' is central. The students suggest that sameness structures initial friendship groups formed and maturity then broadens the acquisition of social capital. That maturity and becoming less 'sheltered' then broadens out the search for new contacts, is perhaps indicative that these students are then involved in the 'search for a good mix' (Byrne, 2006). Byrne's (2006) study, although focussing on white, middle-class mothering practices, examines the construction of social

networks and the 'classed, raced and gendered identity performances, that repeat and reinscribe classed and raced discourses. They present these classed and raced mothers actively seeking out a 'good mix' of children for their own to socialise with, in order to make them culturally diverse; so long as there is not too much difference. With the mothers of Byrne's study, their commonality as 'mothers' was not enough to construct lasting friendships and alliances, other constructs of sameness were brought into the 'vacuum of 'things in common''(Byrne, 2006: 1006). Similarly, then, their commonality as 'students' is not enough to form the bases of alliances; 'things in common' such as tastes (micro-level) and social and financial backgrounds (macro-level), often mediated via embodied signifiers, are what count. The security in the sameness and the familiar, in early years of university, is outgrown as students mature throughout their university years, according to these students. Difference is more 'accepted' then, according to Eleanor, whose point that 'some were' more 'sheltered' to 'difference', connects to other students' reasoning about 'difference' and often the need for a 'good mix'. Mixing with students from different backgrounds is positioned as helpful, especially when discussing 'rahs'.

Adam discusses 'rahs' at NEW in comparison to OLD and states that the 'rahs' are not as prominent at NEW and that they integrate more with other students than those at OLD

> ...perhaps it's 'cause there's less of them to socialise then they socialise with people who are not Rahs so they fall into other social groups as well, rather than just all sticking with Rahs...
>
> (Adam, 21, working-middle-class, NEW University)

Adam here suggests that a 'mix' of backgrounds is good for 'rahs', in order to prevent them from becoming an exclusionary sub-group in university. The institutional mix that Adam here refers to then, is significant in terms of the effects of mixing with others and the extent to which others are different or the degree of difference. The benefits of a 'mix' for 'rahs' were also mentioned by Faye, in the context of Halls:

> I think like for people like that like my flatmate she's made mates with me and some of the other girls and because we're all like totally normal - we'll not like look down on

people so ... I think in that respect its really - university's like really good for people like that - you need to get off the pedestal in a way...and learn that daddy doesn't pay for everything!

<div align="right">(Faye, 18, middle-class, Old University)</div>

Faye's claim that 'we're all like totally normal' demonstrates instances of middle-class fractions, whereby the normality of her and her friends is held against the 'rah' 'on a pedestal' somehow not living in the real world; being more 'sheltered' than others, as Eleanor put it earlier. The comparison between 'looking down on people' draws on moral distinctions and embodied values. The idea of a mix here, is posited as enabling freedom from the constraints of a sheltered existence outside of society. It is premised on the logic that a few 'rahs' surrounded by 'normal' students will integrate better and *be* better, rather than if there are a high concentration of 'rahs', who would simply replicate exclusionary practices and values. In Byrne's (2006: 1008) study, she argued that the middle-class mothers showed an '[o]penness to difference…as long as…there was not too much difference'. Difference in the make-up of their children's prospective schools was desired but it also needed to be restrained, whereby a good 'mix' entailed not too much or not too little cultural difference, but still enough of the 'norm' (Byrne, 2006: 1015). There were instances reported in the research dialogues in this research, whereby the 'mix' did not always involve positive experiences across difference. Other examples of negotiating difference and a 'mix' in experiences of Halls will be explored as aspects of the 'student experience' in order to understand the frameworks of inclusion further.

8.4   Mixing in Halls

Crozier *et al* (2008) identify the role of Halls as significant in the shaping of a collective sense of identity and the data collected from the students who did choose to stay in Halls indicates this is the case, for most. What also became apparent through discussions of Halls, were some interesting distinctions within and between the Halls of residences and the experiences of the students occupying such spaces.

All students who wish to live in Halls must apply for a place, stating preferences for different sites, each of which has different costs and amenities. Typically, the most expensive Halls were modern and newly built, catered, had en-suite facilities and were located close to campus. Those positioned further away, self-catered, and generally older buildings, were the cheaper options. Such financial implications create real boundaries in terms of the accessibility for different students, with varying levels of financial resources at their disposal. Because different halls often establish differences according to the cost of living at them, physical/geographical boundaries are created between the students as a result of this. However, how this feeds into perceptual or 'imagined' boundaries is interesting. The exchanges in and between the students in different Halls serves to perpetuate ongoing constructions of (imagined) boundaries. This was particularly evident with OLD students' descriptions of Halls. Whereas NEW certainly offers a range of Halls with different costs, the ways in which these different buildings are discussed are fairly neutral in class terms. With the exception of Colin, none of the NEW students articulated the differences in cost between the halls, or of the class differences and any ideas of segregation in these respects. This was, however, predominantly the case with OLD University students, with particular residences being identified as 'rah' or 'posh', creating boundaries and different senses of identity and belonging:

Erm it kind of like starts whenever you get your Halls cos erm the wealthier people tend to go for Headingly Halls 'cause you get – like, I think it's more expensive because you get your meals and everything included and then I think that everyone else is either at Shields Halls or the other halls of residences erm so it tends to be like a stereotype attached to Headingly Halls…and you know, like posh people go there and obviously [there are] people that aren't but like the majority of them are quite well off and stuff and erm so I guess you kind of make your friends at Halls so when you're with that type of people you kind of stick with those kind of people so that kind of starts the segregation……erm and then there's everyone else...

(Charys, 21, working-middle class, OLD University)

Reflecting back on the comments made by the OLD University focus group in chapter 5; about the Headingly and Shields Halls being pitted against each other as 'rahs' and 'chavs' respectively in organised bar crawls, is another example of Charys's point about a 'stereotype' attaching to particular halls. Many other

students drew similar distinctions around the different Halls, with Headingly by far the most commonly cited as a 'rah' Halls. However, that it is *within* these sites that the 'segregation' starts is a compelling notion. Citing Reed *et al* (2003), Clayton *et al* (2009: 169) maintain that the 'very different accommodation structures are crucial to differential processes of identity formation, fitting in and the development of specific sense of belonging' and that 'in the first year social experiences are structured through Halls of residences' (2009: 169). The social experience in terms of the following year's residential choices (i.e. who the students choose to then live with, and where) is one such example of this. Halls are a site in which similarities and differences are realised, perhaps for the first time in university. Despite Halls being hailed as part of the 'student experience', wherein the notion of 'everyone in the same boat' is commonly voiced, other experiences recounted class distinctions that served to challenge such a notion. Alan's and Siobhan's examples demonstrate it is not enough to simply be in Halls; rather, other stocks of capital are required to make experiences positive and to be able to fully capitalise on this aspect of 'student experience'. They also demonstrate instances wherein differently classed students living in proximity to each other create emotionally charged class tensions. This is particularly significant in thinking through the structuring effects of these early experiences for future interactions. The examples provided below are lengthy but they provide detailed and vivid examples of the ways in which class tensions and awareness of differences are brought to the fore, through the social interactions that occur amongst the students when living in the Halls.

…you can tell that one of my flat mates really thinks of himself as better than everyone and the things he comes out with like on last Thursday when … my best friend came around and we decided to drink erm (laughs) we decided just to drink Frosty Jacks with blackcurrant so it didn't taste that bad and it's cheap so we decided to drink that and then he came in the kitchen and I think there was just me, my best friend and him and he said something like erm to my friend - like obviously in a joking manner cos he wasn't actually deliberately putting him down - but he was subconsciously - he was just saying…'Why are you drinking Frosty jacks? I'd rather get drunk on champagne'. Yeah, like coming out with stuff like that and we were like – I think my friend came out with, 'Oh well I don't have daddy to buy me champagne', so, and I just went out of the kitchen laughing so (laughs) yeah there's just stuff like that that he comes out with would make me really think that he thinks of himself as

better… 'cause he used to go to boarding school and so he was just surrounded by an environment where that was alright to act like that, so I guess it was that that makes him like this… there's quite a few people like that…he hangs out more with the few people who are like that – there's only about three or four of them...

<div align="right">(Alan, 18, working-middle-class, OLD University)</div>

Alan lived in Bamburgh Halls, some forty minutes' walk away from the university campus; one of the remotest Halls attached to the university and thus considerably cheaper (also reflected in his summation of the relatively few 'people who are like that' i.e. wealthier students). Alan notes how this was not his first choice and he feels the distance is quite isolating and inconvenient for study and leisure demands. The cultural and economic distinctions of taste and morality drawn between the students via their consumption preferences, backgrounds and embodied characteristics and values are encountered via 'jovial' confrontation. What is interesting here is the way in which he describes the student as 'joking' and 'not deliberately putting him down' but quickly adds 'but he was subconsciously'. This is pertinent to discussions that will follow in the final section about the 'banter' and 'jovial' distinctions that feature in ongoing boundary-work. In this particular confrontation, the presence of Alan's friend and his retort to the other student about their drink choice (drawing on the common phraseology of 'daddy's money'), differs from the example that Siobhan provides. Alan and his friend were able to deflect the denigration of their taste together, whereas the 'banter' that Siobhan encounters generates feelings of isolation from her student others in her Halls. Their accounts suggest that differently priced Halls attracting a type of 'mix' 'are implicated in the repeating and re-inscribing classed and raced discourses' (Byrne, 2006: 1001).

Siobhan lived in 'York Halls'[xxxviii] which is expensive in comparison to other Halls on offer; it is close to campus, newly refurbished and offers en-suite facilities; which, as she notes, attracts wealthier students. Siobhan applied to stay here specifically for the en-suite facilities and although she considered it very expensive, she also vocalised a strong personal focus on cleanliness and hygiene, justifying the added cost as a necessity.

... like the people that live there generally have a lot of money…And they don't understand – like I told them that I had to go – like I was like, 'really, will you please

be quiet cos like I've got to get up early for work' and they were like, 'urgh, why do you work?', and I was like, 'well, I need the money', and they were like, 'well, just ask your parents', and I was like, 'well, they can't afford to just give me money'. And like, when I like, went in, like everyone was sat in...the living room and talking about the schools they all went to - and they've all been like to private schools who I was living with - and they were like, 'oh, where did you go?', and I was like, 'oh, just a state school', and they were like, 'oh, so are you a pauper?', and I was like, 'well compared to you-yes'...I was like, I can't believe people are that rude...I'd never say something like that but ...like some of them went to Eton, this guy was like, 'yeah, I went to Eton', and he was like, 'I'll probably be like Prime Minister', and I was like, 'Oh you must be joking', but he was like, 'people like me, we don't pull failures', so I was like, 'oh right then' and I was like oh my god I can't believe I'm living with these people!

(Siobhan, 18, working-class, OLD University)

Siobhan's interactions with the more privileged , who not only had the financial capacity to afford the basics she struggled to afford but also a 'party lifestyle', in which frequent nights out and late night parties were common and conflicted with her need to sleep before paid work. Siobhan describes this example as a particularly hostile experience of her otherness being publicly marked out, whereby she is recognised as lacking (Skeggs, 2005a). She was singled out as inferior, a 'pauper'; other by means of her relative financial difficulties and prior schooling. Her relation to people 'like them', by inference marked her out as one of those more deemed to 'pull failures'. Siobhan draws upon moral distinctions between herself and the other higher classed students, whereby differences in values and manners again act as cultural distinctions and moral boundaries between them.

8.5   Boundary work: 'us' and 'them' (residential places)

...boundaries presuppose inclusion and exclusion and are constructed through social practices, attitudes or values that are affirmed and re-affirmed through interaction. The process of being included (belonging) therefore requires 'boundary work', the active maintenance and negotiation with others (whether imagined or in practice) of guiding frameworks for inclusion.

(Southerton, 2002: 175)

Reflecting on the work around identity in Chapter 5, identity is social and we rely on a sense of relation to others in order to form a sense of our selves. Boundary work is identity work. Boundaries or the 'constitutive outside' (Hall, 1996) or 'constitutive limits' (Skeggs, 2005) to our selves, work to define the 'us' and the 'them' (Jenkins, 1996), which indirectly produce 'typification systems' (Lamont, 1992: 11). That is, the boundary work organises both the self and social identities into categories (Southerton, 2002: 175). As the quotation above from Southerton (2002) indicates, ongoing negotiations and (re)constructions of social practices and attitudes, guide frameworks for inclusion and such processes are prevalent in the data. Southerton (2002: 174-5) further draws on Cohen (1985: 12) to show how boundaries are involved in the processes of identification:

By definition, the boundary marks the beginning and end of a community....boundary encapsulates the identity of the community and, like the identity of an individual, is called into being by the exigencies of social interaction. Boundaries are marked because communities interact in some way or other with entities from which they are, or wish to be, distinguished.

(Cohen, 1985: 12)

Bringing in this notion of 'the community', is useful when examining data of the residential element of the 'student experience'. The social interactions that occur between the students serve to mark out the boundaries of different student communities that involve institutional and class distinctions. As noted in the previous section, residential places such as Halls can be central to the processes of identity formation in early HE experiences. Moreover, as the example provided in the previous section of Charys showed, different Halls are often differentiated by cost and are culturally inscribed as 'rah' or 'posh' or 'chav' by the students, despite the reality that these spaces are often occupied by students from a range of social backgrounds. Nevertheless, the ways in which these spaces are differentiated and labelled, relating to relative cost, tie in to the students that inhabit them and such processes of distinction exist equally with regard to student residential areas.

Studentification, according to Hubbard (2008: 323), is now 'a recognised phenomenon in many British cities....[and] is the process by which specific neighbourhoods become dominated by student residential occupation'.

Although other areas were mentioned on a couple of occasions, by far the most popular residential areas in this research included Greyville and Redville. Whilst both are popular student residential areas, the latter is seen as more of a 'mix' of students and local residents whereas, Greyville is the predominant area of 'Studentification'. The two areas comprise of very different types of dwellings available. Greyville tends to be famously comprised of large, Victorian houses that have been bought by property developers and split into large student shared houses, the rental prices for which are very high in comparison to other areas. Redville offers more of mixture of properties, including shared student houses (smaller than most of them in Greyville) and a high quantity of 2-3 bedroom flats. Both areas have access to a range of amenities; the main differences between the areas are the relative distance from both campuses and nightlife venues. Greyville has a substantial selection of bars and restaurants, contained on Black Road and a number of small, independent boutiques; it is also within a short walking distance of both OLD and NEW main university campuses. Both areas provide the potential for comfortable student habitation with easy access to amenities. However, the ways in which they are perceived and distinguished from each other, indicate ongoing boundary work frequently underscored by class. Some students clearly articulate the areas in class terms:

Adam: ...like Redville is probably the most diverse but I'd say Redville is probably the least affluent as well 'cause you actually get further away from the city centre then it's less affluent and therefore there's like lower social classes and things

Sophie: Greyville... that's like the centre for Rahs basically there's like a little community of Rahs living there

(NEW University Focus Group/Paired interview)

Adam and Sophie (like most other students making the comparison between the two) highlight the perceived class differences of the areas, with Greyville also commonly referred to as 'rah territory'. The rental prices of the different areas are often held up as differentiators, however the assertion that Greyville is 'rah territory', often rehearses boundary work based on other socio-economic factors

as well as cultural measures. Here, Rory comments on the perception of Greyville as 'rah' noting institutional, economic and cultural factors:

Well I think it's, you know, poly verses posh again you know, the universities. Like you go up Black Road and there's all the like, you know, and you're walking along and you hear, "oh yes and daddy bought me a new BMW at the weekend", and I'm just like, "I wonder which university you go to" – not stereotyping or anything but you know, and erm I think obviously Greyville is nice you know, it's got all the posh designer shops and things like that so obviously its marketed to a more wealthier sector I think

(Rory, 21, working-class, NEW University)

Rory, like many others, refers to Greyville as more OLD University ('posh') and NEW University (poly) as more Redville. Likewise, Charys makes a similar distinction between the two universities and a number of links to amenities, as well as student communities in her rationale for choosing to live in Greyville:

…Greyville seemed to be the one like everyone like wanted to go to like it seemed to be the coolest 'cause like you've got like Tesco and lots of other cafes and then Black Road runs through Greyville so that's where everyone like aspires to be and then I think the cheaper houses are in like Redville…but most people I know that live in Redville are from NEW so I think that people associate Greyville more with OLD and because its deemed to be the posher of the two universities that's the erm reason for that...we also really wanted to live in Greyville just 'cause we'd hear that it was the best craic and like that's where everyone that we knew was going and like, I didn't know anyone from my uni who lives in Redville…also the location is like closer to uni than what Redville is and erm it seemed to be where everyone went. We went to visit it and it was [a] really nice like kind of area like, the atmosphere around places and nice little wee shops so we just thought we'd live there and we got a nine-bed... I've heard that Redville is a really good place to live 'cause like apparently people from NEW who lived in Greyville in second year and now live Redville they say its better because people are more chillaxed and like they are more up for a party and that kind of thing – I don't know, just – aye, I think maybe because of the Rahs – they didn't like the Rahs in Greyville - the way they walk around as if they own the place (laughs)... Yeah like everyone just walks around and poses in Greyville (laughs)

(Charys, 21, working-middle-class, OLD University)

Charys here demonstrates a number of means of distinction about the areas and their inhabitants; the boundaries exist upon a number of factors including cultural tastes, embodied behaviours and values and different (institutional) social networks. Interestingly, on account of these factors, different students choose to opt-in or out of particular areas. As Taylor points out, however, '[t]he decision of where and how to live is seldom as easy as just making a choice and making it be so, yet middle-class...[students] do have more opportunity for agency in exercising their geographies of choice' (2010: 165). The 'choice' to rent property in Greyville is clearly effected by financial resources, as the rental costs are significantly higher than the other areas on offer. Savage's study (2008:152-3) documents a rise in place being defined through a notion of consumer choice. Aesthetic and consumer choice orientations to place are clearly evidential to place here, with regards to living in Greyville. Here, students' needs are 'constructed in relation to and mediated by space and place, with many pointing to the relevance of resources and amenities in the creation of 'nice', 'safe'....space...where 'good areas' encompassed...good transportation links and networks to other places' (Taylor, 2010: 164). Furthermore, living in Greyville, for these students, is a form of social and cultural capital building – the acquisition of property in this area is a commodity, a strategy and an expression of the social and cultural identity of 'student'; particularly an OLD University student. The attachment to Greyville by these students is often an example of 'elective belonging' (Savage *et al*, 2005); 'a powerful reorientation to place from the well-educated and affluent middle-classes' (Paton, 2010: 137). That Greyville is 'cool' and 'the place to be' is repeatedly articulated by the OLD University students and information the students rely on of where to live is predominantly recommendations from other students.   The boundaries and boundary-work is reaffirmed and rearticulated via these interactions.   This could account for the reports from students that there does tend to be a higher proportion of OLD University students in Greyville and NEW University students in Redville, which is certainly suggested by Charys's comments above.

...obviously we knew Greyville was quite a safe area as well with so many students living there – we looked at Brownville as well but people were like, 'oh Brownville's a

bit dodgy – you don't wanna live there'... we took advice from people we knew like in other years and stuff and where they'd been and what they'd experienced and people were like 'yeah go for Greyville' so that's what we did...

<div align="right">(Amy, working-class, OLD University)</div>

The association of certain residential areas like Brownville[xxxix] (and elsewhere, Redville and others) with levels of crime and the feeling of safety, was prevalent in many of the descriptions and experiences of living in different areas. Discussions around safety and the perceptions of safe areas, are linked to the classification of housing areas, with Greyville being perceived as higher class and 'studenty'; therefore safer as both Nadine and Elspeth exemplify below:

Erm…I think there is a big difference between both of the areas…we were unlucky to fall upon the one in [Redville] second year - it was a nice house but it wasn't a nice area at all... I know actually of two people that have been attacked ... like coming out of their houses and like we didn't want to live there ... but this year it was a lot nicer – I do feel much safer now [in Greyville]…and I think you know, it is more 'studenty'....There was like one evening when erm this little girl came to our doorstep and the mum was standing there like in the distance and she'd obviously asked her to knock on the door and see if we had any (laughs) cigarettes and it's like you get weird things happening like that all the time and like our fridge erm, broke down, so they moved it into the back yard and then erm another time we had erm some chavs knock on the door and asking if they could like have our fridge to like grow their drugs in it and things and it was like really scary if you were in the house by yourself – you just don't know what they're capable of doing!

<div align="right">(Elspeth, 22, middle-class, NEW University)</div>

... erm the main choice of Greyville was because they [housemates] believed it was a lot safer – like it was one of the safest areas....when personally, I didn't really see the difference within like Redville for instance, I didn't see how that was any less safe but like they believed Greyville was safer and ... they thought obviously because the houses are slightly higher priced in Greyville then they thought you were actually paying for something but (laughs)...one of them seems to think that it is like the safety that you're paying for and because it's seen as like a higher class area altogether but I don't see how living in an area where it's higher class makes any difference when you are living on a bit of a budget anyway...like, really you should be looking for the best value not, you know, it's more expensive therefore its [safer]...

mostly like the opinions on the areas in *Northern City* is formed off like what other people have said who you know that live in certain areas and I know quite a few people who live in Redville 'cause it does seem to be students choose like either Greyville or Redville – like all the ones that have chosen Redville they don't like have any complaints like whatsoever ...

(Nadine, 21, middle-class, NEW University)

Both Elspeth and Nadine are in the relative minority of NEW students living in Greyville, typically coded by participants as 'higher class' and OLD University students' territory. Redville, on the other hand, is considered by many to be more the territory of NEW University students and is coded as 'lower class'; again re-inscribing the perceived class divide between OLD and NEW University students. Despite there being significant levels of crime (particularly Burglary and Theft from a Dwelling) in the Greyville area[xl], it is perceived as safer by these students whereby living in a 'higher class' student community is believed to offer protection from the kinds of 'lower class' criminal activities, such as growing drugs and gang violence (associated with Redville and Brownville). The more 'student-y' area of Greyville, as opposed to the more 'diverse' and 'lower class' Redville, is interpreted as 'safer', perhaps because of the stocks of 'people like me' against the unfamiliar. However, the links between the perceived class of the area and the cultural and moral associations these bring of fear versus safety. As Nadine notes, however, the 'choice' of where to live is not always a personal or individual one but often depends on negotiation between house mates. Nadine would have preferred to have moved somewhere cheaper, to Redville, but the decision was not solely hers and she ended up in Greyville anyway. Natalie offers a similar example, whereby negotiations between her house mates resulted in them opting for Redville instead of Greyville, thus going against the 'norm' for OLD students.

Yeah like the girls I'm living with next year who I've got a house together with didn't want to live in Greyville at all because they see Greyville as being more of a like wealthy area and like they think that the people who are going to live there next year are going to be the more wealthy students and they didn't want to live there because it might like – so they didn't want to have to feel bad about not having money –like if the rich people were going out or something and if they can't afford it they didn't want

it to be an issue – they want to be with like people who have the same problems as they do – like the same financial stuff... we're living in Redville 'cause we saw it as a really studenty area and its really cheap so it's not kind of really rich people it's just kind of normal – like average you know...

(Natalie, 18, middle-class, OLD University)

Natalie's housemates opted out of the norm of Greyville for OLD University students on socioeconomic grounds. Interestingly, it was not on account of rental prices but of the relative amount of disposable income for 'going out' etc. That they didn't want financial differences to be 'an issue' and sought a sense of belonging via sharing similar concerns and difficulties, rather than having to cope with feelings of difference and disjuncture from their student neighbours, is highly interesting. It contributes to the notion that identities and senses of belonging and inclusion or fitting in, rely on negotiations of sameness and difference. Furthermore, that these emotionally mediated negotiations involve the interplay of economic, social and cultural resources.

8.6   Boundary work: 'us' and 'them' (institutional and leisure spaces)

Much of the differentiation between residential areas rests around distinctions between OLD University areas and NEW University areas, whereby perceived segregation between the institutions is manifest in student residential communities. Despite contradictory evidence to such conceptions of segregation highlighted in the excerpts above, it does exemplify one of the manifestations of the ongoing boundary work with regard to the two university institutions. As Rory noted above, 'it's poly versus posh again' and this phrase is repeatedly invoked in the spaces of interaction between the university students, as well as being attached to particular night-life places and leisure spaces or 'urban playscapes' (Chatterton & Hollands, 2002: 95). Whilst the relative costs involved in frequenting particular more 'exclusive' night-life venues typify the presence of 'rahs', where particular places get assigned as 'rah bars'; the class distinctions between the institutions and the leisure spaces they interact in, rely on a number of cultural and social factors, as well as perceived economic differences. Not only are physical/geographic boundaries constructed in terms of OLD or NEW or indeed, 'rah' spaces, social boundaries exist and are reconstructed interactionally between the two institutions and their students.

Hollands (1995) looks at the 'the phenomenon of 'going out'' and argues that cultural consumption and appropriation of evening city space is central in the production of youth identities. His study was based in Newcastle upon Tyne and involved interviews with (amongst others) both local young people and non-local students, at Newcastle and Northumbria Universities. He found that not only do students tend to go out more than locals (11.5 times a month compared to 6.8 respectively) (Hollands, 1995: 21) but evidences ideas of 'the divided city', whereby socio-spatial divisions between locals and students exist. Such compartmentalisation of nightlife spaces was described in 'us' and 'them terms between 'local' and 'non-local' students, OLD and NEW University students, and 'rahs' and 'non-rahs'.

…I guess because I'm not a typical student in that sense so I'd always just drink around like 'The Station' 'cause that's where I've always drank from being at school type thing and that's where my friends all drink but erm loads of people at uni would talk about going to…places where there's offers on and…all these kind of places that I've never been to in my life so I guess again, if you didn't know the city you would just go to where there are cheap drinks on offer and stuff, whereas if you know it… [you] wouldn't touch it with a barge pole (laughs) if you were like a student that lives 'round Greyville and you go to OLD Uni then you probably drink around Greyville whereas I've never even thought about going over there…

(Jayne, 25, working-class, NEW University)

Jayne's statement of her not being a 'typical student and therefore avoiding 'typical student' leisure spaces, was something that was repeated by the other local working-class students; despite the fact that many of the other 'non-local' students in the research talked about visiting the venues the local ones mentioned. What was perhaps different in their preferences were the nights of the week that they chose to go out, with local students being more likely to go out at weekends with their other friends who weren't studying. According to Chatterton and Hollands' (2002: 110) studies of 'urban playscapes', 'mid-week evenings [are] often designated as 'students' night' by scores of competing pubs and clubs to avoid clashes with young local people' due to perceived clashes and tensions. The local working-class students who resisted an identity as a 'typical student' instead, preferred to socialise with existing peer groups on 'local' nights in 'local' spaces. This separation and socio-spatial segmentation on the

part of the producers of nightlife spaces is important to bear in mind however, as perceived divisions were also stated on 'students' nights' with other students along the lines of affordability and exclusivity. As well as Jayne's reference to Greyville being an OLD University student nightlife scene, other areas in the city centre were often marked as OLD or NEW University territory. Sophie and Adam discuss both the perceived claiming of nightlife spaces, by the different university students and some of the perceived segregation between universities:

> SOPHIE: And like more in 'Gold' and like 'Muse' and like I guess 'Muse' is quite mixed 'cause like I know quite a few OLD students that go like on a Wednesday on a student night and 'T Bar' is more like OLD... there's bars that are more expensive like the likes of 'Premier' are more expensive and are seen to be more upper class in a way

> ADAM: Yeah like you get like in 'Keys' you get the Rahs from OLD but then you also get the Rahs from NEW so it's not just a case of OLD it's a case of the Rahs...In the cheaper places you tend to get....like the rest of us (laughs)
> (NEW University focus group/paired interview)

The boundaries of 'us' and 'them' are quite clearly marked here along economic lines, whereby the affordability in terms of disposable income, divides which places one can afford to drink in. That the 'rahs' (be they OLD or NEW university) tend to frequent more 'exclusive bars', was also commonly vocalised by most of the students when discussing nightlife and different groups. The new 'exclusive' bars that have emerged via increased corporate activity in many 'urban playscapes', according to Chatterton and Hollands (2002: 110), 'appeal to wealthier elements of the student population' and provide a means of separation from the 'more traditional mainstream' of bars and their consumers. The affordability and exclusivity of bars therefore play a role in separating out social groups within the student community. The 'rahs' are also often portrayed as squandering vast sums of money on champagne and cocktails, whereas the 'us' of the 'normal' students tend to opt for particular , specifically for the special offers on drinks. However, it was not a simple case of certain bars are reserved for 'rahs'; most of the students tended to talk of particular 'nights' attracting different students:

'Senoritas' is quite Rah-ish on a Monday and 'Thai-Thai' erm and 'Famous' used to be quite a Rah place to go on Wednesday…

(Charys, 21, middle-class, OLD University)

Hollands (1995: 23) argues that the concept of the divided city is not a new one: 'it has a long history is urban sociology'; and to this he adds the following note:

One of the difficulties in utilising such a concept like the divided city however concerns not only which social groupings are divided, but where, why and by what processes....divisions often blur important distinctions and divisions and differences within a given population and may work to stereotype a social grouping… the issue is a complex one.

(Hollands, 1995: 84)[xli]

As has been shown, the boundaries of 'us' and 'them' are complex and shifting; the perceived divisions are often contradictory and frequently intersect and blur between 'local' and 'non-local', 'rahs' and 'non-rahs', 'NEW and OLD'. Wealthier students are clearly grouped as 'rahs' against everyone else, who are then positioned as more frugal. Class distinctions are embedded in the boundary work between the institutions in particular.

The two university institutions are discussed by the students in this research in various manners and the distinctions manifest in interesting ways. The boundary-work between the two institutions is of course already figured for some during the choice process, however for the rest of the students it is during the earliest stages of their university careers, when they are inaugurated into the university 'rivalry'. Early experiences of university social life introduce students to the existing boundaries and rivalries between the universities generated before them and they continue to pervade university life via different mechanisms. Sporting events such as the 'Northern Cup'[xlii] are heralded as being the epitome of the universities' rivalry, whereby t-shirts with slogans and chants are created and are in abundance. Other competitive occasions, such as mooting for Law students, are also mentioned and other events such as organised bar crawls also make use of the types of slogans, chants and jibes that are prevalent during the Northern Cup. The point that is emphasised most

by the students commenting on these distinctions and the existence of rivalries, is that it is 'all a bit of fun'; 'banter'; 'nobody takes it seriously' etc. Despite these claims, there appears to be several contradictions whereby the perceived boundaries between the institutions effect social interaction between the respective students. Very few of the participants in this research mentioned having friends at the other university; those that did mentioned that they did not tend to see them very often or socialise in the same places. Despite the campuses existing in such close proximity, there was much to suggest that the students from each institution felt much distance from each other.   Natalie captures this sentiment below:

I only know one NEW student and it's because I went to school with him…but erm I've only met him once and that was like total chance – it was just because we happened to be in the same bar at the same time and I haven't really spoke to him or heard from him since. I don't really know what NEW students do.

(Natalie, 19, middle-class, OLD University)

The boundaries between the 'us' and 'them' of the institutions were repeatedly stated in a number of ways – many examples have featured throughout this and previous chapters and work on the logic of the status differentiation of the two universities, coded often in class terms (NEW as 'lower' class and OLD as 'higher'; often versed, as noted previously, in terms of 'north' and 'south' respectively). These boundaries were frequently constructed through university organised events as stated above, such as the Northern Cup. Other events organised by student groups such as bar crawls however, replicated the sense of sporting team rivalry that exists between the institutions in the Northern Cup, which Nadine below roundly exemplifies. I asked Nadine if she thought there was a rivalry between OLD and NEW:

I'd say erm, yes! (laughs) It's interesting I think 'cause like in the first year you're encouraged to do certain like Poly versus Posh bar crawls and that kind of thing and they seem to pitch like each uni against each other and I don't know, I think that in first year you're sort of forced into it a little bit like getting like "Yeah NEW!" or "Yeah OLD!"...in the first year they do try to like force you into quite serious like rivalry I think, 'cause on the Poly versus Posh bar crawl and erm I was just like well, this is a bit pathetic really – it's like, you know, team spirit - school spirit is a good idea and

you should have confidence in your school and everything but I think it's a bit ridiculous when you're doing like shot games or whatever to (laugh) judge which ones the best (laughs) yeah I'm not sure how that shows that. Well 'cause like NEW used to be a Polytechnic I think there is certain…derogatory remarks really like, around it...but I think OLD students in general do seem to be a bit more comfortable with being called posh than not being called posh because we are quite aware that OLD's like higher rated overall as a uni so they've got to take pride in the fact that it's more – well it seems as higher class whereas as NEW just don't care that they're called the Poly so even though it could be taken as a bit derogatory…

(Nadine, 21, middle-class, NEW University)

That the students at NEW didn't care that they were held in distinction as 'the Poly', was frequently stated by NEW students; the inference was that they knew their university was positioned as lower status than OLD but that it didn't matter. Conversely, students at OLD were portrayed by these students as being the ones who felt the need to claim a sense of superiority on account of their identity as OLD University students. Some of the participants offered other examples of occasions when the students from the two institutions did interact and these often involved palpable tensions. Rory and Lyndsey offer examples of specific encounters (of their friends) with students from OLD University, whereby the very mention of their institutional affiliation, results in (unexpected) encounters of hostility and thus demonstrate some of the interactional tensions between the groups of students:

… there's been a few cases when I was out with my friend and he was talking to this lass all night and everything and then the moment he mentioned he was from NEW she walked off 'cause she was from OLD and I thought – that's really off! You know, it's just two different universities you know, we're still doing the same thing you know. It doesn't bother me at all and I suppose there's always poly versus posh but you know, there's been a few cases like that like - I was in a takeaway once and there was OLD on one side and NEW on the other side, throwing food at each other and I was like I'm sorry I didn't realise it was that immature – I just thought it was with the sports teams – you know a bit of healthy rivalry but obviously some people take it to new extremes (laughs)

(Rory, 21, working-class, NEW University)

I definitely think there's a rivalry between the two universities. Like, I know when we go out in societies its always Poly chants and stuff like that but it's just a bit of fun - on our behalf anyway….I think, yeah, there is a difference between OLD and NEW students – I think that OLD ones tend to– well, this is the sort of stereotype, but they tend to be more upper class, erm and erm they tend to be erm well, that their daddies have got good jobs and stuff like that – well that's what NEW say anyway and erm NEW tend to be more down to earth and practical and stuff like that (laughs) but that's a stereotype (laughs)... there's one [chant] that goes "Poly 'til I die, Poly 'til I die, I know I am, I'm sure I am, I'm Poly 'til I die" but then the ones that are against OLD are like erm "You can shove your daddy's visa up your arse" erm basically chanting that or like "You can shove your red bricks up your arse"...It tends to be like when you're on a pub crawl and [they're] like "Ah yeah lets do a poly chant" kind of thing but erm some people take it really seriously and I've heard people say like, "Ah yeah I was getting chatted up by this guy and he asked what uni I was from and I said NEW and he just walked in the opposite direction" (laughs) – I heard that and I think it's just a bit of fun but some people take it so seriously that they're not even gonna socialise with people from different unis – which I think is a bit bad – and I think most people just think it's a bit of banter (laughs)

(Lyndsey, 18, middle-class, NEW University)

The rivalry between the university sports teams has indeed been taken, as Rory puts it, 'to new extremes'. Whilst the students set up the rivalry between the universities as being tied mainly to a sense of healthy 'team/school spirit', they also recognise the two institutions as historically different in terms of status. The differences in institutional status are implicated in the interactions between their students where perceived class differences between them, manifest in a number of forms. T-shirts and chants highlight the ways in which class manifests in emblematic forms; Graeme and Alan below talk about how they circulate beyond the Northern Cup, in the form of organised bar crawls:

...what they tend to do is like you pay a fiver or whatever and they sometimes have a OLD t-shirt or a NEW t-shirt and people take the mick a little bit and they're like "ah you know, if you go to NEW you're gonna work for my dad" and stuff but erm it is just a bit of a laugh really…

(Graeme, 18, middle-class, OLD University)

I know there are like pub crawls with like Poly vs Posh (laughs) but I just couldn't be bothered with stuff like that but I don't really…see the point ... the t-shirts on that night I remember for OLD there was, 'Your Dad Works For My Dad' and just slogans like that which, I've not found kind of funny but one of my flatmates – he's quite rude – he bought one of those shirts just for it – he didn't go on the pub crawl but he just bought it for the slogan [Interviewer: Do you know what the NEW one said?]…On that night it was.....'Poly for Life' or something but erm I think the usual one's a bit more explicit... erm 'I'd rather be a Poly than a cunt'…

(Alan, 18, working-middle-class, OLD University)

Besides the 'chants' that are regularly called upon in nights out or organised bar crawls, the t-shirts act as more permanent/fixed displays of the class distinctions, that are continually redrawn between the two institutions and their students. Moreover, that the t-shirts are available for purchase outside of their intended purpose (the bar crawl) and the chants existing beyond the 'friendly rivalry' of the sports teams, to social interaction in nightlife spaces, is a striking indication of the centrality of class in the drawing of boundaries between the two institutions and their students. That they are 'having a laugh' and the terms are used jokingly, that it is 'banter' betrays the positions from which they are made and to whom they are directed. Ford and Ferguson's (2004: 79) 'prejudiced norm theory' argues that 'disparagement humour creates a normative climate of tolerance of discrimination' via its reinforcement of stereotypes of particular individuals or social groups. Raisborough and Adams (2008) argue that 'mockery offers a certain strategic orientation to class and distinction work' but further that:

…mockery creates spaces of enunciation, which serve, when inhabited by the middle class, particular articulations of distinction from the white, working class…..these spaces, often presented as those of humour and fun, simultaneously generate for the middle class a certain *distancing* from those articulations.

Just as with the use of 'stereotype' in the articulations presented in Chapter 5, the 'humour and fun' of the 'banter' between the institutions and its students serves to distance the articulations from the person making them. Whilst Raisborough and Adams' (2008) study focuses on cultural representations of the white, working-class; where the term 'chav' is commonplace, they draw attention to the 'emotionally motivated boundary work' (2008: 2.4). This, according to

Sayer (2005: 953) is 'particularly strong in groups that are anxious about their position' in relation to those 'above' and 'below'. That the terms 'rah' and 'chav' regularly circulate in HE spaces offers an example of ways such disparagement humour can be used to further normalise middle-classness. However, the examples of the 'banter' between the institutions and its students go beyond use of 'chav' and 'rah'; they regularly invoke explicit class distinctions in exchanges of 'friendly' ridicule. Ridicule 'renders the target inferior, while simultaneously invoking the superiority of the one doing the ridiculing' (Cowan, 2005: 1) and thus involves the target of ridicule in as much as the perpetrator. Cowan argues that ridicule is 'such a prevalent commentarial form that we often miss its significance…[in] the reinforcement of cultural hierarchies' (2005: 1). Likewise, the students appear to give such little significance to the content of the statements they make in 'banter'. Cowan (2005) also states that ridicule 'is not a product of derision, but of the social relationships that make derision meaningful…it reflects and reinforces a dynamic of status ascription within a given domain of social interaction'. Within the domain of interaction of HE and certainly between the institutions, the 'banter' serves to reinforce boundaries between institutions and the status ascribed to each, that then reflect on its students. That social relationships are influenced by a deeply entrenched class system, gives the ridicule its base meaning. The 'banter' is a form of classist abuse and ridicule yet because it is not particularly directed at individuals, exists as harmless fun that *shouldn't* offend people. These examples of class distinctions mediated as 'banter' are made acceptable against other forms of discrimination:

...meeting people in university is just a microcosm of meeting people in society... [but] it's pretty easy 'cause everyone's in the same boat...like what's expected of you at university is pretty much the same thing as what's expected of you in society so if you go and you're sexist and racist and abusive to people then erm you might find for instance that it's going to be pretty hard for you to get on...

(Graeme, 18, middle-class, OLD University)

Graeme's comments are made during a discussion of what students need to 'fit in' or 'get by' (or conversely, as above, what would not be acceptable) and the importance placed on meeting people and making friends and types of

unacceptable behaviour, echoes the majority of students involved in the research, particularly middle-class students, in the sense of 'being in the same boat'. When asked about what is unacceptable in university, racism was the most popular response; classism conspicuously goes unmentioned explicitly, which is perhaps indicative of the relative acceptability of the use of racist versus classist terms (Gidley & Rooke, 2010: 104). After all, the frequency with which the terms 'rah' and 'chav' are used by the students unproblematically and unchallenged, would suggest that they are not deemed as offensive as racist terms and are therefore more acceptable. What is interesting about Graeme's statement however, is the comparison of university with wider society. Seeing everyone as 'in the same boat' however, overlooks the effects of class and betrays the complexity of positions from which students enter into higher education; the social, cultural and economic resources they come equipped with and which they are subsequently able to accrue and exchange.

8.7   Summary

This chapter has looked in detail at elements of the 'student experience' that are characterised as the 'social' side of university. These elements of the 'student experience', and the opportunities it provides for the exchange and accrual of capital are differently accessed according to a range of social factors. However, whilst living together with other students in Halls and student residential areas beyond, as well as socialising with other students are held up as key areas for further 'inclusion' in the 'student experience', these sites are also subject to ongoing boundary work, whereupon class distinctions continuously operate. Imagined boundaries of 'us' and 'them' are constantly redrawn between Halls, residential areas, institutions and leisure spaces (such as bars) on economic, social and cultural bases and via social interaction. Here, distinctions are made in the everyday of student life that are picked up and repeated via interaction; as new students are inducted into the (re)constructed (imagined) boundaries in student life and the spaces and places it involves. Some of the participants' accounts of their student lives provide examples whereby class differences are strongly felt and experiences of disjuncture from their student peers, results in feelings of exclusion from the norm. Status distinctions between the two universities are reconstructed through the 'poly versus posh' 'banter', which although is held up as harmless fun in most cases, the accounts document other

cases, whereby the 'banter' provokes emotional and often hostile reactions. The 'joke' often depends on whose expense it is made. Moreover, even as seemingly harmless fun and 'banter', the ridicule, the mockery and the disparagement humour all serve to reinforce cultural class distinctions and thus contribute to the remaking of class in the everyday.

9. Conclusion

9.1   Introduction

In this thesis I have attempted to make a strong case for the acknowledgement of class differences in the everyday lives of HE students. This research aimed to address the absence of class in educational policy discourses and to challenge the model of social mobility underlying them. This study also aimed to contribute to sociological research on class identities and higher education, and especially to explore the relatively under-researched issue of middle-class experiences. This concluding chapter will attempt to summarise and synthesise the findings of this study as well as providing suggestions for future research. I begin by discussing the major themes and findings of this research, which inform broader academic debates and which include class identities in higher education and the idea of normative student identities; the language of class and class terms; embodiment of identities; institutional cultures; choice, value and (classed) educational strategies; and finally, student spaces and places.

The thesis began by critically examining elements of educational policy and government rhetoric to understand how class - the dreaded 'c' word (Sviensson, 2009) - is muted and instead terms such as 'choice', 'diversity and 'inclusion' circulate. These terms however, only serve to mask class inequalities and promote the idea of the student as consumer (Ball, 2004a, 2004b, Morley, 2001) and/or active citizen (Reay, 2008), which both rely on notions of a middle-class self. Links between the individualistic rhetoric of government policy and individualisation theorists were made and challenged on the basis that they radically misconceive the nature of modern class identities by relying on limited and anachronistic conceptions of class. The remaining thesis went on to make the case for reclaiming class as a worthy mode of study and to argue for an advanced understanding of class as an often emotional and relational process in the minutiae of everyday life as well as part of large-scale inequalities.

9.2   Normative student identities

This research makes an important theoretical and empirical contribution to understanding the operation of class identities in HE and the study of identities more broadly. Much literature focuses on working-class disadvantage and

review of these indicated a relative lack of educational research that focussed on middle-class experiences of higher education and research into the everyday experiences of university students beyond access and outside of relationships to the learning/academic aspects of student life. This study has focussed on the interaction between middle-class and working-class and in everyday constructions of normative student identities. Using Bourdieu's work as a loose framework, this thesis argues for the complexity of class identities as dynamic and relational and reconstructed via everyday interactions and encounters with others both inside and outside of the university.

One of the most compelling aspects of the research data collected was the numerous references to and invocations of the term 'rah' throughout many discussions with research participants. The term 'rah' was used in many ways, but what became clear were the ways in which the figure of the 'rah' was implicated in the construction of normative (middle-class) student identities. Middle-classness has been identified as a relational formation (Archer, 2011; Lawler, 2008b; Gunn, 2005). There were numerous examples of the 'rah' being used alongside the term 'chav' to denote a middle-ground and many more students that performed similar, but less explicit, 'middling' work. The context of these disassociations provided fascinating grounds for theoretical reflection and analysis. It is widely documented that middle-class identities and the cultural values they embody are produced in resistance to vilified working-class bodies (Lawler, 2005; Skeggs, 1997, 2004; Tyler, 2006, 2008; Bourdieu, 1984; *inter alia*). Yet in the context of higher education, this process of asserting supremacy is not straightforward and the data provides evidence of class fractions whereby middle-class 'ordinariness' is constructed via discourses of meritocracy. The meritocratic logic of earning privileged positions and economic rewards via hard work is contrasted with the 'rahs' who embody ostentatious displays of wealth and unearned, hereditary privileges. Claims of entitlement and ordinariness are made therefore via notions of their hard work and that of their parents to have afforded their position as university students. The significance of the usage of the term 'rah' specifically relating to education then is in the ways in which middle-class identities are constructed. Notions of 'rahs' and then 'everyone else' (i.e. 'non-rahs') reinforce this idea of meritocratic logic; whilst the 'rahs' haven't earned their privileges, presumably 'everyone else' has. Whilst working-classness is considered to be related to lack of intelligence (Bourdieu, 2010) the

model of social mobility underpinning educational discourse suggests that those who have made it to university, the 'lucky survivors', don't suffer with this vilifying lack and are presumably, by right of their having entered HE, more middle-class and therefore acceptable.

Middle-class students in this research laid claims to normality and ordinariness via positioning others as undeserving and/or deficient in acceptable moral values, thereby reinforcing theirs as the 'right' way to be. Whilst policy and discourse upholds middle-class values as the *right* way to live, the identity-work undertaken via normative and performative statements occurring in the everyday of university life serves to reinforce such values and such views.

Insider/outsider knowledge also contributed to conceptions of normative students identities, especially from those who knew they were not considered 'normal' students. Local, working class students in the research were aware they differed from such normative students identities and instead carved out alternative 'local student' identities or strongly disidentified from the category 'typical student'. This contributes to understanding of the challenges different 'types' of students face in terms of fitting in or standing out in university and the ways in which they negotiate their identities in relation to the rest of the student community.

9.3   *The language of class and classifying terms*

It is well documented that people are reluctant to identify themselves in or use class terms (Bradley, 1996; Savage *et al*., 2001) and one of the contributions this study makes is in the analysis of the ways in which class is articulated in the everyday. The analysis of the term 'rah' and its use by the research participants adds to the claim that Tyler (2008: 1471) makes that a 'new vocabulary of social class has emerged in Britain'. As with 'chav', the term 'rah' has been shown to represent a number of class values and associations and as such acts as a culturally specific pejorative class term. As stated above, unlike the term 'chav', the term 'rah' has special significance with the (higher) educational field and is (perhaps) likely to be confined to that field. As such, it serves the function of reinforcing meritocratic and middle-class ideals and claims to entitlement within the field of education yet it perhaps has wider significance in terms of the culturally specific class practices of claiming ordinariness via positioning against elitism (Savage, 2005). It is linked with representations of a young elite. The

presence of a definition of 'rah' in different media/websites suggest that it may become more mainstream than exclusively confined to the education field; I have certainly heard it used in Northern City by non-students, which may be indicative of the significance of Northern City as a 'university city' and this perhaps throws up considerations for future research. Whether or not the term 'rah' has much currency outside of education, it is another example of the cultural manifestations of class and the renaming and reframing of class. Therefore the term is significant in broader debates about the significance of and cultural representations of class identities.

The term 'rah' was used to denote a range of cultural class signifiers and represented a way of making these class distinctions without specifically using the term 'class'. Rather, the term exists 'out there' in the social world and relies on processes of interpretation to make the associations (Reay, 2005). Therefore repeated use of the term represents a presence of class in the everyday distinctions at work and yet, a refusal and resistance to explicitly name class. The sense of discomfort with making class judgements was often palpable in the research dialogues and the use of the term 'rah' is one of the ways in which these judgements are able to circulate as opinions and judgements already existing in the social world. The repeated use of the term 'stereotype' and the link of 'rah' as a stereotype also serves the function of being able to deflect the tendency to be normatively judgemental (Pickering, 2002). This desire to deflect associations of being judgemental feed off/into individualisation and discourses of classlessness. As such, the findings from this research contribute to our conceptual understanding of the operations of class distinctions in the everyday of HE and beyond (Bourdieu, 1984).

The interactions between the two universities in this research also demonstrate different ways that class circulates and is renamed in the everyday. Class distinctions are constantly reactivated in the everyday use and comparisons between 'poly and posh'. Like the use of the term 'rah' was often part of the 'banter' between individuals and groups in HE, the 'poly versus posh' 'banter' does similar work in reproducing status differences between the institutions and its students whilst deflecting the associations of being judgemental or classist via its use as 'harmless fun'. 'Banter' or 'disparagement humour' and 'ridicule' serve to redraw distinctions of cultural hierarchies whilst also allowing for a certain distancing from those articulations (Raisborough &

Adams, 2008; Cowan, 2005). The perception of class as a thing of the past serves, in some respects, as the mechanism for the way this 'humour' works. When students use phrases like 'your dad works for my dad' in verbal exchanges such as chants and other ways such as t-shirt slogans, they suggest they are using class distinctions playfully and ironically on the pretext that they would never be taken seriously. Yet, in the examples the participants offer, the 'banter' often generates emotional reactions and demonstrate that the 'joke' very much depends on who it is aimed at and who makes it; jokes that confer inferiority provoke emotional defences. Paraphrasing Bourdieu in this context, one might say disparagement humour of this kind serves to classify and it classifies the classifier. Yet of course this is not at all straightforward; the 'Poly versus Posh' humour doesn't map neatly onto the class identities of students at each institution - both institutions are predominantly middle-class. Rather, it reinforces status differentiations and the stratification of university institutions.

The final contribution the research makes to the ideas around the 'language of class' relates to the ways in which class is articulated via speech codes via accents etc. The significance of cultural classed codes in relation to how we speak is such that they become part of the ways in which class differences are perceived amongst the students in HE. They also have particular significance in the context of the field of education whereby the special status of RP accents as distinguishing intelligence. Furthermore, the fact that RP is historically situated within educational discourse as 'proper English', implicitly ranks other accents and ways of talking in a classed hierarchy. Accents and ways of speaking, then, are significant in HE, whereby specific 'languages of class', specifically RP as middle-class, position speakers as intelligent and other accents as lacking in comparison.

9.4   Embodiment: speaking and looking the 'right' way

As noted above, accents are assigned with cultural class codes and dispositions and cultural class tropes of intelligence, friendliness etc. However, what was significant was the ways in which they were interpreted through the classed bodies of the HE students. Accents were not interpreted singularly and depended upon interpretation of other embodied signifiers such as behaviours and, most frequently, visual displays. These processes are inherently complex as they not only rely on the interpretations of different aspects of embodiment

singularly and combined, but also involve the presence of the subject making distinctions and the object of those distinctions. Again, borrowing Bourdieu's (1984) theoretical schema, judgements relating to embodiment are judgements of taste whereupon taste classifies and it classifies the classifier; historically reactivated moral euphemisms of the body signal class often without naming it directly (Reay, 2005).

The interpretations of 'rahs' provided fascinating examples of the ways in which embodied aspects of identities are read and interpreted in the educational field. The ways in which the bodily performances of the 'rahs' were interpreted by differently classed students highlighted different emphases on cultural and material differences of studenthood that were premised on notions of inauthenticity. Whereas the working-class students interpreted their 'look' as inauthentic economic deprivation, middle-class students again, implicated notions of meritocracy and interpreted it as being engineered to look effortless and therefore inauthentic. The different interpretations offered ways of seeing how notions of studenthood involve hard work and effort and for some (more than others), a period of economic hardship. The ways in which the students articulated a sense of inauthenticity demonstrated Western notions of identities as being contained within, revealing inner, true selves.

The performances of the 'rahs' are interpreted as 'cynical performances' (Goffman, 1959) yet serve to demonstrate the ways in which middle-class students are able to creatively adapt their identity performances in the context of HE that working-class students are more restricted in. For instance, to assume a look of 'poverty' or to embody the dishevelled appearance described of the 'rah' either out of HE context or without the other conflicting signifiers of RP accent and designer brands, the 'look' would lose value and significance; in order to resist derision, working-class bodies are less able to experiment with looks of this kind. The 'look' of the 'rah' is presumably one that will be left behind beyond HE, whereas for others their circumstances dictate their appearance. The 'rah' appearance ostentatiously signifies wealth and a lack of concern with paid work; whereas the structural constraints requiring regular part-time work during term-time often mean that for some students, 'dressing down' as a 'student' (not as a 'rah' necessarily) to fit in is an impossibility when the type of employment requires a more formal mode of dress. Furthermore, whilst the 'rah's' conspicuous consumption is mocked to a certain extent, the brands they wear

have symbolic value and HE represents a privileged space in which they are able to override connotations of conspicuous consumption as unclassy (Skeggs, 1997).

The discussions around student looks and accents indicate complex negotiations around getting it 'right'. Getting it 'wrong' serves to mark out otherness from student normativity and this is emotionally acute when 'non-traditional' students experience such disjuncture on account of the way they speak or dress etc. Working-class participants divulged examples of when they feel they are being negatively judged for not speaking the right way or looking the right way and so stand out rather than fit in. Obviously this has implications for the ways in which class identities are managed and negotiated in the context of HE and beyond. It contributes to an understanding of the difficulties working-class students may face beyond the point of access in HE and the ways in which middle-class hegemony in HE structures what is normal and what is acceptable. Class identities are performed and interpreted via the body and thus this research contributes to our understanding of the ways in which embodied class identities are managed and negotiated in the context of HE and more broadly in the field of education. Furthermore, following a Bourdieusian understanding of the logic of fields, such findings extend beyond the field of education to others such as (most likely) the economic field.

9.5   Institutional Cultures

The context of HE further involves differences in institutional contexts and there are many ways in which differences between the universities were drawn. Much is made in educational policy discourse of the 'diversity' of needs of 'diverse' students and the requirement for 'diverse' institutions to meet these different needs (Archer, 2007). This research deals with such 'diverse' students and 'diverse' institutions and the role of different institutional cultures in terms of access and of participation in HE has been discussed in several ways. Firstly, the perception of institutional cultures figure, for some, in the choices of where to study; secondly, perceptions of the institutional culture figured in the extent to which students felt they belonged and thus to a sense of their student identity; and finally, the perceptions of the institutional cultures of the two universities in this research influenced the interactions between the institutions and their students. The findings here inform broader ongoing concerns around the

sociology of education, specifically of HE, by contributing to understandings of the choice process and the differing nature of HE institutions as well as debates regarding HE massification and neoliberalism. Additionally, and importantly, they also add to this work by focussing on what happens to students beyond the choice-making process and beyond entry.

The role of institutional cultures, and specifically the classed make-up of their students was shown to influence the choices some made of university institution. Negotiations of whether certain institutions were 'for the likes of me' resonated and local knowledge of OLD university led to self-exclusion in some cases. Therefore the negotiations of institutional cultures impacted on the choices of institutions whereupon class identities limited spaces of choice on the grounds of fitting in rather than the potential gains to be had from studying at a more prestigious institution. Class identities were further inflected with gendered negotiations of risks and responsibilities that factored in the decisions to study close to home. Financial risks of moving away to study were also highly prominent and as such may be highly relevant to the imminent rise in tuition fees as will be documented below in the final section.

Distinctions between the two institutions are constantly reactivated and redrawn via interactions and use of 'poly versus posh' as noted above.   Despite educational policy discourse presenting the institutions via neutral terms of diversity without specifically acknowledging their hierarchical status and the essentially stratified nature of the system, students demonstrate awareness of the status differentiations and reconstruct them in everyday interactions. Moreover, the status differences between the two institutions often served to confer distinctions between its students; OLD was typically assumed to be more middle-class and NEW more working-class despite the internal class differentiations in each. Again, the term 'rah' resurfaced, with OLD being labelled as more 'rah', despite there also being 'rahs' recognised at NEW. That 'rahs' were often described as an exclusive subgroup of the student population also came into discussions about the cultural mix of the institutions whereby a greater mix of students from different backgrounds was perceived as beneficial for 'rahs' so that they would integrate more with more 'normal' students. Institutional cultures, therefore are significant in the initial choice processes of some students as well as the social experiences and opportunities to fit in and belong. The special significance of the classed distinctions and interactions

around the institutional spaces offers much potential for future research into similar instances of this across other cities where universities with different statuses exist in close proximity.

9.6   *Investment strategies and spaces of choice*

Whilst government educational policy discourse positions the student as a neutral consumer making rationally based choices in terms of investments and gains, much research suggests otherwise and challenges such discourses as overlooking the influence of structural inequalities that limit spaces of choice (Archer & Hutchings, 2000; Ball *et al.,* 2000; Reay 2001a).   This research contributes to such challenges to classless discourse and likewise argues that class and gender influence the processes of choices and decision-making. One of the ways in which structural inequalities manifest in issues regarding access and participation is through choice of institution as highlighted above. Choosing to study at OLD was frequently discussed as an investment strategy on the basis of knowledge that qualifications from more prestigious institutions would confer advantages on them for exchange in the labour market. Prior education and social contacts or 'hot knowledge' (Ball & Vincent, 1998) were the most influential in bestowing knowledge of the university system upon potential students. A lack of knowledge necessary for making fully informed choices of where and what to study may therefore impact on future gains from differently valued educational qualifications and experiences.

The student experience included academic study, socialising with other students and living with other students and for some, part-time work. Structural constraints on working-class students often required that they work part-time during term-time and this in turn, impacted on the social and leisure time they were able to invest. Material constraints further excluded many (working-class) students from the opportunity to participate in more social and leisure experiences due to the financial cost of doing so. Moreover, these constraints interwove with local students' tendency to invest their time with existing friendship groups (people like them) and self-exclude from the social scene of university students living away from home and their local areas. Yet it was precisely these social elements that were being consciously invested in by (predominantly) middle-class students. Using the concept of 'hysteresis' and the notion of the 'economy of experience' it was suggested that the mass expansion

of HE and the anxieties to retain privileged middle-class positions in and from HE were part of the strategies of (middle-class) students. That expansion had moved the goal posts somewhat in terms of graduate recruitment and a stronger requirement for the 'personality package' on top of academic qualifications was shown to motivate middle-class students to invest in the social experience of university in order to cultivate and develop such desirable qualities. That working-class students are more likely to self-exclude from the social side of university and/or be limited by their need to work part-time demonstrates another way in which middle-class privileges persist and working-class students are potentially disadvantaged further. Therefore this contributes further to knowledge of the choices made and the potential consequences in terms of unequal gains from HE for differently classed students. It further suggests that as the value of HE has altered, future changes such as the rise in fees in 2012 will potentially further affect these conceptions of value and who is able to gain. Furthermore, by looking at ideas of investments and strategies, this work would also have significance for studies looking beyond HE at entry into the labour market.

9.7   *Student spaces and places*

This research set out to explore how class identities operated in the everyday of university life with particular emphasis on other aspects of students' experiences than academic studies (an underdeveloped area of research) and as a result of this endeavour and the fascinating data it generated there are several suggestions for future research of this kind. One of the significant contributions this research makes to an already burgeoning body of sociological work on higher education and social class is the focus on student spaces of interaction. Chapter 8 detailed many instances of the ways in which student spaces and places were used in the everyday distinctions of university life; of the inclusions and boundary-work ongoing between the students in and between the two different institutions. As such, this work contributes to wider academic debates on geographical and social space and their intersections.

Whilst Crozier *et al* (2008) highlight the special significance of Halls of Residences in solidifying a sense of collective identity, this research builds on this by highlighting the differentiation between different Halls and its students as implicated in the process of negotiating, developing and managing identities.

Halls present highly appealing sites for future research exploring the operation of classed identities in the everyday of university experiences. For many writers in the field (Crozier *et al.*, 2008; Reay *et al.*, 2009; 2010, Clayton *et al.*, 2009) the early experiences of HE are the crucial in developing a sense of student identity and of 'fitting in'. Halls therefore would present an ideal site in which to explore the experiences of new students; longitudinal research following students through their academic trajectories would also provide scope for exploring the development of student identities and the social networks. A comparison of early experiences between students in Halls and those living in alternative accommodation or indeed in the familial home would also be a fascinating exploration of the different ways in which early experiences of university contribute to the negotiation and operation of (classed) identities in HE.

Writers such as Hubbard (2008) and Smith (2002) exploring the effects of 'studentification', work through ideas of gentrification and the impact on local communities. The expansion of HE is directly related to this phenomenon of 'studentification' and cities housing more than one university such as the one in this research are more likely to witness such phenomena. Certainly, Universities UK (2006) see the phenomenon as a policy issue for university management and stakeholders. However, what this research focuses on are the experiences of HE students inhabiting such spaces and the ways in which they figure in the identity and boundary work of HE students in the everyday of university life. It would be incredibly interesting to pursue further research into this in different university cities to explore the ways in which residential spaces and places figure in the experiences of HE students and the role of them in their (classed) student identities.

Student leisure spaces are also highly significant in the ways in which (classed) student identities are negotiated and play into the construction of boundaries of inclusion and of 'us' and 'them' between physical places such as bars. Work on leisure spaces by Hollands (2002) and Chatteron & Hollands (2002) argued that spatial segregation occurs different consumption groups, which highlights material resources as a factor in occupation of certain spaces and they also demonstrate divisions in nightlife spaces according to students and locals. This research contributes to their findings showing that such spatial segregation occurs between students and further complicates divisions according to financial resources by consideration of institutional affiliation also.

Economic differences are drawn into cultural boundaries of 'rah' bars so that whilst the exclusivity of some bars limit who can occupy them in terms of financial resources, this impacts on cultural affiliations and identifications and reinforces (imagined) boundaries. Further research into the student leisure spaces would provide promising terrain for researchers interested in student experiences and class identities. There were few examples of participation in campus leisure spaces such as student union bars by the students in this research. However, how these spaces contribute to negotiations of classed student identities and how they are perhaps differently used and taken up in other institutions may be prove promising terrain for future research.

9.8   Summary - Implications for Policy and Academic Debates

This research sought to challenge the model of social mobility underlying the rationale of government educational policies and the absence of explicitly naming class within them. Whilst this challenge has been achieved via the considerable contributions to studies on class identities in HE as outlined above, the findings in themselves demonstrate there is still much to consider for policy makers and social researchers.

This research was premised in an era of Widening Participation whereupon the target of 50% of 18-30 year olds in HE by 2010 signified promises of greater equality, social mobility and prosperity. Yet such egalitarian hopes are limited and obscured by neoliberalist educational policies. The New Labour government's educational policies demonstrated continuity of the legacies of the Conservative government's administration before them in aspects such as the emphases on accountability, standards and choice, market competitiveness, centralisation and prescription, and performativity; in short, via neoliberalist, marketised education (Reay, 2008; Leathwood, 2002; Esland, 1996; Ball, 1999). The discourses of individualistic classlessness of the New Labour educational policies are likely to continue with the present Coalition government. As a result of the Browne report (2010), commissioned by the New Labour government, the Coalition government has made the somewhat publicly contested move to increase university tuition fees to up to £9,000 and substantially reduce government funding to universities. Broadly speaking, the move represents a further step in the quest of neoliberalist governmental strategy; the responsibility and funding reduces from the state and the

educational system is further marketised. In this respect, it is possible to say that the findings from this research will continue to be significant in the short-term future.

As noted above, this research challenges educational policy and discourse that positions students and institutions as neutral but different without due recognition of the historically classed hierarchical structures that underpin their very being. The 'free market' logic underpinning neoliberalist government strategy is never neutral and should not be treated as such. Policy makers need to question and re-evaluate the logics underpinning these policies, which are clearly in tension with the class experiences students have. Moreover, the findings from this research show the (potentially harmful) ways in which these hierarchies filter into the everyday experiences of university students. One of the ways in which hierarchies that exist between the institutions in many university towns/cities threatens cohesion and sense of studenthood, is the (potentially negative/classist) interaction between students. The way in which the hierarchical value of the institutions becomes attached to the student and their sense of self as well as relationships to the student body, highlights ways in which tensions between discourses of meritocracy and the reality of classed relationships (to HE) exist.

On a more localised policy level, the institutions in this research (and perhaps others like them), need to be aware of and sensitive to the potential harm caused to their students and the institutional cultures perpetuating class inequalities via distinctions such as 'poly versus posh' and 'rahs versus chavs'. Such classist distinctions are being reactivated in the everyday and moreover, in organised events that the institutions are affiliated with. Ways of 'fostering a sense of school [sic] spirit', as one student termed it, other than those that reactivate and serve to further entrench hierarchical and historically classed distinctions between the institutions and it's students, should be aimed for. Students enter HE as already classed, they bring class with them but the ways in which class distinctions are already built into the culture and deployed through social events and divisions held between the different Halls of Residences, for example, demonstrate how the environment can exacerbate class issues somewhat.

My findings highlight the significance of moving away, living with other students and being part of a student community to the extent to which

(normative) student identities are claimed as well as how much they are able to accrue valuable social and cultural capitals and opportunities for inclusion.   It is possible to speculate on the potential for unequal access to such experiences in light of the approaching fee increases. In a recent survey with 16-18 year old A Level students (ComRes, 2011) exploring the impact of the rise in tuition fees over university choices, 10% said the rise in fees would deter them altogether and 49% overall said they would consider going to a more local university in order to save money. Of those 49%, 56% were those who said the fees had put them off a bit and this is compared to 31% who hadn't been put off at all. Overall in the ComRes (2011) study results there is a still a strong belief that HE will pay off eventually, despite there being recognition that there is a relative lack of graduate jobs. Although there is no measure for social class in this survey, the links between the rise in fees and the strong link to choosing to study at home in order to save money is worth thinking through with the findings of this research. Reflecting on the findings of the ComRes (2011) survey, then, if fees rise and more students choose to stay at home then perhaps the value of this experience alters somewhat. If moving away and living independently is something that the rise in fees will see a reduction in, those who *are* able to take advantage of this experience are likely to be able to capitalise highly on it.

For policies such as Widening Participation to be effective and to strive to foster the equality it has claimed is its purpose, more valuing and close reading of (qualitative as well as quantitative) research that seeks to explore both the micro- and macro-processes in HE is needed. Middle-class students will continue to prosper from the educational 'conveyor belt' (Lucey *et al.*, 2003: 289) of privilege yet the plot is not so straightforward for 'non-traditional' students. University perpetuates class and class inequalities, which are present in the seemingly banal aspects of everyday life, as I demonstrated throughout this work. As such, this thesis contributes to a number of academic debates ongoing both inside and outside of (higher) education. For example, discussions and arguments around embodiment and identity as well as what I will call here 'languages of class' (i.e. 'rahs' etc.) joins a burgeoning body of work concerned with social inequalities, not least the body of work on the 'chav'. Moreover, the focus on the middle-classness, which until now has been very under-researched, further adds to this body of work. Additionally, it adds to much work looking at

pre- and post-HE choices and participation as well as issues around the links between geographical and social space.

This thesis says something not just about class distinctions in universities, but in wider society. As ongoing technological and communication advancements continue to transform society, the economy and the relationships people have with one another, class continues to pervade the lives of us all. Yet its negative effects sadly hit some more than others. Class, as a dynamic force, continually in process in the minutiae of everyday interactions, does not desist when the economy restructures but rather, is part of the affective, emotional dimensions of social life and continues to be coded into new cultural forms. Certainly, as the current Coalition government continues to make further steps to marketise public institutions of education and health, the unequal benefits of such a system highlight that issues of class are ever more prominent, and research of this kind ever more important. Whilst this thesis does not directly offer solutions to inequalities and merely makes broad suggestions for changes to policy, it does make an appeal to continue research of this nature, for the work of the social sciences to be recognised as important, and to contribute to understanding about the ways in which class operates so that we can perhaps hope for a fairer society of the future.

10. Appendices

INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

Introductions:

- Go through research agreement and collect signed copy

- Explain interview process and that topics include things like: why choose *NEW/OLD universities, their background information, what it was like starting uni, friendship groups, accommodation, life outside uni e.g. any part-time working, friendships, their identity and experiences.

- Say what you think – no right or wrong answer

STUDYING AND FINANCE

-What was it that first made you decide to come to university?

-Is there a tradition in your family of going to university?

-Tell me about your education before university

-What made you decide to come and study at *NEW/OLD? How did you find out about it?

-Do you think it matters which university you attend and why?

-Do you think there is any particular value of attending uni? What do you see as the value? How would you explain the 'value for money' you get at uni?

-Would you say that everyone is equally entitled or able to come to uni? Do you think everyone has equal chances?

-What finance arrangements do you have for payment of your tuition fees? What do you think of current finance arrangements for students?

-How do you feel about accumulating student debt?

-How do you support yourself while you're at uni? P/T work? – if so, why? Value?

-What do you see yourself doing beyond uni?

-Consider postgrad education?

-Thinking about beyond university, with so many people graduating at the same time as you, what will make you stand out to employers? What do you think you can offer from your experience of being at university beyond what you've studied?

LIVING ARRANGEMENTS

-Where do you live while at uni? (dis/)advantages of your living arrangements?

-How do you think the student 'experience' may differ depending on different housing arrangements e.g. halls of residence, shared housing, living with parents/partner?

-What are the different student housing areas in *Northern City? Can you tell me a bit about them? How can you tell differences?

-Where did you stay during uni? Do you think it affected your experience? Can you tell me a bit about accommodation available e.g. what are different halls like? Suited to different students?

UNIVERSITY LIFE AND EXPERIENCE AS STUDENT

-What was it like when you started uni?

-Describe to me one of the most daunting experiences you've encountered at uni

-Describe to me one of your happiest memories of being at uni

-Did you feel like it was a case of most people in the same boat or different experiences for different people?

-How have you found studying at this level? What is it like in lectures/seminars? E.g. do you enjoy them? Was transition from 6thform/college to uni difficult at all?

-What are the other students like on your course?

-Do you get involved with other aspects of uni life outside of lectures? If so – tell me more, did you know anyone else that did that before? Why did you do it?

-What other things are there for students to get involved in on campus? Do you think there is a particular kind of student that goes for these things?

-Do you socialise on campus e.g. in union/bars etc? Do you think there is a particular type of student these places are popular with?

-Off-campus are there any particular student areas? Where do you go and why?

-Are there different types of areas for different 'types' of students?

-Would you say there exists a rivalry between *OLD and NEW? Why?

-What was it like going home for the first long break when you first started uni? i.e. with friends and family?

-What do your friends and family think about your choices with uni?

-How do you think being a student today might be different from say, ten years or more ago?

STUDENT IDENTITY

-Would you say there's such a thing as a student 'look' or even uniform, at *OLD/NEW?

-How would you describe the way you dress for uni?

-Do you think your 'look'/style has changed since starting uni?...in what way…

-What has been the best and worst thing about coming to uni and being a student?

-For people to be able to 'fit in' as students what kind of things do they need to be equipped with? (prompt: For example, certain personality, background, income, way of dressing, way of being….)

-In terms of your identity, apart from being a student how do you think other people would describe you? Fit with your own pic?

-Do you think your friends or family would say that they've noticed a change in you since going to uni? Would you say you feel your identity has changed since starting uni? If so, how?

-Looking back at some of the things we've discussed e.g. friendship groups, leisure activities etc., as a (fe)male student, how do you think experience may differ for the other sex?

-What social class would you describe yourself as? As part of that social class do you feel like this is the norm at uni?

-What do you take social class to mean?

-How can you tell a person's social class at uni?

-Do you think it is possible for a person to change their social class through uni?

-If everyone is a student in the same boat – how are differences in wealth evident?

-How would you describe the cultural mix at uni? At *OLD/NEW in general?

-Is it something that you notice?

-What's your experience of cultural diversity at *NEW/OLD/Northern city?

-Do you feel like your cultural norms/values are accepted at uni? Widely upheld?

-Are there any 'ways of being' i.e. identities and/or behaviours that would not be accepted in uni or would find it difficult to get by?

WHAT *IS* STUDENT LIFE LIKE IN UNIVERSITY TODAY?

Are you a current student at XXXXXXXXX or XXXXXXXXXX?

Would you be willing to participate in a focus group *OR* an interview?

Research student is looking for participants to discuss their experiences of studying here – what student life involves, accommodation, funding study, working, socialising etc.

Interested? Contact Vicky at: V.G.Mountford@ncl.ac.uk to find out more. Gift vouchers available for participants.

Are you a current University student?

Can you spare an hour to participate in a focus group or interview?

I am looking at experiences of higher education so want to talk to students about what student life is like and what it means today for different students – interested? See below for details....

£10 Gift vouchers and payment of expenses available to participants.

For more information...
CONTACT:

V.G.Mountford@ncl.ac.uk

Vicky Mountford
School of Geography, Politics and Sociology
5TH Floor Claremont Tower
Newcastle University

Some things to think about.....

What factors influence how you experience university life?

Does it matter which university you go to?

Why come to university in the first place?

From 'Freshers' to Graduation – what happens in between?

I'm interested in hearing *your* take on university life and what it means for today's student coming to ▓▓▓▓ to study – all current students welcome to participate! Get in touch and arrange a date and time that suits you.

Participant Profile

Name:

Age:

Gender : ☐ Male ☐ Female

Nationality: _____

Race/ethnic origin:

Asian

☐ Bangladeshi

☐ Indian

☐ Pakistani

☐ Other Asian background.

Black

☐ African

☐ Caribbean

☐ Other Black background

Chinese

☐ Any Chinese background

White

☐ Any white background

Mixed ethnic background

☐ Asian and White

☐ Black African and White

☐ Black Caribbean and White

☐ Any other mixed background

Any other ethnic background

☐ Any other ethnic background

☐ Prefer not to say

Town/City of residence before university:

_____

How would you define your Social Class:

_____

What do you base your social class on? (check as many as you feel apply)

Parent(s) education ☐   Parental occupation ☐

Household income ☐   Personal education/employment ☐

Residence ☐   Background ☐   Family history ☐

Other (please state) ☐

_____

If you have any comments about this profile or any further information you would like to add or request, please use the space below:

All participants self-identified their social class and their own words are used in each case.

The information in these profiles is gained primarily from the 'Participant Profiles' the sample were asked to complete prior to participation, with some additional details gathered during the interviews. Those that took part in the focus groups/paired interview are shown separately. In order to be ethically sensitive to the identity of the participants the information provided is brief but provides a basic synopsis of individual's positions from which to reflect upon during the analysis chapters (numbers 5-8). More information was gathered from interviewees due to the nature of the different research methods: one-to-one interviews were focussed on the participants' own circumstances; focus groups on the discussions generated in their responses to questions around vignettes.

INTERVIEWEES

FAYE

Faye was a white, female, 18 year old, OLD University student in her first year studying Law. Originating from a small Northern town, she moved to OLD to study and was living in Halls of Residence (Halls) at the time of interview. Faye self-identified as Middle Class, highlighting the following factors in her understanding of social class: Parental education; Parental occupation; Household income; Background. Faye's mother worked in academia and her father in Music Production. She lived with her mother prior to OLD, (her parents having divorced) although she maintained a strong relationship with her father. Faye attended a selective state school. She explained that her mother was paying for her tuition fees and she had taken a student loan, although this was supplemented by regular financial assistance from her parents, whom were also paying her accommodation costs.

VANESSA

Vanessa was a white, female, 23 year old, NEW student in her final year studying English and Film Studies. Vanessa originated from an area of high socio-economic deprivation and chose to study local. Throughout university she lived with her partner and friends in the local area. At the time of interview Vanessa was at the end of her second course at NEW, having dropped out after one year of the first. She re-entered as a mature student after working in retail in between courses, which she also continued to do on a part-time (but often full-time when she could fit it in) basis during her studies and full-time during university holidays. Having attended a comprehensive school in her locale where university attendance was not the norm, she originally applied through clearing, without any personal research at that time. She re-entered university having decided on a career in teaching and she was looking forward to starting her PGCE at OLD University at the time of interview having been accepted and being on track for a 1st. Vanessa self-identified as working-class and talked strongly of her identification as so through values that she was socialised with which contain a strong work ethic; she also relates class position to local, employment and education and notes that her circumstances have improved through education. Her mother was a teacher and had recently completed a degree as a part-time mature student.

ELSPETH

Elspeth was a white, 21 year old female student at NEW University in her final year of studying Languages. She moved away to study in OLD from near London and chose NEW on account of both family contacts in the north and the suitability of her course for her progression needs, which indicated much personal research. She lived in Halls in her first year and then lived with student friends thereafter, with a year abroad in between her 2nd and 3rd year of study at NEW. Elspeth self-identified as middle-class on account of her parent's occupations and university attendance as well as her schooling and living circumstances. Elspeth's parents paid for her tuition fees and also provided her with an allowance and she did not take a loan although she did occasional bar work for additional income and as 'something to do'. Elspeth described both her parents as 'professionals' and had attended a selective state school prior to NEW.

JAYNE

Jayne was a white, female, 25 year old NEW Student studying humanities. Jayne said she had experienced several difficult periods in her life, including illness that affected her educational trajectory. As a result, she did not complete her A Levels to the standard she was predicted, and subsequently started NEW University doing a different course in Business, through clearing, that she did not enjoy or felt prepared for. After dropping out after two years, she worked full-time in customer services while completing HEFCs and returned to NEW University having made a more informed decision on her course. Jayne self-identified as working-class which she based on her family background, where there is a history of living in council houses and in 'old working-class communities'; as well as parental occupation types and income/wealth. Jayne attended a local, comprehensive school situated in an area of high socio-economic deprivation and said her parents were the first in their family to own their own home. Her father had held manual and managerial positions.

CRAIG

Craig was a white, 22 year old male student at NEW University studying Law. He grew up in a local town and made the decision to stay locally and study due to financial reasons and the desire to stay with his close group of friends. Craig strongly identified as working-class on the basis of his (largely) single-parent upbringing and periods of financial difficulty; and having lived in council housing. He said that his family's situation had now changed when his mother remarried, as they were in much more comfortable surroundings however, where he once described himself as lower-working class he could now see himself as working class but never middle class. Craig was able to pay for most of his fees owing to a settlement he received from an accident he was involved with as a child. For his final year however, he accessed a loan for his tuition fees. In addition, he has accessed student loans for maintenance and worked consistently throughout university to supplement his income. He lived in the parental home throughout his studies in order to save money.

TIM

Tim was a white, 19 year old, male student at OLD University in his second year of studying Law. He was originally from Yorkshire and moved into Halls of Residence in his first year before moving into shared student property with other

students he met in Halls. Tim self-identified as middle-class on the basis of parental occupation and education, household income and type and personal education and employment. He also talked of class in terms of appearance and accent as well as friendship circles. Tim took out the loan to cover tuition fees and also was in receipt of a maintenance loan as well as financial support from his parents, who paid for his accommodation and helped him when needed. He also took part-time work on occasion, to supplement his income.

IMOGEN

Imogen was a white, female, 49 year old, OLD University student studying Art, which was her second degree. Imogen strongly identified as middle-class on the basis of background, personal education/occupation, residence and income. Imogen lived near to Northern City with her husband who worked as a partner in a legal firm. Her two children had grown up, gone away to university and then started their own families. In addition to accessing loans for tuition and maintenance as much as possible, Imogen also worked part-time (and more) during her degree. Imogen highlighted the additional expense of studying art in the amount of materials needed, which her extra income helped towards.

CHARYS

Charys was a white, 21 year old female student at OLD University studying Law. Charys identified as 'Irish-British' and had moved here to study from Northern Ireland, where she previously attended a grammar school. She knew other people who had moved to OLD to study both at OLD and at NEW and had spent her first year living in Halls of Residence before moving out with student friends into a shared house in Jesmond. Charys identified as working-middle class and identified Parental occupation and Personal education/employment as reasons for this. Charys explained that she had lived in a working-class area but although her mother worked as a Nurse and her father as Fireman and had been quite successful, as she was one of ten children, their increasing financial security was obviously split. As a result Charys had taken out loans to cover her tuition fees and maintenance costs however she divulged that she was only able to loan the minimum amount. As one of the eldest children, she   wasn't able to get extra help from her parents although they did pay her rent and she worked alongside her studies to supplement her income.

NATALIE

Natalie was a white, 18 year old, OLD University student who identified as 'British/Scottish' and studied humanities. Natalie also identified as 'Middle/Upper' class and attributed that to Parental education and occupation, household income, residence, personal education and employment, background and family history. Natalie's parents had in her words, 'really good jobs' and although she wasn't able to say exactly what her father did however it was 'high-up' in a large multinational corporation and her mother had worked for an international hotel company in business marketing but had left work when having Natalie and her sister. Natalie came from a small village not far from the Scottish borders and had attended an independent school before university and her gap year. Natalie decided to work in the conservation core in USA during her gap year; an experience that she talked of fondly and which allowed her the opportunity to work with people from very different backgrounds to her own. Natalie opted to study outside of Scotland unlike a lot of her peers and moved into Halls of Residence where she lived at the time of interview. As Natalie was a Scottish student, she had access to other funding that the rest of the students in this study had not but was also considering taking some part-time work for the experience and for additional income. Natalie had family connections in the north of England also and had known people who had studied there before her at OLD.

SIOBHAN

Siobhan was a white, female, 18 year old OLD University student. She moved from the Midlands to study in OLD where she also had a boyfriend she had met the previous year to the interview. Siobhan moved into a relatively expensive Halls of residence in order to have access to en suite facilities and she expressed a strong desire for cleanliness. Siobhan had taken out a loan for her fees and her maintenance costs however the latter did not cover her basic outgoings of rent etc and so she was working alongside her studies, to supplement her income but was struggling financially. Her parents had divorced and her father was now living with a new partner so she did not qualify for additional financial support as her entitlement had been calculated as based on her father and his new partner's income despite the latter providing no financial

support. Siobhan identified as working-class on the basis of parental occupation and employment as well as background and family history. Siobhan said she was brought up working-class and had attended a local comprehensive school. Her father worked in maintenance in her local university and her mother in retail. She noted her sister had gone to university previously but had got more financial support, as it was prior to their parents' divorce and was based on their combinatory income.

ALAN

Alan was an 18 year old British student with Chinese ethnic origins at OLD University where he studied Engineering. He moved to OLD from north east England into a Halls (where he lived at the time of interview) that involved a bus journey to campus. Alan had started his course with his best friend from home who was housed in a different Halls. He remained close with him; admitting that he tended to stick with his friend and not socialise much with his other course mates. Alan's sister had attended OLD before him and he also had school friends who attended NEW. Alan's parents had saved to pay for his tuition fees and accommodation costs however, because his mum didn't work and his dad worked very little now, (previously having worked for a large international fuel firm) he had secured a bursary and had also recently secured a scholarship grant, relevant to his studies, to help with his maintenance costs. Alan identified as 'working/middle' class and based his on parental education/employment, personal education/employment, background, residence and household income. He saw himself as 'somewhere in between' as he'd lived in a working-class area and didn't consider his family to be very extravagant.

GRAEME

Graeme was a white, male, 18 year old student studying humanities at OLD University. He lived in the parental home in his first year but was looking for shared accommodation with his friends for the remaining duration of his studies. Graeme accessed a government loan to pay for his tuition fees and maintenance and in addition was able to continue the part-time job he had got the year before starting university. In self-identifying as middle-class Graeme based this on parental occupation and household income and although he said the area he lives in was historically working-class, that he had been brought up middle-class.

He further mentioned that he didn't see social class as impacting on his everyday life, however he was able to measure/differentiate people's class status during discussions. Graeme went to a selective school in his local area where it was common place to attend university – some 75% he estimated out of his year group. Graeme's father was a financial advisor and his mother a secretary for a large shopping firm. Graeme was the first in his family to attend university.

AMY

Amy was a white, 21 year old female student at OLD University studying languages. Having moved from Midlands to study in OLD she first lived in a Halls of Residence before moving into shared student accommodation with friends. Amy attended a grammar school prior to university where university attendance was commonplace and subsequently, was the first in her immediate family to attend university. Amy self-identified as working-class and based a lot of her discussions around this on 'working-class values' which included a strong work ethic, the 'value' of education, money and hard work and a sense of morals and perspectives. She was clear to state that even if she experienced great financial success she would not 'change' and her upbringing and values instilled would remain. Amy described herself as different from most of the other students, in terms of class background but that she saw no real divide in that respect and had made many friends. She saw herself as part of the student collective and based this on normative pre-entrance studies and common purpose of study.

COLIN

Colin was a white, male, 23 year old student from Northern City at University of NEW, studying languages. Colin attended a grammar school prior to university, having moved from his local school when he was younger. Colin strongly identified as working-class and based class on parental occupation, household income, personal education/employment and residence. During discussions he also discussed appearance, values and attitudes as markers of class as well as sense of humour. Colin has access to all financial assistance from the government and informed me that his status was classed as having lived in child poverty. Colin's circumstances were unique out of the participants in that he confessed to having used his maintenance loan to often support his parents

financially, who suffered periods of serious financial hardship. At the time of interview Colin was in his fifth year of enrolment at NEW; he was extremely versed in his entitlements as a student and had decided to maximise his opportunities by not only taking the compulsory year abroad studying languages but had decided to learn another language independent of his course and take a year out of his studies to live abroad and work in this country. He informed me that recently he was informed by his university career's service that he had taken advantage of everything he possibly could in terms of broadening his skills and experience whilst being a student. Colin was one of the most critical of the classed university system and the majority of student peers; he strongly disidentified as a normative student in this respect.

RORY

Rory was a white, male, 20 year old student at NEW studying Film.   Rory self-identified as working-class and based this on parental education/employment, residence, background and family history. He talked of getting out of his working class hometown in North West England and also strongly associated accents with class and appearance. Rory explained that he had many university friends from upper-middle class backgrounds and was able to get on with most people. He informed me about his busy social life and enjoyment of socialising and talking to new people. Rory had accessed loans both for his fees and for his everyday costs and has also used overdraft and credit cards to assist him with living costs. Rory described an enjoyable experience in Halls and was living close to the university campus in shared, rented accommodation at the time of interview. He was considering staying on with his flatmate for another year beyond graduation to possibly pursue postgraduate education.

LINDSAY

Lindsay was a white, female, 18 year old student at NEW studying Law. Originally from north east England she moved into a Halls of Residence and then located a shared student flat with her sister and two friends in a desirable Quayside location. Although Lindsay was only in the early part of her second year of study she had already attended Law Firms for interview for training contracts upon her graduation. Her abilities in her subject were also commended by a local law firm who awarded her a small bursary. Lindsay self-

identified as middle-class on the basis of parental occupation/education, household income and residence. Her father was a Project Manager and her mother was a Manager in an education institution. Lindsay had carried short-contract periods of casual part-time work in hospitality. Lindsay was keen on full social participation in university and spoke of her recent involvement in charity fundraising events. Lindsay had a loan to cover her fees but was given a regular allowance from her parents which covered her rent and a small amount of basics although she advised that she was able to ask her parents for more assistance if she needed it.

JOY

Joy was a white, female, 21 year old student studying Humanities at OLD. She lived with her partner in her home town (near to Northern City) nearby to her mother. Both of her parents had undertaken postgraduate education and worked in teaching but were separated. Joy advised that she was in possession of a full bursary for her fees and the maximum amount of loan for maintenance as her circumstances had been based on her single parent income. She described herself and her family as being 'very middle class' but 'poor but with middle class values'. She identified as middle class in her profile on the basis of parental education and occupation, personal education and employment, residence, background and family history. Joy had attended a grammar school which she described as having the same standards as a private school. She said that at her school it was very much the norm that students progressed to university, which reinforced the values set down by her parents. Joy also stated her intentions to complete postgraduate education to at least Masters level.

MICHELA

Michela was a white, female, 20 year old student studying Film at NEW. Michela self-identified as 'Lower Middle Class' and based this on parents' occupation/ and education, household income, residence and family history on the participant profile. Her discussions in interview of her background and class were very different however. For example, Michela discussed her mother's low level qualifications and low paying job and her background living as a single parent family, often characterised by financial struggle. She recognised her background

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as working class but she told me she saw herself as moving away from that and she based her 'Lower Middle Class' self-identification very much on herself. She told me that she based this on her cultural tastes and high level education and in this respect differed greatly from the majority of other students who instead saw their background circumstances as very much determining their own class location.

FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANTS

SOPHIE

Sophie was a white, female, 23 year old student at NEW studying Film. Sophie originated from the Northern City and grew up in the popular student area of Greyville but subsequently moved in with friends (some working, some studying) in Redville where she was living at the time she enrolled and at the time of the research. Sophie was recruited for the research through Adam, her boyfriend and she agreed to take part in a focus group, which then ended up as a paired interview. Sophie identified as middle-class on the basis of the following factors: parental education, background and family history, and she previously attended a selective state school. Sophie was financing her studies via a government loan for fees and maintenance and was also working at least 16 hours per week in the hospitality industry, out of necessity to pay her outgoings. She did not rely on financial assistance from her parents, having lived out of home and worked for a few years prior to enrolling in NEW.

ADAM

Adam was a white, male, 21 year old NEW student studying Business Management. He was at the end of his course at the time of interview and was thinking about setting up his own business in light of the recession and limited job opportunities. Adam grew up and had lived not far from Northern City – some 50-60 miles away. He lived in Halls in his first year and fondly reminisced about his experience there, where he met many friends. Adam discussed having made lots of friends from a variety of backgrounds but drew strong distinctions between him and OLD students as well as upper-middle class students in general, whom he aligned as leading a separate existence to the rest of the students studying in OLD. Adam said he had applied for OLD University but had

been rejected and reflected that he was pleased about his move to NEW, having known people who went to OLD and disliked it on the basis of the other students who went there. He himself identified as 'low/middle' on the basis of household income only and had previously attended a local comprehensive school. Adam had taken full loans for his fees and maintenance and had taken casual work on occasion to supplement his finances.

GERALDINE

Geraldine was a white, female, 21 year old student at OLD University. She moved to OLD to study Law from south west England and lived in York Halls in first year before then moving into a shared girls' house with friends she met in Halls. Geraldine identified as middle class on the basis of parental education and occupation, personal education and employment, background and family history.

ELEANOR

Eleanor was a white, female, 21 year old student at OLD studying Languages. She identified her social class as 'Middle to Upper – more middle' and did not state what she based this on. She did add however that she had been educated at boarding school and had lived predominantly between England and France. Eleanor lived in Hexham Halls in her first year and then shared student accommodation in Greyville for the remainder of her studies.

JENNY

Jenny was a white, female, 20 year old OLD student studying Languages. Jenny identified as middle class, citing household income, residence and background as her bases for this identification. She moved to OLD from West Midlands and stayed at Shields Halls during her first year before moving into shared student accommodation in Greyville for the rest of her course.

ROD

Rod was a white, male, 19 year old student at OLD studying Languages. He originally lived near London and moved into Headingly Halls in first year before then moving into shared student housing in Greyville. Rod identified as middle-class and based social class around parental education & employment,

household income, residence, background, personal education/employment, family history.

PATRICK

Patrick was a white, male, 21 year old student attending OLD studying Architecture. He self-identified as 'Upper middle class' and based it on parental occupation, household income and residence. He originated in Yorkshire and moved into Bamburgh Halls for his first year before then moving into shared student accommodation with his friends – not those he had met on his course.

Research Agreement

The Study

The aim of the research is to speak to current students about their experiences of higher education in XXXX and XXXX universities. The research is intended to explore the elements of each person's experience throughout their career as a higher education student. This will include exploration of experience from embarking on their degree and time at the institution and situations they have experienced as they progress. Students will be asked about their personal backgrounds and hopes and aims for embarking on a degree. Personal experiences of learning as well as socialising and friendship groups will be explored and the elements of their experience they feel are important in their time at university will be key issues of investigation. The analysis of such research will involve a focus on student's identities and how they are lived through their experience of higher education. The rationale of the research is set in higher education as a site of change in UK in terms of government funding policies and initiatives such as Widening Participation, which essentially seeks to increase participation and create a more diverse student make-up in university institutions. In the face of such changes, the research aims to uncover details of how students experience higher education today and how/if such diversity is recognised and lived within this site of change.

In all research situations a recording device will be used to record data and notes may also be taken by the researcher(s). See 'Storage of Data' for further information.

<u>Participation and right to withdraw</u>

Participants in the research have the right to withdraw from the research at any time. This may mean the participant may wish to leave the research situation at any time and also has the right to withdraw their consent to use data recorded from any or all research situations.

<u>Confidentiality</u>

Anonymisation of data will be used to protect, wherever possible, the identity of participants. Codes/pseudonyms will be used from the process of research data collection to transcription of data, through to presentation of data in published results.

<u>Storage and use of Data</u>

All written data will be kept securely by the researcher. Recorded data will be stored electronically in password protected, secure files.

NAME OF PARTICIPANT: ....

<u>To be signed by the research participant:</u>

I am happy that the aims of the research have been explained to me by the researcher and I know of my right to withdraw from the research at any time. I am aware that the data collected about me from this research exercise will be anonymised and may feature in published work.

Signature: ....

Any further comments:

....

....

....

....

Research Agreement: Focus Group Participation

The Study

The research seeks to explore with current students their thoughts and experiences of higher education in XXXX and XXXX universities. The aim is to investigate the elements of 'the student experience' in higher education and how different identities and backgrounds affect and shape that experience. The data collected from the study will also be analysed in terms of a more general sense of how identities are shaped, upheld and developed during the interactional elements of student life. The rationale of the research is set in higher education as a site of change in UK in terms of government funding policies and initiatives such as Widening Participation, which essentially seeks to increase participation and create a more diverse student make-up in university institutions. In the face of such changes, the research aims to uncover details of how students experience higher education today and how/if such diversity is recognised and lived within this site of change.

Participating in a Focus Group

As a focus group participant you will be asked your views and opinions on a range of issues connected to student life. The focus group will be made up of other students from your university and the aim of the exercise is for you to converse with each other, rather than the researcher necessarily.

In all research situations a recording device will be used to record data and notes may also be taken by the researcher(s). See 'Storage of Data' for further information.

Participation and right to withdraw

Participants in the research have the right to withdraw from the research at any time. This may mean the participant may wish to leave the research situation at any time and also has the right to withdraw their consent to use data recorded from any or all research situations.

Confidentiality

Anonymisation of data will be used to protect the identity of participants. Codes/pseudonyms will be used from the process of research data collection to transcription of data, through to presentation of data in published results.

Due to the group participation nature of a focus group, complete confidentiality cannot be assured. Participants are asked to respect the views and privacy of each other and not to divulge any personal or sensitive information you are not comfortable in sharing.

Storage and use of Data

All written data will be kept securely by the researcher. Recorded data will be stored electronically in password protected, secure files.

NAME OF PARTICIPANT: ....

<u>To be signed by the research participant:</u>

I am happy that the aims of the research have been explained to me by the researcher and I know of my right to withdraw from the research at any time. I am aware that the data collected about me from this research exercise will be anonymised and may feature in published work.

Signature: ....

Any further comments:

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VIGNETTE ONE:

Simone is a middle class female student at OLD studying Law. She currently lives in Halls and is looking to move with some of her friends to a student area of OLD. She says she likes Northern city because it has everything you would want in a city but it is compact and easy to get around. She does notice however, that OLD doesn't seem to be very multi-cultural and talks about how she likes to be part of a diverse community. She wants to move to an area where she feels safe and can easily access the city centre and nightlife. A few weeks ago some of her friends from home came to stay and she was excited for them to meet her new friends as she has not had much contact with them since moving here. One of her friends made remarks about some of her new friends, mainly about their dress sense, accent and private school background and upbringing. He referred to one of her friends as a 'Rah' and a 'Toff' and made fun of their accent. Her other friends said nothing but seemed to join in with the joke by laughing. Simone is now worried about going home for the summer as she feels she may have grown apart from her friends a bit, not having seen them much and had new experiences and made new friends, which they have not. Simone talks about class differences with people at Uni. She says that there does seem to be certain cliques and knows to a certain extent what her friend meant by the terms 'Rah' and 'Toff' – she says there does seem to be a certain dress sense and accent and behaviours associated with people from different class backgrounds but has trouble pin pointing exactly what that is. Whilst she identifies as middle class on the basis of her family's background in terms of household income, education and occupation status, she associates this with being normal and admits she wouldn't like to be thought of as working-class herself. At the same time she disassociates herself with the characteristics she links with being a 'Rah' or 'Toff'.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER FOR VIGNETTE ONE:

- What advice could you give Simone about student areas to live in based on her comments about diversity and requirements of safety and access.
- Simone lives in Henderson Halls – can you say anything about those halls and compare it to any others?
- Do you agree with Simone's assertions about Newcastle not being very culturally diverse?
- Her friend who makes the disparaging remarks about her friend is male – do you think this may be a factor in the situation?
- 'Rah' and 'Toff' are mentioned as terms associated with class – are you familiar with these? What is your take on these – what do they mean? What other class terms are used commonly and what do they mean/stand for?
- Is it possible to differentiate social class at university?
- What can you say about 'cliques' at university? Does class/gender have any role in this?
- Why do you think Simone doesn't want to be thought of as working class? Could gender play a part in this?
- Is there a common sense of dress/style or certain behaviours that are typical of Newcastle University students?
- Simone bases her identification as middle class on a range of factors – discuss these and comment on how class can be distinguished.

VIGNETTE TWO:

John is a working class student and is close to completion of his degree in Law at NEW. During his time at university he decided to live at home with his parents, which he says has been in order to save money and stay close to his friends. He has made a few friends from his course but says he doesn't relate to most of them and talks about feelings of perceived inferiority linked to his accent and ability to articulate his ideas and he relates this to social class. He also makes the comment that the girls on his course tend to get more help and attention from lecturers. John has spent most of his spare time with his close group of friends. His group of friends all have jobs and regularly socialise after work and at weekends. In his final year especially, John has felt a lot of pressure trying to maintain his social life and keep on top of the work he has from Uni. His current average is a low 2:1 and he feels this is as a result of his tendency to be easily persuaded by his friends to go out. He feels as though none of his friends really understand the pressures he is under and says that should he end up with a 2:2, his prospects will be very limited and perhaps should have got a job after 6th form instead. He has had to use student loans, student overdraft and wages from his part-time job (16-20 hours per week) to fund his studies and will graduate with a substantial amount of debt. He says that he thought he'd be able to get a job straight away after his degree and chose a vocational degree for that purpose but now is not so sure. He compares a Law degree to an Art degree, saying that the Law degree is obviously more useful and refers to an Art degree as a degree just for the sake of it. He thinks that only the very wealthy and privileged tend to do this sort of degree as they don't have as much to lose and are just at Uni to enjoy themselves for a few years.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER FOR VIGNETTE TWO:

- What can you say about John's potential prospects?

- Is university for everyone? Might John have been better getting a job after finishing 6th form?

- How could John have got the most out of university? What is the value of going to university?

- What do you think about John's comments about types of degrees? Do different degrees have different value?

- John talks about social class connecting it with accent and articulation of his ideas in classes - what are your views on this?

- John makes the comment about gender differences – what do you think of his remark and can you say anything about how a students' approach to learning/experience may differ according to gender?

- John talks about his close connections to his friends from home and lack of friends at uni – what are your views on this?

- Thinking about John's part-time work, social life, and studies, what can you say about balancing different demands?

- What factors do you think have contributed to John's lack of a sense of belonging to university and his disassociation with most of the students on his course?

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12. Notes

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[i] This target itself was not met of course however, the target setting itself is highly significant to encapsulate the extremely ambitious propositions of New Labour with WP.

[ii] Top-up fees were introduced in the academic year 2006/7 and this figure rose to £3290 by 2010/11.

[iii] It is worth noting that at the time of writing 64 universities have announced their intention to charge the full £9000 fees allowed by the government from 2012.

[iv] These were Oxford, Cambridge, Imperial College, University College London.

[v] University of Birmingham, University of Bristol, University of Cambridge, Cardiff University, University of Edinburgh, University of Glasgow, Imperial College London, Kings College London, University of Leeds, University of Liverpool, London School of Economics and Political Science, University of Manchester, Newcastle University, University of Oxford, Queens University Belfast, University of Sheffield, University of Southampton, University College London, University of Warwick.

[vi] See: http://www.plymouth.ac.uk/pages/view.asp?page=36755 : 'Reproduced with kind permission from Research Fortnight - www.researchresearch.com/RAE2008'.

[vii] http://www.thecompleteuniversityguide.co.uk/league-tables/rankings?y=2008

[viii] In *Times Higher Education Supplement* (6th December 2000)

[ix] Higher Education Foundation Certificates

[x] General National Vocational Qualifications

[xi] The Registrar General's Classification schema has since been replaced with National Statistics Socio-economic Classification.

[xii] See also: Plummer, 2000; Reay, 1997

[xiii] There is a tendency for 'vocational' courses to be set up against 'academic courses' as some sort of class division, however the use of 'vocational' courses is often limited in what is considered 'vocational'; for example, engineering, architecture, medicine and law are all vocational courses, yet they tend to be associated with prestigious institutions, thus complicating and problematizing the claim that these studies make.

[xiv] Humphrey's article does not provide the corresponding make-up of students from fee-paying schools in Northumbria.

[xv] Social desirability bias may of course also be an issue in one-to-one interviews. The only way one can hope to overcome this is by helping the participant to feel safe and comfortable in the interview situation, encourage them to use their own words and that their opinions matter whilst remaining impartial and non-judgemental in one's own reactions.

[xvi] A vignette can actually take form of one of many different things – sometimes a piece of media, an image, a film clip, a set of statements or a small sketch/scenario. I focus here on the short scenario as was employed in my research.

[xvii] See Appendix No.2 for a copy of the Poster and Flier

[xviii] See Appendix No.3 for a copy of 'Participant Profile' distributed.

[xix] I also thought when investigating the classed notions of 'choice' and 'value' these factors may be important to consider.

[xx] However, I did find research into these groups incredibly useful - particularly 'Overheard at….OLD/NEW (the latter of which appears to have now been closed and removed from Facebook) that provide examples of ongoing (classed) interactions between the university students and are commonly posted in jest/amusement but which are saturated with class distinctions and provide a clear demonstration of the class tensions and fractions operating in the every of university life. These groups could provide wonderfully rich (if potentially difficult) data for future research projects.

[xxi] See Appendix No. 4 for individual summaries (Participant Profiles) of each of the research participants in the sample.

[xxii] See Appendix No.5 for an example of both the Standard Research Agreement and the adapted version for Focus Group participants.

[xxiii] See Appendix No. 1 for an example of the interview schedule used.

[xxiv] See Appendix No.6 for examples of the vignettes and questions used.

[xxv] This point is particularly noteworthy in later discussions in the analysis chapters on 'the rah', which will be introduced in the next chapter. Whilst none of the interviewees were asked about 'rahs' and the term wasn't discussed until they had mentioned it, the focus group participants were asked about the term directly.
[xxvi] Whilst 'Emo' and 'Goth' may not appear to be opposite exactly, and could be read as quite similar in certain respects: both style/subcultures are linked to particular music genres 'emotive rock' and 'gothic rock' that were developments in music post-punk; and both tend to embody particular 'dark' styles with 'goth style' being more influenced by medieval styles and 'emo' incorporates more comedic aspects. As always the differentiation between the two styles/subcultures are based around a number of elements of sameness but distinctive differences that allow them to be held as opposites.

[xxvii] See: http://www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=rah
I have selected 3 out of the 5 definitions listed under the term as these correspond most to the descriptions given during the research:
   1. Someone who went to private school (or wish they had), likes rugby (not football), probably a member of a rowing, sailing or yachting club, refer to their parents as 'Mummy and Daddy'. Boys: often seen to be wearing a lemon (or any pastel shade) sweatshirt slung casually over their shoulders and deck shoes. Girls: Dress similar to that of boys along with pearls, numerous shopping bags and Daddy's credit card. Names often include: Rupert, Will, Guy, Jeremy, Emily, Alexandra, Henrietta, Harriet. Followed by a double/triple barrelled surname, e.g. Harrington-Smythe.
   2. Noun. Refers to a social 'type' among young people, often while at university or school. Depending upon the environment this term can have varying degrees of intensity. Generally, it is used when referring to someone who possesses or aspires (painfully) to the stereotypical characteristics of what is seen as a higher social class (in the traditional, fixed sense). For example, in a wealthy public school a rah may have to invoke an image of old aristocracy and do so in a pompous and superior manner - usually demonstrated in an expensive, flamboyant lifestyle and often loudly declared opinion. Whereas in an environment where there is fewer generally exuberant lifestyles an individual could be termed a rah simply for being obviously more aspirational or often just wealthy in itself. Has many connotations of succeeding only as a result of old boy networks and from being fully supported by parents.
   3. A rah is stereotypically a privately educated, or what appears to be a privately educated female living in the UK. They are normally seen sporting Jack Wills, Abercrombie & Fitch, big messy hair, and uggs. The majority of 'rahs' attend universities and live a party lifestyle, and are often the cliché 'popular' set. Opinions split on rahs, some people think

they are pretty bastards that live off Daddy's money, and the other half admire them for their style that is often replicated.

4.

xxviii http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rah_(slang)

xxix 'Rah's here are portrayed as 'braying' and 'full of confidence of a blinkered life'. See: http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/life_and_style/education/article7041470.ece?token=null&offset=0&page=1

xxx Out of all the participants there were only two people that did not explicitly name 'rah' as a term of usage - one of these could be described by others as 'rah' but did not use the term herself (Elspeth, to whom I will refer in the next chapter) and the other was Imogen, a mature student who was significantly older than the rest the participants involved in the study. At 49 years old, Imogen described the other students on her course as being younger than her own children and communicating differently to what she was used to. In her own words she said, 'they actually use different words – a different language – a different way of relating to each other'. The age difference between her and the other students as well as her lifestyle outside of university signified her distance from the student community she talks of on her course. This idea of difference and belonging in terms of a sense of student community also contains notions of age as well as class and gender and this will be drawn out in more detail in proceeding chapters. However, what is noteworthy here in relation to drawing out what the term 'rah' means and how it is used is that age may indeed be a factor in the usage of the term, as well as the significance of the term with the field of education; thus concurring with definitions cited in popular media sites and by the participants who express not having know the tern before university.

xxxi The link for this particular facebook group is not provided due to pseudonyms being used for the institutions in this research. However, many such facebook groups exist – particularly at (but not exclusively) at older, more prestigious universities.

xxxii Initially, there were no questions in the interview schedule relating to accent. However, as a result of the initial interviews, accent became a prominent theme. It was from this realisation that accent became a feature that was built into the vignettes used with the focus groups. Comments on accents and ways of speaking continued to arise throughout the interviews without being prompted by myself. When participants mentioned accent as being a differentiator I then was able to probe this further.

xxxiii As the 'rah' identity was not claimed by any of the participants and what are largely discussed as 'rah' brands means analysing them from that perspective is not possible within the confines of this research. This of course perhaps presents opportunities for further research into the significance of particular brands and the ways in which fashions circulate to generate meaning and identities.

xxxiv http://www.abercrombie.co.uk/anf/careers/brands.html

xxxv http://www.jackwills.com/Jack/Default.aspx

xxxvi Carole Steedman's (1986:92) *Landscape for a Good Woman...* details an interesting point about class and the wearing of bed clothes outside. She recalls that her mother used to encourage her and her sister to walk to the post office in their dressing gowns, 'using the street as an extension of a house....[promoting] a certain physical licence, a defiance of the narrow conventions'. It would be possible to interpret the middle-class or 'rah' students' wearing of pyjama bottoms outside and messy, 'just got out of bed look' in a similar way. This leads one to further suppose who is able to take up such a look; working-class, female bodies are certainly not permitted – see BBC Report Thursday 28 January 2010: http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/8485559.stm

xxxvii See Skeggs (2005) who also uses *Shameless* as an example of a 'media obsession' with depicting white working-class men and women as 'tasteless, excessive, ungovernable and atavistic' (2005: 966).

xxxviii This Halls site was a privately owned residential space that is divided between OLD and NEW University students.

xxxix Brownville was another area inhabited by students in the city but much less so. The area has high levels of socioeconomic deprivation – significantly more so that Redville.

xl I'm unable to evidence the statistics relating to the areas due to having changed place names to protect anonymity. However, a studies such as Barbaret's (2004) and Kenyon (1997) shows that reports of Burglary tends to be higher in student-dominated areas.

xlii A tournament of different sporting events between OLD and NEW Universities.