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White working class women, subjectivity and neo-liberalism. A school based exploration of young women's experiences and how these experiences have shaped their planned trajectories in the UK context.

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Declaration of Authorship

I Kelly Worwood hereby declare that this thesis and the work presented in it is entirely my own. Where I have consulted the work of others, this is always clearly stated.

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Abstract

This thesis explores the subjective constructions of white working class young women in the UK. It is comprised of school-based case studies; analysis of demographic questionnaires, focus groups and 13 interviews with white working class 14-15 year old girls.

The research is qualitative; applying quantitative analysis which places the cohort within the national demographic context. A review of relevant educational history and current policy is provided alongside existing research findings addressing gender, racial and socio-economic marginalisation within education and wider society.

White working class identity is identified through social stratification tools and theorised through alignment to feminist and social justice arguments. The thesis is feminist post-structuralist; performative subjective discursive construction is applied. Respondents' experiences are articulated within a neo-liberal gaze and the individualisation premise offers a counterpoint to post-structural subjectivity. Both approaches are necessary when conceiving of respondents' subjectivities.

Respondents share their familial, educational and social contexts alongside their personal, educational and professional trajectories. The findings here depict respondents inhabiting a 'post-equality of opportunity' 'post-feminist' age, resulting in a pseudo-meritocratic world view even when classed, gendered and raced trajectories emerge. Individualisation leads to self-responsibility prevailing in respondents' explanations, even against the backdrop of material, social and educational barriers. Ambition is described but this is often not enabled by the realities of their lives.

Neo-liberal classed, gendered and raced versions of feminine identity emerge from socio-political, media and policy rhetoric. Demonised depictions of working class femininity and motherhood sit at odds with the strong working class women respondents often cite as heroines. Middle class feminine identity is understood though respondents' perceptions of futures which are acceptable and respectable. Discourses oscillate between the narrow versions of personhood on offer. Respondents discursively resist negative versions of working class identity. However they also simultaneously reinforce them, securing themselves positions of safety under a neo-liberal gaze.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

Section 1: Autobiographical Introduction

When I made my application to commence a PhD it was my intention to examine the career trajectories of women working across the cultural sector, my workplace for over a decade. I wanted to explore the career choices women had made in order to draw conclusions about influences specific to gender and class. My application sat neatly as an obvious extension of my professional life and research history. Then, during the summer of 2011, between being accepted on a PhD programme and commencing the work, I sat with my teenage nieces on a train and realised that I needed to rethink my approach. My nieces were about to make the educational choices that would craft their futures. They were telling me stories about their experiences at school, stories of their experiences as working class girls that were the same as the stories myself and my sisters had told, and those that my mother had shared with us before that.

I realised that my original proposal to address the career trajectories of women working in the cultural sector was an attempt to rationalise my own experience. For me it was the early educational experiences which were most compelling: why were the stories of my nieces, my siblings and my mother so similar?

The core of my professional history, what had genuinely driven me forward, was a need to ensure that education was truly egalitarian and at the core of ensuring social mobility for working class people like myself. My desire to 'be educated' has been driven by a moral obligation, as a working class girl, to push on with my own learning and career in order to demonstrate equal capabilities to my middle class peers and to support others like myself in doing the same. So, I began to unpick the personal and professional influences which had helped me, in my professional and personal life, in an attempt to understand the relevance the PhD had to where I had come from and the current experiences of others from the same socio-economic beginnings.

Three generations of schooling and shared experiences

I grew up as an inner city child in the Midlands of the United Kingdom (UK). My family is comprised of working class, intelligent, liberal people. I was raised on a combination of income generated through trade employment and state benefits where necessary. At school I received free school meals, a descriptor which placed me in the category of 'low income' children, just as it still brackets children in schools across the UK today.

I attended two infant schools and one primary; the first was on the edge of the council estate where we lived until I was aged five, when Mum moved us to a rent-controlled house in a nice middle class area of Leicester. We then lived in a terraced house left by an aged aunt in Trust to a wealthy nephew of a local fizzy drinks manufacturer. Legend suggested that the Trust stipulated he could not sell the house for a hundred years and had to let it to a family at a lesser rate than was good business. So we came to live in a very nice area, socially distanced from the estate we left behind. This move facilitated Mum's intention to move us away from the council estate where she and her family had grown up, in the year before my eldest sister was due to be enrolled in the local secondary school with a demonised reputation that matched the so-called 'sink estate' it sat in. My mother succeeded in ensuring that we didn't attend that school and both myself, my sisters and later, my three nieces, all attended the same successful girls' state secondary school, respected for its educational success and diverse socio-economic and ethnic intake.

Most of my early memories of school begin after this move. I loved my infant and primary school. I adored attending, and felt inspired, safe and nurtured. The school, in the middle of one of the most culturally-diverse cities in the UK, was a successful multi-cultural model of education. The students were from diverse cultural backgrounds with some variations in social class; predominantly children from middle-class families with a small number from working-class families such as mine. My sisters and I all attended, as did two of my nieces when their mother moved back to the catchment area in later years.

My secondary education was at a single sex, non-secular, state secondary school; as rare a type of school then as it is today. The school population was drawn from the two areas surrounding it, a middle-class residential area to one side and a large council estate on the other. These social divisions were perfectly apparent in the school's social groupings. The girls, in the main, stuck to their own kind and the blurred racial and social barriers of my primary education were not so apparent in the social groups we formed.

My eldest sister attended the same primary school as me for a year and then moved to the secondary school in her first year; my middle sister joined the junior school in the first year when I joined the infants' class. It has always been my belief that my eldest sister befriended girls who were predominantly from family models she recognised from our previous neighbourhood and primary school, that is, girls from similar working class families to our own. She was a bright child with a complex childhood, which led to her secondary schooling ending before the end of her last year and leaving with limited qualifications.

My middle sister responded to our complex childhood by developing a challenging and rebellious nature, finding a kinship with children often categorised as difficult and hard-to-reach. She was suspended and then finally excluded from attending school in her last year, although she was allowed to return to sit her exams and went on to gain enough GCSEs to attend a local college. It was only a couple of years ago that my parents discovered my sister had been expelled. We had intercepted the original expulsion letter the morning it arrived, supporting her lie, with her going to 'school' every day and finding various places to hang out until the end of term.

When we moved to the new area I made some very close friends who I am fortunate to still count as my dearest friends today. They were from what could be described as comfortable middle-class white professional homes. A number of my friends' parents were left-leaning educational professionals. These families have become a loved and treasured extension of my own, my adopted aunts and uncles. I believe that, through accessing firstly the friendships then the families, homes and lifestyles of my new peers, I began to develop an understanding of the class system and the position of my family within it.

My parents were aged 15 and 16 when my eldest sister was born. Mum has always maintained she struggled socially at our school gates with the parents of my new friends who were older, educated mothers. My mother is an exceptionally bright woman; she gained a scholarship place through the 11-plus exam to attend a prestigious local convent grammar school in the 1970s, something that was virtually unheard of for a working class girl at the time. She was from a large Irish Catholic family which often required her to play truant to care for younger siblings.

Consistent with issues that working class girls still face today, broader social and familial factors prevented my mother from making the most of her educational opportunities. She eventually left school before the end of her final year due to being pregnant with my eldest sister. When Mum depicts her secondary school experience she describes a complete lack of understanding from educators, the Nuns at the convent, of the wider social and economic issues she faced as a teenager from a working class family. She was made to feel like an outsider on the estate where she lived as she attended a 'posh' school in her uniform and straw hat; she also felt she was an outsider at her school as she was considered poor and was looked down upon by her middle class peers who knew she was from a council estate across town.

During our secondary education we could be conceived of as having a complex family life, common to children from low socio-economic status families, which greatly affected my attendance. The consistent breaks in my attendance often meant I missed aspects of the curriculum and was a little behind my peers. My parents instilled in me a desire to succeed, but our lives meant we often lacked the day-to-day commitment necessary to reach our full potential as there were too many other issues which took precedence.

I left school with a reasonable set of exams results including six GCSEs at grades A-C. On GCSE results day, my then boyfriend, the only other working class teenager in our friendship group, asked me 'are you ok with that?' He had gained nine A's and B's and was worried that my very average GCSEs would be upsetting. Interestingly, while I made middle class friends, my first romantic relationship was with someone who, whilst he had a very different family to my own, understood some of what it meant to be from our background. I was happy with my grades in the context of the issues my family faced during that time.

My GCSE results were just enough to get me to college, enough to begin the journey of getting away. I took on the unquestioning positions of my middle class peers, believing I would proceed directly to university. I moved out to live on my own very quickly, which led to further disruption throughout my A-levels. I did poorly at A-Level and started a degree which was not one I really wanted. I left my first attempt at university, down but not out, and enrolled on a Foundation Course in Art and Design based in an art school attached to a university local to me. This was a life-affirming experience. I landed in a fine art department, an arena which encouraged studying any subject of personal interest as a stimulus for creativity.

Looking back now, with the greatest respect to my parents, I received limited parental supervision in relation to my educational choices. I gravitated towards arts subjects as I felt I had a flair for them. I had never quite kept up with the curriculum and always felt like my Maths, Science and English knowledge lacked the depth of my peers. This lack of supervision did not result from a lack of love, concern or aspiration, which was plentiful. It emerged from a family more preoccupied with much larger problems than our schooling. No one in my family had previously attended university and very few members had received any post-statutory education. My parents did not expect that we would go to university. They were thrilled with the idea that I would attend, but this was simply not part of their own educational sphere of reference.

The area we lived in benefited from a range of extra-curricular activities. I had become committed to taking part in a range of youth arts activities, free initiatives for inner-city children. Most of the children taking advantage of this free offer came from middle class families, as is often the case today. Committing to these initiatives had a huge impact on my work ethic, my identity as a learner and my ability to socialise independently away from school. Alongside arts subjects, I had loved and shown a flair for science at school, but my attendance affected my ability to achieve high grades. I only secured C's at GCSE, which meant I lacked the confidence to try them at A-Level.

Like my mother, my father is also intellectually highly capable. However, a combination of high IQ with dyslexia meant that he left school aged 13 as an educationally-frustrated teenager considered to be disruptive and challenging. As was the case with many children in the 1970s my father's dyslexia went unrecognised at

school. He has spent the last four decades becoming a highly skilled tradesman. I have seen him complete incredibly complex builds from nothing and his intelligence has overcome his dyslexia and educational origins to find ways to shine.

Some of the key drivers for this study are the experiences of my parents; they are self-educated, intelligent, politicised people. They have a broad view of the world with much accrued knowledge however, arguably, this is despite the formal schooling they received, not because of it.

I graduated in 2000 from a traditional art school with a Bachelor of Arts in Fine Art. My arts practice throughout this time was grounded in science and social science theory. I have always felt I would have selected these subjects for undergraduate study had things been different in my earlier education. At the end of my degree I realised my arts practice was relational and designed to engage beyond passive viewing. It was an issue-based practice and intended to support engagement with social and political issues.

By the end of my degree the themes present in my artwork were staunchly feminist in their position. My department was Sculpture, run by male Marxist sculptors with little engagement with feminism. As a working class girl at university I had very little understanding of feminist theory or its relevance to my own experience. My dissertation 'Genetics or Eugenics, Discussed or Disgust' focused on the subject of Eugenics and its broader social implications.

I moved away from this area in order to focus more on feminist issues by my third year; however my final dissertation was firmly embedded in medical and scientific canon and was sent to the affiliated university's biology department to be marked. My dissertation tutor asked if I intended to continue any academic pursuit after my BA as he felt the conceptual aspects of my writing to be strong. His confidence in my intellectual ability was a key turning point in my consideration of how my career might progress.

Socially, art school was a new world of class differentiation. My friends until that point had always been middle class girls and boys, with somewhat different lives to my own family. However, my friends at art school were mostly educated at public schools. My housemates consisted of a lovable 'army brat,' who had spent the preceding six years as the dresser to Princess Anne; the daughter of the Dean of Norwich Cathedral and a

shoeless 'Trustafarian' whose father was the headmaster of an elite Sussex public school.

I lived with my art school family for two years, which had a profound effect on me. My enunciation improved and, for a while, I am somewhat ashamed to say I felt very uncomfortable about my working class roots. I could not reconcile who I was in this new world. I was afraid my educational roots would let me down and I had not yet found the pride in my working class history, which I now wear as a badge of honour, although a feeling of being a 'pretender' has never quite left me. I have always felt like an interloper in the workplace and in the world of academia, that somehow my inferior knowledge and skills would always be my downfall, and that I am not quite as socially or educationally 'worthy' as my contemporaries.

When I took the train with my three teenage nieces in August 2011, returning them to their parents after a visit, we were discussing the recent riots which had taken place across the UK. My nieces all showed a maturity beyond their years when they shared their frustration and anger at the negative perceptions of the young people involved. They understood much of the political context that was the backdrop to those events, including the government expenses and media phone-hacking scandals, huge youth unemployment statistics and the frustrations of young people who had seen the removal of much of their infrastructure through austerity-driven public sector youth budget cuts.

We talked about changing attitudes towards young women, including their mixed views on the need for feminism, with one of them asserting that women have just as many choices as men. One niece disagreed with another on this as she felt the world was still an unequal place. They talked about the friends they had made at school and their teachers perceptions of them. My youngest niece felt that teachers had indicated to her that some of her friends were 'students without prospects.' She said she would show them all by doing well at her exams and that, although she wore make-up and didn't talk with a posh accent, she was not stupid. The others talked about the different attitudes of educators in the school, including whether you were friends with academic high-achievers or 'boffs.' One of my nieces had been friends with more 'boffs' than the others. I realised that my nieces, from working class families, faced the same issues my sisters and I had in the generation before in the same school environment.

My nieces described being judged by their perceived class and that of their friends, by their accents and the clothes they wore. These social descriptors influenced how educators and key professionals around them interacted with them and generated expectations for them. This led me to wonder if these perceptions, rather than their abilities, had led to the career advice they were given. Of course, there are additional complications dependent on social class backgrounds which impact on children's experiences, but there are too many similarities in the attitudes of key education professionals across my mother's, my sisters', my own and my nieces' educational experiences for it not to be of some significance. Even when a child is bright, the educational environment they are in can discourage them from certain prospects.

After I attended university my middle sister did the same, qualifying as a teacher and then moving into Higher Education (HE) to work as a lecturer. When she talks about her students she shows a particular loyalty to those who are from backgrounds similar to ours. I have always felt my eldest sister was let down by the education system. She became a non-attendee and the school was aware of the complex reasons for this. She is an intelligent and highly creative woman who, with greater educational support and encouragement, would have completed a greater level of education. She has since forged a career in hospitality management, navigated with very few qualifications, a testament to her capabilities.

Two of my nieces are now engaged in HE trajectories, aiming for careers in law and forensic accountancy. My other niece works in education and shows a flair for supporting children who present with complex educational and behavioural needs. My nieces have alluded to being influenced positively by members of their own family who attended HE and the notion of influence will be explored in this thesis. I am fiercely proud of my family's achievements against the odds.

Since beginning to write this thesis I have had a family of my own including two children, now a girl aged two and a boy aged six. The boyfriend who was worried for me on GCSE results day has become my husband. He is now a consultant psychiatrist working in the National Health Service (NHS). He attended the boys' state school next to mine and was also the first person in his family to attend university. We often talk about the changing nature of opportunities for children from backgrounds like ours. We were both from the last years of full university maintenance grants and so attended

without the added financial strain of university fees, which could have significantly affected our educational choices.

My son has just entered the state statutory education system, which I now view from a parental perspective. The difference, compared with that of my own parents, is that I am now one of the mature middle class parents at the school gate. My children's home is one where both parents have progressed as far as possible, from an educational perspective. My children will likely be afforded all the advantages of a middle class family's financial, educational and social position. I am a member of my son's schools academy trust governing board and am probably as empowered as any parent of a child in state education can be, a stark contrast from the experiences of my own parents.

Much can be made of the opportunities given to working class children to change the course of whole families. The members of my family, and other working class people who have accessed social mobility through education, are not the heroes of this story or shining examples of a successful meritocratic society. We are just the lucky ones who managed to find a route through a terrain which affords only some of us the chance for change.

Professional history and influences

After graduating in Fine Art I realised that art, as a practice, had excited me as a teenager but began to seem somewhat selfish as a practice. My work was issue-based, exploring social and familial experiences, but I needed to find a place for it in the world to give it relevance and to earn a living.

My first job after graduating was as an Occupational Therapy Assistant, running creative activities in a forensic mental health unit comprising patients including rapists, murderers and paedophiles. I read terribly sad histories of the men and women in my care, usually from disadvantaged and abusive backgrounds. Staff informed me about the statistics relating to children who had been in care or on the Child Protection Register, ending up in prison or as recipients of mental health services. My job was to help these patients to engage, articulate their troubles and to improve confidence in their communication skills. I began to see some value in my subject if it could help those in society considered to be amongst the most damaged and marginalised.

I pursued art as an educational practice and realised I needed to gain an academic foundation to my work. I undertook a PGCE course in Art and Design. This was, in part, driven by the existing incentivised financial support which came with teacher training at that time. Even without paying tuition fees, I had generated significant debts throughout my university years. I knew I was completing the PGCE with no real intention of being a long-term classroom teacher, but could see that it would validate my ability to work using art educationally with others.

Within my PGCE I theoretically explored pedagogy for the first time, which introduced me to aspects of sociological theory. Upon graduating I taught in secondary and special needs schools. I later practiced in alternative learning environments, working with groups perceived as marginalised within my local community. I then made a transition to working in museums and galleries full-time, firstly as an educator and then as a programmer. In programming I moved away from direct engagement with learners, designing educational experiences and resources to be delivered by teams of artists.

In gallery education I worked to create multiple platforms for discourse relevant to the needs of participants. I wanted marginalised individuals to use art as a medium to reflect upon, communicate and rationalise their lives and relations. This was my attempt to ensure an egalitarian approach to arts opportunities funded by the state, which are usually only accessed by a privileged few.

Working in the visual arts sector was often frustrating as the same 'old-boy' hierarchies apply, as they are still prevalent across UK sectors today. This context encouraged me to seek opportunities for people like me to get ahead. I wanted to explore how institutions ever change if those who design the educational world for others never really know the complexities of entering education or employment from the position of socially or ethnically marginalised.

Working at a leading national art gallery allowed me the opportunity to represent the cultural sector in the creation of curriculum and policy. I sat on a panel re-designing the National Curriculum for Art and Design in secondary education. This was exciting and felt valuable, however I saw how arbitrary the process of forming the statutory educational curriculum can be. I realised I had a desire to get to a position

professionally where I could work to ensure that research influences policy more rigorously. This may present as somewhat naive, but why does anyone want to move into educational research if not to try and improve the status quo?

In my role at the gallery I managed an MA Module in partnership with Goldsmiths, University of London. In this environment I was initially reminded of my feelings of being a 'pretender' as I line-managed a team that had far greater educational experiences to my own. I later enrolled on the MA that I managed aspects of to study Contemporary Art Education, Theory and Practice. This allowed me to explore the relationship between artistic and pedagogic practices, introducing me to contemporary pedagogic theory and, for the first time, the philosophy and research practices relating to the field. My MA also involved artistic practice and culminated in me filming female autobiographical histories. This work was grounded in reciprocity and necessitated a trusting relationship between interviewer and interviewee. Within the work I was striving for an equitable relationship of mutuality, using art as a mechanism to research, investigate and empower those involved.

During my MA I was seconded from my employing gallery to manage an educational research project at Goldsmiths. I worked with the research team to manage the practical components of the project, which culminated in the publication of a book designed to support professional development for educators in the field. This project captured teachers' narratives as they introduced new and innovative approaches in their own classrooms after a programme of professional development overseen within the research model. I was fascinated by the research process and capturing narratives; this contributed to my later application to undertake a PhD.

During my MA I completed a module entitled 'Masculinities, Femininities and Gender in Education.' This was my first formal introduction to feminist theory and writing. I had stumbled across Andrea Dworkin and others who had written about the plight of women, but never with the support to understand how it could enable me to theorise my views on the world. I had always called myself a feminist without fully knowing what that meant. Feminism was not a topic discussed around our dinner table at home and was only a term I came to know after I completed my degree. I had long believed in equality and the need to strive to stop injustices towards women but, before this period of study, had limited language to convey this.

My subsequent exploration of the gendering of education involved a consideration of the role gender had played in the influences of others in supporting my choices. I wrote a paper exploring the construction of gendered identities of women artists and women working in art education, which led me to explore the history of women in education and the role gender and class have played in affecting how working class women access that offer.

By the end of my MA I was merging sociological research with artistic practice and reached the conclusion that I was not an 'artist;' I was a researcher who had always used art as a mechanism to question the status quo.

At this point I moved into working in a funding and policy context in the cultural sector. My roles within sub-governmental office came with positives and negatives, bringing me closer to the career I would now like to pursue, but also meaning that I became privy to the often reactionary politically and financially-driven decisions behind the delivery of national educational and social policy. It saddened me to see the injustice of arts sector spending, where so much is attributed to the experiences of so few, and that arts in the UK, despite valiant efforts from a cultural sector minority, still remain a relatively exclusive pastime of the middle classes.

My main ambition in my work to date has been to enable equitable routes into exclusive environments in order to support the accumulation of educational, cultural and social capital for those considered to be marginalised. The conclusion I reached when commencing my PhD was that I had spent my career attempting to catch those who had fallen though the educational net. I wanted the research for this thesis to be about why this happens.

The experience of women in my own family over previous generations, along with the social mobility I have gained through my own education, led me towards a study addressing the educational inequality of working class young women. I aimed to examine the constructions of self which can be seen to enable and disable social mobility as accessed through Further Eduction (FE) and Higher Education (HE).

I have benefited greatly from HE and the social mobility it brings. Anecdotally, I have

always considered one's educational status not only to affect who you will marry and where you will work, but also a plethora of other opportunities available to you as a result of your perceived social and professional status. Statistically speaking, as will be shown in this thesis, the UK is not currently enabling many girls like myself to obtain the benefits I was afforded. Furthermore, I believe we are often discouraging working class young women from believing that certain educational opportunities and futures are appropriate for them.

Key individuals and experiences

On my second day at secondary school I sat in the classroom of one of the most feared teachers in our school. This teacher had thrown furniture to get his point across and used methods we might generously call 'old school' today, but which would also likely see him charged with misconduct. We were a class of nervous first year children (year 7 in today's system) entering the enormity of a secondary school.

School registers were called in alphabetic order and so I was always last to have my name called out. 'Kelly…,' the teacher paused, '…Worwood,' almost spitting out my surname. 'Where are you, Worwood? Stand up.' I did as instructed. 'We're going to have to watch you aren't we, Worwood?' I had never met this man and he knew nothing about me. I was terrified but also inwardly furious.

This was one of many similar incidents during my secondary schooling, following in the footsteps of my two older sisters. My solution to being stereotyped as a trouble-maker on my first day was to be good, polite and to work incredibly hard. My hand was permanently stretched upwards so that I could answer questions, but for teachers like this one there was an immediate distrust and disrespect shown to me because of my family's perceived reputation.

I believe that individual experiences and key professionals are additional contributory factors in steering the course of one's future. The prejudicial attitude of the teacher described above gave me motivation to prove him wrong. There are, of course, individuals whose actions worked in the reverse. One teacher, a public school and Cambridge-educated lady in her 40s, maintained a constant belief in me and my abilities. Without her encouragement, I honestly do not think I would have had the

confidence to continue in education. I may have held the shared belief that I should attend university, along with my middle class peers, but I lacked the confidence in my academic ability.

This teacher, my biggest ally, was my middle sister's most challenging teacher. When meeting my mother for the first time at a parents evening, she stated that my sister and I challenged her understanding of nature and nurture. She could not believe we were from the same home and that we were amongst her most liked and disliked students.

My middle sister attended university as a mature student after having a child when aged 21. She is no less educationally capable than me, but I learned to behave in order to be perceived as 'intelligent' sooner than she did, to perform intelligence through a middle class image. I had the 'right' friends, dressed in the 'right' way and displayed middle class behaviours which reflected that of my educators. I behaved in a way that my middle class teacher understood to be 'intelligent.' If educators had not categorised my sister as they did, aligning her with her working class friends, judging her unruly clothes and make up, if they had tried harder to understand her behaviour sooner, she may have achieved her educational success earlier on.

Section 2: Introduction to the research

My journey to the subject of this thesis has been described above, but how does my experience and that of my family correlate to a relevant contemporary study and build on the body of research available regarding working class girls' educational and social experiences?

Looking back, I can identify multiple influences and conditions which encouraged and supported me towards attending HE, crafting my educational and career trajectory. The memories I have of my own influences contradict each other and I am unsure, retrospectively, exactly how I arrived at my decisions. The working class experiences of my family have provided me with a set of suppositions.

The case studies detailed in this thesis, involving a cohort of young working class women as they planned their futures, drew upon some of my own suppositions to structure the initial direction of the research. The thesis examines the young women's subjective construction within the overlapping contexts of their lives. For this reason, I ask them to define their rationale for their educational, career and personal choices including sharing their planned future trajectories.

In this thesis I investigate the material and social influences, constraints, relations and conditions as perceived by the young women in this study. I have sought to identify ways in which they felt constrained and supported, and how this structured their versions of self, their hopes and aspirations and influenced their plans to navigate their futures.

In order to begin the process of structuring the research model and devising the methods of data capture, I wrote a set of research questions to present within the overall model. Accordingly, the thesis seeks to:

- Identify commonalities of decisions around entering FE and HE
- Position the individual's decisions against broader familial, educational and societal factors
- Identify key figures/spheres of influence and moments in individual students' lives which are instrumental in their commitment to education

- Ascertain defining characteristics of when and how the individual case study participants have constructed their identities as attendees and non-attendees of FE and HE
- Make connections between the policy and surrounding discourses promoting and supporting individualisation (being self-responsible), identifying examples of how policy is interpreted and reinvented in their environments
- Identify trends of career choice within those working class girls who do enter HE
- Identify vocational and work trends for those who do not enter HE

These questions led to the formation of the research model, with data capture designed in three phases. This supported me in writing a questionnaire, developing the focus groups and case study interview questions. The two sets of standardised questions for focus groups and individual interviews evolved through the answers given at each stage of data capture, as particular themes emerged from the participants' responses.

The research primarily uses qualitative analysis, but applies quantitative analysis to contextualise its findings. It draws together a cohort of case study participants including young women aged 14-15 based in the research partner schools in London and the Midlands. Both schools are categorised as 'requiring improvement' by Ofsted and hold a number of shared demographic characteristics.

Through the analysis of demographic data from a quantitative questionnaire a small cohort of participants was selected for focus groups interviews. From the findings of the focus groups, 13 case study respondents were invited to interview. These three stages of data capture and analysis establish thematic areas of influence, exploring specific areas of subjective identity formation. The research captures the thoughts of the young women as they navigate the choices they perceive to be available to them in 2014, identifies their rationales and traces those rationales to particular contexts of influence.

My decision to work specifically with self-defining 'white British' working class girls as case study respondents followed the initial focus group discussions. My rationale for this is detailed in the methodology chapter 4. Case study respondents are drawn from the same socio-economic and racial groups and present as having different preferred educational and career trajectories. The socio-economic positioning of the working class

young women included in this study is defined and evidenced within the methodology chapter (chapter 4). My arguments for the application of the 'white working class' terminology is made in the literature review (chapter 3), and methodology chapter (chapter 4).

The intention of this research is to identify any commonalities of experience or shared themes of working class girls in relation to their educational, career and personal trajectories. I aim to establish if there are examples of policy, media and social discourses that are classed, raced and gendered. If so, I want to explore how they infiltrated the subjectivities of respondents, identifying ways in which contemporary versions of working class feminine identity arose and were navigated by the participants.

The research context emerged from initial key readings that synthesised my early thoughts on the cohort's experiences. Ball, Maguire and Macrae, in *Choice, Pathways and Transitions Post 16* (2000), provide an account which theorises and contextualises the experiences of 24 young people within their political, social and economic context. This provided me with a model of interviews with young people at the moment of choice-making. Their application of Hodkinson et al's (1996) conceptualisation of 'horizons for action' supported them in categorising their research findings. This enabled them to draw together existing bodies of theory and the research findings of others, alongside their own findings, which were thematically clustered to depict the socio-political contexts of their respondents.

This approach was pivotal in supporting the early design of my research model, including how I present my analysis. Ball, Maguire and Macrae introduced me to the idea of individualisation, a concept which directed me to the work of Giddens (1991) and Beck (1992) and individualisation is extensively articulated in the literature review.

Ball, Maguire and Macrae (2000) describe Giddens' (1991) conception of the processes of individualisation as having created new social identities beyond the categorisations of class, race and gender distinctions. This, along with their explanations of Beck's (1992) extension of this premise leads 'to a reconfiguring of new social relationships and patterns of social welfare' (2000, p3). This was instrumental in my early conceptions of the theoretical framing of my research model. Ball, Maguire and Macrae when

describing individualisation suggest that:

> 'Interdependence is turned from being a social process into a process by which
> we fend for ourselves in an attempt to wrest a living from an asocial
> environment' (Wilkinson, 1996, p226). The culture and ideology of
> individualism interpenetrates - feeds and is fed by - social changes which
> encourage greater reflexivity and individualisation (Ball, Maguire and Macrae,
> 2000, p3).

The application of Giddens and Beck, Beck Gernsheim's individualisation premise and its contestations within feminist analysis are explored in the literature review (chapter 3). I also examine the interface of feminist research with neo-liberal ideology and its effects on the feminist theorising of subjective construction.

The research analysis in this thesis contextualises the choices described by respondents within a contemporary neo-liberal individualised policy climate. This suggests they inhabit a 'post-feminist,' 'post-equality of opportunity' terrain. Discursive symbiosis takes place that reinforces neo-liberal ideologies and identities. The discursive terrains of post-feminism and post-equality of opportunity are established through policy, media, educational and social rhetoric, which contributes to an overall notion of a pseudo-meritocratic era of opportunity for the young women.

The greater opportunities available to young people through FE and HE allow them to place themselves at the heart of the choices they make regardless of any material or socially-structured limitations. Ball, Maguire and Macrae (2000) introduced me to the work of Rose (1989) and his notion of individualised biographies; personal narratives conceived of as structured through choice and equality discourses that ultimately lead to the 'responsibilitization of the self' (Ball, Maguire and Macrae, 2000, p4).

This notion of individualisation, its role in creating discourses of self-responsibility and its relationship to a neo-liberal agenda, can be seen in the literature review (chapter 3) and throughout the analysis chapters.

Ball, Maguire and Macrae (2000) aligned individualisation to the formation or application of social policy, suggesting that policy has trended towards conceptually

placing the onus on the individual to be solely responsible for their own success or failings, regardless of any broader societal failings. My thesis applies this concept of individualised policy filtration to 'equality of opportunity' and other legislative and policy formations.

The young women in this study did not overtly situate themselves in classed, raced or gender-based socially unequal structures. However, the following analysis establishes how those defining traditional sociological analytic structures emerge within the women's subjective construction.

Walkerdine, at a lecture I attended at Goldsmiths in 2016, asked 'Is it pre-historic to argue that class needs to be central to feminist analysis?' (2017, p12). My response, after the completion of my analysis, would now be 'no.' My data shows that class analysis is entirely relevant and central to current models of feminist analysis, just as issues of gender and race remain vital.

The narratives throughout this thesis demonstrate that, while the young women may not overtly consider their classed, racial and gendered positions, they clearly display choices and rationales informed by these criteria. They speak of self-responsibility for failure and success, depicting encounters with individualised policy discourse. The young women also respond to negative and derogatory discourses of working class massification (Skeggs, 1997) and 'white working class' vilification (Tyler, 2008). They resist those depictions of themselves, their loved ones and friends, or can be seen to reinforce those identities to protect themselves from any negative alignment.

Walkerdine's (2015) concept of class, as passed down through intergenerational transmission of experiences, is another key theoretical approach used in this thesis to demonstrate ways in which working class identity manifests in the lives of the young women in this study. Reay describes class as 'a complicated mixture of the material, the discursive, psychological predispositions and social dispositions' (Reay, 1998, p272). This thesis utilises research methods and theoretical tools which support class, gender and racial analysis, set against contemporary macro-theories of expanded individualised choice.

Reay indicates that 'in a social context of growing inequalities there is a need to

reinvigorate class analysis, not bury it' (2006, p289). She suggests that:

> …within educational policy the prevailing focus has been on within-school processes; a focus that has often been at the expense of understanding the influence of the wider economic and social context on schooling…until we address social class as a central issue within education then social class will remain as the troublesome un-dead of the English education system (Reay, 2006, p289).

Reay, Crozier and Clayton (2010) explore the construction of learner and social identities of working class students from four UK HE institutions of varying positions within the HE hierarchy. This model of tracing the construction of the participants' identities also guided my early thinking and supported my approach to research analysis.

This thesis does not propose the idea that all young people should attend HE. Instead, it argues that all young people should have the opportunity to attend HE or to be supported through vocational routes that are credible and increase life chances. Reductive classed and gendered options are often offered currently, designed only to fill time until the person reaches the new school leaving age of 18. Reay (2011) highlights a need for a step change in British perceptions of vocational and academic educational routes. She asserts that we maintain a system which polarises educational participants into racial and class-based norms, both in terms of quality of experience and perception, alluding to a need for national change of hearts and minds to combat this.

McRobbie discusses 'the undoing of feminism' (2009, p5), the notion that 'second wave modernity' has been central to promoting the idea that we no longer have a need for feminism resulting in a 'faux feminism' (2009, p1). Young women within her depiction are led to believe they have reached equality through modernisation. McRobbie proffers that the illusion of young women's new-found power comes as consumers of culture, beauty and image-led consumerism with sexual freedom born out of fertility control. Young women are offered 'a notional form of equality, concretised in education and employment, and through participation in consumer culture and civil society, in place of what a reinvented feminist politics might have to offer' (McRobbie, 2009, p2). Young women, in the aftermath of feminism, have lost a form of sisterhood.

Explanations of a post-feminist terrain are argued as still relevant to the young women in my study in 2014. Respondents distanced from themselves emerging forms of third wave activism which now excite feminism theorists and policymakers. In the lives of the respondents, feminism is not a requirement and there is a limited language of agency to allow for it. Why do they need it in the post-equality of opportunity spaces they inhabit? Here, notions of 'post-feminist' and 'post-equality of opportunity' terrains, depicted within a neo-liberal individualised frame, establish an overall context of a pseudo-meritocratic era.

The theories of Foucault and Butler work as micro-conceptualisations of subjectivity, essential to work with the macro versions of subjective construction at play within individualisation. Together, they create a multidimensional layering of subjectivity. I foreground Foucauldian conceptions of 'technologies of power,' 'technologies of the self' and 'governmentality' (Foucault, 2007b) to illuminate forms of subjectivity constructing 'discourses.'

Emerging discourses are considered as the mechanism in the formation of 'subjectification' and as a demonstration of the relational aspects of 'power' (Foucault, 1997a, p88) and 'self-technologies' (Foucault, 2016, p26). I conceive of Foucauldian discourse as 'practices that systematically form the object of which they speak' (Foucault, 1972, p49) and subjectification as ways in which 'the subject constitutes itself in an active fashion through practices of the self' (Foucault, 1997b, p291).

Butler is applied here to develop Foucauldian theories of subjectification, as acquired through constructive discourses. She develops the premise further through her notion of performativity (1993) conceived as:

> …compulsory repetition of prior and subjectivating norms, ones which cannot be thrown off at will, but which work, animate, and constrain the gendered subject, and which are also the resources from which resistance, subversion, displacement are to be forged (Butler, 1993, p22).

I apply Butler's performativity premise not only to gender subjectifying practices but also to utilise the method of subjectification applied to any narrative discourse emerging

from the young women in my study, as one way that we learn and reinforce available subjective positions.

I have structured the thesis by initially introducing the autobiographical departure point of the research. I have introduced the overarching approach of the research, including the positions of theoretical departure which initiated the research and a brief overview of the research structure.

The historical and current contexts of working class girls' education (chapter 2) provide a salient history of working class education in the UK context in relation to working class girls. This chapter also provides an explanation of the current depictions of white working class girls in policy rhetoric and a depiction of their current positon within educational performance data.

The literature review chapter (chapter 3) is laid out in three sections: the first two sections set out the theoretical framing of the research;

Section 1 - Neo liberalism and individualisation

Section 2 - Foucault and Butler

Section 3 - Feminism, subjectivity and working class (white) girls

The last section draws upon the evidence available from other research in working class experience and working class feminine subjective construction. Here, I also situate my study within a post-structural feminist paradigm, exploring how this research brings new knowledge to the field of educational study regarding white working class female experience.

The methodology chapter (chapter 4) introduces the research process methods and feminist methodology. It provides a location for the quantitative demographic analysis of working class girls and their educational performance nationally. This includes the demographic analysis required to define the cohort, their families and their schools as working class.

Preceding chapter 5 is an introduction to the approach and themes emerging within the three analysis chapters. Chapter 5 is then presented in two sections:

Section 1 - Neo-liberalised policy, individualisation, self-responsibility and notions of failure and success

Section 2 - Educational and career trajectories and the school context

Across the two sections of this chapter I introduce how the young women encounter individualised policy rhetoric and the narratives provided of their ambitions and planned future trajectories. I examine the impact of aspects of the school context, including the argument that the failing school context is felt keenly in the young women's narratives.

Chapter 6, 'Familial guidance and influence, narratives of maternal struggle, familial responsibilities and maternal trajectories,' describes the influence of family and introduces the idea of classed and gendered subjectivities emerging from maternal relationships. This chapter also explores how reductive neo-liberal forms of feminine identity affect and construct young women.

Chapter 7, 'Communities and their constructions of meanings and values,' depicts the impact of public perceptions of working class communities and individuals on the young women's sense of self.

The conclusion in chapter 8 brings together the historical experiences of working class girls, current policy, media and socio-political representations as suggested in this thesis, together with the research findings from this study. Findings emerging from respondents' narratives are merged with that of other researchers to provide a synopsis of recommendations toward better educational and social approaches to working with, and on behalf of, white working class young women.

Chapter 2

Historical and current context of working class girls' education

In this chapter I provide an overview of key contextual factors and milestones in the development of educational opportunities for working glass girls throughout history. I will also explain the broader experiences of women, and the developments that led to mass education for all children, in order to contextualise the experiences of working class girls. This section concludes with an explanation of white working class girls' current positioning in policy rhetoric and situates the cohort in relation to their educational performance.

This chapter is presented in three sections. Section 1 introduces the (1870) Education Act and the development of the UK education system up to the introduction of the (1944) Education Act. Section 2 explores the role of feminist educationalists and the establishment of negative versions of working class women's feminine identity, revisions of women's educational history and its relationship to feminist models of educational research. Section three examines education policy from 1944 onwards including the current position of white working class girls**.**

Section 1: Introduction of the (1870) Education Act and educational developments up to the introduction of the (1944) Education Act

The Education Act (1870) made formal state education compulsory for all children. It was introduced for two main reasons: firstly, as a means of policing and civilising society, following the decline of the social and regulatory influence of the church; and secondly, as a training ground for the requirements of an emerging need for industrial workers. These factors had a profound impact on the development of the educational experiences of working class girls and it is here that we begin to see the emergence of the demonisation of working class young women as the moral abject of a righteous society.

Until the passing of the Education Act it was not compulsory for children to attend formal schooling. Purvis (1991) suggests that prior to this Act any education received

by working class girls took place in dame schools, Sunday schools, ragged schools, factory schools, or day board schools run by the Church of England or the British Foreign Society. There is little indication of the attendance of working class girls at this time but, from available evidence, we can presume they attended in a relative minority. Laqueur (1976) suggests that, for many working class girls during this period, the only education they received was three to four hours per week at Sunday school, providing them with the opportunity to learn to read and write.

The 1870 Act was intended to instigate school attendance for all children across Britain (excluding Scotland and Wales) at state-funded schools between the ages of 5-13 years. Attendance at school for working class children had not been a requirement prior to this, and very few working class boys, and even fewer girls, had received any formal schooling.

The introduction of elementary schools required education boards to be established to manage the infrastructure. Education boards varied in efficacy; the specifics of the Act included a range of reasons for exemption for working class children, which led many to continue to be denied a formal education. The 1870 Act proposed a means test for parents in order to establish if support was required for poorer children's fees to be paid. However, this approach was not enforced and therefore not adopted by all education boards. McDermid (1995) found that in the instances where the educational offer for elementary education was made by the local education board, many working class children would still only partially attend due to work and other family commitments.

In 1870, the Taunton Commission reviewed all existing education paid for via government funding. Originally this did not include women's education; however the women's movement within first wave feminism in the UK successfully lobbied for its inclusion (Middleton, 1970).

The findings of the Taunton Commission were primarily focused on boys. Nevertheless, the Commission was vital in the progression of women's educational development as it denounced the current state of women's education as weak and teaching as substandard. Roach (1986) indicates that the findings of the Commission argued, for the first time, that 'girls had intellectual capabilities in line with their male counterparts and that there should be some parity between the subjects taught to boys and girls' (Roach, 1986,

p152).

The Taunton Commission recommended three types of parental requirements for the education of male children. Williams (2011) depicts these as:

- First-grade school, established to meet the needs of boys who remain in education until the age of 18 years, with a liberal education including the classics Latin and Greek. This was considered necessary for the preparation of middle class boys for professional careers.
- Second-grade school, up to the age of 16 years, was recommended to prepare middle class boys for the newer professions, including the army. This would also include two modern languages.
- Third-grade schools, intended to provide for children who required an education up until the age of 14 years in order to prepare young men to become small scale farmers, tradesmen, or artisans.

These recommendations came to be seen as secondary educational routes, with elementary schooling made compulsory for both sexes only up to the age of 13 years. The Commission's report can be considered to be the first policy directive to recommend formalised classed and gendered routes through the education system.

While the 1870 Act included for the provision of education for girls, and argued for some parity between the education of boys and girls, this needs to be considered against the dominant patriarchal structures from which it emerged. The 1870 Act arose around the same time that it was still being argued that '[f]emale education it was felt should be geared towards women as mothers, but while it was necessary to make women fit mothers it was believed that too much education would render women infertile' (McDermid, 1995, p108). Other similar views at the time included those which 'argued that menstruation so diminished a girl's whole strength as to make intellectual development a positive danger' (Hunt, 1991, p26).

Heggie (2011) indicates that as state-funded schools opened across Britain, there was an increasingly popular argument that school could be a place to prepare working class young women for a life of domesticity and service. A socially-structured and gendered curriculum later emerged, designed to support the education of women in service and

impose a middle class version of femininity on working class girls.

Purvis (1991) describes that during the 19th century middle class girls had access to an elementary education, attending private day schools run by other middle class women. The girls were not expected to engage in any acts of work, with the mainstay of their learning centred on creative and cultured pastimes to help them attract a good husband. Their education was far removed from that of working class girls' preparation for a life of service and domesticity.

Secondary schooling remained fee-paying until the passing of the Education Act 1944, and was therefore populated by the middle and upper classes. Purvis (1989) indicates that financial assistance was available for both grammar and private schools through scholarships for bright middle and working class children emerging from the elementary system. However, applications from boys were prioritised.

Purvis (1991) suggests girls' secondary education came in the form of private fee-paying girls' schools, populated by the daughters of wealthy families or daughters from respectable families of limited means. Examples included daughters of the clergy, who might need to earn a living as a governess or teacher in later life.

High schools emerged in the 1850s and by 1900 over 90 girls grammar schools had been established in the UK. The Girls' Public Day Schools Company set up a further 38 un-denominational schools and the Church Schools Company set up 33 Anglican High schools for girls (Purvis, 1991).

Girls' high schools and grammar schools began to offer opportunities to learn subjects taught to boys (Senders Pedersen, 1979). However, by the turn of the 20th century, secondary education had narrowed to follow the same path as Victorian elementary education, in that a central function was to prepare girls for a domestic role, both in and out of the home. Hunt (1991) suggests there was very little deviation from this approach between 1900 and 1950. A rare example of this deviation can be seen in the development of vocational learning for women, driven by the women's movement.

In 1859, the Society for Promoting the Employment of Women was founded in London. Albissetti (2012) indicates that, as with other educational models across Europe, this

was primarily formed to solve the problem of employment and training for middle-class girls in the UK, with the inclusion of a lucky few working class girls.

Goodman (1998) found that around the same time as the elementary education system was introducing domestic education subjects to working class girls, a need arose to provide an extension to this for those working class girls leaving the elementary school system. However, the training initiatives 'remained within existing parameters of female employment, rather than pushing the boundaries outwards' (Goodman, 1998, p314). McDermid (1995) indicates that in the latter 19th century higher grade schools were created, which provided an additional three years' study for lower middle and working class girls. These schools expanded the curriculum for young women but domestic subjects were retained as central to the offer. Working class girls were usually encouraged to choose the domestic subjects in order to prepare for realistic career options.

There is evidence of early examples of working class girls being prevented from accessing training and career development opportunities due to the immediate financial responsibilities they had at home. Goodman (1998) found that the Technical Education Board, a government department established to oversee the provision of technical education, provided technical instruction scholarships to girls' secondary schools. Grants were made available to middle and working class girls to the London School of Economics and the Economics Faculty. In 1912 the Women's Industrial Council conducted an inquiry into the take up of the educational grants. They found that girls from working class homes, when presented with these training opportunities, did not take up the offer. Instead, their families, in need of immediate income, would often send girls directly into the workplace, impeding any progress towards skilled employment the girls may have aspired to.

During this period, educational opportunities for working class girls can be viewed as designed to support and stabilise patriarchal relations. However, an example of working class education with emancipatory value did emerge. A growing movement of trade unions and socialism brought an understanding that every child should receive an education to ready themselves for roles which would encourage social development. Dick (1980) suggests that radicals and conservatives of both sexes began to see the need

for an educational offer for the masses, and it was from these opposing political positions that a unity was found. Dick describes the introduction of mass schooling as associated with two processes:

> …first, the evolution of a self-conscious working class, beginning to define itself in opposition to the gentry and middle classes; secondly the attempt to create a community ethic, which aimed to overcome the conflict generated by class consciousness through the development of shared social values (Dick, 1980, p27).

The effect of this mass schooling was a wider dissemination and migration of middle class ideology, and a pseudo-growth of the middle classes serving the purpose of meeting the aspirations of the working classes while subduing them into a model of patriarchal hierarchy. This enabled the continuation of the church's power and supported capitalist developments, wealth gain and propagation of the 'ruling classes.'

Recognition of the needs of the working class arose during the mid-19th century, giving rise to attempts to respond to church and state-run educational opportunities. Most notable of these is the Socialist Sunday School (SSS) movement, which mobilised in 1892 and continued into the 1970s.

Gerrard (2012) describes SSS as a community-led initiative which brought together working class children within a locality on the one free day during which adults and children could all contribute to their education. As she notes:

> [t]he schools operated within locales of broader socialist activity in the attempt to create alternative educational opportunity and imbue a socialist ethic in children. Teaching science, literature, socialist interpretations of history, cooperative ethics and involving the children in a range of activities from needlecraft to rambling and singing, SSS took their remit to introduce children to socialist culture and ideas seriously (Gerrard, 2012, p541).

The visionary education provided by SSS can be seen as the most liberal and egalitarian model available to working class children and girls since the passing of the 1870 Education Act. Sadly, this model had little impact upon the statutory educational offer

to emerge for working class children and girls across the UK.

During the period from the beginning of the 20th century to the passing of the Education Act (1944), working class girls' overall educational progress was limited. Several attempts were made to propose secondary education for all, but there was resistance to them. Lawson and Silver (1973) refer to this period as one fraught with social change with a growing sense of responsibility for social problems emerging against a back-drop of economic hardship accentuated by the impacts of the Boer, First and Second World Wars. They suggest that education throughout this period became a social policy within which party politics were argued.

In the period preceding the 1944 Act, prior to the outbreak of the Second World War, there was consistent political agreement that there was a need for the implementation of reform of post-elementary education.

Section 2: The role of feminist educationalists and the establishment of negative versions of working class women's feminine identity

Wright (2009) indicates that women in the 19th and early 20th century, although de-barred from many forms of citizenship, saw education as a means to actively participate in the national interest and shape national character. Innes (2004) depicts this galvanising of equal rights and citizenship as a mode of early feminism. Through the harnessing of citizenship and the educational reform agenda many women found a voice to argue for equality (Leneman, 1998). Educational reform was considered to be a 'cornerstone of earlier suffrage work' (Cowman, 1998, p80-81) for organisations such as the United Suffragists.

The Suffrage movement's primary area of educational reform was concerned with the development of relevant formalised educational opportunities for middle class girls in order to advance career opportunities for middle class women who found themselves without a livelihood. Instances of support for working class girls within the Suffrage movement can be seen in their philanthropic work to support children of the poor. Although commendable, the work of upper and middle class women in the development of education for women, particularly the poor, led to complications. The lives of middle and upper middle class women of this period were often far removed from the realities

and living conditions of the working class women and children they aimed to support.

The Suffragette movement afforded working class women the opportunity to join the middle classes in their support for suffrage, but there are few examples of this being undertaken. The dominant thinking of early socialist feminist historians, in their examination of the 19th century educational scene, was that most of the suffrage movement consisted exclusively of middle class women (Jannou and Purvis, 1998). However, this view has been contested. For example, Myall (1998) indicates that early readings of the women's movement as middle class 'neglect…the significant contribution made by working class women within it' (p173-174). The recorded roles of working class women may be few, due to middle class women having the educational background, time, resources and social positions available to enable their participation (Leneman, 1998). However, feminist historians have identified members of the movement's leadership as being of working class origin.

The work of the Suffrage movement had a symbiotic relationship to educational reform:

> Mary Wollstonecraft argued that, when educational inequalities were removed, sexual inequalities would be eliminated. This is why those who wanted sexual equality put so much energy into the struggle for educational equality and why those who did not want sexual equality offered so much entrenched resistance to the extension of education to women (Spender, 1987, p5).

Middle class women fighting for independent legal status for women and greater educational and employment opportunities followed a need for social divisions to retain the dominant hegemony of Victorian life. Purvis (1989) suggests that middle class women were to be kept apart from the labouring class, although a significant anomaly was the genteel feminine pastime of philanthropy. With philanthropy came an opportunity for Victorian feminism to grow, with middle and upper class women obtaining positions of power overseeing the needs and facilities of the poor and destitute.

Purvis (1989) suggests that early educational routes for working class women were wholly gender and class-based. Single working class women in 19th century Britain were expected to engage in domestic work e.g. sewing, trades in cotton factories and, in

some instances for a lucky minority, school teaching. Teaching was seen as one of the only early routes available to working class women to engage in a degree of social mobility. Most working class women did not have access to adult educational opportunities, as the cost was prohibitive.

Purvis characterises working class women's working lives during the turn of the 20th century as being:

> …daily misery, poverty and exploitation. Working class women tended to be concentrated in particular kinds of employment that was poorly paid and involved long hours of work and can be seen as unskilled…both single and married women might find that they had a subordinate status within the family structure - especially a married woman, since she was economically dependent on the main breadwinner, her husband (Purvis, 1989, p47).

The idea of working class femininity was entrenched in the views that middle class people had of working class realities. These realities had rarely been seen by middle class people but were defined as:

> [p]overty, squalor, poor housing conditions, lack of hygiene, intermittent patterns of work became the characteristics of the individual themselves…for the middle classes the working class woman was someone who was vulgar, coarse, inadequate, ignorant, dirty, incompetent in domestic matters and potentially a source of moral pollution (Purvis, 1989, p63).

Goodman and Harrop (2000) suggest that by the latter half of the 19th century the education and salvation of the poor was considered to be a valuable philanthropic contribution made by middle and upper middle class women. Education devised by middle class women for the poor was considered to have transformative opportunities enabling them to become 'good persons and decent citizens' (Goodman, 2000, p18), with the added benefit of filling the days of middle class women away from lives occupied by employment.

Many middle class women sat on committees of schools for working class children and the moral behaviour of their pupils was a central concern. The founders of the

Manchester Ladies Jubilee Female School Charity, cited in Goodman, wrote that:

> [t]he moral depravity, ignorance and almost unparalleled contempt of modesty and orderly conduct amongst the labouring class of females in this populous and manufacturing town cannot have escaped the notice of the most inattentive observer. The notoriety of seduction and prostitution, the scandalous outrages to decency and decorum which are exhibited daily in our streets by whole crowds of female children demand the vigorous exertions of every Friend to religion and Virtue [sic] (Goodman, 2000, p26).

These early depictions of working class environments, families and women can be seen as the first examples of the demonisation and vilification of working classness. Here, middle class women's negative perceptions of working class feminine identity emerge within social consciousness.

The negative formation of working class feminine identity during this period contrasts with the overall developments made by middle class women at this time. Martin (2000) suggests that the passing of the Education Act (1870) and the creation of school boards enabled middle class women to take a seat at the political table of educational reform. School boards were the first stage of elected office held by women in this country at a time when they did not hold the right to vote for our elected parliamentary leadership.

Edwards (2001) posits that one positive development for working class women at this time was the introduction of schooling for working class children. This created a need for more educators. One of the first routes into a profession for working class young women came in the form of teaching.

In her research Edwards (2001) found that there were two routes into teaching, either to begin as a pupil teacher or as a teacher who had received formal training. However, the routes into teaching still emerged with a class distinction. Pupil teachers were often drawn from the working or lower middle classes, with their training taking place informally in their own school context. Teachers who attended 'teacher training colleges' came from the middle and upper middle classes.

The early educational offer made to working class girls was reductive by comparison to

her male working class peers and her middle class female peers. When education was offered, it directed them to a life of service and domestic responsibility. Social mobility, as secured through educational advancement, was virtually unheard of, with the only examples available through teaching. The middle and upper classes viewed working class children and communities with contempt and pity, establishing a demonisation of working class girls and women which, I argue later in this thesis, is still present today.

Revisions of women's educational history and its relationship to feminist models of educational research

The emergence of women in academia in the 1960s brought with it a desire to view social and educational history through a female lens. Prior to this, social and feminist historians' analysis was drawn from the speeches, policies, articles and books created by the educational leadership, predominantly men. As Gardner (1996) notes, '[t]his type of historical evidence also said little about many of the groups involved in education…little of how the changing educational landscape was perceived and accommodated by those who were to be most affected by it' (Gardner, 1996, p237). Stephenson (2008) suggests that '[c]ritical developments in oral history scholarship reflect, and have been reflected in, an increasing perception of its relevance, and in its dynamic application across a wide disciplinary terrain' (Stephenson, 2008, p3).

Social sciences, driven arguably by feminist theorising, moved towards a broader accumulation of materials and information as potential data for analysis. The study of women's educational history drove the use of broader source material in other subject fields. Throughout the 1990s, the introduction of oral histories became valid data for analysis.

Carol Dyehouse's (2002) retrospective look at the socio-economic breakdown of male and female students between the First and Second World Wars is one of the most significant examples of historical analysis with living respondents featuring working class women's education. Dyehouse applied a questionnaire format to collate the experiences of men and women between the war years in Britain, using social indices to create a study of socially-stratified higher educational attendance. This mixed methods study examined the proportional breakdown of higher educational attendance in relation to gender and social class, with narratives provided by respondents to annotate social

indices. Dyehouse's format of existing participation statistics, questionnaire data and further qualitative annotations through interview processes is a model which significantly influenced my data capture for this study.

The preceeding sections of this chapter review the aspects of educational and social history relevant to the development of children's and working class children's education in the UK up to the passing of the Education Act (1944). Evidence suggests limited educational opportunities for working class girls during this period. The educational offer that was made was primarily designed to ensure that working class girls' developed the domestic skills required of them at home and in the workplace. Within this period we also saw the emergence of negative depictions of working class girls' and the intervention of philanthropists driven by their desire to ensure that working class girls developed respectable middle class sensibilities.

Section 3: Education policy from 1944 onwards including the current position of white working class girls

As introduced earlier in this chapter, very few working class children, and even fewer working class girls, attended any form of secondary education throughout the first four decades of the 20th century. The Education Act 1944 legislated for introduction of the 'tripartite system' (Reay, 2017) with the introduction of the 11-Plus examination and three tiers of secondary schooling in the UK. Children who passed the 11-Plus would attend grammar schools whereas the majority of other students would attend secondary modern schools. A third category of technical colleges was also suggested within the tripartite system, however very few of these were ever constructed and so they had minimal impact upon working class girls' education overall.

The Education Act 1944 established free secondary education for all children according to 'age, ability and aptitude' (Bunkle, 2016, p792). Halsey, Heath and Ridge's (1980) study of grammar schools, describing working class boys' routes through education since the Education Act, found that school choice, including the capacity to access schools categorised as the most successful, was directly affected by social position. Bunkle (2016) indicates that few working class girls passed the 11-Plus or were offered places at the elite single sex grammar schools, with most attending the secondary modern and comprehensive schools. Exam results required to enter grammar schools

within the tripartite system were set lower for boys to ensure that enough boys were accepted (Gaine and George, 1999; Francis and Skelton, 2005). Evidence suggests that attendance at grammar schools was rarely a pleasant experience for working class girls (Reay, 2017).

The tripartite system lasted for 20 years. By 1964 the UK Labour government began a transition to non-selective education, a move that was not challenged by Margaret Thatcher during her term as Education Minister from 1970 to 1974 (Bunkle, 2016). The only contestation emerged from a series of 'Black Papers' which objected to the threat of grammar school closures. The Black Papers highlighted concerns over the impact of progressive forms of education on deteriorating standards and behavior, yet Thatcher did little to prevent the school closures (Hughes, 2006).

Bynner and Joshi (2002) review data amassed from two longitudinal birth cohort studies in 1958 and 1970. They find a 'persistence of class inequalities in educational achievement' (p421) across the UK. The introduction of 23 new UK universities in the 1970s led to an increase in women attending HE. However, Deem (2012) suggests that, by 1978, restrictive and discriminatory practices were still common and the increase in HE attendance by women overshadowed the rarity of attendance by those categorised as working class.

By the time of this study's data capture in 2014, an awareness of working class underachievement within the UK education system was re-emerging within research circles and recognised within a central government policy context. In 2012 the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) indicated that:

> [b]y 11, only around 75 per cent of children from the poorest fifth of families reach the expected level at Key Stage Two, compared to 97 per cent of children from the richest fifth. Only 21 per cent of the poorest fifth of children (measured by parental socio-economic position) manage to gain five good GCSEs, compared to 75 per cent of the top quintile (Economic and Social Research Council, 2012, p1).

Strand's (2014) work resonates with the work of Gillborn and Mirza (2000) in addressing the requirement of intersectional analysis in relation to gender, ethnicity,

social class and underachievement. Strand's longitudinal study of over 15,000 students at the ages of 11 years, 14 years and 16 years is considered to be one of the largest cohort studies available in this area of study.

Strand's data involves a nationally-representative group of young people in England between 2001 and 2006. He finds that, at age 16 years, the achievement gap relating to social class is twice as large as the largest gap relating to ethnicity. Strand's intersectional analysis of the performance data of young people from low socio-economic status families highlights that:

> …ethnicity, gender and SES (Socio Economic Status) do not combine in a simple additive fashion; rather, there are substantial interactions particularly between ethnicity and SES and between ethnicity and gender. At age 16 among low SES students, all ethnic minority groups achieve significantly better than White British students (except Black Caribbean boys who do not differ from White British boys) (Strand, 2014, p131).

Rothan (2007) contests Strand's analysis, and argues that 'social class operates in a similar way for all ethnic groups without a specifically "ethnic effect" that mitigates its impact in certain groups' (Rothan, 2007, p306).

However, Demie and Lewis (2010) in their analysis deconstruct performance data by ethnicity and socio-economic group, and specifically draw out 'white British' as an ethnicity. In a London-based case study, Demie and Lewis found that:

> White British pupils are simultaneously both the lowest and the highest attaining ethnic group, depending on the level of disadvantage experienced. Making comparisons without explicitly considering this interaction, i.e. treating White British as a single group, is extremely misleading (Demie and Lewis, 2010, p30).

Demie and Lewis (2011) also indicate that, while a lack of consensus exists about the use of 'white working class' as a category, this definition remains useful for educational policy purposes as it supports a clear differentiation of social classes, and ensures that data capture, policy and subsequent funding are allocated accordingly.

Another significant finding from Strand, and one central to this thesis's position, was that 'for low SES girls, Black Caribbean joined the other minority groups in scoring significantly higher than White British, making White British girls the lowest scoring group' (Strand, 2014, p146). When considering demographic breakdowns, Strand indicates that '[t]he lowest achieving groups in absolute terms were both low SES Black Caribbean and White British boys along with White British low SES girls' (Strand, 2014, p147).

By 2013 Ofsted further acknowledges this issue, stating that:

> While girls outperformed boys across all of the main ethnic groups, the achievement of White British girls eligible for free school meals was below that of low income boys from other ethnic groups, with the exception of Black Caribbean boys. The poor performance of low income White British pupils is not, therefore, a gender issue (Ofsted, 2013, p29).

This recognition of the 'poor performance' of white working class girls by Ofsted is welcome, as it acknowledges a problem. However the suggestion that gender is not an issue in white British pupils' performance is worrying as the language used infers limited interest in the specificity of gender as an intersectional component in white working class girls' underachievement.

Research from Demie and Lewis (2010, 2011) and Strand (2014) shows that, in part, white working class girls' underachievement remains unseen when placing all social groups within the category of 'white.' The success of middle class white British students masks the low achievement levels of many low-income white working class students. In addition, the 'successful girls' discourse (Baker, 2010), further overshadows the ongoing poor performance of white working class girls, leading to limited policy responses addressing white working class girls' poor attainment until now.

White working class girls' underachievement may not have been a policy priority in the last four decades, however it has remained a focus of academic research as will be seen in the literature review chapter (chapter 3). In the last 5 years central government has

started to recognise consistent barriers to the academic development of white working class young people and, with that, some recognition of the underacheivemnt of white working cass girls.

Examples of research examining white working class educational marginalisation working directly with educational leaders are also emerging. These include Mongan and Chapman (2008), who have presented research findings to the National College for School Leadership, and Demie and Lewis (2010) in their work with the London Boroughs.

Ofsted may still not be considering the gender implications of white working class performance as highlighted above, however they do acknowledge white working class educational underachievement:

> In some areas of the country and in some communities, there is a worryingly engrained poverty of expectation, with large groups of disadvantaged pupils performing poorly. Of particular concern in this respect is the low attainment and poor progress made by too many White British pupils from low income backgrounds (Ofsted, 2013, p17).

The DfE responded to Ofsted's report, launching an inquiry titled 'Underachievement in Education by White Working Class Children' which culminated in the release of the Education Select Committee's session report of the same name (Department for Education, 2014). This report acknowledges that 'White British Free School Meals (FSM) children have consistently been the lowest performing group during 2006/07–2012/13, with a FSM/non-FSM performance gap that is larger than others' (Department for Education, 2014, p16). White British children eligible for FSM are cited as:

> the lowest performing ethnic group of children from low income households, at all ages (other than small subgroups of white children); the attainment "gap" between those children eligible for free school meals and the remainder is wider for white British and Irish children than for other ethnic groups; and this gap widens as children get older (Department for Education, 2014, p3).

This report recognises the committee's inability to assess all contextual social, familial

and additional factors in the construction of 'underachievement' while also acknowledging that there is policy problem to be solved:

> The problem of white "working class" underachievement is not specific to boys, attention to both sexes is needed…data shows that White British FSM eligible pupils perform poorly against many other groups as well as their non-FSM eligible peers. The government agrees that this underachievement affects both boys and girls (Department for Education, 2014, p3-4).

The evidence from the Department for Education (2014) indicates that, at the time of my study's data capture, white working class girls were the lowest performing female group during their formal statutory schooling. The DfE's acknowledgment of white British girls as the lowest performing female group can be considered a milestone in policy recognition for this cohort. However there are limited examples of policy interventions which address this issue.

The inference in the DfE report, described above, is that school performance is a key feature in working class underachievement. The DfE acknowledges that twice the proportion of poor children attending outstanding schools 'will leave with five good GCSE's when compared with the lowest rated schools' (Department of Education, 2014, p5). This suggests that school choice is central to educational performance, with students from low socio-economic status families not accessing the educational opportunities of high performing schools.

The DfE recognises that class differences in school choice decisions emerge from 'tighter budget constraints of low income families' (Department of Education, 2014b, p13). This suggests that it is low income which promotes working class parents' 'inability to purchase houses next to popular schools, pay for private tuition for entrance tests, or take long journeys to school' (Department of Education, 2014b, p13).

Policy makers and researchers take multiple positions on where the responsibility lies for improving the achievements of those 'underachieving' in state education. Media portrayals can add to divisive politicised arguments, aligning blame of failure at home and at school. *The Daily Telegraph* headline 'Poor parenting linked to underachievement at school' (Paton, 2013) and a headline from *The Guardian* 'Schools

must focus on struggling white working class pupils, says UK charity' (Weale and Adams, 2016) are examples of this.

In a BBC News interview aligned to the release of the DfE report on White Working Class Educational Underachievement, the then Ofsted Chief Inspector of Schools, Michael Wilshaw, was quoted as saying of his time as a head teacher:

> I was absolutely clear with parents - if they weren't doing a good job I would tell them so. It's up to head teachers to say quite clearly "You're a poor parent." If parents didn't come into school, didn't come to parents' evening, didn't read with their children, didn't ensure they did their homework, I would tell them they were bad parents. I think head teachers should have the power to fine them. It's sending the message that you are responsible for your children no matter how poor you are (Sellgren, 2014).

This position is arguably inflammatory and protectionist in its inference, supporting classed demonisation discourses. This statement sat alongside an official policy document released by Ofsted (2013) acknowledging white working class underachievement and citing school improvement as the key mechanism to address the issue. Wilshaw's statement aligns poverty with a lack of responsibility on the part of working class parents. I suggest this reinforces negative working class educational failure discourses and potentially reduces the public pressure for Ofsted to make good on their official policy position.

Chapter 3

Literature Review

Introduction

This chapter examines the bodies of theory relating to this thesis, and provides a theoretical context for my research. It develops this theoretical framework by drawing from other empirical studies addressing the social, familial and educational experiences of working class young women. Contextual material to position the findings of this research appears throughout the thesis. This chapter needs to be viewed alongside the contextual information provided in the historical and current context of working class girls' education (chapter 2), methodology (chapter 4) and analysis chapters.

To avoid repetition, not all references in the analysis chapters feature here. In the analysis chapters I have occasionally required new references outside of those presented earlier in the thesis, deemed necessary if analysis took nuanced directions requiring further context. When this occurs, references remain drawn from the overall research paradigm.

In this chapter I establish the connection this thesis makes between what I propose to be the macro sociological theories of Beck, Beck-Gernsheim and Giddens and their individualisation premise and the micro theories of post-structuralism. I suggest a necessary symbiosis between the two bodies of theory, and argue that both are necessary to define the clearest version of subjectivity formation available.

This chapter is laid out in three sections: Section 1 - Neo-liberalism and individualisation; Section 2 - Foucault and Butler; and Section 3 - Feminism, subjectivity and working class (white) girls.

Section 1: Neo-liberalism and individualisation

This section defines neo-liberalism and introduces the work of theorists Giddens and Beck. It examines Giddens, Lash and Beck's notion of individualisation within reflexive modernity and Beck and Beck-Gernsheim's developments of the individualisation premise. I suggest that neo-liberally conceived policy and legislation have led to an individualised 'post-equality,' 'post-feminist' terrain, which examines how individualisation makes one self-responsible regardless of material or social constraint.

The neo-liberal context

This thesis argues that a neo-liberal context is central to the subjective construction of the research participants of this study. It maintains that neo-liberalism permeates and guides their individualised educational and social policy climate. Here, and within the analysis chapters, I introduce the ways in which neo-liberalism crafts social, political and media rhetoric, and defines versions of classed and gendered identities.

Neo-liberalism is defined as:

> …a theory of political economic practices that proposes that human well-being can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within a strong institutional framework characterised by strong private property rights, free markets and free trade (Harvey, 2005, p2).

Harvey (2005) argues that the function of the state is to manage money and its distribution within structures pertaining to defense, police, law enforcement and legal infrastructure. Harvey indicates that those legalities also ensure the ability of citizens within neo-liberal societies to have the correct routes to legally acquire and maintain personal wealth and property. To this end, neo-liberalism is a political ideology of reduction in state intervention in all aspects of the human condition and social infrastructure.

Neo-liberalism presents as the current dominant global, social, political and economic theory. The ensuing neo-liberal discourses have led the way in the formation of the

hegemonic 'social imaginary' (Rizvi and Lingard, 2009), thus forming a perceived reality for the individual, community and state.

Dean (2014) argues that neo-liberalism has become a blanket term used to describe a number of diversifications of the original political, economic and social theory of the Mont Pèlerin Society (MPS). The MPS in its original form was a collective of groups of neo-liberals from various disciplines drawn from across the developed world. They came together to generate discourse to enable a departure from collectivism and socialism, and to develop an agenda enabling a divergence from classical liberalism (Mirowski and Plehwe, 2009). Dean asks us to distinguish between neo-liberalism conceived of as the state and regimes of the state. This divergence he cites as necessary when one begins to mobilise against neo-liberalism's dominant socio-political hegemony. A neo-liberal state infers that the blanket ideology cannot be surmounted but the dissection of neo-liberalism as thought collectives allows us to ground the location of a neo-liberal agenda within our own areas of policy interest. This concept allows researchers to provide challenges to the dominant hegemony. In the case of this thesis, this notion allows me to develop specific responses to areas of educational and social policy which affect the research cohort.

Advocates for the principles of neo-liberalism can be found in almost all areas of social, political and economic policy and delivery. Dean (2014) refers to multiple externalities and spheres of action, suggesting that neo-liberalism has representation within universities, research institutions and the media. They can also be found in the financial sectors, in positions of leadership within our state-governed Her Majesty's Treasury and the Bank of England. In addition, we can see the influence of the neo-liberal agenda within our leading global institutions such as the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank and the World Trade Organisation (Harvey, 2005). Neo-liberalism has become the dominant hegemonic rationale of global leadership and influence. A concerning element of this takeover is that it has become accepted as the logical route to action in understanding global economics, social policy and politics. It is for this reason that I propose analytical routes which move between micro and macro sociological theories, as these enable an examination of the interface between the localised experiences of this study's research cohort and the socio-political hegemony of neo-liberalism.

Reflexive modernity and individualisation

Reflexive modernisation can be considered to be a convergence of the theories of Beck, Giddens and Lash (Beck, 1994). Beck (1994) defines the notion of reflexive modernisation as the self-destruction of modern industrialised society:

> …undercutting its formations of class, stratum, occupation, sex roles, nuclear family, plant, business sectors and of course the prerequisites and continuing forms of natural techno-economic progress. This new stage in which progress can turn into self-destruction, in which one kind of modernisation undercuts and changes another, is what I call the stage of reflexive modernisation (Beck, 1994, p2).

Beck, Bonss and Lau (2003) claim that reflexive modernisation creates new forms of capitalism, labour and global order, new social structures and interpretations of our natural environments, new versions of government and nation states and, importantly for this thesis, new forms of subjectivity.

In Beck (1994), the theory of individualisation emerged as a central tenet of Beck, Giddens and Lash's (1994) reflexive modernisation premise. Individualisation can be understood as the process of self-positioning which takes place under neo-liberalism.

Giddens (1994) emphasises the importance of 'individualism' over the now discredited socialist theory of 'collectivism.' He indicates that neo-liberals and, often, critics of neo-liberalist ideals, understand individualism as the forerunner to individualisation and that this is a narrow view. This is often read as an extension of the self-serving and profit-capitalising activity of the free market. However, this is mistaken as individualisation should be defined as 'the expansion of social reflexivity. In a world of high reflexivity, an individual must achieve a certain degree of autonomy of action as a condition of being able to survive and forge a life' (Giddens, 1994, p13).

Giddens (1994) suggests that 'class becomes individualized and expressed through the individuals '"biography;" it is experienced less as a collective fate' (p143). Beck (1992) describes individualisation as the way in which neo-liberal political and sociological theories have created new social identities beyond categorisation through class, race and

gender distinction. He suggests that this moves us away from previous generational confines of familial responsibility, social position etc. This new reflexivity is created without institutional, familial or social influence, and enables us to move beyond previously held, normalised social confines.

Beck and Beck-Gernsheim further describe individualisation as including the freeing of selves from previous social confines. Individualisation, they argue, is a social condition:

> …not arrived at by a free decision of individuals…people are condemned to individualisation. Individualisation is a compulsion, albeit a paradoxical one, to create, to stage manage, not only one's own biography but the bonds and networks surrounding it and to do this amid changing preferences and at successive stages of life, while constantly adapting to the conditions of the labour market, the education system, the welfare state and so on (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2002, p4).

Beck and Beck-Gernsheim rationalise individualisation as something expected from individuals. They note that as individuals' options grow in a modern, global society then so does our need for decision-making and our potential capacity for failure. If we are to succeed then we must plan for the long-term but also be flexible and adaptable to change. Their argument is that the breadth of opportunity has outgrown parameters which once defined life choices through structures of family association, local community opportunity or boundaries of social position and cultural heritage. They suggest that decisions around how to navigate new individual opportunities for biographies now come from the individual themselves.

Beck-Gernsheim (2013) depicts individualisation as not an entirely liberating set of options, indicating that the journey to modernity generated two components that define self-reflexivity. Firstly, Beck-Gernsheim argues that modernity created a reduction of the importance of previously held personal restrictions and influences such as religion, family, community, social hierarchy and gender. She argue that these former restrictions had provided a stabilised framework on which to build our notions of self, leading to us gaining freedom and opportunity previously unknown to us. Secondly, she argues that influences or parameters have given way to a new set of defining characteristics, a new set of parameters including the labour market, welfare state, educational opportunity

and heavy legislation of personal activity, parameters created by a growing institutionalised society.

Giddens, Beck and Beck-Gernshiem's theses have encountered criticism that individualisation removes many of the formerly held constraints of sociology as depicted in the feminist critique of individualisation later in this chapter. However, Beck-Gernsheim (2013) counters this accusation, clarifying that under the individualisation premise, subjectivity formation not only has to take into account previously held social categories that have prevented social mobility, but also needs to consider multiple defining features of a new global age. The process of individualised subjective formation is not read as negative or positive, but provides an opportunity to theorise subjectivity without discounting gender, ethnicity and familial influence, adding to the number of discursive possibilities of subjectivity formation. Beck and Beck-Gernshiem (2002) describe the effects of individualisation on the individual as both a burden and an opportunity.

Reflexive modernisation, as a new defined era, has created new social orders. Neo-liberal governments' dissection of the welfare state into a shared model of public/private in health care, education and housing has led to an intensification of individualisation and self-responsibility. Within the methodology chapter I will depict the situations of this study's participants as living within social housing and as attending schools whose cohorts are drawn from the lowest socio-economic groups. The research participants are amongst the most marginalised within the state education system, however, even amidst this back-drop of material, educational and social deprivation I identify a continual reoccurrence of self-responsibility. Individualisation becomes apparent in the ways in which the young women at times distance themselves from versions of feminine working class identity. The divisive derogatory political and media depictions of 'chavs' and a 'benefit-scrounging' culture manifest in the young women's subjectivities. The participants desire to distance themselves from the negative intensifies their individualisation.

Beck, Bonss and Lau (2003) conceive of reflexive individualisation as producing 'side effects' (2003, p25) indicating:

> …what for one individual is the overstepping or overthrowing of boundaries is,

for another, the setting of new boundaries and the changing of the probabilities of various outcomes. Individualisation thus not only multiplies side-effects, it deepens asymmetries…This is what it means to say that the agents of individualisation are also its victims' (Beck, Bonss and Lau, 2003, p24-25).

Feminist critiques of individualisation have interpreted the reflexive individualisation premise as detached from the reality of those still trapped within the same economic, geographical, familial, cultural, social and gender restrictions as before. Feminist arguments suggest that a freeing from former social norms discounts the very real lived experiences of marginalised groups facing the same issues preventing social mobility. I argue that Beck and Beck-Gernsheim recognise an increase in the complexity of social stratification inclusive of former restrictions, as opposed to a reading of individualisation as a theory proposing a new set of social stratifications divorced from historic categories.

There are instances in Beck, Bonss and Lau's (2003) writing which support feminist claims of a lack of room within the concept of individualisation for issues of gender, assuming that battles for equality have been won. The authors describe the perceived evolution of the roles of women within reflexive modernisation and the transformation of gender roles as a key component of individualisation 'changing the internal relations of families, producing *The Normal Chaos of Love* (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 1995) and dissolving the sexual division of labour, affects the labour market from two directions' (Beck, Bonss and Lau, 2003, p6).

Their assertion of changes in familial relations and the dissolution of the sexual division of the labour market do not reflect the realities of gender differentiation or the marginalisation women still experience in the work place or domestic sphere; I will return to this point in section three of this chapter.

Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (2002) suggest that individualisation can lead to subjectivity formation which sets the individual up as entirely self-responsible, self-reliant and without the reassurance, guidance or strength of the collective voice of former parameters of our historic categories. The findings of this study go some way to confirming this premise. Some of the young women present as having little allegiance to notions of a necessity for greater equality or working class collectivity. They present

as depicting a 'post-feminist' and 'post-equality of opportunity' age. However what the findings of this study do reveal are instances where the young women seek out and identify positive versions of working class feminine identities. They do this through the identification of female role models within their families and communities, with their subjectivities then drawing upon those inter-relationships to establish positive versions of self.

Neo-liberal notions of individualisation provide a way to theorise the impact of dominant hegemonic discourses of self-management, self-improvement and personal responsibility. These discourses require the individual to be self-responsible for perceived success or failure, absolving the state of responsibility. In section 3 of this chapter I introduce additional ways in which neo-liberal ideology further engenders narrow classed versions of feminine identity, and identify additional ways in which neo-liberal ideology manifests in the production of reductive versions of feminine subjectivity.

Section 2: Foucault and Butler

As will be set out in the methodology chapter (chapter 4), this thesis situates itself within a post-structural feminist paradigm. I apply theories of discursive subjective formation which take their departure point from Foucault and Butler. Therefore, this section articulates Foucault and Butler's theories of the discursive construction of subjectivity. I introduce Foucault's theories of 'power and self-technologies' and 'governmentality' as I draw upon those theoretical tools within my analysis. Drawing on Butler's theory of performativity, which I will set out below, I argue for the discursive construction of subjectivities, and the performative establishment of self.

Discourse as a generative tool for subjective formation

Foucault's seminal text *Archaeologies of Knowledge* (1972) clarifies his approach to a methodological explanation of the production of alternative histories. It includes the archaeologies of key areas of social stratification and social structures which, throughout history, have evolved to manage society. Foucault was interested in the history or genealogy of problems (Foucault, 2007a), arguing that bodies of science, viewed as power structures, were historically-situated fields of knowledge which

emerged through discursive formation. He contends that the discursive accumulation of language, throughout history, has constructed the bodies of knowledge which we now consider to be historically accumulated truths.

Later, Foucault turned his attention to the workings of the self, including ways in which we interact with external discourses to form our subjectivities both at a conscious and unconscious level. It is this later development to his depiction of discourse which I draw upon to provide a framework for my empirical research and its findings.

Foucault's defines discourse as 'practices that systematically form the object of which they speak' (Foucault, 1972, p49). In this approach, the power of discourse, according to Foucault, can be seen as the mechanism which creates the object of which the discourse speaks. The power of discourse creates norms according to which one's subjectivity is produced as 'the subject constitutes itself in an active fashion through practices of the self' (Foucault, 1997b, p291).

This notion of discourse allows us to re-consider our understanding of a subject's construction. In the context of this study, this notion is used to establish sets of linguistic themes to support the analysis and communication of ways in which the participants construct their sense of self. This develops a clearer understanding of how they normalise aspects of their subjective construction whilst identifying depictions of versions of self from characteristics within language applied by, and on behalf of, the young women.

Foucault and Butler assert the power of discourse to formulate subjectivity. Butler indicates that we must 'understand the speaker as formed in the language that he or she speaks' (Butler, 1997, p28). She asks us to reconsider the subject's role within and through language construction.

Discourse, as a productive apparatus, enables us to consider how subjectivity is something constructed through historicised, re-iterated linguistic construction. This allows us to interrogate how particular discourses construct identities within contexts such as educational institutions or social locations. Foucault and Butler's conception of discourse can be used to interrogate and untangle processes of normalisation, and how such norms govern practice, values and desires, including how such norms may vary

according to a subject's lived realities.

Power and self-technologies

Foucault argues that it is important to examine power emerging from the investigations of resistance e.g. that to examine legality one should examine illegality (Foucault, 1982). In this approach, to examine power relations one should explore its counterpart through the investigation of resistance strategies and how those resistance strategies are regarded or disregarded. As Foucault argues, '[p]ower is relations; power is not a thing, it is a relationship between two individuals, a relationship which is such that one can direct the behaviour of another, or determine the behaviour of another' (Foucault, 2007b, p134-135).

Foucault does not see power as an overt entity in itself, i.e. something devised by a government to oversee its citizens and retain order (Foucault, 1982). He considers that power, constructed through multiple relations or relationships and acting within those relationships, is 'a set of rational techniques, and the efficiency of those techniques is due to a subtle integration of coercion technologies and self-technologies' (Foucault, 2016, p26). Coercion technologies and self-technologies emerge from Foucault's earlier writing when he refers to them as 'technologies of domination' (Foucault, 2007a, p154) and 'technologies of the self' (Foucault, 2007a, p165).

Foucault argues that we cannot consider techniques of both 'domination' and 'self' without considering the point at which 'technologies of domination' or the later 'coercion technologies' overlap with 'technologies of the self.' We must consider ways in which the 'self-technologies' are imbued or engaged in the 'technologies of domination' (Foucault, 1997a).

In Foucault's terms, 'technologies of domination' and 'self-technologies' are articulated as procedures within every civilisation. They are 'prescribed to individuals in order to determine their identity, maintain it, or transform it in terms of a certain number of ends, through relations of self-mastery or self-knowledge' (Foucault, 1997a, p87). In summary, Foucault describes the concept of 'technologies' as tools which would enable him to analyse 'so called sciences, as very specific truth games, related to specific techniques humans use to understand themselves' (Foucault, 1988, p18).

Foucault articulates technologies of the self as those which:

> …permit individuals to effect by their own means or with the help of others a
> certain number of operations on their own bodies and souls, thoughts, conduct,
> and way of being, so as to transform themselves in order to attain a certain state
> of happiness, purity, wisdom, perfection or immortality (Foucault, 1988, p18).

Foucault believes that power emerges through a continually fluid accumulation of power relationships as 'a plurality of relationships' (Foucault, 1996b, p257-258). He takes a counter view to the ontological conception of power; that it is not made up of the cowering oppressed and the dominant oppressor, but is an intricate weaving together of relationships. He considers power to be a productive process, but one that is also open to resistance, with resistance conceived as another dimension of power relations. He suggests there is not a single point where one can be free of the struggle of a power relationship and that the power relationship consequently will affect one's behaviours.

In Foucault's conception of the homosexual power struggle, these power relationships do not lead to one ultimately being trapped. He believes there is fluidity in struggle, and capacity for resistance and change. He proffers that in order for power relations to exist there must be a tension, and with tension comes resistance. Considering that modes of oppression do not have to be conceived of as permanent, Foucault argues that 'resistance comes first…power relations are forced to change with the power of resistance' (Foucault, 1996a, p386).

Foucault's depiction of 'power technologies' can be aligned to the notion of 'subjectification' in that they support the formation of self through discourses moving externally to the self. This argument contends that 'self-technologies' are then aligned to our understanding of 'subjectivation' i.e. the ways in which one constructs subjectivity through the adoption of predispositions or values. Here we see ways in which external technologies and discourses become imbued into the subject's interior.

Governmentality

The notion of individualisation, discussed earlier, understood as a mechanism for self-responsibility, can be conceived through Foucault's notion of governmentality. By 'government,' Foucault does not refer to the narrow view of elected national leadership, and instead views government in relation to the governing of children, families, communities and souls (Foucault, 1982). He describes governmentality as the ability to govern 'a group, a community, a family… a person' (Foucault, 2007b, p135), with governing someone defined as determining:

> …ones behaviour in terms of a strategy by resorting to a number of tactics. Therefore, if you like, it is governmentality in the wide sense of the term, as the group of relations of power and techniques which allow these relations of power to be exercised (Foucault, 2007b, p135).

Here, governmentality is seen as a reciprocal act. It is a strong example of the interaction between technologies of self and technologies of power, and an example of the imbuing of external discourses and technologies highlighted earlier.

My understanding of this is that governmentality is proposed as a process through which 'external' discourses, techniques and apparatus are imbued 'in' the subject and so constitute the subject. Neo-liberally driven individualisation can be seen as an example of the power of governmentality at work as it produces self-responsibility and a technology of the self.

Discursive construction and performativity

Butler's theory of performativity, that is, the idea that subjectivity and identity emerge through performative practices, their discourses and values, builds on the work of Foucault and post-structuralism. Butler develops the theories and contestations of post-structural forms of subjective construction.

Butler indicates that the performance of gender should not be misread as the 'truth of gender' (Butler, 1993, p24). Performance needs to be distinguished from peformativity, in as much as performativity is the repetition or reintroduction of characteristics of

norms which 'precede, constrain, and exceed the performer' (Butler, 1993, p24). Butler asserts that performativity cannot be taken as 'the fabrication of the performers "will" or "choice"' (Butler, 1993, p24).

Butler uses the theory of performativity to construct gender as a 'regulatory regime' which enacts:

> …social constraints, taboos, prohibitions, threats of punishment…ritualized repetition of norms, and this repetition constitutes the temporalized scene of gender construction and destabilisation. There is no subject who precedes or enacts this repetition of norms (Butler, 1993, p21).

This concept of gender performativity describes the cognitive creation of gender. Butler (2007) builds on this interpretation with an explanation of gender as performative, a way to contest the illusion that gender is a naturalised state. As she argues, gender is, in fact, 'manufactured' psychically and cognitively:

> …through a sustained set of acts, posited through the gendered stylisation of the body. In this way, it showed that what we take to be an "internal" feature of ourselves is one that we anticipate and produce through certain bodily acts, at an extreme, an hallucinatory effect of naturalised gestures (Butler, 2007, pxv-xvi).

Butler's commitment to the gendering of the subject to create the illusion of naturalised versions of masculine and feminine provides opportunities for feminist theorising. Subjectivity enacted through discourse and gender performativity are key post-structuralist tools that allow us to understand the re-categorisation of the subject more broadly.

Butler's theoretical approach re-defines relations between power, identity, subjectivity and discourse. As with Foucault, Butler's discussion of power and power relations emerges from a commitment to the subject within their theoretical enquiry. Butler indicates that power subjection (with 'subjection' meaning one's ability to be subjectified through a process) should be perceived as 'paradoxical' (Butler, 1997a, p1-2). She asks us to challenge ourselves to understand power not only as external to oneself, as the thing that presses upon us as an external force as we have historically

understood it, but to conceive of power as the thing that our formation of self relies upon to understand power as an external force and an internal one. As she argues, 'power is not simply what we oppose but also, in a strong sense, what we depend on for our existence and what we harbor and preserve in the beings that we are' (Butler, 1997a, p2).

Butler argues that subjection is within this relationship of power and relies upon a discourse that we do not choose but that 'paradoxically, initiates and sustains our agency. "Subjection" signifies the process of becoming subordinated by power as well as the process of becoming a subject' (Butler, 1997a, p2).

In her vodcast, Butler (2014) states that, within this notion of dominant discourses drawing us into existing forms of identity, Foucault, through his attention to new forms of subjectivity for gay, lesbian and bisexual people, believed that new forms of subjectivity are therefore possible or preferable. Butler suggests that 'in the subject and power he famously remarked, and I quote again "maybe the target nowadays is not to govern what we are but to refuse what we are"' (Butler, 2014).

If we acknowledge the potential for agency within a discursively constructed self, how do such selves emerge? Butler builds on Foucault's work, articulating that it is the discourse which constitutes the identity. However, do the parameters of a discourse and the asking of the question by the interviewer constitute the responses from the subject as a site of resistance and agency? Do discourses of resistance mobilise or create different discursive positions to those normalised through a process of subjectivation?

Butler (2014) describes this process of the agent within discursive construction as when one:

> …gives up resistance, one delivers oneself in to the hands of a discourse that confirms the authority of the one who has asked you to constitute yourself in the terms of that discourse, but there is always a you whom speaks that discourse, who becomes a figure for the discourse, an anthropocentric figure who speaks to you and before whom, to whom one speaks (Butler, 2014).

Butler (2014) understands Foucault's late works on rationalising subjectivity to indicate that, when one takes on another's discourse of power, one is binding oneself to that

identification of a truth. When one attaches to that version of available truth one is becoming that version of identity and, by becoming that version of identity, one reinforces that version of identity as a heterogenic social normality. Butler (2014), in her vodcast, cites this as happening in two ways. Firstly, the more one attaches to versions of that discourse, the more one can only understand themselves within that discourse, becoming less likely to contest the hegemonic normalities which define them. Secondly, an alternative pathway to discursive constructions of subjectivity lies in the form of growing numbers of individuals only able to see themselves within a particular discourse, which then reinforces that discourse as an actual truth. As she states:

> [e]veryone avows who he is as an individual, but individuality is an emphatically social form which means that the logic of identity is invoked and reproduced through every such avowal, which in turn means that when I avow an identity I am bound to others who are doing the same act under a similar constraint (Butler, 2014).

In the case of this study the already dominant discourses such as neo-liberal notions of femininity are presented back to the subject group. The young women's self-affiliated 'individual identities' are constructed in that image of the dominant discourses which surround and enact them, however multi-layered and multi-discoursed these versions of self may be.

Butler's self-regulation premise (2014) continues with this concept to describe ways in which the regulatory power of the discourse moves from those who initiate the discourse to the 'interiorisation' of that discourse. She depicts the ways in which the individual takes on that discourse as their own, in their own voice. This moves the 'discursive power' to the individual who becomes the authority of that discourse. For example, what Foucault may have conceived of as a 'power technology' moves to a 'self-technology,' ensuring that we have subjects who self-regulate, self-police and self-reprimand.

Here, we can see how Foucault's notion of governmentality can become internalised as a form of 'self-technology.' Therefore, the subjectification which stifles is one already formed through interiorisation of a discourse of reductive identity. As Butler explains in her vodcast: '[i]t is now the social discourse that becomes articulated in the structure of

the subject, a function and effect of reflexivity itself' (Butler, 2014).

The discursive platforms to emerge within the life of my study's respondents can be conceived of as emerging from the performative ascription of external subjectifying practices, that is, discursive versions of reductive forms of working class identity which position the women within neo-liberal notions of femininity. However, this thesis argues that agency can emerge when self-technologies interiorise discourse and are repurposed or resisted by the subject.

The analysis in chapters 5, 6 and 7 intends to find epistemological responses to the following questions:

- Is the individual only working with available 'constructive' discourses and, if so, how can we conceive discursive agency within that?

- Does agency emerge when identifying discourses driven by the young women who show resistance to neo-liberal versions of feminine identity?

- Are the girls I interviewed able to construct versions of self which resist the force and effects of dominant discourses under the umbrella of neo-liberalism and individualisation?

- Are these girls able to construct broader versions of self through alternative discourses?

Butler indicates that we must 'understand the speaker as formed in the language that he or she speaks' (Butler, 1997, p28). This asks us to reconsider the subject's role within and through language construction:

If the subject who speaks is also constituted by the language that she or he speaks, then language is the condition of possibility for the speaking subject, and not merely its instrument of expression. This means that the subject has its own "existence" implicated in a language that precedes and exceeds the subject, a language whose historicity includes a past and future that exceeds that of the subject who speaks (Butler, 1997, p28).

The discourses my research subjects are constructed through appear as historically-grounded conceptions of the subject. Therefore, the language available may be binding in as much as it can only support further understanding and an articulation of subjectivity within that historicised sphere. How then, in this case, can the research participants apply the language of historicised discourse with autonomy or resistance? How, if at all, is it possible to 'subvert' the available language of existing discourse into new variants, new areas of resistance which can be conceived of as transformative? Do the young women re-appropriate language that historically might have been regarded as oppressive, within our understanding of, say, gender or class oppression?

Butler (1997) considers ways in which discourse can cause harm and oppress. She indicates that discourses that harm do so though the repetition of language, that discourse acquires 'authority' through repeated 'citation' (Butler, 1997, p51).

Butler provides a cautionary note on the duality of the speech act:

> Autonomy in speech, to the extent that it exists, is conditioned by a radical and original dependency on a language whose historicity exceeds in all direction the history of the speaking subject. And this excessive historicity and structure makes possible that subjects linguistic survival as well as, potentially, that subject's linguistic death (Butler, 1997, p28).

When describing legacies of citations Butler (1997) argues that no terminology or statement within discursive definitions can exist without the accumulated historicity they have acquired. Butler does though find room for discursive agency, and re-addresses this positioning of power and subversion within discourse. She explains that one's refusal to identify oneself as a particular available identity could be read as the action to initiate a new form of identity. She also cautions against the understanding that subjectivity should be reduced to a version of identity. She indicates that the shaping of new subjectivities are sites for agency within subjectivity formation, which:

> ...ask[s] the question where is the policing of identity in the scene? Is there a compliance or a refusal in relation to the police demand and if there is refusal how does that become part of creating and informing new modes of subjectivity,

that retain and sustain that refusal as part of the task of subject formation? (Butler, 2014).

The notion of agency within discursively constructed subjectivity, including my justification of it in relation to discourses of resistance and compliance, are explored through the work of other feminist researcher and theorists later in the chapter.

Section 3: Feminism, subjectivity and (white) working class girls

In this section I draw from the work of other researchers and theorists that address working class experience. When identifying experiences of white working class young women amongst existing research, there is an overlap with other demographic groups relevant to constructing a picture of white working class young women's experience. I have identified relevant bodies of research which illuminate key debates within the field, however this is by no means an exhaustive list.

This section demonstrates the way in which working class feminine subjectivity is conceived, while also addressing white working class young women's educational, social and familial experience. Some key debates are located in other chapters: 'Failing school context,' where I also depict the situation of socially structured school choice, is located in the methodology chapter (chapter 4). Amidst the empirical findings here, I also locate this thesis' position in relation to feminist post-structural conceptions of subjectivity and feminist applications of the individualisation premise when conceiving of research subjects.

I have presented the material here around three headings: 'Class and gender manifestations in education and the workplace;' 'Demonisation of (white) working classes' and 'Working class girls' conceptions of subjectivity.'

Class and gender manifestations in education and the workplace

Schooling

Studies that examine youth subcultures and working class children's educational experiences until the 1970s often do not make explicit the experiences of working class

girls. During the 1970s, authors such as Hall and Jefferson and Willis began to redefine concepts of post-war working class youth sub-cultures and examined working class children in the school context. They identified that class culture was not something imposed on the school externally, but was comprised of 'experiences, relationships and ensembles of systematic types or relationships' (Willis, 1977, p1) within the school environment. Hall and Jefferson (2006) recognise the 'gender blindness' and 'the missing girl' (pxvi) within their early studies. However, research in school settings and policy from the 1970s onwards began to address issues surrounding gender, class and race within policy, pedagogy, and socialisation (Gaine and George, 1999).

McRobbie (1978a, 1978b) addresses the specificity of the 'culture' of working class girls' through her empirical school and youth culture-based ethnographic studies. McRobbie and Garber (2006) in their 1975 study question whether girls within subcultures are present but invisible. They suggest that research prior to their own had not identified the 'whole alternative networks of responses' through which girls had negotiated 'their relation to the subculture' (2006, p183). McRobbie (1978a, 1978b) brought forward explicitly sociological research to examine the inter-relationship between youth, culture and feminism. She explores issues of 'moral panic' in the socio-political depictions of working class young women and highlights the negative depictions of 'teenage motherhood,' an issue that is still present today, as my research will show.

Reay indicates that the working classes are discursively constituted as an 'uncritical, tasteless mass' (Reay, 2001) in much the same way as Skeggs (1997) suggests they are 'massified.' Steedman (1986) indicates that children:

> …still reach understandings of social position, exclusion and difference. At all levels, class consciousness must be learned in some way, and we need a model of such a process to explain the social and psychological development of working class children (Steedman, 1986, p14).

Reay indicates that working class children and young people are constantly under threat of being '"found out" in education, discovered to be inferior, less cultured, less clever than the middle classes' (Reay, 2001, p343).

Reay (2001) assigns responsibility for the failure of the education system to solve the problem of social mobility to the UK's ruling elite, who fail to connect educational policy with wider social welfare concerns. Reay indicates that social mobility conceived of as only accessed through education creates a comfortable cloak to hide behind when trends in social policy move to an increasingly individualised agenda. Within my study it has been necessary to relate the perceived educational underachievement of white working class girls back to the broader social issues affecting the demographic group, as educational attainment cannot be seen in isolation from broader issues of multiple deprivation. However, participants' notions of failure and success are often gleaned through theirs and others' perceptions of academic performance, viewed without any such consideration of social or familial marginalisation.

In chapter 5 I argue that a proportion of this study's respondents display negative learner identities, and that these are deeply entrenched by the time they complete their GCSEs, the period of my study's data capture. Reay and Wiliams (1999) examine primary school assessments, and identify that assertions of intelligence emerge through the pupils' performance in early standardised testing. They argue that assessment processes develop self-perceptions of underperformance, which fosters identities of academic failure early on in working class children's school lives. This study's findings focuses upon working class young women nearing the end of their schooling, and displays a chasm between the aspirations they have for themselves and their beliefs around whether they can meet the academic requirements required to achieve their aspirations.

In my study, individualised accounts emerge of the participants' ability to access their more ambitious career trajectories, with choices often deferring to the more 'realistic' classed alternatives they choose; this is what I refer to in chapter 5 as the application of 'the back-up plan.'

My findings supports Reay's notion of the 'cloaking' of policy trends. What is generated by the participants in my study are self-responsible discourses which overshadow the materially and socially unequal opportunities available.

The term 'sink school' has become synonymous with areas of multiple deprivations and aligned to schools considered to be 'failing' or categorised as 'requiring improvement'

by Ofsted. Reay and Lucey find that working class children develop coping strategies when faced with negative school perceptions. Working class children develop protectionist positions of:

> …"I don't want what I can't have" in order to be able to feel good about the options that are available to them…when working-class children are offered schools which are demonised within working-class as well as middle-class social networks…Then the class-constrained nature of school choice is actively resisted, albeit unsuccessfully, rather than accepted (Reay and Lucey, 2000, p89).

In the methodology chapter (chapter 4) I situate the research partner schools as 'requiring improvement' and introduce the concerns and research arising from schools positioned in this way. The negative impact of the demonising of their 'sink schools' on the young women in this study is apparent. They demonstrate resistance to negative external perceptions while also voicing concerns about lack of resources and the quality of the education they have on offer.

Gaine and George (1999), in their re-examination of issues of inequality within education, depict the impact of inequality through the interaction between categories of race, gender and social class. They explore the critical issue of the pressure of the policy shift towards 'various kinds of separate provision which could variously be called diversity, increased choice, separatism, exclusion or stratification in schooling' (Gaine and George, 1999, p130).

They argue that 'coded class advantage in the policy of choice is a central problem,' (Gaine and George, 1999, p148) and rightly predict that the stratified classed system emerging in the late nineties would become 'the critical issue in education policy' (Gaine and George, 1999, p148). The findings of this thesis concur with this statement. The evidence presented within the analysis chapters in relation to school context foreground issues which emerge when cohorts are all drawn from the lowest socio-economic groups. Within my findings, I identify issues which suggest the research participants do not access role models which could broaden the realm of possibilities to them post-16 years and the educational opportunities within their school context present as narrowed due to the classed and gendered expectations presented to them as students.

Gillies (2006, 2007) contests the widely held assumption of a lack of interest or aspiration by working class parents in their children's education, and suggests that we make this assertion through our reading of working class parents when understood through the value system of their middle class peers. She states that we need to shift perspective away from middle class values in order to consider the different modes of value placed on the education of working class children by their working class parents. One could argue that placing an emphasis on working class parents 'failings' detracts from the reductive educational offer made to children and young people from the lowest socio-economic groups. This becomes a mechanism which positions working class parents as responsible for the failings of educational policy.

Gillies (2007) argues that New Labour lobbied for state intervention in child-rearing in the UK based on the assumption that parental guidance was not sufficient within working class homes. She proffers that state intervention is required to fill the void of working class parental support with the implicit suggestion being that 'working class parents must be taught how to raise children that are middle class' (Gillies, 2007, p7), an inference which has a lineage in history as previously demonstrated in chapter 2.

Gillies (2006) finds that working class parents view formal education through a distant lens. Although parents wish for their children to achieve at school there is also a 'resignation and realism' (Gillies, 2006, p287) in the views they hold regarding their children's educational futures. Working class parents' own academic failings often define their views about educational experience.

When referring to working class mothers Gillies notes that they share middle class parents' sense of pride in their children's accomplishments, but their pride emerges from different values to that of the middle classes who recognise more directly the achievements of educational success. Working class parents apply value systems and behaviours which focus on 'keeping their children safe, soothing feelings of failure and low self-worth, and challenging injustice' (Gillies, 2006, p281), both within the social and educational context of the school.

Available evidence suggests there is no lack of aspiration from working class parents for their children. For example, Allen (2014) and Irwin and Elley (2013) find that

working class parents clearly demonstrate their understanding of the necessity of their children's education and their support for it. Those who present as the least advantaged demonstrate no less parental concern, but have limited confidence in engaging with their children's educational futures.

Allen (2014) suggests that political rhetoric including that of the former UK Prime Minister David Cameron

> …repeatedly addressed Britain as an "aspiration nation" appealing to those who want to "rise from the bottom to the top"…with pledges to "combat culture of worklessness." This rhetoric of aspiration and concurrent framing of upward mobility as an unequivocal good, ignores a raft of sociological evidence that reveals no shortage of aspiration among working-class families (Allen, 2014, p761).

While this study does not collect data from participant's parents, questions were posed to participants about parental and familial roles in educational and career planning. Findings presented within the analysis chapters depict parental roles as primarily supportive and ambitious for their children. As with Gillies and Allen, my study's findings describe instances where parental support was limited by parents' knowledge of the educational landscape. When this was the case the young women describe encouragement offered by parents who aspire for 'better' lives for their children than those they had led themselves; this was often considered through a desire for their children to achieve academically to access improved job prospects.

Francis (2005) suggests that classrooms remain places of gendered interactions with gender ascription and affiliation being a method of successfully navigating the school environment. Francis indicates that, while gendering was present, it is seen alongside class, racial difference and other sub categories.

In analysis chapter 5 I argue that the young women in my study do not consider gender equality to be an explicit issue in the structuring of their choices. This contributes to my argument for their positioning within a 'post-feminist' age, with gender inequality falling behind issues of race and social position, even when they depict gendered and classed career choices.

Higher Education

Access to Higher Education (HE) for white working class young women remains
limited, with attendance by all other female ethnic groups in receipt of free school meals
remaining higher than for those from white British and Irish backgrounds (Universities
and Colleges Admissions Service, 2017). This study considers the planned Further and
Higher Educational choices of its respondents, and attempts to find explanations which
illuminate the young women's views regarding access to a life lived through academic
advancement. The research references I provide here are examples of others' findings
addressing similar issues of material, educational and social access to HE, helping to
situate the evidence presented in chapter 5.

Lucey, Melody and Walkerdine's (2003) longitudinal study follows British girls born in
the 1970s through to adulthood. Respondents were both working and middle class, with
27% of the working class cohort and 93% of the middle class cohort staying on to
complete A-Levels with HE plans. Their study explores the young women's
subjectivities as the working class girls moved from their families into middle class
professional and intellectual domains, a process which depicts the respondents as
having to undergo 'internal and external makeovers' (Lucey, Melody and Walkerdine,
2003, p297). Emerging narratives show participants' who develop survival mechanisms,
with these considered to be the way in which the young women protect themselves and
their parents from any parental inability to offer material or intellectual support, similar
to that often provided within middle class homes.

The findings of Lucey, Melody and Walkerdine's (2003) suggest that working class
parents display narratives of support and pride, but they also identify occasions when
parents display jealousy at the life chances they never had. The authors find that
working class parents feel a sense of loss over the transition of their children to HE, as
their children distance themselves not only physically but also emotionally and
intellectually from their families. Working class children, in this study, experience a
deep sense that they are being given opportunities not afforded to their parents, thus
leading to feelings of guilt.

The studies of Lucey, Melody and Walkerdine (2003) and David et al (2003) reveal

differences between middle and working class parents in relation to their children's transition to HE. Middle class parents, in these studies, see university as a rite of passage that enables a young person time to grow and a process that provides a reassuring confirmation of social reproduction of their own educational patterns. In contrast, in these studies, working class parents identify HE as an opportunity for their children to live a different existence to their own, and an opportunity for escape.

Working class girls are required to disaggregate their subjectivity in order to manage the transitions they make. For working class girls' families, HE is a form of escape, but this escape involves complex emotional changes for both the family and the student. This can be seen as an explanation for why many working-class girls give up the ambition to attend HE and why drop-out rates are high. Young women who choose to remain committed can be perceived to present 'a painful separation which wards off the anger, the pain and loneliness with a defense that she needs no one' (Lucey, Melody and Walkerdine, 2003, p295).

Lucey (2001) indicates a self-perception for working class girls whereby it is not their destiny to live out middle class lives. Working class girls who progress to university face leaving their class sphere and engaging in a world that is alien to them. This is what Reay, Crozier and Clayton (2009), when referring to working class students attending elite universities, posit as 'strangers in paradise,' or when working class young people are required to navigate the juxtaposition of their middle class HE institutions and their working class homes (Reay, Crozier and Clayton, 2010).

The young women in my study planning their educational trajectory share feelings of wanting to improve their life chances but, as with Lucey (2001), Lucey, Melody and Walkerdine (2003) and Reay, Crozier and Clayton (2009) they engage in discourses of HE being 'not for them.' 'Back-up plans' (see chapter 5) emerge in order for them to navigate the realities of the gendered and classed career opportunities they felt were accessible, particularly when the young women recognise that their academic achievements may not allow them to access HE.

Evans (2009) draws on data gathered in an ethnographic study of working class children in an inner city London comprehensive school to examine the choices and rationales of young working class women over entering HE. She finds that class and gender combine

to have a detrimental effect on limiting perceived career and educational trajectories. Evans argues that the notion of a democratised HE system has not infiltrated the lives of working class young women, which suggests that any understanding that the offer was democratic enough to take up is countered by a reducing sense of entitlement to middle class institutions and practices. She also suggests that the women in her study often deemed HE as inappropriate for them.

The minority of working class girls in my study who opted for a university trajectory cite the overt material restrictions such as cost of university and the need to remain at home to reduce this cost. They also allude to a need to maintain familial ties and home-based familial responsibilities.

Evans (2009) suggests that policies designed to normalise entitlement to HE have only reached the middle classes. Evans indicates that there is an assumption within educational policy that the key incentive for HE participation is future financial gain and that this offers only an individualised reading of career aspiration. David et al, in an empirical study addressing gender's impact on HE choices, indicate that 'gender linked to social class, ethnicity and education, was highly salient in all the processes of choice of higher education' (David et al., 2003, p35).

Hey (2009) considers the implication that HE choices are conceived of as neo-liberally driven individualised decisions. She observes a dichotomy that many working class young women do not focus on personal gain but access HE to secure financial improvement for their families. She aligns her findings to the work of Evans (2009) and notes that Evans argued that 'a means to higher earning power was crucial but the importance of this was seldom individualistic and more usually altruistic and family centred' (Hey, 2009, p19).

Amy, a participant in my study, when asked about her educational trajectory, states; 'I want to help my family as well with like money and everything and get a job.' As with other young women in the study, her desire to contribute financially to the family home was crafting the educational decisions she was making. The findings of my study concur with Hey in that a number of respondents indicate a need to access employment as soon as possible, and so forfeit HE, with others seeing the long-term benefit of HE in improving their earning capacity so that they could then offer financial support at home.

Politicising educational 'choice'

McRobbie (2009), in her revision of Pateman's (1988) 'Sexual Contract Theory,' conceives of the idea that new, neo-liberal forms of feminism include a necessity for a 'new sexual contract.' She asserts that in order to be 'equal,' women must buy into a culture of femininity. Within this explanation, women within western societies can choose to:

> …come forward and make good use of the opportunity to work, to gain qualifications, to control fertility and to earn money to participate in the consumer culture which in turn will be become a defining feature of contemporary modes of feminine citizenship (McRobbie, 2009, p54).

McRobbie argues that buying into this new sexual contract includes a denouncement of feminism and, with the sexual contract now 'embedded in political discourse and in popular culture' (McRobbie, 2007, p718), governments are now acting to 'look after' young women. The gains made in education by young women also contribute to this notion of 'buying in to the sexual contract.' Under this guise, young women hold subjectivities emerging from discourses promoting them as 'active and inspirational subjects' (McRobbie, 2007, p727). These individualised discourses of female success mask the lack of progress made by lower middle and working class girls.

McRobbie highlights that young women leaving school with no qualifications become subjects of educational failure, as routes back into the educational system become reliant on parental monetary contributions or the acceptance of significant debt. Individualised deficit models of educational capacity lead to governmental denial of the role of feminist intervention within the politics of education. This capitalises on the opportunity to instill individualised values of success and failure which deflect young women away from viewing real material disadvantage, with working class girls given the opportunity to 'come forward' or appear 'to make herself available as a subject of social change who has the capacity and the determination to transcend the barriers of the older class system' (McRobbie, 2007, p728).

After failing in this there is little recompense or support within young women's

educational models by way of feminist pedagogic practices or feminist-driven educational policy to protect them. In accepting the opportunities available within the 'post-feminist,' 'post-equality of opportunity' era of individualisation, young women must denounce that there are still inherently sexist parameters within currently available forms of equality. In denouncing feminism in this way we add to the rhetoric of feminism as a sociological premise of the past and contribute to the argument that feminism is unnecessary to a contemporary social and political age. As McRobbie notes, '[w]ithin the language of Britain's New Labour government, the girl who has benefitted from the equal opportunities now available to her, can be mobilised as the embodiment of the values of the new meritocracy' (McRobbie, 2009, p57-58).

Hey asks what it would mean for solutions to emerge from teachers, youth workers and academics to 'construct a pedagogical dialogue capable of respecting the agency at play in girls' and young women's social relations, whilst simultaneously providing resources to think with and against their limits?' (Hey, 2009, p26).

My study was never intended as a model of action research, however I acknowledge that opportunities for dialogue with the participants did enable some reflection during their moment of choice-making in relation to their educational trajectory. Inciting a form of pedagogic dialogue, this supported the young women in politicising their understanding of the restrictions they faced.

Work

The reality of gender and social equality is precarious for the young women in my study. Stephenson (2012) highlights the damaging nature of the UK's austerity-driven budget cuts on the lives of women from the lowest socio-economic groups. The impact of austerity disproportionately affects working class women in UK society through funding cuts to education and training, housing and government welfare benefits, legal aid, the NHS and the work of the voluntary sector to support vulnerable women. As I write, we find ourselves at the end of a period of nine years of austerity-driven public sector spending cuts. The context of reductions in all areas of public sector spending heavily impacts upon the young women within these case studies' in their attempts to navigate trajectories as some of the most marginalised members of our society.

During this period of austerity-driven reductions in employment opportunities and increased employment insecurity Kelly and Kenway (2014) examine how young people structure their identities during key moments. They observe that young people now consider themselves to have multiple new horizons to consider when forming their subjectivities. Kelly and Kenway apply a notion of the de-traditionalisation and re-traditionalisation duality, theorising that female subjects adopt a historically non-traditional approach to work in that they expect to engage in paid work alongside shared domestic duties.

Kelly and Kenway indicate that feminism has inferred to the young women that they could expect their share of work in the core labour market, even though the choices made by young women predominantly took them to service, hospitality or secretarial work and to the core labour market with far less regularity. This engagement in the labour market held many traditionally masculine elements for the female employee in relation to the management of family and home lives. In order to take up employment women are required to outsource domestic duties including household cleaning and childcare, which would usually fall to other women predominantly from lower socio-economic brackets.

When referring to this situation, Kelly and Kenway indicate that what emerges is 'the creation of a new home service class, re-traditionalising class relations between women' (2014, p169-170). The reality of classed and gendered employment opportunities for working class women supports McRobbie's (2009) view that neo-liberal versions of feminine success do not acknowledge that equality for some women, in a post-feminist age, relies upon the inequality of those from lower socioeconomic groups.

Walkerdine (2003), like Kelly and Kenway (2000) and Bakker (1996), acknowledges that the western world has seen an increase in the number of working class women entering work predominantly within the service industries. This attests to new workforce opportunities for women theorised through concepts of gender erosion and gender intensification, or a de-traditionalising and re-traditionalising of gender roles.

Walkerdine (2003) examines ways in which we subjectively position women in relation to the workplace, and working-class women in particular. She offers the idea that we situate 'upward mobility through education and work as the feminine site of the

production of the neo-liberal subject' (Walkerdine, 2003, p238), and suggests that this is one way in which we come to understand re-classification and new forms of classed femininities. We position the female worker, who may not have achieved educationally-stimulated upward mobility, as the mainstay of the neo-liberal economy. The category of working women, or those categorised as working class women, and their perceived educational underachievement becomes a central requirement to the maintenance of the neo-liberal economic model.

The argument Walkerdine makes highlights the idea that while social mobility itself has not significantly improved for working-class women, an increase in service work opportunities and access to HE has enabled working class women to imagine a life which identifies far more with middle class ideals, aspirations and status. As she notes, 'new labour market demands can be understood as aiming to produce a subject in the image of the middle class' (Walkerdine, 2003, p238).

It follows then that success, for a working class woman, can only be achieved by those who engage in the practices of education or employment attached to securing middle class versions of femininity. However, the success of a neo-liberal ideologically-driven state relies upon young working class women to remain in gendered and classed positions rarely conducive to neo-liberal models of social mobility.

Demonisation of (white) working classes

In chapter 2 I identified the history of middle class conceptions of working class women as feckless, sexually promiscuous and morally reprehensible. Here I examine contemporary forms of vilification of working class feminine identity in order to depict the discourses of demonisation available to working class white young women today.

Skeggs (1997) talks about living daily with insecurities and doubts emerging from one's social positioning of working class-ness. She defines white working class women as 'symbolically positioned,' and 'inscribed and marked' by 'symbolic systems of denigration and degeneracy' (Skeggs, 2004, p2). Skeggs argues that the symbolic positioning of working class women prevents their ability to translate their cultural resources as 'these were read and valued as worthless by those who participated in and

institutionalized the dominant systems of exchange' (Skeggs, 2004, p2).

In her explanation Skeggs argues that class formation is established through value and conceived of as bodily inscribed. As she states;

> This value, which can be read on the body is produced through symbolic systems which set limits on who can be known and how. This is not a "turn to culture," or a shift to recognition politics, but a means of showing how bodies and peoples are inscribed with worth (both moral and economic), and how this process of inscription makes entitlements and fixes limits (Skeggs, 2004, p26).

Skeggs' (1997) analysis of dialogue with the working class women in her study led her to identify resilience and resistance to this form of denigrating of working class-ness, with participants depicted as having 'managed to generate their own systems of value, and attributed respectability and high moral standing to themselves' (Skeggs, 2004, p2).

In her study, Skeggs (1997) found discursive practices which enabled resistance to the dominant reductive discourses of feminine working class-ness. I concur with these findings, in that when the young women in my study indicate negative perceptions of class, they move to counter this negativity with a positive response to such classification. When they communicate the roles of their mothers, one can see the recognition of negative working class discourses of teenage motherhood on benefits, negative ascriptions which could be aligned to their mothers. They resist this form of negative working class feminine discourse, and cite their mothers as heroines who display maternal strength in overcoming struggles, and argue that these are attributes one should aspire to.

Walkerdine (2003) provides definitions of working class women's subjectivities in relation to their development of coping mechanisms to live with the criticisms and categorisations of definition. She argues that working class women find defensive positions, 'avoidances, practices designed to make the pain bearable, to make it go away, to pursue other possibilities of being, to develop practices of being, coping, hoping, longing, shame, guilt and so forth' (Walkerdine, 2003, p243).

Walkerdine takes this practice of coping with marginalised subjective positioning back

to the psychosocial, and proposes that women internalise (individualise) success or failure and that the only tools available 'to understand these is an individual psychological discourse' (Walkerdine, 2003, p243). This internalizing of failure and success is present in the respondents of this study, as will be set out in chapter 5.

Skeggs (2005) states that 'white working-class women are figured as the constitutive limit – in proximity – to national public morality' (Skeggs, 2005, p965). This 'showing and telling' (p965), specifically of white working class women in public, leads to them being attached to historicised and contemporary readings of working class women as lacking moral value. Skeggs depicts how white working class women's depictions evolved from 1980s political rhetoric, which viewed working class single mothers as a category of national concern and humiliation, to categorising this group as 'loud, white, excessive, drunk, fat, vulgar, disgusting, hen-partying women who exists to embody all the moral obsessions historically associated with the working class now contained in one body' (Skeggs, 2005, p968).

The empirical data that emerges from Skeggs' interviews explores public perceptions of the demonised category of the 'hen do' white working class woman. She conflates these findings with academics and policy makers' conceptions of white working class versions of feminine identity from the same period. In doing so, she defines the processes by which versions of working class femininity are used to re-define moral boundaries of right and wrong by central government, and identifies the connection between public perception and political rhetoric. New Labour later utilised old rhetoric of the deserving and undeserving poor, leading to '"underclass" discourse to produce the historical division of respectable and abject' (Skeggs, 2005, p972) within the public perception of the working class.

Skeggs applies the term 'massified' (Skeggs, 1997, p3) to signify working class women losing any individual consideration of circumstance. Political and media presentations of working class women become pathological, with 'cynical use of single mothers in the UK' used 'to represent a threat to social order' (Skeggs, 1997, p3). Skeggs cites media examples including a UK fashion magazine spread entitled 'Council Estate Slags,' and suggests that this shows that 'working class women are still represented through their "deviant" sexuality' (Skeggs, 1997, p3).

Tyler (2008) describes a similar system of classification to that of Skeggs, stating that the ways one navigates gender, race, sexuality and the corresponding representational struggles are 'played out within highly condensed figurative forms' (Tyler, 2008, p18). In this process, the notion of 'figure' is used to describe ways in which we have historically and culturally created different 'social types' that have become overly defined and represented, with working class women 'publicly imagined (figured) in excessive, distorted, and caricatured ways' (Tyler, 2008, p18).

In the case of Tyler's conception, the notion of 'chav' becomes a mechanism to assert superiority in the accumulated 'social capital and subject position' of the speaker. As Tyler states, '[i]n terms of classed identities, we can understand the emergence of the chav figure as an intrinsic part of a larger process of "class making"' (Tyler, 2008, p18).

Tyler (2008) theorises the use of the term 'chav mum' as a more contemporary description of this phenomenon. As Tyler notes:

> [t]he figure of the female chav and the vilification of young white working-class mothers…"chav mum" is produced through disgust reactions as an intensely affective figure that embodies historically familiar and contemporary anxieties about sexuality, reproduction and fertility and "racial mixing" (Tyler, 2008, p18).

'Chav,' as discussed by Jones (2011), promotes the misunderstanding that we have only a minority underclass of working class people remaining in the UK, and that we have now all assumed middle class positions within society. Chav has broadened in meaning since its inclusion in everyday vernacular, from a working class person to a working class person who is unemployed and on benefits, and who engages in consumerist culture. Jones argues that the term has become tragically unobjectionable, even within left-leaning middle class circles, as an acceptable way to demonise the poor.

Tyler (2008) applies 'figurative' analysis to identify ways in which social types and groupings become caricatured and 'figured' in public. The term chav becomes an intrinsic part of a larger process of class-making that provides middle and upper class people with the opportunity to distinguish themselves from the white poor. Chav, as a definition then, needs to be read as symbolic in the 'deepening economic inequality and

class polarisation in Britain' (Tyler, 2008, p18). Within Tyler's definitions, the term chav is perceived as a white racial slur; 'chavs are not invisible normative whites, but rather hypervisible "filthy whites"' (Tyler, 2008, p25).

There is often a correlation between the term chav and media references to working class women's sexual promiscuity and early reproduction. Unmarried and working class young mothers have long been figures of social derision and faced criticism, but the application of the term chav to this category of persons has supported the normalising application of humorous derision across popular media and culture. This is what Tyler refers to as newly emerging forms of 'sexist class disgust' (Tyler, 2008, p26), with the emergence of the term 'pramface' now a popular abusive term asserted in the urban dictionary as:

> ..."a woman who looks so young she ought to be pushing a pram around a council estate in the shittiest part of town." The chav mum or pramface, with her hoop earrings, sports clothes, pony tail ("Croydon facelift") and gaggle of mixed race children, is the quintessential sexually excessive, single mother: an immoral, filthy, ignorant, vulgar, tasteless, working-class (Tyler, 2008, p26).

The application of chav terminology emerges in conversation with the participants of this study, as highlighted in chapters 6 and 7. It is used by the young women as a mechanism to describe the negative views of others toward working class-ness, but is also used by the young women themselves to negatively depict their peers in a way, I will later argue, that discursively distances them from the degenerative versions of working class identity available.

Wilson and Huntington (2006) examine literature surrounding teenage motherhood in their study to identify examples of teenage mothers as marginalised and stigmatised across the United Kingdom, New Zealand and the United States. In their literature analysis they present the argument that policy discourses emerge within these countries focusing on welfare provision and social exclusion. Their findings indicate that teenage mothers in these instances were vilified, not because of the evidence of poor parental outcomes, but because teenage motherhood presents instances where young women do not comply with governmental objectives of economic growth through HE attendance and improved employment prospects.

The findings of Wilson and Huntington further reinforce my position, stated in chapter 6, that the young women in my study find themselves reinforcing negative discourses of teenage motherhood. They do this in order to assert distance between themselves and their peers who they feel have not followed neo-liberal requirements of fertility management. Thus, allowing the pursuit of FE and HE trajectories which would enable them to gain financial independence from the state.

Teenage motherhood is one way in which the respondents in my study offer discourses of negative working class-ness. Tyler suggests that very little has changed in the last 30 years for marginalised groups to be re-conceived within the UK media, which remains socially elite, with class allegiances reproducing social inclusion and exclusion and 'minimal opportunities for economically marginalised groups to communicate their experiences and identities within mainstream forums' (Tyler, 2008, p31-32).

Discourses of negative working class-ness further emerge in my study through the demonisation depicted through benefit shaming. This arises through the desire of respondents to be financially independent of the state. Atlanta, one of the participants of the study in chapter 6, defines success as knowing:

> I can support myself, working, I mean I'm fifteen and I've got a job. I never wanna be on the dole. I'm not slating people I mean my mum was on the dole, but succeeding is financially succeeding.

A further criticism often present when depicting white working classness and benefit shaming is the idea of intergenerational familial worklessness. Within contemporary research there is little evidence to substantiate the existence of intergenerational familial worklessness.

A study conducted by MacDonald, Shildrick and Furlong (2013) outlines how political rhetoric is responsible for cultivating the myth of generations of families who pass on a culture of worklessness to the young people in their families. Their findings indicate that only a small minority of families can be identified as having two generations of family members who had never worked and this could be explained through social factors. Families who had multiple generations within the same house included young

people who had recently left education, or one member of the family unable to work due to care commitments, illness or disability. Conversely, the findings also indicate that young people from families of long-term unemployed parents cite this as rationale for wanting a life of employment, with parents who had been long-term unemployed displaying a:

> …commitment that their children should not end up in the same situation as them. They were unanimous that a life of "welfare-dependent" worklessness was not acceptable, never mind preferable, for their children (MacDonald, Shildrick and Furlong, 2013, p212).

MacDonald, Shildrick and Furlong align the intergenerational workless poor to the headlines favoured in the media. Young working class people, those living in social housing and who have been raised on welfare support, find themselves within an era where their families are blamed for their own lack of opportunity. Conceptions of their friends and families emerge as those who have failed to participate in the project of self-improvement and self-management, with this seen as unacceptable.

When the young women in my study discuss their future aspirations, they often cite a desire for financial self-reliance and not relying on state welfare. They recognise a need not to be represented in the image of denigrated worklessness often used to describe their families and communities. Bauman (2005) indicates that it is through discourses of neo-liberalism and meritocracy, and a lack of work ethic in particular social groups, which provides us with the ability to dissociate ourselves from the struggle of those who are 'failing' to succeed in the neo-liberal state. He infers that moral empathy becomes absent when individuals fail within meritocracy, suggesting that this moves the neo-liberal state to a position where they are no longer responsible for caring for those in need. This move from need to obligation leads to a shift in the rhetoric surrounding the welfare state from one that highlights a need to seek out those who are deserving to one which justifies seeking out those who are the undeserving poor.

Definitions of working class identity create the potential for negative subjectivities among working class young women. However, we also see opportunities for young women to find room for discursive resistance. Hey (2009) indicates that when we focus on marginalised women or subordinated groups within empirical analysis, we may

discover that marginalised groups often 'bearing the brunt' of damaging 'disrespect discourses' (Hey, 2009, p19-20), may against all odds be the ones who have the ability to better protect their mental health. Hey indicates that young women share an awareness of the impossibility of their own position and this knowledge of the challenges they face leads them to a form of resistance to middle class notions of taste or middle class life trajectories.

Hey presents the argument that working class agency has, until recently, historically emerged from outside of the parameters of 'bourgeois ideals of progressive individualism' (Hey, 2009, p20). I propose that the young women in my study draw from historicised, gendered and classed versions of self which can subjugate them, but that this historicised subjectivity can also promote discursive resistance. In chapter 7 the respondents define working class communities as hard working and mutually supportive which, I argue, draw from positive historicised conceptions of working class notions of community.

The retention of class analysis in the conception of working class girls' subjectivity

I have previously introduced a number of ways in which working class girls' subjectivities are constructed though systems of classification, gender ascription and racial identity. Here I identify arguments made for the retention of forms of class analysis in sociological feminist analysis.

Savage, Bagnall and Longhurst (2001) suggest that class is still pivotal when people situate themselves in relation to governance and leadership in the UK. Marshal et al. (1988) and Devine (1992a, 1992b) also argue that people still conceive of themselves in classed terms. Feminist researchers such as Tyler (2008), Skeggs (1997) and Walkerdine (2017) offer valid arguments for the retention of class analysis in relation to the sociological conceptions of working class young women. Skeggs (1997) indicates that 'the historical generation of class categorizations provide discursive frameworks which enable, legitimate and map onto material inequalities' (Skeggs, 1997, p5). She suggests that historicised discursive class constructions were key proponents of class positioning which constructed not only the ways women were viewed and conceived of in the world, but also the ways in which the women understood themselves. It is the recognition of the women as they mediate what Skeggs considers to be 'classificatory

systems' (Skeggs, 1997, p4) which generates subjective construction. In Skeggs' (1997) study, women made substantial efforts to distance themselves from categorisations of themselves as working class:

> …their class positions (alongside the other social positions of gender, race and sexuality), was the omnipresent underpinning which formed and subscribed their ability to be…Class operated in a dialogic manner; in every judgement of themselves a measurement was made against others. In this process the designated "other" (based on representations and imaginings of the respectable and judgemental middle class) was constructed as the standard to/from which they measured themselves. This classifying of themselves depended on the classifying systems of others (Skeggs, 1997, p74).

Skeggs (2005) indicates that the disappearance of class as an analytical category did not emerge as social classification was in decline, but arose at a point that economic distance between the wealthy and poor in Britain was increasing. Skeggs argues that while class analysis has been removed, class as a definition within popular culture has been retained. Tyler (2008) reinforces Skeggs (2005) position suggesting that the disappearance of class as an analytic category occurred alongside the rise of political rhetoric of inclusion, classlessness and social mobility, whilst terms such as 'social exclusion' and 'underclass' rapidly replaced terms such as 'working class' (Tyler, 2008, p20). Tyler (2008) identifies a suppression of class inequality in Britain, and argues that this suppression has led to the denial of its existence.

Another variant of classed discursive construction emerges in chapter 6 where I examine the familial influences at play within the construction of the respondents' feminine working class subjectivity. This draws directly from Walkerdine's (2015) research examining the intergenerational transmission of class. Walkerdine's understanding of the lived history of class uses a psychoanalytical model focusing upon 'affective transmission through bodies, in locations and in history' (Walkerdine, 2015, p167). It suggests ways in which one can 'produce a complex account which does not pathologise the experience of the previous generation (usually the mother)' (Walkerdine, 2015, p167). This concept explores 'the ways in which embodied responses to historical events are transmitted to the bodies of descendants and to think about the ways in which this might relate to the embodied responses to classed

inequalities over generations' (Walkerdine, 2015, p168). Walkerdine indicates that working class women's subjectivities may be constructed discursively through the lived experience of the passing on of intergenerational familial trauma. Walkerdine considers her own experiences within this context:

> I begin to feel what might have transmitted itself to me down the maternal line. Of course, I cannot know whether what I feel is grounded in any accurate detail of what happened, but I can claim it as a kind of witnessing that can be transforming for the present generation (Walkerdine, 2015, p180).

In chapter 6 the young women communicate the ways in which the vilification of their mothers intersects with their own identity formation. They communicate maternal narratives that become discourses of struggle which greatly affect their versions of self and their conception of their lived realities.

This thesis draws upon the theoretical tools of class analysis cited here in order to contextualise the multiple ways in which class is still imbued and lived by the young women in this study. Class has not disappeared from the lived experience of women, but the focus of feminism on infrastructural and legal inequalities (McRobbie, 1982) may have allowed room for feminist discourses within the academy which have not adequately theorised the realities of many women's lived classed experience. Without class position being articulated within current feminist forms of theoretical analysis, we devise no language of agency which might filter into the discourses of working class young women's lives. The de-politicising of feminism's role in educational studies mentioned earlier leads to nominal opportunities for discursive intervention or disruption.

This study identifies discourses which, I argue, are classed in their origin. Classed discourses present as both negative and positive components of subjective construction. An example of this is the young women's use of 'chav' terminology to define a safe distance between themselves and their vilified peers. Other examples emerge in chapter 6, where I show that respondents feel the need to generate positive discursive routes to depict their families as 'good' people, and in chapter 7 where they recognise negative external perceptions of their communities but resist this in order to engage in 'respectability' discourses which reposition individuals within their community.

Post-structural feminism and subjectivity

Feminist theorists working in education have increasingly adopted post-structuralism to theorise the material and discursive structures which inform their work. Here I examine how post-structural feminism rationalises the contested notion of self within subjectivity. I forego a detailed history of feminism's chronology within this thesis, as relevant components of feminist development to this research model are communicated throughout as necessary.

This study is situated within feminist post-structural debates, acknowledging that post-structural critique and post-structural concepts of 'power, resistance and freedom' (Adams St Pierre, 2000, p488) enable a subtlety within modes of educational research analysis. This allows for the nuanced impacts of 'desires, relationships, strategies and structures' (Adams St Pierre, 2000, p493), nuances of feminist analysis I believe are essential for the consideration of the multiplicities of material and social structures the young women in this study navigate.

Feminists have contested post-structuralism's validity as being wedded to the need for historic or humanist versions of the subject to exist in order to develop and move forward with the emancipatory politics which feminism embodies. Sawicki (1994, p288) refers to the question of identity as being a 'point of profound tension within feminism,' describing gender-based identity politics as having 'an ambivalent relationship to the Enlightenment, humanism, traditional forms of authority and even to feminism itself' (Sawiki, 1994, p288). Post-structuralist feminism redefined the essential practices which locked individuals into particular subject positions or categorizations defined by gender (Kristeva, Jardine and Blake, 1981), which can be seen as feminism's final move away from the liberal humanist subject.

Foucauldian demarcated post-structuralism has been much-debated in feminist literature, with concerns over whether Foucauldian concepts of subjectivity and power leave space for identity politics or the capacity to conceive of the subject as an agent. That Foucauldian forms of post-structuralism contest feminism's need for agency, activism or political organisation. Sawicki questions Foucauldian post-structuralism, asking 'can we define a workable politics without any form of foundational

epistemology, feminist or otherwise?' (Sawicki, 1994, p289).

A post-structural reading of feminism is alarming as it deconstructs historic notions of institutions of collective oppression, and replaces them with localised models of discursively constructed subjectivity. Feminist post-structural notions of self then are not formed through oppressive forms of power and structure but through layers of inter-relationships, defined by discourses which craft and modify the self. Post-structural Foucauldian readings of 'technologies of the self' potentially create victims complicit in their own oppression, with 'technologies of power' creating modes of discursive oppression seen to discourage emancipation.

Foucault appeals to some feminists as he articulates clear interventions into historical understandings of struggle. In Foucault's critique of oppression and marginalisation, feminism can find a kinship of political and social philosophy. Although Foucault has been criticised for a somewhat androcentric world-view, feminists have incorporated Foucault's work from as early as the 1970s. This has provided feminist social and political theorists with new ways to conceive of the world, allowing for alternative constructions and resistance to dominant hegemonies.

Foucault and other formations of post-structural discourse analysis provide a conceptual opportunity to challenge power relations between men and women across racial and social groups. Post-structural discourse analysis recognises that power struggles transcend male/female gender boundaries, destabilising gender though the notion of discursively-driven subjectivity formation. Discourse analysis enables feminist theories to address the differences between categories of 'women' when deconstructing issues faced across social and racial divides. This allows me, within this thesis, to identify aspects of discursive construction oscillating between the different and multiple power relations encountered by my study's respondents.

A key concern with this thesis' application of feminist post-structuralism, highlighted at the end of the Foucault and Butler section earlier, is that, as a theoretical framework, post-structuralism prevents any capacity for agency. Francis (1999) responds to concerns for agency of the subject, when the subject itself is conceived of as de-centred or constructed through multiple discourses. She suggests that, by positively arguing for multiplicity within analysis, one does not automatically render the subject as without

agency:

> The self is passively positioned in certain discourses, but is at the same time active in positioning in other discourses. According to Foucault (1980), wherever there is discourse there is resistance: for instance, if a self is positioned as powerless by one discourse, it is possible that s/he may position her/himself as powerful via an alternative discourse. Moreover, discourses are not fixed, but change over time as the social institutions that produce them change (Francis, 1999, p383).

Francis suggests that agency can emerge through being passively and activity positioned within subjectively constructive discourse. In the analysis chapters later in this thesis, these notions of passivity and activity are explored through identification of resistive discourses. With resistive discourses considered in relation to the questions regarding ones capacity for agency within subjective construction and ones capacity to resist dominant hegemony outlined earlier in this chapter. The application of post-structural feminist discourse analysis to this thesis is examined further in the methodology chapter (chapter 4).

Davies (1993), Francis (1997) and Rajiva (2009) apply methods of analysis that arise from feminist post-structural conceptions, espousing the validity of agency within subjective discursive construction. Rajiva indicates that:

> …the constitutive force of discourse does not imply that subjects have no agency; discursive practices refer to peoples' "positioning" within specific discourses and how they, in turn, negotiate social realities, a dynamic that Davies and Gannon (2006) describe as becoming a subject through processes of submission and mastery (Rajiva, 2009, p79).

While the concepts on offer highlight concerns over limiting parameters, we can also see articulations which display reflexivity and, within that, potential forms of discursive agency. Lucey, Melody and Walkerdine (2003) indicate that 'sociological work which attempts to theorise connections between the individual and society (between agency and structure) is limited by an unwillingness to work with the notion of unconscious processes' (Lucey, Melody and Walkerdine, 2003, p289). Here, these authors argue for

traditional sociology to recognise its current tendency to place the psychic and the social as oppositional, offering solutions through a psychoanalytically-informed mode of post-structuralism.

Other authors have been unable to find a positive reading of agency within post-structuralism. Jones (1997) suggests that educational undergraduate students ignore the anti-humanist traditions of post-structuralism in favour of a version of discourse which enables the contradictory approach of both being constructed while simultaneously constructing oneself. Archer (2000) critiques the reality of agency and argues that the adoption of deconstructive discursive sociological understandings of human subjects placed humanity at risk within the 'Academy.' Archer proposes a revised understanding of humanity as necessary to reflect the lived human experience outside of academia. She argues that, in reality, those living in the world do so with a sense of self as central to the way they make choices about what they should do or who they are. Archer contends that if we remove this agency from the individual through our constructions of the world as relational, we risk removing the individual's capacity to apply that agency.

Some feminist readings of agency are situated within a theoretical middle ground. Skeggs (1997) suggests that subjectivity's distinction of self is positional, with the self simultaneously positioned through discursive practice and constraining structural practices. Adams St Pierre (2000) argues that available post-structural critiques can be seen as destabilising the feminist project, but that this destabilising is necessary, as those who find it hard working within post-structuralism are often those who ignore how uncomfortable humanism's single truth, power and absolute knowledge claims have been for many of the marginalised, especially women.

This thesis is positioned among these contestations, drawing upon the theoretical depictions of agency presented by Butler earlier in this chapter. Davies can be considered one of the foremost researchers to have embraced and applied Butler's philosophical notions of subjectivity and performativity to her empirical educationally-focused work (Davies and Banks, 1992; Davies, 1993, 2006). Davies' readings of Butler demonstrate my adoption of agency while considering the potential of limited discourse parameters. For Davies, Butler's 'subject does not have an existence that lies outside of or prior to these acts of formation. It does not construct its own conditions of possibility separate from its performance of itself within those conditions' (Davies,

2006, p426). However, Davies suggests that Butler's subjects do have agency, but she concedes that this is a form of 'radically conditioned agency' (Davies, 2006, p426).

Foucault, Butler and feminists applying post-structural theory to the constructions of self argue that subjectivity emerges from existing discourses, imbued or contested to establish new variants of self. In line with this it becomes reasonable to conceive of the research subjects within my study as discursively constructed that is, established through conflicting and overlaid discourses which constitute a version of their current or future selves. In the following analysis chapters I identify constructive discourses, and articulate moments when respondents adopt and resist dominant discourses. I suggest that performativity of subjectifying discourses takes place within a limited array of identifications, with any agency conceived of in line with Davies notion of agency as 'radically conditioned' (2006, p426). In addition to this I consider that moments of the research process itself can be conceived of as performative, with the young women using moments of research dialogue to generate future versions of self which subscribe to, or resist, available versions of identity.

Feminist individualisation and feminist revisions of the neo-liberal subject

Feminism can be seen as one area of sociological revision where components of both the pro-individualisation analysis and pro-class, race and gender analysis have intertwined in theoretical and analytical applications. A central argument made by feminists in relation to neo-liberally positioned individualised theorising is that individualisation discounts the realities and lived experiences of socioeconomic position, such as gender and race, in the formulation of one's subjectivity. Davies et al (2006) describe the application of neo-liberalism within feminism as usually taking the form of an anti-critique of government. Here, I provide examples of feminist arguments that highlight the inadequacies of neo-liberalism's individualisation theory, along with its conceptual benefits, and refer to examples which act as pivotal points when situating my findings.

Ringrose (2007) applies individualisation as a mechanism to understand the way in which a '[d]e-classed and de-raced "women" who is to secure individual rights and choose to become "somebody"' who 'reconciles completely with a neoliberal programme of individualization' leading to 'autonomous self-hood and self-

responsibilization for either success or failure'(Ringrose, 2007, p480-481). Here, young women take responsibility for their own success in a marketised world of increased levels of risk and choice. This notion of de-classed and de-raced women is referred to in chapter 5 where the respondents diverge from Ringrose's idea, and recognise some of the social and racial restrictions they and their peers face within choice-making, but with little recognition of any gender differentiation. Where my study does converge with Ringrose's findings is through the overall position of self-responsibility emerging within respondents' views when they are asked who is responsible for their future success.

Walkerdine (2003) suggests we establish ideal feminine identities in the image of middle-classness. She makes the suggestion that an 'embourgeoisement of the population' (Walkerdine, 2003, p240) generates the false premise that the end of the working classes has taken place, with this premise galvanised within 'what has been termed neo-liberalism' (Walkerdine, 2003, p239). Walkerdine argues that forms of 'self-management' can then be seen to emerge as 'technologies of regulation' for 'citizens' (p240).

Walkerdine (2003) indicates that psychological practices are a necessary tool of the 'self-invented subjects' (p241) ability to stay afloat. The neo-liberal subject requires psychology in order to tackle the newly emerged uncertainties in relation to the financial instability existing within a neo-liberal state. She indicates a need for the individual to understand and navigate new uncertainties, with success emerging from one's psychological capacity to navigate those uncertainties. Walkerdine (2003) applies a Foucauldian understanding of subjectification here, seen to produce a subject who sees themselves as persistently failing but who is also required to understand their failure, only in individualised terms, as their own psychological failure. This individualising practice of internalising failure is discussed further in chapter 5.

McRobbie (2009) synthesises debates surrounding notions of post-feminism, theorising the process by which feminism has been rendered redundant. Her text enables one to de-mystify ways in which anti-feminism and feminism intersect in media, political and sociological debate. McRobbie examines feminism denouncement, with women portrayed as having made all the necessary gains to achieve equality. McRobbie (2009) establishes versions of neo-liberal feminine identity which allow us to look globally at

how feminism has been disaggregated in order to shore up a neo-liberal ideology. This thesis proposes that the white working class young women of this study are situated through media, socio-political and policy narratives in 'post-feminism' and 'post-equality of opportunity' terrains. The discourses I identify as emerging within these terrains create a pseudo-meritocratic set of choices for this study's respondents, with the classed, gendered and racially-driven discourses I identify within the analysis often countering the notion of equality on offer.

McRobbie (2009) suggests that Giddens and Beck's versions of individualisation display how neo-liberalism and the individualisation thesis promote the notion that we live in a post-feminist era. She makes the assertion that the individualisation premise does not recognise power struggles which have been fought by women to date, nor the on-going issues faced by women still striving for equality. McRobbie subscribes to the notion that Giddens and Beck's individualisation premise depict young people as having moved away from the previously held narrow social parameters which once formed their identity, and argues that within reflexive modernity 'emancipation politics has given way instead to life politics (or in Beck's terms, the sub-politics of single interest groups)' (McRobbie, 2009, p19).

This creates the false image that western women have every available choice, leading to the rhetoric that poor choice rests on one's own shoulders. As McRobbie (2009) states:

> …disavowal permits the subtle renewal of gender injustices, while vengeful patriarchal norms are also re-instated…On this basis post-feminism can be equated with a "double movement," gender retrenchment is secured, paradoxically, through the wide dissemination of discourses of female freedom…Young women are able to come forward on the condition that feminism fades away (McRobbie, 2009, p55-56).

Hey (2009) contests the application of '"zombie" feminism' (p12) present in McRobbie's work, suggesting that a category of 'post-feminist' generates a rhetoric which reduces our capacity to situate feminism politically. My argument for characterising a 'post-feminist' terrain resonates more with McRobbie's notion of 'post-feminism.' I suggest that, as a descriptor, this allows us to theorise the re-entrenchment of gender inequality. I asked the respondents in my study 'What does feminism mean to

you?' and 'How would you describe feminism?' The young women, as discussed in chapter 5, find little necessity in a need for improved gender equality, believing equality to already have been achieved.

Baker (2010) provides an explanation aligned to Beck-Gernsheim, suggesting that theories of individualisation are not immediately liberating as individualisation does not mean a move beyond gender categorisation. Scharff (2011), in line with my own findings described in chapter 5, identifies that young people display a 'dis-identification with feminism' (Scharff, 2011, p126). Scharff argues that young women's neo-liberal notion of choice contradicts their inherent perceptions of feminism identified as something from a bygone era. The young women in Scharff's study, as with those in my own, perceive an already level playing field with little need for any form of feminism.

McLeod (2002) suggests that Giddens (1991) individualisation thesis and reflexivity arguments do not help us to understand the ways in which de-traditionalisation is forming new versions of gender identity. McLeod suggests that de-traditionalising runs concurrently to re-traditionalising in terms of gender roles. This notion aligns with the work of Kelly and Kenway (2014), cited earlier, and further highlights McRobbie's argument that equality achieved for some women relies upon the in-equality of others from lower socioeconomic groups.

In chapter 5 of this thesis we see the emergence of gendered and classed career choices for the respondents within this study that reinforce this notion of a re-traditionalising of gender roles. In some instances the young women demonstrate discourses of career goals that are drawn from the immediacy of their educational and familial locale and as a result those goals are narrowed through classed and gendered ascriptions.

Reay (2003) applies Beck's individualisation premise as a 'backdrop' in order to demonstrate the negative implications of individualisation for working class women transitioning to HE from FE. She highlights distance between the realities of the lives of those in her study against the notion of 'projects of the self' (Reay, 2003, p301) to emerge from individualisation. I suggest that the research participants within my study communicate individualised narratives and personal biographies established through self-reliance and personal choice, however, these 'projects of self' are limited by the 'localities' of the research respondents.

Thompson and Holland (2002) suggest that Beck's individualisation thesis recognises elements of women's lives which may still not be played out as equal to men:

> In his view "we are situated at the very beginning of a liberation from the feudally ascribed roles for the sexes." (Beck, 1992, p. 104). Although he describes men and women as being freed from "gender fates" in practice consciousness of change outstrips material changes between men and women. …that the arenas of work and the division of labour in the home may be the sites of continuing inequalities. What is new is an "equalisation of prerequisites" in education and law, and raised expectations among women (Thompson and Holland, 2002, p337-338).

This results in the creation of a distinction between the imagined possibilities of women and their lived realities. For example, the young women in my study already consider their future maternal responsibilities. In chapter 6 they refer to future maternal responsibilities when considering career opportunities, including how they will need to navigate motherhood in relation to their working lives. There is a recognition of 'continuing in-equalities' which sit at odds with the discourses of 'post-feminist and 'post-equality of opportunity' to also emerge in their dialogue. Thompson and Holland (2002) acknowledge that gendered roles into adulthood are under new pressures, examining ways in which newly emerging pressures on young men and women combine with the 'disjunctions between the rhetoric and realities of gender equality' (p339), to inform young people's projected adult identities. My analysis, later in this thesis, contributes to the unpicking of these disjunctions of reality and rhetoric.

Francis and Skelton (2008) highlight that Beck's explanation of individualisation as a state and not a choice within self-reflexivity provides new possibilities when considering ways in which feminists constitute agency within the neo-liberal individualisation thesis. They describe the usefulness of considering Beck's (1992) conception of individualisation as a helpful tool for pro-feminist educationalists to support their understanding of the techniques young people apply to make sense of their lives. I see the benefit of the application of the individualisation premise to understand ways in which one becomes increasingly positioned as self-responsible in a neo-liberal age. I agree with McLeod's (2002) suggestion that we need to do more to reinstate

analysis considering the situated nature of subjectivity, and reconsider the roles of schooling, class and location. I conclude that there is a necessity for a symbiosis between the theoretical tools drawn from post-structuralism and the individualisation premise.

Conclusion

Neo-liberal ideology is theorised here as the foundation by which policy, media, and social politics are formed as the current dominant hegemony. Individualisation is now consistently applied within post-structural feminism as a pivotal tool for explaining how 'post-feminist' and 'post-equality' debates are absorbed into working class subjectivity. It is used to provide explanations of how one takes on responsibility for success and failure through self-management, which enables the state to relinquish the need to provide a social and economic infrastructure which enables success. Throughout this thesis' analysis chapters, the premise of individualisation will be used to depict the process by which neo-liberally driven media, policy and social rhetoric become 'self-technologies,' securing neo-liberal agendas through governmental forms of self-management.

I have introduced the philosophical foundation of feminist post-structuralism as emergent from the work of Foucault and Butler who have provided theoretical tools applied within my analysis. Generative discourses allow an understanding of my study's cohort as generated through a multiplicity of layers of ascription and refusal of the dominant hegemonic discourses available.

Research examining the working classes more broadly, including that which addresses working class children and women's experiences, specifically depicts the lives they lead and the choices they make as remaining defined by categorisations of race, class and gender. These classifications remain dominant; however respondents in my study display subjectivities which are complex and constructed through a multiplicity of localised aspects of their educational, social and familial contexts. Working class demonisation and vilification have featured throughout history. These depictions endure with new denigrated versions of white working class feminine identity emerging politically and within the media, taking place amid neo-liberalism's move to justify providing only for the few, not the many, in society as a whole. In this way, young

women are inducted into a belief that they exist in a world of equality. However, as the research later in this thesis depicts, when one examines the discourses which construct them, equality is not always felt or believed.

The evidence presented in the methodology chapter highlights the very real material and social inequalities in working class young women's lives, including the ongoing issue of white working class girls' poor educational attainment. Discursive analysis then illuminates how the young women navigate inequalities to establish lives involving aspiration, and self-respect, as well as respect for their often-demonised schools, communities and families.

Applying individualisation and feminist post-structural forms of discursive construction enables a sociological view of the world which depicts subjugating practices alongside those supporting the individual to take on self-management of subjugation. Feminist post-structural forms of discursive agency are considered here to be micro sociological theories which allow us to conceptualise the forms of resistance and transformation the young women are engaged in.

I propose that neo-liberal macro notions of subjectification and micro post-structural versions of subjectivation need not be set up as binary opposites within analysis. Rather, they are both required in order to understand the evolved complexities of the ways in which subjectivity emerges.

This literature review identifies a need for further examination of white working class young women's subjectivity formation in relation to the current socio-political and policy climate. I believe this thesis adds significantly to the limited body of research currently available. There is a need to address the role that a neo-liberalised climate plays in how white working class young women are subjectively constructed, including how that construction informs the choices they make and their lived realities.

Chapter 4

Methodology

Introduction

In this chapter I introduce the initial set of research questions which informed the development of my research design, outlining the methods of data capture and analysis applied to this research model. I provide a narrative of the research journey, and the adaptations applied to the research design as a consequence of the experience of the realities of undertaking the research within the field.

This study primarily comprises a set of qualitative case studies of white working class girls, aged 14-15 years old, from the lowest socio-economic groups situated across two school sites in London and the Midlands. The research was undertaken between 2014 and 2015 and culminated with interviews with 13 case study respondents.

My research project applies quantitative methods of analysis in order to situate the research partner schools/participants demographically and place the case study respondents in broader historic, national and educational performance contexts. Demographic arguments presented here align to the theoretical sociological justifications for the distinction and application of 'working class' and 'white working class' terminology, as described in earlier chapters.

Data was collected in three phases. The first phase consisted of a whole school year group quantitative questionnaire intended to identify females within the year in the lowest categories of socio-economic position. The second phase involved semi-structured focus group discussions with young women from the lowest socio-economic groups at both partner schools. The final phase consisted of the selection of the case study respondents from the focus group attendees, with 13 self-defining white British young women invited to participate in 1:1 semi structured interviews.

In chapter 3, I provided a chronology of the emergence of working class girls' subjectivities and situated the design of this research within a post-structural feminist paradigm that framed the application of methods of data capture and analysis. In line

with a feminist post-structural position, this research recognises my subjectivity as the researcher within discourse analysis. My autobiographical introduction in chapter 1 intends to support the reader in navigating any subjective biases I may hold. My relationship to the participants was a vital component of the study's direction and the research model was designed to establish a relationship of mutuality with participants. I have been mindful of my position of power as the researcher within any research dialogue. I intend to describe ways in which that power imbalance was navigated and considered throughout data capture and analysis.

Sociology works with a plethora of methodological and theoretical explanations within class analysis, with the concepts of social stratification and social class regularly interchanged regardless of their variance. Social theory has developed through wider debates in sociology, with positivist versus humanist arguments providing two contrasting and conflicting models of sociological research e.g. 'positivist/quantitative versus interpretive/qualitative' (Crompton, 2008, p1219). This body of research, including its assertions about class identification and analysis, sits within this tradition of contention, and draws from quantitative and qualitative justifications for social class analysis and social stratification.

Research methods and process

A review of the existing literature, as set out in chapter 3, identified a need to design a model of research which worked with girls from low socio-economic status families. Limited current research is available that focuses upon the educational experiences and choice-making of young women from the lowest socio-economic groups aged between 14 and 15 years in the UK, between 2014 and 2015. The young women that participated in my study were planning their educational and career trajectories during a time of heightened political, media and social rhetoric which had intensified the demonisation of the working classes. The data capture also took place as the then Conservative-Liberal Democrat coalition government's 'austerity' driven budget cuts to educational and social services were being delivered. This research was designed, in part, to understand the impact of this agenda and its rhetoric upon participants.

I began the research process with a particular desire to address the participants' thoughts on Further Education (FE) and Higher Education (HE). However, as the research

progressed, much of the dialogue was driven by their thoughts on their position within social and familial structures.

My initial intention was to identify the potential impact of any neo-liberal ideology driven educational and social policies in their shaping of working class girls' experiences and understandings. This was achieved through examining the influences, commonalities and differences to emerge when talking to a group of young women from the same socio-economic group. The focus on white working class girls emerged part-way through the data capture, as will be explained later in the chapter. My initial research intentions, which foregrounded the research model, aimed to:

- Identify commonalities of decisions around entering FE and HE
- Position the individual's decisions against broader familial, educational and societal factors
- Identify key figures/spheres of influence and moments in individual students' lives that were instrumental in their commitment to education
- Ascertain defining characteristics of when and how the individual case study participants construct their identities as attendees and non-attendees of FE and HE
- Make connections between the policy and surrounding discourses that promote and support individualisation (being self-responsible), and identify examples of how policy is interpreted and reinvented in their environments
- Identify trends of career choice within those working class girls who do enter HE
- Identify vocational and work trends for those who do not enter HE

My research questions were intended to develop an understanding of discursive positions which emerge at key moments in life when individuals are in the process of planning their future trajectories. Data collection had three categories including: whole Year 10 individual questionnaires; focus groups and 1-1 case study interviews. I will depict the selection of participants and their defining characteristics throughout the chapter.

Research methodology: a model of feminist research

In chapter 1, I explained my interest in this area of study, including similarities of my own socio-economic, familial and educational experiences with those emerging from the narratives of this study's research respondents. I do not consider these parallels to have been inhibitory to the process; however they have shaped the research model design, methods of data capture and are central to this study's feminist position.

Oakley (1981) is much cited for her role in the transformation of qualitative methods of sociological research from a 'masculine paradigm' (p31) to a central tenet of feminism's rethinking in sociology. She proposes that 'the researcher and researched as objective instruments of data production' are inadequate, and suggests 'that personal involvement is more than a dangerous bias - it is the condition by which people come to know each other and to admit others in to their lives' (Oakley, 1981, p58).

In her revision of the conception of feminist research methodology she had endorsed in 1981, Oakley (2015) highlights her concerns that the 'political and social relationship between researcher and researched cannot easily (or helpfully) be fitted in to a paradigm "feminist" research' (Oakley, 2015, p209). She proffers concepts of 'friendship' and a 'gift relationship' (Oakley, 2015, p209) as alternative views. I apply this notion of a gift relationship between researcher and researched in my study as an explanation of the generosity of the research participants.

In recognition of the relationship formed between researcher and those researched in this study, reflexivity in the research methodology and methods is essential. I recognise my own early biography as parallel to the lives of participants and as a result I have needed to address the role I played in any emerging constructive discourse.

Bucholtz (2001) critiques reflexivity within discourse analysis, indicating that the choices made by the researcher at each stage of the research process should be conceived of as visible elements of the discourse under investigation. As Bucholtz argues, 'politically effectual discourse analysis must turn inward as well as outward, for critique does not ensure reflexivity and reflexivity does not necessitate critique' (Bucholtz, 2001, p181). Throughout the data capture and analysis I consistently considered the power imbalance within the research process. I was aware of the

influence that the research process could have on the individual's perceptions of their choice-making and trajectory. Within each stage of the data capture and analysis I considered how my subjectivity could be crafting the discourses to emerge.

My thesis concurs with Oakley and the shift in feminist methodological positioning which followed, however I remain aware of the counter-arguments made by others. Duncombe and Jessop (2012) highlight their concern that rapport has become a form of 'faking friendship,' and in 'doing rapport' (p109) the interviewer is ultimately positioned to extract data from the interviewee, even if that is done with emancipatory intentions. While I recognise the power differential between myself and the participants, I attempted to disrupt that throughout the research process. I engaged honestly with the participants in relation to the similarities and differences between our positions. Rather than a 'faking' of friendship I felt we engaged in honest and reciprocal dialogue, as can be seen in a conversation with Kealy in chapter 6 (p206-207). I ensured that the young women were aware of the research intention to improve opportunities for women from backgrounds similar to the ones that we shared.

My early life experiences were similar to some of the experiences presented within the focus groups and case study interviews. One can ascertain, from the contextual chapters of this thesis, the ongoing similarities with white working class girls' experiences across generations in the UK. Therefore, I believe some similarity of experience between researcher and participant was to be expected.

My initial research questions emerged from a set of suppositions which arose from my own experiences. However, there were instances within the research interviews where unexpected divergences within the participants' answers took the research into thematic areas I had not previously considered. Those divergences provided moments when the expected similarities between my own and the research participants' experiences enabled me to conceptually reconsider some of my previously held biases.

Qualitative methods of data capture provided the best opportunity for the research relationship to explore the beliefs and feelings of the research participants in order to obtain 'a rich understanding of how an issue unfolded,' and to enable me to conceive of 'how a decision came to be taken' (Newby, 2010, p343).

Reid, Tom and Frisby (2006) explicitly devised a model of data capture to address the empowerment of research participants through a longitudinal study of working class women in the USA. Their study was a model of feminist action research and not one applying the techniques of feminist critical discourse analysis, as this study does. However, they deemed their study to be an opportunity for the participants, women on low income, to 'share ideas, to learn that they were not alone and to develop an analysis of the "politics of poverty"' (Reid, Tom and Frisby, 2006, p327). This study resonates with the objectives of Reid et al as it was my intention to provide an opportunity, throughout the data capture, for the respondents to conceive of their futures and begin to actualise the mapping of those futures. I also intended to support the participants to politicise their language when considering the implications of the restrictions they may face.

Feminist critical discourse analysis: methods and application

Qualitative methods of feminist critical discourse analysis, as applied here, emerge from the notion that 'many researchers adopting critical discourse analysis as an approach do so from a radical perspective and see their research as a challenge to the status quo that reinforces discrimination and embeds inequality' (Newby, 2010, p505).

Feminist critical discourse analysis is situated among three platforms which have come to define critical discourse analysis: discourse studies, feminist post-structuralism and critical linguistics (Rogers et al., 2005). The literature review chapter introduced the theoretical premise of post-structuralism and demonstrated ways in which feminist scholars have applied or contested these theories within models of analysis. Researchers' application of methods of critical discourse analysis demarcate in their analytical position from non-critical analysis by stating that their methods do not attempt to depict the 'role of language in the social world' (Rogers et al., 2005, p369). Rather, their analysis of language is to understand 'why and how language does what it does' (Rogers et al., 2005, p369) to reveal and transform conditions of inequality.

Fairclough (2013) indicates that, within critical discourse analysis, one needs to conceive of 'concrete social events and abstract social structures as part of social reality,' that the 'relationship between social structures and social events is mediated by social practices' (p74). Fairclough defines critical discourse analysis as follows:

- It is not just analysis of discourse (or more concretely texts), it is part of some form of trans-disciplinary analysis or relations between discourse and other elements of social process
- It is not just general commentary of discourse, it includes some form of systematic analysis of texts
- It is not just descriptive but it is also normative. It addresses social wrongs in their discursive aspects and possible ways of righting or mitigating them (Fairclough, 2013, p10-11).

This thesis adheres to Fairclough's definition of critical discourse analysis through its establishment of a relationship between the thematic findings to emerge from the textual transcripts and their relation to the historic, policy and statistical positioning of the research respondents. This thesis recognises the potential to develop discursive language of agency with its participants, language which could mitigate repressive social practices and structures that define the respondents' contexts.

The systematic analysis of narrative texts was undertaken through thematic coding of the focus group and 1:1 interviews transcripts. The transcription process involved re-reading the texts, initially from the position of the answers posed, until a set of thematic categories emerged. The coding of key words and phrases into clusters of related responses led to the emergence of themes which depicted sets of values, shared pre-conceptions and beliefs. This began to discursively deconstruct the young women's subjectivities through an identification of the 'practices that systematically form the object of which they speak' (Foucault, 1972, p49). The thematic dimensions emerging from the transcripts became discourses which performatively (Butler, 2007) ascribed subjective positions.

The thematic categories led to the three analytical chapters which follow. Themes were clustered for the purpose of presentation into contexts referring to school, family and community in their broadest terms. Each of these contexts allowed for the identification of discourses which demonstrated the splintered formation of one's subjectivity, oscillating around the core dimensions of gender, class and racial ascription.

Within the analysis chapters (chapters 5, 6 and 7) there are discursive formations which inevitably flow between categories, as life is not lived within categorisation and the construction of self moves fluidly between discourses of social events, social processes and social structures.

There have been many ways in which sociology has attempted to depict the passage of young people into adulthood to communicate the complexities of subjectivity formation in relation to institution, inter-relationships and social/material habitats. This research follows that of Hodkinson, Sparkes and Hodkinson (1996) cited by Ball, Maguire and Macrae (2000) who conceive of this landscape as 'Horizons for action,' and Archer, DeWitt and Wong (2014) with their application of the concept of 'spheres of influence.'

Thompson et al (2002) depict the journey of young people through mapping the 'critical moments' in their lives in order to identify how such moments may inform social inclusion or exclusion, and collate and present biographies through a life story approach. Furlong and Cartmel (1997) indicate that the passage to adulthood for young people is directed, in part, by their geographical and social location. This research seeks to identify the rationale for the transitions the young women articulate within the research process, drawing from the idea of locality in relation to school, family and community contexts. I apply the term 'planned future trajectories' to the depictions the participants give to their imagined futures. This study defines those locations within a 'social imaginary' (Rizvi and Lingard, 2009) of 'post-equality' and 'post-feminist' terrains created by what, I argue, are neo-liberally constructed contexts. Here, I identify how processes of governmentality (Foucault, 2007b) can be seen to effect subjective construction.

Feminist post-structural position

This thesis aligns with post-structural feminism. Davies et al (2006) conceive of the new post-structural feminist subject as 'fluid, fragmented, with more open boundaries' (Davies et al., 2006, p87), and argue that subjects co-exist with the texts that constitute them. Davies (1997) makes the argument that post-structuralism does not move to 'destroy the humanist subject' or create a binary 'anti-humanist subject' (Davies, 1997, p272). She suggests that one of the strengths of post-structuralism, emerging from Foucauldian discourse, is that we are now able to see ways in which being human has

shifted throughout history, to understand the multiplicity of being a human today. In doing so, we are able to find agency in discourse. Davies (1997) finds middle ground within post-structuralism and humanism, and defines discourse as providing the possibility of agency through 'inscription' of elements of a humanist self in Foucauldian discourse. In this formulation if you are constructed as powerful in available discourse then you are indeed able to act powerfully within it. When one can see the 'constitutive power' (Davies, 1997, p272) of language available within post-structuralist theory as enabling 'reflexive awareness' (Davies 1997, p272), reflexive awareness then allows for agency within discursive formation.

The post-structuralist feminist methodology applied here enables this model of research analysis to argue that the respondents are conceiving of their future selves in the moment of their contribution. Taguchi states that: '[t]rying to think that experience is actually made and taking place in the very telling of the experience, challenges us to think about experience differently' (Taguchi, 2005, p250). Here, I argue that construction of the respondents' subjectivities is, in part, formulated within the moment of their communication of experience and their conceptions of future self.

Francis (1999) asserts discourse as constituting a 'self' but believes we still feel ourselves to have agency, moral obligation and preference for different kinds of discourse. She argues that choosing narratives to describe our lives is central to the ways we see ourselves as humans. She suggests that we have some choice in how we engage in discourse, as we are constituted though it, resisting some and choosing others:

> I can sometimes recognise when I am being constituted through discourses of gender dualism, and choose whether to draw on alternative discourse to resist such positioning (Francis, 1999, p391).

Feminist critical discourse analysis has diverged with the newly emerged theoretical dimension of feminist post-structural discourse analysis. Baxter (2002, 2008) makes a case for the necessity in differentiation between feminist critical discourse analysis and feminist post-structural discourse analysis but recognises the shared sensibilities across both analytical fields through their 'key principle: the discursive construction of subjectivity' (2008, p244). This significant shared approach, in Baxter's view, is considered to be areas associated with Butler's performativity theory. Baxter also

suggests that feminist post-structural discourse analysis 'offers a "supplementary" approach to the "grand narratives" expounded by the established schools of discourse analysis' (2008, p255). She posits that feminist post-structural discourse analysis is an effective supplementary methodology to support feminist critical discourse analysis with new strategies.

I do not feel a need to adopt the theoretical dimensions of feminist post-structural discourse analysis as I consider definitions of feminist critical discourse analysis to be workable enough tools for data analysis. However, Baxter's identification that both feminist critical discourse analysis and feminist post-structural discourse analysis recognise discourse as 'always inscribed and inflected with traces of other discourses,' allowing for 'the diversity and multiplicity of speakers' identities' (Baxter 2008, p244) to emerge support my explanations here.

Also resonating with this study is Baxter's suggestion that gender is just one cultural variable in the construction of identity, and her recognition of the roles of regional background, ethnicity, class and age as 'highly significant' (Baxter, 2008, p244). Baxter indicates that feminist post-structural discourse analysis 'does not have an emancipatory agenda, but a 'transformative quest' (Baxter, 2008, p245) and this concept of a need for transformation rather than emancipation is keenly felt within this study.

Study respondents' socio-economic position

My research questionnaire asked students to identify whether they were in receipt of Free School Meals (FSM). Wherever possible, students in receipt of FSM were invited to participate as case study respondents. This aligned with the high levels of social deprivation within the school's geographical community, as will be set out later. However, in some instances, the focus group and case study respondents did not qualify for FSM.

Schools in England participate in the annual school census as a requirement of Department for Education data capture. One included category as part of the census is FSM. Gorard (2012) argues that FSM statistics are still the most consistent and thorough capture we hold nationally, even though there remains a grey area between take-up and eligibility for FSM, with some students falling through the statistical net.

He considers that models of analysis that attempt to address social deprivation and its relationship to educational attainment should continue to use FSM as a core indicator as it 'remains a better indicator of low socioeconomic status than the current alternatives' (Gorard, 2012, p1003).

Hobbs and Vignoles (2010), in their analysis of FSM's relationship to familial income, agree that children in receipt of FSM are more likely to be from the lowest income families. However, they argue this does not account for all children from the lowest income families as evidence suggests that families in their study in receipt of means-tested state benefits scored higher on income thresholds than some of those who were not. Therefore, using FSM to identify the lowest income families could miss significant numbers of children who fall into the lowest income category but do not qualify for FSM. This appears to be the case in both of my research partner schools.

While Hobbs and Vignoles (2010) argue that FSM eligibility is a valuable and useful proxy for familial income, they also argue that any research solely based on this as the defining socio-economic factor is prone to 'imperfect proxy bias' (Hobbs and Vignoles, 2010, p686). This presents as problematic in terms of bodies of research using FSM eligibility as a central defining criteria. In the case of my research partner schools, the issue of FSM categorisation not being representative of the real numbers of students from the lowest income families is countered somewhat through our understanding of the levels of deprivation encountered by a large proportion of the families within the school catchment areas.

This study used FSM to identify the socio-economic status of some of the research participants. However, this left a minority of focus group and case study respondents outside of FSM categorisation. Regarding my partner schools, a senior manager at Borough College indicated that their school 'did not have any middle class students' and that, while the number of children registered for FSM was far higher than the national average, this statistic failed to identify other students also from the lowest income families. Fairfield Academy also indicated that their student intake was drawn from the lowest socio-economic groups, and this was a reflection of the geographical area of the schools intake.

In order to identify those questionnaire respondents who were not in receipt of FSM but were from low-income families, in the opinion of the school, I applied the model of National Statistics Socio-economic Classification (NS-SEC) to the analysis of the answers provided. The NS-CEC is the central mechanism used by government and academia since 2001 in the UK, and is derived from the Goldthorpe Schema (Goldthorpe, 1997; Erikson and Goldthorpe, 1992). This approach is a sociological classification system which identifies employment relations from a functionalist perspective.

Erikson and Goldthorpe argue that the Goldthorpe Schema is not so much stratification but an 'instrument de travail' (1992, p46). The Goldthorpe Schema is the central mode of categorisation in European comparative social classification (Elias, 1997b). It works to categorise modes of employment in industrialised societies, with the stratification of social positions reflecting the requirements of different and evolving forms of labour. This approach applies categorisation through skill levels encompassing formal education and informal training along with work experience. In this instance I was guided by the the model of application outlined by Rose and Pevalin (2011).

I applied information on parental employment and educational history provided by the young women in their questionnaires to the stratification model. This was intended to mitigate claims which could be made that those without FSM could fall into categories outside of the lowest socio-economic groups.

Rose, Pevalin and O'Reilly (2005) argue that NS-CEC definitions enable the conceptual reading of structural social positions as existing independently of the individuals who inhabit them at any given time. They indicate that the positional context of the occupant shapes and crafts their life chances with the characteristics of respondents' positions within the labour market aligned to their material and symbolic advantages, health, mortality rates, educational opportunity and uptake. The benefit of this mode of social stratification is its ability to allow us to theorise the connection between classed social positions and the material disadvantages of lived experience.

Two examples of the young women not categorised as in receipt of FSM are detailed below:

Example 1

One focus group respondent from Borough College was identified as not being in receipt of FSM, however her questionnaire highlights that she lives in the family home with one parent who held school-age qualifications and was employed as a domestic assistant within a care home laundry. The correlation on the NS-CEC for this family would place them in category L13, that is, routine occupations. In line with the NS-CEC classificatory system the categorisation derives from the only waged member of the family.

Example 2

A case study respondent from Fairfield Academy was identified as not being in receipt of FSM, however questionnaire data indicates that she lives in the family home with two parents, one who completed secondary education and another who completed a skills apprenticeship. One parent works as a cleaner and the second is disabled. This places the respondent's family into the NS-CEC bracket of L13, that is, routine occupations.

All but one of the case study respondent's households within the study were L13 or L14. One respondent's household were categorised as L12 'semi-routine occupations' as her mother was a teaching assistant. The L13 'routine occupations' are defined as 'positions where employees are engaged in routine occupations which have a basic labour contract' (Rose and Pevalin, 2011, p6).

The L14 'never worked and long-term unemployed' group are defined as:

> Positions which entail exclusion from the labour market involving (a) those who have never been in paid employment but would wish to be; and (b) those who have been unemployed for an extended period while still seeking or wanting work (Rose and Pevalin, 2011, p6).

The categories devised within the NS-CEC are then collapsed in to:

> socio-economic classes. The principal one of these 'class' variables - the official
> NS-SEC as adopted by Office for National Statistics…contains eight basic
> categories (Rose and Pevalin, 2011, p8).

Within the NS-CEC classification system adopted by the Office for National Statistics all of the respondent's households were in the lowest two categories, 7 and 8.

This classification system enabled me to place those students who did not qualify for FSM (e.g. those whose families are in receipt of state welfare) into the lowest two socio-economic categories.

The full demographic breakdown of focus group and case study participants inclusive of NS-CEC breakdown, familial background and status as FSM are presented in a table available in Appendix 4 of this thesis.

The social demographic data of both schools' localities, as will be set out later in this chapter, align with the individual research respondents' familial demographic information to define the picture of the social deprivation arguments made within this study. The demographic explanations of circumstance are a mechanism to contextualise the research respondents' social status; these are material depictions of class status which support the socially-constructed notions of classed subjectivities offered in the literature review.

My research methods included initial delivery of a quantitative questionnaire across the whole of the year 10 groups at both partner schools. The data shared in the questionnaires allowed a group of girls from the same socio-economic groups to be established for focus group interviews. The focus groups were initially comprised of mixed ethnicities. My decision to work with white working class young women was taken after the questionnaire and focus group phases of the project, as the data capture took place alongside renewed policy interest in white working classes and recognition of issues with a lack of educational advancement of white working class girls (as highlighted in chapter 2).

My findings from the literature review establish that there is limited current research into white working class girls' choice-making in the UK educational context. The last stage of data capture involves individual interviews with 13 white working class girls from the lowest socio-economic groups, as defined below, drawn from the attendees of the focus groups across both school sites.

Establishing the relationships with partner schools

The first step in the design of my research model was the establishment of the criteria to identify the research partner schools. Initial reading around the impact of the 'failing school' context on working class identity presented as a starting point, and so I made the decision to identify partners schools that had been categorised by Ofsted as 'requiring improvement', and would potentially be facing external criticism. In order to identify case study respondents from the lowest socio-economic groups I also wanted to find schools with a high proportion of students within that demographic.

The schools involved in my study emerged from my existing relationships with educational professionals. A member of my academic department alerted me to the potential interest of a school in London where he sat on the Board of Governors. The second came from an acquaintance who worked as the deputy head of a school in the Midlands. An initial letter was sent out to the Heads of both schools outlining the nature of the research and the parameters of the required commitment of the school and students.

The first meetings with staff took place with a senior manager at both schools where it was agreed that the research was to be introduced by them to the school's Senior Management Team (SMT). A research outline and data collection schedule was provided for this and agreement to participate in the research was approved. Both schools' SMTs agreed to participate on the grounds that they could approve the questionnaire and subsequent interview questions. They also stipulated that they could use their discretion to approve any students invited to participate after questionnaire completion, which was to ensure that students who may find the process challenging, including those with child protection issues, could be omitted from participation if necessary. A final condition was agreed to ensure that the research process did not infringe upon any essential curriculum delivery.

Selection of schools, their demographic context, educational performance and external perceptions

The two research partner schools in this study are anonymised throughout. The school in the Midlands has been given the pseudonym 'Fairfield Academy' and the London School the name 'Borough College.' Both schools are co-educational academies. Borough College is a secular school and Fairfield Academy non-secular, following Christian values while embracing all faiths. Fairfield Academy includes an on-site primary school attached to the secondary school. The school population during 2013 for Borough College was 1049 inclusive of A-level and National Diploma students; 48% of the pupils were girls. Fairfield Academy had a student population during 2013 of 933, inclusive of all primary and secondary students; the overall percentage of girls across the school site was 47%.

Due to child protection legislation this study could not access the postcode data of all respondents within the study. Therefore, the study looks in detail at the catchment areas for the school and demographically quantifies the local population through access to data sets which depict the demographics of the schools' geographical locations.

It is difficult to make assertions about the socio-economic status of whole school populations and individuals. However, we can align available data sources in order to make assertive judgments in this regard. The data analysed here intends to depict the schools demographically during the two academic years (2013-2014 and 2014-15) in which the data capture took place.

Social demographic data sets are used below to further depict the schools' geographic locations as within areas of multiple deprivations and to further contextualise the school population. Ofsted reports and school performance data from 2014 are used to position the schools within the national league tables. This information is shared in order to support our understanding of the reputational perceptions of the schools as 'failing.' Additional contextual material to the data sets is drawn from conversations with staff members at the schools which relate to senior management perceptions of their Ofsted status and students' performance.

The two schools initially presented with similar characteristics: both schools were academies as defined by the Department for Education (DfE) and both schools follow their local education authority admissions policy driven by catchment area. Demographic analysis of the wider community within the schools' catchment area added to the social demographic breakdown of the students' familial categorisation.

Both schools within this study draw from communities with at least 70% of their catchment area categorised within the lowest 20% economically i.e. England's most deprived communities (Department for Communities and Local Government, 2015). This directs us to an understanding of the communities local to the schools, inclusive of the school catchment areas, as those experiencing the highest national levels of multiple deprivations. While this does not necessarily define the case study respondents, it highlights that a large proportion of students within the schools are from families considered to fall within the category of the most deprived.

Both research partner schools had over twice the national average of students in receipt of FSM (local authority and regional tables, 2014), with almost half of their populations having parents, guardians or carers in receipt of state welfare benefits (local authority and regional tables, 2014). According to Ofsted, the number of students in receipt of Pupil Premium Funding (PPF) (an additional government funding for students eligible for FSM, looked-after children and children of service families) at Borough College had doubled in the previous two years to over 80% (Ofsted, 2013a).

Fairfield Academy's Ofsted report stated that 'the proportion of students known to be eligible for free school meals is more than twice the national average and they are the majority at the academy' (Ofsted, 2013b). A senior manager at Borough College highlighted that any higher achieving students would leave the school to enter the grammar system early on in their five years. The challenges faced by both schools in terms of addressing the plethora of additional educational and social needs of their student populations are stark. While Ofsted acknowledge these issues in relation to the schools' performance, their methods of categorisation still measure results against national averages rather than tracing the educational journey of individuals within the school. Staff members within both partner schools describe a situation where middle class students do not enter the schools or, if they do, they move to other 'better' schools as early as they can prior to their GCSE years. This in turn affects the educational

performance data of both of the partner schools.

Concerns over the pressure to succeed, regardless of the complexities of the needs of the student populations, were communicated to me by the staffing bodies in both schools. As set out in one of the analysis chapters (chapter 5) the respondents display a grasp of external negative perceptions to their school's Ofsted status, with reactions that are protectionist of their school context but also critical of being in receipt of what was being depicted to them as a poor educational offer.

'Failing school' context

At the time of the data capture, both schools were categorised by Ofsted as 'requiring improvement' (Ofsted, 2013a, 2013b). The failing school context can be conceived of as the accumulation of negative rhetoric surrounding a school's performance, subsequent to the categorisation by Ofsted as the school 'requiring improvement.' The application of 'requiring improvement' status is usually aligned to poor educational outcomes for students, and/or poor pedagogic approaches and leadership within the school. Rhetoric of poor performance can be seen to resonate both within and external to the school. Student cohorts within 'requiring improvement' schools predominantly provide for children with more complex emotional, behavioral and educational needs when compared with schools which have a largely middle class intake. Schools with 'requires improvement' status are more frequently to be found in areas of multiple deprivations and are less likely to improve to 'good' or 'outstanding' status (Ofsted, 2017).

In my opening conversations with staff members, the schools' current Ofsted status emerged as a significant consideration in their participation in my research. The SMTs from both schools agreed to participate in the research after an acknowledgement of a need to target the under-performance of girls. They had recognised a decline in the academic performance of girls as they progressed through secondary schooling, which was already a management priority issue in both schools. Senior managers from Fairfield Academy and Borough College indicated a desire to better understand their student cohorts. Borough College indicated that the positioning of girls' achievement was of key significance to their agenda, and described the performance of girls as

'plummeting' throughout the five years of schooling, with particular underperformance of white working class girls cited within this group.

The senior manager at Borough College referred to a 'too cool for school' mentality that was causing girls within the school to lose interest across the five years. A Fairfield Academy senior manager highlighted a situation where they had a 'leader of the pack' mentality, with a few girls in the year group which formed the research cohort, holding leadership positions within the school. They indicated that engaging a minority of girls had acted as a catalyst to improve engagement with other females in the year.

A point of interest from early conversations with both senior managers emerged with the variance of the schools' attitudes to issues relating to teenage pregnancy. Borough College had an on-site 'Teen Talk' health clinic providing sexual health guidance and access to contraception. Their senior manager described the rate of teenage pregnancy as having fallen to its lowest in decades with only one teenage pregnancy in post-16 years students recorded during the academic year of 2013-14.

Fairfield Academy was a non-secular Church of England school grounded in Christian values. Their senior manager indicated high levels of teenage pregnancy within the school. He explained the school's provision for teenagers who became mothers during their time at the school as including a special unit where the students were supported to complete their studies wherever possible. In chapter 6, the perceptions of research respondents to these differing approaches to teenage pregnancy emerge within the focus group dialogue, with respondents indicating ways in which fertility management and subsequent pregnancy within the school context impacted upon them.

Included in the initial dialogue with the both school senior managers was their perception of their schools tenuous position within the local authority as a result of the school's Ofsted status of 'requires improvement.' Both teachers highlighted the pressure the staffing bodies felt in relation to this status and within the national school league tables. Borough College indicated that the last academic year's English GCSE results had led to significant external criticism of the school and that the staff had felt significant pressure as a result. The commitment of staff at both schools to their students' education and social issues was evident and commendable.

At Borough College, the senior manager indicated that her staff required support after the recent Ofsted inspection. She shared her concerns that her staff already felt under extreme pressure from external Ofsted criticism, indicating that they may display some resentment at my presence, and that I too could be perceived of as providing external critique. The senior manager at Fairfield Academy asked me to consider my role as a researcher within the school community with care, and noted that some teachers may resent another outsider they considered to be further critiquing staff performance and offering solutions. I explained to both senior managers that the research was not there to provide solutions to problems within the school. Both senior managers understood and shared with other staff the nature of my role as a researcher. They shared an explanation that the research intention was to contribute to policy and practice development for children facing marginalisation. However their initial concerns highlighted the teachers' attitudes to the daily pressure created through external criticism.

Penninckx and Vanhoof (2015), in their systematic literature review of the emotional impact of the Ofsted inspection process, note:

> …negative emotions amongst school staff as a result of inspections, albeit to different degrees. Inspections lead to an increase in stress, anxiety, anger, apprehension and other negative emotions…severe negative emotional effects on school staff from inspections, leading to "post-inspection blues" and the "loss of professional identity"' (Penninckx and Vanhoof, 2015, p495).

However, even with the pressure felt due to school status, the majority of staff from both schools welcomed my research. To mitigate their concerns I ensured that the staffing communities at both schools understood that the research intention was to examine the young people's decision making in relation to entering FE and HE through improved understanding of their familial, educational and social contexts.

This study is not a deficit analysis model (Gordon, 1981) intended to correlate underachievement and social class. However, it requires an understanding of the role that deficit thinking plays in order to grasp the negative discourses emerging from it.

Lucey, Melody and Walkerdine (2003) describe the way in which we have historically pathologised working class children through discourses which situate them in relation to

deficit models of educational attainment. Throughout this thesis I apply the language of policy and policy rhetoric when writing about the educational performance of working class children and young people. I make reference to the 'underachievement' of white working class children and young people with some discomfort. While this is not a deficit model examining perceived educational failure, in order to grasp the impact of policy and research in relation to this study I use the terminology as cited by others.

The data sources used here align the respondents from low socio-economic status families to their school's educational attainment in order to set the tone for readings of the students' external perceptions of their schools as failing. Data is used to define the material contexts and depict the social and familial contexts of the research respondents as deprived. These combine to support the arguments made in the analysis chapters which highlight that the young women feel the negative public perceptions of school performance along with social and familial deprivation.

Emma, a student from Fairfield Academy indicated during her interview:

> People think our school's crap because we don't get loads of GCSEs but it's not, they think we're all chavs and that, but our teachers are really committed to us, they really care about us, it's not like at other schools.

This is an example of emerging discourses establishing an awareness of external negative perceptions. Emma recognises the negative discourses which situate her school as 'failing' due to school performance which she resists. She is provoked to re-position the school and the role of those within it. She takes de-humanising classed conceptions of her peers and 'humanises' them through a demonstration of positive relationships between staff and students. She infers the school is not like other schools, and conceives of the school as unique in its capacity for care.

Research methods

School questionnaire

The initial quantitative questionnaire was distributed to the whole of Year 10 at both schools and included a small number of qualitative questions. Quantitative questions were designed to divide the year group into those who identified as male and those who identified as female, and to identify the students from the lowest socio-economic brackets, as well as by ethnicity drawn from categories used within the UK census model of data capture (Office National Statistics, 2011). The questionnaire asked respondents to state their familial, educational/employment history and familial domestic living circumstances in line with NC-CEC. It also asked the respondents to specify if they were in receipt of FSM.

Demographic questions included a combination of structured questions which allowed the respondents to identify their ethnicity and parental financial position. In some instances these closed questions had the addition of a text box for any further clarification the respondent felt necessary.

A small number of open qualitative questions were included. These focused on the young women's perceptions of their current familial circumstances, for example: 'From the list below please indicate your family's financial position: wealthy; reasonably wealthy; enough money to live comfortably; not enough money to live comfortably; struggle to live on the money we have.' Other qualitative questions asked them to consider where they saw themselves in the future, and so identify if they were planning on FE and HE trajectories, for example: 'Thinking about where you live, who you live with and what you will be doing day-to-day, where do you see yourself in 3 years' time?'

These questions opened up a dialogue with the respondents which addressed their perceptions of their current social, educational and familial context including their planned future trajectories. The answers to these questions supported me in writing thematic questions for the focus groups which followed. The full questionnaire can be found in the Appendix 1.

Presenting and distributing the questionnaire

I presented the research model to the whole year at both schools. Initially it was made clear to the students that they did not have to participate, which affirmed that potential research participants were to be self-selecting and would only participate in the research by choice.

The deputy head teacher in the Midlands school made the suggestion that I present the research to students and staff within a Year 10 assembly in order to describe my relationship to the research and open up a personal dialogue. This allowed me to reach all of the staff who would be overseeing the questionnaire's completion, i.e. Year 10 form tutors, within the time allocated to Personal Health and Social Education (PHSE).

I considered the best way to present the information to a group of 14 and 15 year olds, in light of the fact that I was asking young people to reveal a significant amount of information about their parents, families, financial positions and their plans for the future, which could leave them open to feeling vulnerable.

I presented the research to Fairfield Academy first. I structured my presentation in two parts; the first part introduced myself, my institution and my role within it, the rationale for the research and the practical aspects of the research process. I explained that the students had the right to decline to participate, indicating that if they returned the forms incomplete this would be taken as a refusal to take part. I reassured the students that all of their responses from the named questionnaires, focus groups and 1:1 interviews would be unseen by school staff and anonymised when passed to me. I indicated that any information they shared would not being attributed to them in any subsequent publication or made available later to school staff.

I did not initially communicate to the students that the research model at focus group and case study interview phases was gender-specific, as I did not want the respondents to consider the implications of gender distinctions when completing the questionnaire.

The second aspect of the presentation was to introduce the questionnaire. I indicated the personal nature of some of the questions and acknowledged that participants might perceive this as intrusive. I showed a copy of the questionnaire and asked myself a

number of the most personal questions from the form, and answered the questions in an honest way. My answers indicated potential similarities between my background and that of some of the students.

I had initially presented myself as a researcher from a London institution, which had gained their attention, but in doing so I had established myself as detached from their realities. In revealing personal aspects of my own familial and educational history I felt this re-defined me, within the parameters of the research, as someone who shared some of the contextual factors of the students' own lives. My answers revealed that I had been an FSM student and that my parents had not completed their own secondary schooling. I also expanded on some of the questions to let the students know that my parents had their children as teenagers and talked them through the moments when my own education hadn't achieved 'good' results and when I had needed to retake exams or find new routes to get to the next phase.

One concern I felt about undertaking this research was that, while I wanted to work with transparency, I was mindful of the ethical need to not cite the research model as being that of a 'deficit' preoccupied with issues of marginalisation. I believed this could be damaging to the participants and I did not want to reinforce any negative discourses they may be facing regarding their educational performance or future aspirations. My presentation indicated that it was my aim to better understand young peoples' educational and career aspirations in relation to FE and HE choices, using this body of research and their stories to inform policy decisions for young people in the future. I felt my description was accurate enough to provide insight but vague enough to ensure no negative connotations. Overall, I felt the presentation was a success and established the buy-in of school staff and a sufficient proportion of the student population to proceed.

My presentation at Borough College did not proceed as smoothly. The year group was much larger and the assembly was at the end of a long summer day. The school gym was incredibly hot and the students were restless and distracted. The student population had undertaken other bodies of research with educational researchers who had observed and interviewed them before. They had also, in the previous three years, been part of a television documentary.

The presence of a researcher from London garnered more interest in the Midlands and, as the senior manager at Fairfield Academy indicated, the students felt that 'someone visiting from London interested in their views was glamorous.' At Borough College, the students responded well to me revealing answers to the personal questions, with a palpable increase in their interest when the presentation took on a more humorous note. However, overall the students and staff at the school appeared relatively less interested than those at Fairfield Academy. There was, however, a positive response through completed questionnaire submission and when focus group attendees were invited to participate.

The questionnaire was completed during PHSE lessons, with the teacher overseeing the process reading out a small introduction to how to complete the form. The students were asked to place their form in an envelope to be sealed by the teacher upon collection and passed to me. The application forms returned to me included some completed in full, some partially completed and others incomplete. The female respondents were grouped by school into those in receipt of FSM and those who had provided enough information about their familial educational and employment history to be quantified through NS-CEC categories as the two lowest socio-economic categories.

The questionnaires led to me having a much larger number of students who qualified as in the lowest two socio-economic groups than I could invite to focus groups, as one might expect within schools whose populations primarily drew from the lowest socio-economic groups. One consideration in the selection of focus group respondents was balancing the need to ensure the respondents provided enough information to demonstrate their socio-economic position, while not only selecting respondents who had taken the time to complete the forms in full. I was aware of not excluding students who felt unable to contribute the personal information required or those who may have lacked confidence in completing the form.

One questionnaire section identified respondents as in receipt of FSM and so many respondents could be identified through this even if the rest of their form was incomplete. In other instances the respondents gave enough information about parental employment and educational history to apply the NS-CEC categorisation. In this way I

was also able to select respondents from the lowest socio-economic groups whose families may not be in receipt of state welfare.

When case study participants were interviewed later I had the opportunity to revisit the information presented on their questionnaires, asking further questions to extrapolate any additional information required about the influence of their family experiences and circumstances or their planned future trajectories. Through this approach I was also able to ensure that I worked with young women who may not have initially been forthcoming in their contributions but who had still expressed a desire to participate.

Once I had made my selection of students for focus groups, senior managers at both schools invited them to participate, again making students aware of their ability to decline if they chose to do so. The only deviation from this came when the senior manager at Fairfield asked for one student, Atlanta, to be included in the focus groups.

Focus groups interviews

The focus groups involved semi-structured interviews which took place on the school sites. I had initially considered holding the focus groups and 1:1 interviews at a neutral location to preserve the privacy of the students, however the complications of child protection law and not interrupting the school day made this unworkable. Focus group interviews were filmed with a tripod and camera, primarily for transcription purposes. I considered whether this could potentially inhibit the dialogue with the students but felt this was necessary for clarity. At the start of each of the three focus groups I outlined the research intentions and reassured the attendees of their anonymity in any publications and with school staff. I also made the suggestion that, within the session, we allowed each other to finish speaking and treated each other's contributions in a respectful way.

The dynamics of focus group interaction can lead to ethical concerns regarding the over-sharing of personal information across research respondents. I was aware that the respondents could be left feeling emotionally exposed due to their peers knowing their personal details. My approach to mitigate this came through monitoring the stress levels of the participants' throughout the dialogue and steering the group away from the over-sharing of sensitive personal information. While the assertion of over-sharing was at my

discretion, I was careful to prevent the young women from covering topics which could leave them vulnerable after the event. I made the suggestion that personally sensitive narratives were shared in the next phase of the research, i.e. the 1:1 case study interviews, or through the young women staying on after the group to individually discuss anything further. At the end of the session I reflected on the areas we had covered in the dialogue and asked all participants if they were happy to include the responses that they had given. I also informed them that, if they changed their minds, they could still choose to remove themselves from any transcripts.

The question format for the focus groups was to move around the groups and ask the same question to each attendee in turn. They could answer if they wished or defer to the next person in the circle. This was intended to stimulate discussion between the respondents and this approach varied in success across the three groups. What became apparent was that the young women attending in all three focus groups came from differing friendship circles and curriculum-specific groups.

In a focus group at Borough College, one participant indicated that they were familiar with having a camera filming their group work within their lessons due to the school's previous participation in a television documentary. Within all three focus groups the camera in the corner quickly seemed to become insignificant, with the young women seemingly comfortable with its presence. The main emerging obstacle to overcome was the group dynamic of drawing young women, who may or may not be friends or with differing allegiances within the school, into open dialogue.

The focus groups at Fairfield Academy are titled focus group 1 and 2. Focus group 1 had five participants and focus group 2 had eight. Focus group 3 at Borough College had ten participants. The focus group attendees, at this stage, were banded through commonalties of socio-economic position and the attendees were of mixed ethnicities.

Fairfield Academy focus group 1

The location for the Fairfield Academy focus groups was a mobile in the school grounds away from the main building. This promoted a feeling of privacy for the groups and it was a small comfortable space for the group size. The group was held during

lunch so the students brought their lunches from the canteen and ate them throughout the interview, which added to the informality of the discussion.

The group dynamic was initially a little challenging. The school had asked me to include a student, Atlanta, who I had not previously selected for participation. Atlanta did qualify in the same socio-economic bracket but had not been invited to participate due to there being more students within the required demographic group than could be accommodated. The senior manager requested Atlanta's attendance, indicating that the school was working hard to maintain her interest and attendance. She had moved a number of times in her secondary schooling, was known to social services through a very complex family situation and was trying her best to 'stay out of trouble.' The manager suggested that Atlanta might benefit greatly from participation through having the opportunity to reflect upon her chosen career path in the police force. Atlanta was assertive within the group, and at times she dominated the conversation, but she also introduced topics which moved the dialogue to very honest and forthcoming contributions from all participants. She asked me about my own education and I spent a few minutes giving an honest account of the moments within my schooling when I had failed and the age when my studies took a more serious direction.

When the school bell rang it took me several attempts to convince the group to stop the discussion as they were deeply engaged within it. Standardised questions (Appendix 2) were used but the group developed a dialogue which took fascinating and unexpected directions.

Fairfield Academy focus group 2

Focus group 2 at Fairfield Academy quickly informed me that they were not all friends and that a number of them 'usually do not talk to each other at all.' The same discussion format was applied to enable some of the quieter members of the group to contribute. The dialogue on particular subjects flowed more freely, leading to the young women initiating conversations across the group. They responded well to me chairing the discussion and even though they had indicated they may not be 'friends,' they were respectful of giving others opportunities to speak. Much of the discussion of this group was about their mothers, their own maternal trajectories and that of the maternal

trajectories of other young women at their school. They asked me direct questions about my personal circumstances and I was forthcoming in my answers.

When I transcribed the interviews later for both of the Midlands groups, I realised that unintentionally my accent had changed. This was not contrived but, throughout the course of my conversation with the young women who had grown up very near to where I had lived as a child, I had re-adopted an accent that had long since softened. Upon listening to the interviews I heard a younger version of myself emerge. I identified with the narratives the young women were offering. We were forthcoming in our answers to each other and I feel this supported me in establishing a rapport and relationship of trust with the groups. The young women were intelligent and funny; reminding me of the feelings of optimism held by young people and that, even within their context of a world where they were vulnerable to social circumstance, life at this juncture was still felt to be full of possibilities.

Borough College focus group 3

This was the largest of the three focus groups. Initially two groups had been scheduled but, on the day, the school felt that the focus group needed to be finished in time for afternoon lessons and the two selected groups attended together. I do believe the large group size impaired the dialogue somewhat. The location was the school library which, although closed to students, was a thoroughfare for staff. This proved to be inhibiting for the participants and when a member of staff passed through the room the group would fall into silence. I was shown to the room just moments before the group arrived and so was unable to rearrange furniture due to the short time scale offered by the senior manager. This led to the group being spread out across a large table which I felt affected the flow of dialogue. With this group it was necessary to continually return to the scripted questions and maintain movement around the circle. However, even with a less favorable layout and with participants answering questions in turn, the conversation took welcome unexpected directions.

The answers from the three focus groups heavily influenced the 1:1 interview questions I subsequently wrote. One of the analysis chapters (chapter 6) emerges from the introduction of the young women at Fairfield Academy's explanations surrounding pregnancy and maternal relationships; this was explored further through the case study

interviews. Students within the focus groups across both school sites also introduced the idea that they often felt that student career and educational advice was inadequate. This was explored again within the case study interviews and led to my later argument that options presented to the young women were classed and gendered with the notion of a 'back up plan' emerging for the young women of 'realistic' career goals rather than their aspirational ones. The emerging data was rich as the participants were generous with their contributions, seeming to take pleasure in having an opportunity to share their experiences and conceive of what their futures might look like.

Selection of 1:1 case study participants

After the focus groups I took the decision to work with white working class girls, with the parameters for the selection of the case study respondents becoming self-defining white British girls from low-socio-economic status families. The rich cultural mix of the respondents within the focus groups, analysed though a racial lens, could provide interesting comparative components. However, this study responds to the findings of the literature review and historical and current context of working class girls' education chapters in their identification of a need for further analysis of white working class girl's choice-making in 2014-15.

According to Crenshaw (1991), the intersectional layering of disadvantage cannot be ignored when addressing issues of socio-economic difference, racial difference, gender, disability etc. This study recognises that racial and class inequalities cannot be considered in isolation (Gillborn, 2010), and acknowledges Gillborn's (2005) arguments that racial inequality and the prevalence of white racial advantage, while not necessarily intentional, remain implicit in the leadership of educational power-holders and policy-makers. This study does not discount the notion of white privilege but, as demonstrated in chapter 2, recognises the enduring under-performance of white working class girls within the UK statutory education system at GCSE and, therefore, situates this cohort amongst ethnicities facing on-going marginalisation.

This study positions white working class young women as a minority who remain in a disadvantaged position with their underachievement overshadowed by the gains made from girls from the same ethnicity but from higher socio-economic groups. The 'successful girls' debate (Baker, 2010), creates a mythologized successful group

developed across media and policy literature. This over-emphasising of the success of girls in education and the workforce establishes them as the key 'beneficiaries' of the evolved conditions present in late modernity. Parallels of marginalisation are present across minority groups within state education; however the central emphasis for analysis here will be intersectional attributes which illuminate the subjectivities of working class white British young women.

The issue of 'white' race is explored within this study's analysis. Lawler (2012) examines the construction of new modes of whiteness through a neo-liberal gaze suggesting the emergence of:

> new modes of articulation of whiteness in which "white" becomes emblematically attached to "working class" and stripped from any association with "middle class." In this context, working-class whiteness is less a "dirty whiteness" (Haylett, 2001; Tyler, 2008) than an intensification of a newly problematic whiteness. This is not "ordinary whiteness/whiteness as ordinariness" (Dyer, 1997), but a form of extreme whiteness, or hyper-whiteness, that works as a counterpoint to "ordinary" (and middle-class) whiteness (Lawler, 2012, p410).

Lawler depicts a new 'extreme whiteness' that redefines the 'white working-class' as people inhabiting an 'anachronistic space' (2012, p409). Tyler's (2008) depiction of 'chav' as a white, racialised and demonised group supports the versions of working class white feminine identity emerging from the respondents of my study. Tyler suggests a newly established divergence of 'classed whiteness' emerging within neo-liberally contextualised identity formation. Tyler and Lawler's interpretation of white working class identity are valuable tools when theorising the respondents' white working class feminine identities; I return to this topic in the analysis chapters that follow.

My selection of 1-1 case study respondents was grounded in the demographic evidence provided by the respondents in their quantitative questionnaires, through their self-positioning as white British young women within the lowest two socio-economic groups as per their NS-CEC categorisation. The focus groups consisted of more of the qualifying demographic group than would be required for the case studies. I therefore

selected participants mindful that the case study respondents should be made up of those who had made significant contributions to the focus group dialogue, but also those who had not been as forthcoming; including participants who had shown reluctance to voice their experiences who I felt would be more comfortable in a 1-1 setting.

Case study interviews

Case study interviews were in-depth 1:1 discussions with participants which took place two months after the initial focus groups. The interviews at both schools took place in quiet, private rooms and were recorded on a mobile phone voice recording application to support an informal dialogue.

Twenty-three semi-structured interview questions were scripted, and a copy of the interview questions can be found in Appendix 3. I worked from a standard set of questions and deviated from those questions as the respondent directed the conversation with their answers. The questions were designed to encourage the respondent to think about their own and others' perceptions of their school, familial and local community contexts. I included questions that were designed to encourage the young women to communicate their views on politics and their knowledge of policy language and policy application within their schools. It was my intention to provide opportunities for participants to conceive of their futures through mapping out their future trajectories and providing rationales for their plans.

Earlier I referred to Baxter's (2008) notion of feminist post-structural discourse analysis as enabling 'transformation' rather than 'emancipation.' The research interviews were conceived with this in mind, in that the research process could provide opportunities to conceptualise versions of the respondents' future selves. This, it was hoped, would enable the young women to conceive of the lives they could lead and the choices they would need to make to achieve their trajectories and aspirations, while also considering the issues they could potentially face along the way. When the conversations did cover their ambitions and planned trajectories, I offered practical guidance about educational and career opportunities. I was quick to show praise for their maturity and insight. I actively encouraged them in the pursuit of their goals and reassured them of their intellectual capacity to reach those goals. In doing this I hoped to use the power of my position as a researcher for some practical good.

Where possible, I provided honest answers to any personal questions respondents posed to me. There was an interest in my educational, career and personal history and I had opened this up for discussion in my approach to the presentation of the questionnaire and within the focus group dialogue. What was clear was that, as a researcher in the school context, I was in a position of power. I was honest with the participants about any commonalities of experience I shared with them, but I was continually aware that they were within a vulnerable position within our dialogue and within the place of choice-making they inhabited. As with the completion of the questionnaire and focus groups, the case study interviews were conceived of as positive spaces for reflection, planning and future projections of positive versions of self. When sensitive subjects emerged I openly empathised with the troubles the young women and their families had faced.

I felt protective of all of the young women's stories which felt, at times, like our shared stories. Respondents were intelligent, trusting and, forthright; a feeling of responsibility to represent them well is with me daily as I write.

Data analysis and emerging themes

The questionnaire enabled me to identify two demographic categorisations of the potential participants. Firstly, the socio-economic categorisation of the young women, which informed the selection of the focus group participants; and, secondly, the ethnicity categorisation of the young women, which led to the selection of the 13 case study respondents.

As the decision was made to work with white working class young women after the completion of the focus groups, the analysis chapters feature only contributions from students which fall in to this category i.e. statements made by white working class young women within the focus groups and from the case study interviews. I therefore only cite contributions from this study's demographic of white British. This decision was not taken lightly and I ensured that I only extrapolated data from focus group conversations between respondents within the selected demographic category. I was careful to not select sections of transcript dialogue which required me to remove the contributions of other demographic categories from conversations. The only transcript

data from the focus groups to be included in my analysis was the subject of teenage pregnancy to emerge from focus group 2 at Fairfield Academy.

The isolated text from one conversation in focus group 2, along with the transcripts of the 13 case study interviews, were then analysed to form the basis of the themes that emerge within chapters 5, 6 and 7.

Initially, the clustering of themes took place through two methods. Firstly, I extrapolated responses to particular questions placing them into clusters of text. Through repeated readings of case study respondent's answer to particular questions I began to identify commonalities of responses and subthemes. For example, when asked 'who was responsible for your success?' there was a repeated emergence of a notion of self-responsibility for personal, educational and career success.

Another example of the emergence of these thematic clusters can be seen in the multiplicity of 'maternal' positions within the young women's lives. These include how they perceived their own mothers, society's perception of working class motherhood and the impact of their roles as mothers on their future planning. Clusters of sub-themes were formed that were inter-related. These were then placed into broader categories to form chapters.

The second approach came in the form of isolating key words from the themes to emerge, using these key words as triggers to check through all of the transcripts for any related material. This enabled me to examine all transcripts for secondary points to reinforce, contest or develop the emerging themes. It was at this stage of the process that I applied NVIVO software to ensure I had not overlooked any areas of dialogue which needed to be considered in relation to emerging thematic positions. This process led to the diversification of subthemes, often highlighting contradictions to the initial narratives that the categorisation through the clustering of responses to particular answers had not previouslysuggested. I have endeavoured to ensure that I present any conflicting positions within the emerging themes throughout the analysis chapters.

The collections of sub-themes required categorisation in order to present them within the analysis chapters. To achieve this I established broader overarching categories with the three analysis chapters focusing on school, familial and community contexts in their

broadest conceptions. This allowed me to make sense of the breadth of examples of discursive formation provided by my study participants. However, the inter-relationships between areas of discursive formations can be seen in the chapters, for example, when parental influence is featured in the school context as this is where educational and career trajectory can be found, or when the young women's perceptions of their peers is located in community context, and conceived of as a defining characteristic of their notion of community. Themes emerging from the qualitative analysis of transcript data were contextaulised through policy and media conceptions of white working class feminine identity and through the alignment to existing bodies of research relating to this cohort.

Ethical considerations

The research in this study was completed in line with the British Educational Research Association Ethical Guidelines for Educational Research (2011). The students were self-selecting and informed consent was given.

One of the challenging aspects of completing the research with transparency was that the rationale for this body of research was to identify the positive and negative aspects of respondents' experiences. Respondents were selected as they are approaching educational and personal trajectories from what I conceive of in this thesis to be a marginalised position. I was mindful that the experience of the research process should be positive and not negative for them. I aimed to create an environment where the young women could express their thoughts about their experiences and future trajectories with questions which did not position them as having limited opportunities. I was mindful that I wanted them to share their real concerns and any negative aspects of their contexts and futures alongside positives. This necessitated carefully acknowledging problems, while remaining positive about the future.

Both schools provided their child protection policies, which I followed in all aspects of the research, including presenting my Disclosure Barring Service approval certificate at all times within the school. I was aware that the interviews could elicit subjects of disclosure with the students and addressed this with the respondents at the start of each focus group and interview. Therefore, I informed the participants that, while the information they provided to me was confidential, if they disclosed any information

regarding them or anyone they knew being in any danger, I would be legally obliged to pass this information on to the child protection officer within the school.

Conclusion

The intention of this chapter has been to communicate the ways in which this body of research makes a justification for its presentation as a reflexively produced body of feminist post-structural work. I have constructed the methodology by taking theoretical insights from approaches to feminist critical discourse analysis, with acknowledgement of aspects of the theoretical developments of feminist post-structural discourse analysis that can further annotate my approach. As a model of feminist critical discourse analysis it has been my intention to depict the aspects of the research process which have been affected by my own feelings about the subject. I have highlighted the moments when the research process was far from objective with the intension of identifying when my own subjectivity and relationship with the respondents crafted the discourses to emerge throughout the process.

I have demonstrated the quantitative research methods which situated the respondents, including the demographics which placed the young women, their schools and communities into positions of marginalisation. The demographic positioning and research surrounding school performance data presented here intends to build on the evidence presented in the literature review and the historical and current context of working class girls' education (chapter 2), which introduce socially structured gendered, racialised and classed positions. This is intended to create tiers in the construction of white female working classness. The analysis chapters which follow highlight these tiers of subjectification and materiality in the lives of the respondents.

Introduction to analysis chapters 5, 6 and 7

The following three analysis chapters examine how my research participants are subjectively constructed in relation to their educational, social and familial contexts. The young women in my study display notions of self which are gendered, racialised and grounded in social status. Each respondent also displays a complex set of self-structures which can be considered as specific to their own complex relations of power. Their experiences align with those of working class women throughout history, previously depicted in chapter 2.

The current national position of working class girls in education, specifically white working class girls, has been presented in the historical and current context of working class girls' education chapter (chapter 2), along with the findings of other theorists and researchers presented in the literature review chapter (chapter 3). My analysis makes references to those bodies of knowledge in order to situate the findings of my study. Contextual material draws from research, policy and theoretical explanations which directly relate to my cohort of white working class young women. In some instances, I draw more broadly from contextual material which does not focus directly upon white working class young women, but which supports the analysis in relation to the participants' school, family and social experiences.

In these chapters I provide descriptions of the respondents' subjective constructions in relation to their aspirations and planned trajectories, both educationally and personally. My findings indicate that respondents' subjectivities emerge from the available discourses of white British working-class feminine identity, which can be identified as those emerging from the neo-liberal dominant hegemony. Their subjective constructions are situated within a neo-liberal age which crafts the socio-political, media and policy rhetoric surrounding them.

When particular discursive themes appear, they are contextualised through the linguistic fields from which they emerge; this research draws upon media, socio-political and research references. Moments of negative discursive positioning of the young women emerge and this is followed by their discursive resistance. These discourses of resistance enable the young women to navigate the often negative socio-linguistic depictions of self which inform their construction.

The analysis chapters are clustered around three themes: school, family and community contexts. Chapter 5 includes two sections. Section 1 examines the role of individualisation and its manifestations within neo-liberal dominant hegemony. It identifies how self-responsibility crafts the participants' views and how they reposition notions of failure and success to navigate negative discursive positioning. Section 2 explores how discourses emerge within school contexts. It examines the participants' learner identities, their planned educational and career trajectories and the school context.

Chapter 6 brings together themes which emerge in relation to family, including maternal narratives and influences, alongside the impact which future maternal responsibilities have upon their choice-making. Chapter 7 addresses themes of community, and considers how the respondents' construct versions of community.

As depicted in the methodology chapter (chapter 4), emerging themes were driven by the responses to particular questions posed at focus group and interview. Categorisation of the analysis is required in order to communicate arguments of contextual influence. I intend to transcend essentialist explanations surrounding commonalities, and instead depict the complexity of 'how' an individual is discursively constituted. Emerging themes are aligned with findings presented in the preceding chapters and I describe how my study's findings compare with current concepts of working class feminine subjectivity.

The analysis chapter themes or 'spheres of influence' (Archer, DeWitt and Wong, 2014, p69) include data analysis from the quantitative questionnaires, focus groups and 1:1 case study interviews with 13 research respondents aged between 14 and 15 years at the time of data collection. It is important to note that, throughout the following chapters, all research participants are self-defining white British young women from the lowest two socio-economic groups as defined in chapter 4. They describe immediate concerns about their futures, their GCSE grades and their ability to get to the next educational career phase of their lives, whilst also considering the longer-term trajectories and issues they may face.

I argue that legislative developments designed to enable equaliy of opportunity, including their surrounding rhetoric, reinforce equality of opportunity as a given. This process has led to terrains of 'post-feminism' and 'post-equality' which define a pseudo-meritocratic age. I establish discourses reaffirming this premise, and explore how policy initiatives such as 'equality of opportunity' form 'self-technologies.' I argue that discourses of pseudo-educational and social equality negatively impact upon the young women's conceptions of their own and others' failure or success.

In chapter 3 I introduced the possibility of agency within discursive subjective construction. I articulated moments of discursive resistance, conceived of as known or unknown to the speaker, with 'performativity' (Butler, 1997) not considered as a managed act. Here I consider Davies et al's (2006) application of Butler's post-structural discursive construction, to find moments when discursive resistance emerges.

Analysis of my research findings identifies moments when subjectivity formation takes linguistic forms. In this way, drawing from neo-liberal dominant hegemony and neo-liberal individualising practices helps identify examples of performative ascription to existing notions of identity. The young women in my study enact aspects of being as 'transformable subjects' conceiving of the new post-structural feminist subject as 'fluid, fragmented, with more open boundaries' (Davies et al, 2006, p87). Where the research respondents in this study take negative discourses and repurpose them to devise strategies of strength and hope.

Butler (1993) defines her notion of performativity through gender identity acquisition. The analysis in my study uses the concept of performativity more broadly to find other forms of discursively constructed subjectivity.

In order to articulate the nature of subjective formation, generative discourses (Foucault, 1989) are argued as regulatory and self-regulatory through the notion of power and self-technologies. Subjectivity must be considered as multi-layered. Constructive discourses are symbiotic, and the intersectionality of the analysis cannot be ignored (Crenshaw, 1991). Class identity is entirely intertwined with race and gender, with these identity fields informing discourses which draw from a multiplicity of power relationships.

While being realistic about the retention of constricting material and socially restrictive

lived experiences of the participants, my analysis aims to avoid a negative trap of the discoursing of working classness i.e. what Walkerdine describe as 'pathologisations' (Walkerdine, 2015, p174). I explore how working class young women mobilise new versions of contemporary working class feminine identity. The young women in my study describe concepts of their futures, moving them away from vilified versions of working class personhood. They move beyond the ascription to aspirational, neo-liberal concepts of the existence which binds them.

The young women in my study prove to be ambitious within the context of their own value systems. They state positive attributes of their lives and contexts alongside negatives. Their descriptions of their family, social and educational contexts are not couched in negative classed and gendered terms. They often proudly communicate the achievements of themselves, their loved ones and friends.

I suggest the respondents in my study draw from the negative hegemonic discursive language available to them, whilst vying for performatively established transformational versions of their past and future selves. There are instances where the focus groups and 1:1 interviews in my study provide the young women with the opportunity to discursively build future trajectories.

Chapter 5

Section 1: Neo-liberalised policy, individualisation and self-responsibility: notions of failure and success

In this section I explore challenges the young women in my study face in conceiving of their futures against neo-liberally-constructed classed and gendered versions of personhood. I consider how the young women's visions of success and failure are grounded in pseudo-meritocratic views of equality. I argue that subjective formation takes place within 'post-feminist' and 'post-equality' terrains.

I argue that neo-liberal ideology constructs and individualises policy, with policy rhetoric becoming a tool of self and domination technology. In this section I find examples of this process of subjective construction and management, and highlight how the young women personalise failure and success, which serves to absolve the state of any responsibility for the educational and career opportunities afforded to them. In some instances the young women demonstrate how they navigate working class failure discourses, repurposing them to positively plan their trajectories. They consistently display ambition and aspiration. However, those aspirations are often restricted due to the material, educational and social restrictions within their lives.

As successive UK governments endorse social and political individualism, reconfigured and disseminated through new legislation and policy, individualisation emerges in the discourses generated in the learning and social environments of young people. Individualisation internalises the responsibilities of young people through proposed choice making:

> …liberal government have always been concerned with internalising their authority in citizens though inspiring, encouraging and inaugurating programmes and techniques that will simultaneously "autonomise" and "responsibilise" subjects (Rose, 1989, p23).

Negative rhetoric of policies such as 'equality of opportunity,' considered to be egalitarian in origin, become subjugating tools for self-responsibilitiation (Ringrose, 2007). Ball, Maguire and Macrae connect individualisation with the lives and

subjectivities of young people when they indicate that:

> "In the space of one generation there have been some radical changes to the typical experiences of young people" (Furlong and Cartmel, 1997, p8) and some of the effects of these changes are evident in the extent to which young people now see their decision-making as individual "choice" rather than the product of structured constraints (Giddens, 1991; Beck, 1992)…Giddens (1991) has argued that risk and uncertainty are experienced subjectively and individuals are held more and more accountable for their own survival in a time where change is the only certainty (Ball, Maguire and Macrae, 2000, p2).

Neo-liberal policy, individualisation and self-responsibility

In this section I show how young women align to the notion of individualised forms of personal success and self-responsibility. Here the young women answer the question 'what might stand in the way of you having a successful future?'

Ruth, aged 15, is from the Midlands and lives with her parents. Both parents are employed in unskilled work. Ruth deploys discursive language of self-responsibility indicating that:

> Me really, because if I don't push myself to work harder and do things then I'm not gonna succeed and I can't blame other people for me not doing my work. So I guess for everybody it's your own choice what you do and if you don't succeed you can't really blame people.

Ruth uses the phrase 'push myself' to indicate a self-reliance on working harder in order to achieve success. She infers that only she is to blame if she does not succeed.

Emma, aged 15, is from the Midlands and lives with her mother and sister. Her family receives state welfare and they live in social housing. Nobody in Emma's family has previously attended Higher Education (HE):

> I think it's based on me, I've got to be focused and I've got to be willing to do it, so without me being strong enough to be able to push to it, to be willing to push

and do it then it would fail because it's based on me. Like, it would be my fault because I'm the one who has to be strong enough and push and work hard for me to achieve what I want to achieve…like, there's a lot of people fighting for jobs and I think that's gonna be the hard part…I think that's gonna be a big obstacle because obviously it is hard to find a job.

Emma talks about her inability to 'push' for the opportunities she wants as her biggest disabling factor. She performatively establishes a discourse of self-responsibility, recognising the realities of a constrained and restricted job market.

Another recurring term to emerge from the interviews was 'wanting it,' as Emma suggests: 'Just me, because I have to be able to want it, to be able to achieve it.'

Kealy lives on her own with her mother who is currently 'looking for work.' Kealy ascribes to the same self-responsible discourse: 'Myself, I feel I'm responsible for my future, to be honest, because it would be only me making the choices but then I just have people supporting the choices I make so it all falls down to me, to be honest.'

Kealy, as with Emma, infers that support from others will follow her own decision-making. These findings can be aligned to those of Ball, Maguire and Macrae (2000) who suggest that individuals see themselves as making choices and decisions within what they conceive of as a meritocratic environment. Therefore, they 'blame themselves for any lack of success, either because of stress or a failure to see their "best" interests, or competing "interests," or not enough hard work while they are at school' (Ball, Maguire and Macrae, 2000, p4). Ball, Maguire and Macrae suggest that the extended time young people find themselves in education, including the growing breadth of choices available to them, can overshadow the material and structural realities of the choices they make.

The findings in this section suggest the young women in my study see themselves as members of a meritocratic society, not in receipt of a reduced set of life options structured though gendered socio-economic or socio-cultural positions. This theme of choice-making re-emerges later when the young women discuss their future educational and career trajectories. In some instances, respondents contextualise how they are

supported to succeed, and reference the responsibility of school, educational professionals and family support.

Anya, aged 14 years, lives with both parents. Her father is employed and her family is in receipt of state welfare. Here she discusses the role of educators in pushing her to succeed:

> I think myself and sometimes the teachers as well 'cos they've got to push you and if they didn't push you, you wouldn't really get anywhere 'cos you'd just get lazy and you wouldn't do the work, so I think the teachers.

Elisa lives between two households; she has one working parent in each household who both work in un-credentialed jobs. None of Elisa's family has previously attended Further Education (FE) or HE. Elisa introduces school as contributing to her success or failure:

> I guess the school because if they don't help you enough and you fail 'cos you don't feel like you've had enough support, I guess they're responsible for that. But it could also be, like, how you grew up, like, if you grew up where no-one cared about you, you wouldn't care about anything else.

A recurring feature of individualisation emerging from discourses of 'post equality' is the idea of meritocracy. This emerges when the young women in my study align their views on success and failure with a reliance on hard work.

Janine lives with her mother and stepfather. Her stepfather works as a chauffeur, neither of her parents have any formal qualifications and their incomes are supplemented with state welfare. Here she depicts a meritocratic version of the requirements of success:

> Me, I feel like I'm responsible, nobody else can make me succeed. I reckon if I work hard enough and make something of myself then that's down to me, I don't think anybody else can take it away from me or make me better, I think it's down to me really.

Hayley lives with her mum, step-dad and step-siblings. Her parents both work and

neither has any formal educational qualifications:

> I think it's mainly me, a lot of it's me and obviously people around me. I need to be positive and if I want to get somewhere I will do it and, like I said, at school if I want the grades that I need then I will do something about it, so if I'm not gonna work on them I'm not gonna get what I want and if I work hard I will get it. I'm the main one responsible for what I want in the future.

The young women consistently indicate that the core disabling factor to success or failure is their own lack of effort. Ruth states: 'I think everyone can achieve what they want…I can't see anything I can't do.'

Mendick, Allen and Harvey (2015), in their study of 14-17 year olds, find that 'hard work' is universally valued 'among young men and women, from middle class and working-class backgrounds, on both sides of the divide between compulsory and post-compulsory education' (Mendick, Allen and Harvey, 2015, p162). They propose that the 'celebrated' notions of 'entrepreneurialism and individualism' that are operationalised within broader neo-liberal practices obscure 'inequalities that limit who can go where in education and the labour market' (Mendick, Allen and Harvey, 2015, p175). Mendick, Allen and Harvey's concept of 'celebrity narratives of individual achievement via hard work facilitate a shift from structural frameworks for understanding "success" and "failure" towards intimate, personal ones' (Mendick, Allen and Harvey, 2015, p175). They cite this as enabling a continuation of women and the working classes being 'excluded from the realm of intellect and reason, which is coded as masculine, middle-class and White' (Mendick, Allen and Harvey, 2015, p175).

In my study, very few explanations of a lack familial support emerge within any explanations for the young women not achieving their goals.

'Post-equality' and 'post-feminist' terrains

Equality legislation has undoubtedly benefited women since becoming formalised in the 1970s and it is important to celebrate the resulting gains made by women. The UK parliament incorporated the European Convention on Human Rights into law by establishing the UK Human Rights Act (1998). Our UK equalities law emerged from

this as the Equality Act (2010). This brought together all forms of equality legislation in the UK, replacing the Equal Pay Act (1970), Sex Discrimination Act (1975), Race Discrimination Act (1976), Disabilities Discrimination Act (1995) and the Protection from Harassment Act (1997). The Equality Act drives all the equality of opportunity policies we see in educational, domestic and workplace settings. However, we now find ourselves at a point where equality of opportunity as a political ideal has become discursively manifest as a reality. The transitions of legislation, through rhetoric into constructive subjective discourse, are complex.

I posed questions to my study respondents to gain an understanding of their notion of equality of opportunity. They gave thorough answers which grasped the impact of equality of opportunity policy across their lives. I asked them if they had equal opportunities at home, school and in wider society; the answers were predominantly 'yes.' Here, the young women discursively enact a world where equality legislation permeates the respondents' subjectivities. They predominantly conceive of equality of opportunity as a given within the opportunities currently available to them.

In the literature chapter I have described the notion of a pseudo-meritocratic age, conceived of as emerging from discourses drawn from 'post-equality' and 'post-feminist' terrains. Littler, in her online article (2016), indicates that:

> [u]nder neoliberalism, the language of meritocracy has become an alibi for plutocracy, or government by a wealthy elite…a key ideological term in the reproduction of capitalist culture. The ideology of neoliberal meritocracy has been characterised by two core features. Firstly, by the sheer extent of its attempts to atomise society into individuals who should compete with each other to succeed…Secondly, it has gained much of its power by drawing on the movements for greater equality that have grown stronger in the global North over the twentieth century. We have been encouraged to believe that if we try hard enough we can make it: that "race" or class or gender are not, on a fundamental level, significant barriers to success. Registering human possibility whilst blindsiding social inequality, this has been the "postracial", "postfeminist" neoliberal meritocratic dream that, in their very different ways, Thatcher, Blair and Cameron have offered (Littler, 2016).

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My findings, which will be set out below, align with Littler's position, and identify when the young women perceive and reinforce 'post-equality' and 'post-feminist' positions.

In my study I asked the young women to define 'equality of opportunity' and the results were surprising. They often embrace the notion of equality as a realistic premise in their lives. Some respondents recognise wider constraints which may inhibit young people's futures as financial, racial and gendered. However, nearly all respondents cite having only themselves to blame for failure or success. In some instances, the rhetoric of equality of opportunity is communicated as a given, even when issues of marginalisation are known to the young women. This pervasive feeling of self-responsibility sits at the heart of the explanations surrounding their future trajectories.

The positive impact of equality of opportunity legislation can be seen, both in the UK and internationally, in the opportunities available to the marginalised and to women in particular. Women in the UK context have broadly benefited from progressive legislative agendas. However, as is shown by statistics for HE engagement, the number of working class white girls entering HE and securing professional life trajectories has remained almost static in the last few generations. I argue that with an increase in opportunity comes the hegemonic rhetoric of 'equality as achieved' in the minds of the young women. This individualised rhetoric of self-responsibility supports Ringrose's notion of 'self-responsibilization' (Ringrose, 2007, p481).

McRobbie (2009) critiques Giddens and Beck's notion of individualisation as lacking attention to 'regulative dimensions of the popular discourses of personal choice and self-improvement' (p19). McRobbie suggests that

> [c]hoice is surely, within lifestyle culture, a modality of constraint. The individual is compelled to be the kind of subject who can make the right choices. By these means new lines and demarcations are drawn between those subjects who are judged responsive to the regime of personal responsibility and those who fail miserably (McRobbie, 2009, p19).

Those within the individualisation premise are categorised by how they respond to new opportunities of equality.

The young women in my study were asked 'Can you tell me what you think the term 'equal opportunities' means?' and 'Do you feel you've got equal opportunities at home and in school?' along with specific questions asking them to elaborate on any areas of marginalisation which might affect their ability to succeed. Respondents predominantly define equality as achieved and continued to demonstrate ways in which self-responsibility takes over as the leading feature of personal success. This was the case even when respondents acknowledge issues of marginalisation.

Anya describes her interpretation of equality of opportunity: 'Equal rights, like, whatever opportunity's open to everyone, everyone has a right to have that opportunity.' She considers equal opportunities to be a right. When asked if she had equal opportunities, she replies:

> Yeah I think we do, in school we have equal opportunities and at home as well but like if you're on the streets, like when you're out and about, everyone has an equal opportunity but some people, like have their own choices and they choose opportunities…Do you know you get some people who say "you can't do this" everyone has an equal opportunity whether you say it or not, they've got their own mind and they can do what they want.

Anya's explanation indicates equality of opportunity as a given. She believes that she has equality but also returns to the idea of choice. For her, equality of opportunity exists but remains grounded in her ability to choose to access that equality.

Claire, from Fairfield Academy, states that:

> People can go as high as they push themselves, a lad could be smarter than a girl but the girl could go further, it's just how hard you push yourself and if you had a really difficult background at home you shouldn't bring it to school, it shouldn't affect you everywhere. It should just make you more determined to do well and less focused on home and it should take your mind off things for a bit instead of just focusing on all the bad points.

Claire engages in the discourse depicting self-responsibilitization (Ringrose, 2007) in that she believes material inequalities or personal problems should not affect her ability to progress within the parameters of the neo-liberal, individualised landscape.

Susy from Borough College was highlighted by a senior staff member at her school as being from a family known to social services. She is considered to be a young woman 'at risk' by her local authority. She describes equality of opportunity as: 'Everyone can do the same things; you can go anywhere you want to go, do what you want to do.' A number of the respondents echo this view of equality at school, home and work.

Emma reiterates the idea of equality as achieved, but compares this with the perceived equality of her educational offer:

> Yeah, I think there is, like I said this school is free education so we're all equal because we've all got the same options, we all get the same education, we all get the same teachers. I think that's, like, equal.

Here Emma considers the equality of the in-school experience as an example of her assumption of 'post-equality.' She believes she is experiencing an equal educational offer even though her school is statistically considered to be 'failing,' as evidenced in chapter 4. Emma's version of equality is drawn from the immediate context of the school, rather than where the school may be situated as unequal to others.

Hayley refers to her available opportunities post-16:

> Like, if people come out with less grades they should still have an opportunity to go somewhere…maybe you're good at that one thing you want to do, so let's say you want to be a builder and you're good at building but you're no good at Maths, English and Science. It doesn't matter, you can still get somewhere in life. I think everybody should have the same opportunity, like, available at college no matter how you do at school or how bad you do at school you should still have an opportunity to go somewhere in life if you take the opportunity and if not it's down to you. Like I said, if people don't want to work they're not gonna get the opportunities when they leave here because that's how the world works, but if you work for it we all get the opportunity to go to college or get an

apprenticeship or get a job. There's always an opportunity to help us or go somewhere, there's always something available for us.

Hayley's view of potential trajectories draws upon a career associated with low socio-economic groups, and she uses the desire to be a builder to articulate the complexities of a vocational versus academic career. She reinforces 'post-equality' discourse through her understanding that there is always something there for 'us,' but this emerges within narrowed classed parameters and reinforces the notion of self-responsibility for choosing equality.

Ringrose (2007) depicts the notion of post-equality as young people becoming 'de-classed' and 'de-raced.' Elisa makes direct reference to race and gender without feeling these differences lead to any lack of equality in the lived experience of her peers:

> …where all genders, all cultures and everything have opportunities to do the same as everyone, there's no "you can do this, you can do that" everyone can do it…cos at school, boys and girls and every different culture can do the same things, they don't stop us from that. And at home it's the same, I guess.

McRobbie (2009) argues that discourses from politics to mainstream media have promoted the idea of the successful contemporary girl as a feature of modernity. These new successful girls are engaged in new freedoms with liberated aspirations and a wealth of opportunities not available to previous generations. Baker (2010) refers to the successful girls' debate as 'a rather mythologised commentary about young women's success in education and employment' (Baker, 2010, p2). Baker (2010) infers that there has been an over-emphasis on the success of girls in education and in the workforce, which establishes them as the key 'beneficiaries' of the evolved conditions present in late modernity.

This notion overshadows the lives of marginalised young women and support arguments that we no longer need new forms of radical feminism. McRobbie's critique of the over emphasis on the 'successful girl' depicted as 'the so-called "A1" girls' (McRobbie, 2009, p15), shows us how neo-liberal notions of individualised femininity take hold and become another justification for the validity of the post-feminist era.

The young women in my study, interviewed in 2014, live in changed times from those depicted by McRobbie in 2009. A major shift from thinking about a post-feminist age is currently under way. 2018 has seen the international '#metoo' campaign which advocates for the eradication of sexual harassment and violence against women. In 2017, national women's marches in America arose in response to the inauguration of President Trump. Broomfield (2017) describes a surge in the popularity of mainstream western feminism to meet those taking place across the developing world.

When the data in my study was captured in 2014, the young women involved could be viewed as distanced from any resurgence of mainstream feminism. Their descriptions of feminism are, in part, informed, but the terminology of feminism itself was often alien to them. Some respondents did not understand the term 'feminism;' those who did often refuted any alignment to a need for feminism in their lives.

The young women's descriptions of a lack of necessity for feminism reinforce the notions of them existing within 'post-equality' and 'post-feminist' terrains. This pseudo-meritocratic discourse contrasts with gendered forms of educational and career decision-making, trajectories which present later in this chapter as re-marginalising.

In my study, the young women mostly describe future plans without any recognition of a need for greater gender equality. When asked 'What does feminism mean to you?' and 'How would you describe feminism?' many of the respondents were vague. Hayley, who earlier depicted gendered views of her educational offer, 'had never heard of the word.' Jenny indicates 'I haven't got a clue.' Kealy describes it as 'Feminism? I don't know. I'd just describe it as girly.' Others, including Ruth, understand the inference of the term, defining feminism as: 'It's difficult to be a woman.' Participants occasionally describe femininity as opposed to feminism, including Elisa who states: 'the people who invent feminism, like, girly nature and everything.'

Claire, from Fairfield Academy, when asked to explain feminism, suggests that her 'stereotypical feminist' was Margaret Thatcher. She states: 'I don't know much about it but…I'm not, like, a feminist.' She continues to describe experiencing gender discrimination as: '…when people say "women drivers" that annoys me because you're a man driver, what if women said "men drivers!"' She displays a disarticulation from

the term feminism. She also aligns her version of a stereotypical feminist with Margaret Thatcher suggesting that feminism from her perspective is attached to a class position.

Sarah conflates the meanings of feminity and feminism in her response, displaying what I consider to be feminism depicted in a middle class image:

> They're women who wear nice dresses, have nice hair and they're ladylike and not just a woman but hard working and would fight for women instead of oh, we're only women…because we're still humans, doesn't matter what gender you are, but feminism's like that and they take care of themselves instead of focusing on what men can do.

Emma also conflates feminism and femininity:

> I think feminism is a lot about being strong about yourself, like being strong-willed and I think that's a lot of it as well but when you look at chavs and things like they don't really care. I don't really think that's very feminine but they choose to be like that, they choose to wanna look like that so I think that's feminine…because that's how they want to look. But I think feminism is being strong-willed, it's not just about the way you look, like, if you look smart, I think feminism is being strong-willed and independent and being able to be an independent woman.

Emma understands feminism to be about being 'strong' and 'strong willed,' adding characteristics of being feminine to her explanation. She suggests that 'chavs don't really care,' and so asserts that in their choices around their appearance they are establishing their own version of femininity. Femininity here, as with Emma, merges with her understanding of feminism. The explanations from Claire, Sarah and Emma bind feminism to a class position, and display recognition of classed versions of feminine identity.

Thompson and Holland (2002) respond to the notion that gender goes un-recognised by young women, and suggest that there are 'contradictory consequences of female individualisation' (Thompson and Holland, 2002, p349). They understand that, while there are new social dynamics re-defining gender parameters for choice and

opportunity, retention of gender differentiation occurs within individual agency recognised by women. This complicates the explanations available within individualisation and de-traditionalisation, which often perceive young women as not recognising the impact of gender on their future trajectories.

Many of the young women in my study view feminism as not relevant to their lives. Some have no grasp of the terminology but display an understanding of the values of feminism in their responses. They often describe a 'post-equality' terrain where equality is considered to be a given. A post-legislative, equality of opportunity rhetoric appears to infiltrate their subjective construction. Here, 'post-equality' and 'post-feminist' discourses emerge which support individualised notions of self-responsibility.

Moments of recognition of gender, racial and social inequality

My study's findings align with Ringrose's (2007) suggestion that young women have become 'declassed and de-raced' through individualised policies. However, I also find a divergence from this theme within my research. The young women identify examples of racial and social inequality within their own contexts. They describe differing expectations of girls and boys within their school context, and reveal gendered subject choices and trajectories.

When asked 'Are options different for different groups of people, for boys, different backgrounds or cultures?' Ruth suggests:

> Yeah, it's bit different between boys and girls because I think girls have a wider range of things they can do, they can do anything, even boxing and wrestling, you get girls who do that and for, like, a boy to be hairdresser, it's not something you see every day. It's, kind of, more aimed at girls so I think it's different. And then with religion, some religions can't go swimming so if someone wants to be a swimmer they haven't got that option. So I think it's different depending on who you are.

Ruth infers that girls have greater opportunities than their male counterparts. Her references to race are grounded in religious restrictions. Her answer depicts gender

recognition; however she believes this places restrictions on her male peers rather than females.

Jenny, who earlier described equality in her home and school context, also suggests a wider range of opportunities available to girls:

> Cos there's not much for boys whereas there's loads for girls, you've got hair and beauty, looking after kids 'cos men can't look after kids, can they, bit weird if you get men looking after kids! So I think there are more options for girls than boys and that's why it's harder for boys to find jobs. Obviously for more desk work and hard stuff but when it's just for hair and beauty you'll be alright, so I think it's harder for boys than it is for girls.

Jenny lists the wider opportunities available as 'hair and beauty' and 'looking after kids.' She cites career opportunities statistically populated by girls from low-socio-economic families. She describes options which are classed and gendered and considers that girls have more opportunities than boys.

Jenny demonstrates a performative ascription of the 'successful girl discourse' within the narrow classed and gendered parameters of opportunities available to her. This aligns with Evans' (2009) suggestion, highlighted in the literature review, that working class young women have a reduced set of available opportunities structured through gendered and social status. Jenny later depicts her own career aspirations as wanting to enter the police force, and describes the main inhibitory factor of attending HE as a lack of finance to enable her to do so.

Elisa, in her response, describes girls and boys having gender-specific courses to choose from: '[g]irls can go into what would be seen as girls' courses and boys could go into boys' courses and any culture could do that.' She conceives of specific routes which are gendered, but without any restrictions emerging from cultural differentiation.

Racial differences do also emerge from my study respondents' answers, and these are sometimes perceived of as significant in their interpretations of inequality. Jenny believes opportunities available to people from different cultural backgrounds are affected by familial or varying cultural influence:

Yeah, like, they can't be anything, like they want to be without, obviously, their parents' consent because of their religion or something like that, umm, I don't know…I don't know how to put it…Say they wanted to do a job, they can't just do it 'cos like I said because of their religion and if their family don't agree then that's just causing things, yeah, so it is harder for people with religion and backgrounds.

Shelley, from Fairfield Academy, suggests that career expectations vary across different ethnicities:

I think in some cases it might be harder because it's like, I know a friend who…because, obviously her parents want to let her go and be a doctor but she doesn't want to do it so there's kind of…I don't know how to put it…there's certain expectations for some.

Orla, from Borough College, who had previously indicated her understanding of equality as already achieved, suggests that race and ethnicity could be an inhibitory factor in young people gaining access to university:

No, in my opinion, I think everybody has an equal choice but, in society, I think due to race or ethnicity there's a lot of influence that it could not help them to, like, get into university or whatever, due to their race or whatever.

Janine highlights racism as a factor relating to inequality:

I reckon with the demographics…I'd say more…'cos there is still racism out there…say more black and Latino will go but I don't think they'll go as far as a white middle class student would because purely of the way they look. So, like, if you put a black student, who may have got A stars and everything and you put a white middle class student that got Bs, the white student, I reckon, would get the job.

Anya's description regarding accessing HE displays an awareness that socio-economic groups can be considered to be a factor in educational inequality. She proposes that:

[p]eople that have got more money and things like that are gonna have better things because then their family can just pay off the university…and people who aren't so wealthy don't really get as much as they do, so there are more options for wealthier people.

When asked to describe issues which might present as inhibiting opportunities, many respondents cite race as significant. Some recognise the social aspects of financial inequality. The young women rarely gave answers citing gender as a prevailing issue. Here, I suggest, the political, educational and social rhetoric of 'post-feminism' has convinced the young women of a gender equality, which evades them in reality.

The following explanations from my study respondents regarding educational and career trajectories remain gendered and informed through socio-economic position, as the options of generations of women in their families did before them. What is new here is that the young women performatively contribute to discourses of 'equality of opportunity' in relation to gender as being achieved. This reinforces a pseudo-meritocratic myth, situating their 'failings' as solely their own responsibility, and unrelated to gender-based restrictions to their life planning.

Baker (2010) presents the idea that individualisation may only lead to identities created alongside those formed through traditionalism. She connects the individualisation premise with neo-liberal models of government and changes in practices emerging from a supposedly post-feminist era. She suggests that the field of education nurtures the theory of post-feminist equality. Girls' perceived gains in this area have removed the visibility of existing structural inequalities, overshadowing any on-going marginalisation, by placing undue emphasis on those individuals who have succeeded within the system:

> Young women are under exceptional and exacting pressure to understand their lives as separated from old inequities and in line with the new post-feminist sensibility; ensuring that the educational arena for girls and young women is characterised by high expectations and acute self-responsibility (Baker, 2010, p3).

Notions of failure and success

Francis (2005), though her analysis of girls' success and failure, highlights moments when we can identify and locate failure as moving from the responsibility of the state to the responsibility of the individual. In my study, the respondents' interpretations of failure and success do not fit neatly within a neo-liberal aspirational model of personal development and gain. The young women discursively engage with the neo-liberal parameters of self available to them, and re-define notions of success and failure in order to mobilise optimistic trajectories among the limited feminine classed positions on offer. Varying descriptions of 'success' and 'failure' emerge when the young women share plans for their educational and career trajectories, including their hopes and fears for the future.

My study respondents often cite emotional and financial stability as being core to their understanding of success. As with Hey (2009), the respondents' rationales for financial independence are often selfless rather than arising from individualised engagement in self-serving neo-liberal personal biographies. The young women recognise and reconcile the need for material stability, 'good' jobs, homes and money. However, this is not depicted as being achievable through extensive wealth, but through manageable, realistic versions of success within the trajectories afforded to them. The desire for financial stability is aimed at supporting their families and establishing their own lives so as not to rely on state support.

The descriptions of versions of success and failure given by my study respondents are localised and age appropriate, as one might expect when discussing the futures of 14 and 15 year olds. Many viewed success as being achieved through securing good GCSE qualifications in order to move on to the next phase of their lives. The young women often depicted financial stability as a key factor in their future planning.

Orla's parents are unemployed. Her view of success is: 'I'd say a well-paid job and a family that, like, didn't have any financial troubles. That would be a successful life for me.' Shelley's view of success is found in financial freedom:

> I think it's having the freedom to do what you want. Not too much money

because with too much money you just lose yourself. Get a job and have enough money to be able to support yourself. So if you did have children you've got the ability to take care of them.

The theme of being able to support your future children was echoed by Hayley, who described this as '…having enough money to bring up your kids if you have them.' Here, Hayley recognises the negative depictions of worklessness and asserts her desire to be financially responsible for her future children. Discourses emerge from the young women which resist demonised versions of working class identity, such as being in receipt of state welfare (Tyler, 2008) and those perceived as 'deserving' (Tyler, 2015, p503) and 'undeserving' (Tyler, 2015, p495).

My study aligns with Thompson, Henderson and Holland (2003), Allen and Osgood (2009) and Wilson and Huntington's (2006) assertions that welfare policy and rhetoric permeates the discourse of young working class women's subjective formation through the negative discoursing of working-classness. In my study, this can be seen in the young women's desire to be financially self-sufficient. Ruth suggests that:

> You want enough money to be able to pay for whatever you need. If you're struggling because you haven't got enough money or you're not comfortable and then you have a kid, they're gonna basically grow up in the same way that you did because they're basically living what you've already lived, without enough money. So you need to be, like financially stable so then your kids will have a better life than you did. Like what you want is what you need to be able to give them and that will make you a bit more stable and feel better about yourself.

Ruth depicts a vision of success as improving upon the life she has led. She cites economic hardships, faced by the young women at home, as driving their desire to improve the situation for their future children.

In my study, few respondents cite a desire to achieve large amounts of personal wealth. Although it is the case that the financial stability they perceive as necessary could be argued as considerable wealth in relation to the socio-economic positions they currently inhabit. The idea of having 'enough but not too much' was prominent. Claire states success, for her, could be conceived of as:

Having a good job and an education…and being happy with what you are as well like, it don't matter if you've like got the best job. I think you should be happy with whether you're earning loads or not…having a good job and an education.

Respondents often commented on how money could help to stabilise their lives. At Fairfield Academy, in the focus group interviews, they discuss the implications of financial stability:

Elisa - just like have good money behind you. And fulfill your ambitions and everything.
Atlanta - as long as you've got a home to live in.
Claire - as long as you're happy, you're comfortable and you're financially stable. To me that's succeeding.

Kealy lives with her mother and sister. Her mother is looking for work and Kealy aligns financial stability with securing a good life: 'I just want to grow up and have a good life; I don't want it to be bad. So my goal's just to have a nice life and not one of them bad ones that some people can end up with.' She views a 'bad life' as '[b]eing in debt and stuff, life just seems hard to deal with when you don't have money.'

Atlanta describes issues that might be faced from coming from a wealthier background:

So many people think that if you've got a big house and your parents have got this, this and this then you have to strive to be what your mum and dad where. I think the negatives in my life have made me strive to be what my parents weren't.

Atlanta and Ruth earlier describe a desire to not repeat their parent's lives. Ruth aims to provide a better life for her children. Atlanta cites a desire not to repeating her parents' mistakes as driving her own ambition.

When discussing parameters for success, respondents regularly cite finances, including

the ability to pay for HE, look after your future children and live a 'good' life. Money is viewed as a key stabilising factor to help them improve upon the lives of their parents, support their families and provide stable futures for their children.

Aspiration

As introduced in the literature review (p66), a lack of aspiration on the part of working class children and their families has previously been cited as a rationale for working class educational underachievement. Policy rhetoric has consistently placed the responsibility for this with the communities and families from which working class children emerge. Francis and Skelton (2005) assert that low aspiration amongst the working classes has been repeatedly cited by Department of Education and Skills as a rationale for underachievement. In a 2010 white paper, Prime Minister David Cameron and Deputy Prime Minister Nick Clegg indicated that: 'In far too many communities there is a deeply embedded culture of low aspiration that is strongly tied to long-term unemployment' (Cameron, 2010, p4).

In my study, respondents describe future trajectories which are aspirational and ambitious. Jenny lives with her mother, receives FSM and none of her family has completed post-16 education. During the course of the research process Jenny changes her mind about her chosen career from childcare to police work:

> Do me exams, get the right results, go to college, then I've got to go to uni. Make the family proud and hopefully get a house and move out. Depart from me Nan! Just make me life something, you know what I mean? Not staying living off the dole all the time. Just make my family proud of me, make sure my future's alright.

When asked what entering a career in the police force would entail, Jenny indicates, 'I haven't got a clue yet.' She returns to school after the summer break determined to work harder to achieve her new ambition and explains this change of direction:

> When I was little I either wanted to be a police woman or paramedic. I think the money as well, obviously the money is quite good and no one's a police woman in the family. Like, I've always looked up to police, never disrespected them or

anything and I had an incident and the police had to come round and to do that to someone to make them feel so much better and protected and that's what I want to do, and while she was there she was trying to comfort me and I was thinking I want to be a police woman and she told me some things and I thought I could do that, just help around and that. Make the world, not better, but safer and everything because it won't just be bad people but people in schools and to help with their education and that.

Jenny indicates that the visit from the police was instrumental in forming her career aspirations. Her field of vision was broadened though direct engagement with a professional in a career that, in her early childhood, she favoured, but which was replaced by childcare during her secondary education. Jenny, through her contact with the police woman, was able to envisage herself in this role in future. She indicates that her desire is to make the world a better, safer place.

Archer, DeWitt and Wong (2014) describes that aspirations are '…shaped by structural forces (e.g. social class, gender and ethnicity) and how different spheres of influence (home/family, school, hobbies/leisure activities and TV) appear to shape different types of aspirations' (Archer, DeWitt and Wong, 2014, p58). In my study, the young women's concepts of failure are often driven by a desire not to repeat the lives of their families, and particularly their mothers, as becomes apparent in the views of the respondents set out in chapter 7. They demonstrate moments of ascribing to positively constructed neo-liberal versions of middle-class self which they are told are a requirement of successful futures.

What can also be seen here are moments when the realities of repeating the lives of families deemed as failures, through socio-political and media driven discourses, become pivotal in the respondents' explanations of their trajectories. By re-defining their own parameters of success beyond the negative working class discourses available, they redefine the negative categorisations of working class lives. This provides an opportunity for the young women to generate life narratives which are successful within the material, social and educational constraints of their lives.

Chapter 5

Section 2: Perceptions of academic performance, educational and career trajectories: the school context

In this section I examine the respondents' planned future trajectories, the rationale for their choices, their views of their school context and the impact of public perceptions of their schools as 'failing.'

This chapter shows that narratives differ between those who need to plan futures with and without academic success. Respondents include those who envisage an academic trajectory including Higher Education (HE), those who were not able to plan a life lived through academic educational advancement, those who consider vocational educational trajectories and those still unsure. In this chapter I argue that respondents who cite a desire to progress their careers through a commitment to HE present with a shared deficit between their perceived professional goals and their capacity to articulate the journey required to achieve those goals.

Learner identities

The educational and career trajectories of the young women in my study are greatly affected by the idea of academic failure. Claire, from Fairfield Academy, indicates that peers can heavily influence one's educational performance, and states that 'the wrong crowd can stop you doing what you wanna do.' Ruth, from Fairfield Academy, also makes reference to her peers, suggesting those around you can inhibit educational progress:

> There's always a group of people that you don't really like, that always put your confidence down and when they're in your lessons you don't really feel comfortable putting your hand up and answering things because you're scared of what people might think of you so I think that, kind of, puts me down a bit.

In the methodology chapter (chapter 4) I described the perceptions of a senior manager from Fairfield Academy who made reference to a 'leader of the pack mentality' among the students. He believes this leads to a culture where the pupils feel that it is either

acceptable or unacceptable to learn, depending on the leaders' views.

Sarah, from Fairfield Academy, introduces the idea of educational competition within the school context:

> Yeah, like, other people are obviously gonna do better than me and if you go to a job with less grades than someone else then they'll just take it…so that will make you wanna be higher but then you're less focused on you and how you'll get it, you'll focus on how they're getting it, so you try and be like other people and that'll stop you from being yourself which'll stop you from doing as well as you can.

Sarah describes a lack of academic confidence, claiming that at the age of 15 she knows that 'obviously everyone is going to do better than me.' She perceives of a version of herself as already academically underachieving and states that life is 'all about competition with everyone.' When discussing competitiveness Sarah describes this as a preoccupation which distracts one from focusing on actual goals: 'It's too much pressure on teenagers which'll stop them actually focusing on what you want to do. It'll just focus on being better than everybody else and you should focus on what you want to do.' Sarah recognises the negativity of becoming preoccupied with being better than everyone else rather than focusing on achieving one's own goals. This can be viewed as a discourse of neo-liberal competitiveness in school and post-educational contexts.

Kealy, from Borough College, describes her aspiration of a career working with animals, as accessed through Further Education (FE) and HE:

> I'll probably take the courses in Hadlow, like, the equestrian course, animal management and veterinary…ones like RSPCA or equestrian type of jobs and they can also lead to becoming one of the Olympic Legacy horse riders, so yeah, if I do good I'll probably get a job with one of them.

However ambitious Kealy's plans are, her learner identity situates her as academically underachieving and the discourses she presents regarding her educational future are those of failure. She describes needing 'good grades' to attend the courses which will enable her future career path, but concedes she will inevitably feel like a failure 'when I

don't get the grades.' Kealy continues to discuss her educational future with a theme of resignation due to failure. Her concerns lie in having to stay behind to repeat her GCSEs.

The 'back-up plan'

A consistent theme to emerge across the interviews was the need for respondents to have a 'back-up plan.' Claire, from Fairfield Academy, plans to attend HE to study theatre and performance. However, she indicates, 'I've got back-up plans…to go into food theory and catering and things like that.'

Hayley wants to attend HE to qualify to teach, but she knows that her 'mum could always get me work in the old people's home' her mum works in if Hayley does not achieve the grades required and later completes a GNVQ in Health and Social Care. A perceived need for financial stability ensures that ambitions held by the young women are tempered by the economic reality of their lived experience. Their aspirations are clear but are undermined by learner identities which lack confidence.

Anya explains her aspiration of become a forensic investigator:

> Anya - I want to do forensics, yeah I've always wanted to do that. I've always
> been a fan of CSI on TV. I've always wanted to do that.
> Interviewer - What does that mean you have to do at college?
> Anya - I've got to stay on and probably do science, A-level science and then
> study forensics at college.

Her concerns regarding achieving this ambition relate to her perceived inability to persevere. When asked 'Who do you think is responsible for your success in the future?' she introduces a self-responsible discourse:

> I think mainly myself, because if I want to do something I've got to keep
> pushing and the most worry is if I give up and I've got to be determined to do it.
> I think its myself and not just giving up…I think I've always been interested in
> that sort of stuff, helping people and solving crimes and things like that, so I
> think maybe that's why.

When asked about the requirements of her ideal career trajectory i.e. if she would need to attend college and university, she replies that she 'probably would.' Her answers did not depict an understanding of any of the detail of the educational route required to secure a career as a forensic investigator. When asked about additional inhibiting factors she cites financial constraints: 'I'm not sure…I do want to go to university but I just think the money, I've got to plan it all out.' Later in the interview, Anya returns to this subject. She suggests that she also does not have the right grades:

> My Maths, English and Science are probably the worst. I wanted to get A's and B's but because I don't go to school very often and I know I should; I'm getting better but I just think I miss out on a lot and I need to catch up on a lot as well.

Anya's aspirations are hampered by her attendance problems, which impact upon her grades. At the end of the interview she indicates that she has an alternative plan of childcare and that this seems more 'realistic,' stating:

> I don't really have that much belief in myself…'cos childcare I think…being a forensic is more of a big job, with childcare it's not very wide, the most you can do is look after children but with forensics it's really wide, a big job.

Anya believes her aspirations are unlikely to be realised. She knows she is far more likely to successfully enter a career in childcare and begins to positively engage in the depiction of a future with that in mind.

I suggest that Anya's use of the term 'big job', demonstrates a distance between her and the people she knows, and professionalised careers. The 'big jobs' she describes are distanced from the people and professionals she has access to; they are professional jobs done by people she sees on TV. Access to professions which could normalise aspirational careers appears to be lacking here.

McRobbie suggests that qualifications act as a 'gendered axis of social division' (McRobbie, 2007, p727). In my study we see manifestations of this division, with choices made to ensure that respondents can remain engaged in the development of their own biographies rather than those who fail due to aiming too high. Anya describes her ambition in life as: 'I just want to get a really good job, have a family and settle down

and not have to struggle and worry about money and stuff.' The reality of a need for financial stability above all else defines her ambitions.

In many cases, respondents cite academic failure as a concern which will prevent them from reaching their career aspirations. Croll (2008) analysed data over a ten-year time frame, comparing the career aspirations of 15 year olds with their academic achievements and career development in their mid-20s. Findings indicate that educational attainment often matched individual ambition, but that occasions of misalignment also occur:

> Either people wanting jobs which their educational attainments and intentions will not prepare them for, or people with less ambitious aspirations than their educational performance would justify. Children from more occupationally advantaged families are more ambitious, achieve better educationally and have better occupational outcomes than other children…where young people are neither ambitious nor educationally successful, the outcomes for those from disadvantaged homes are very much poorer than for other young people (Croll, 2008, p243).

Croll suggests that multiple choices are available to all young people, but that those choices are heavily constrained by individuals' own educational and social circumstances. The young women in my study can be considered to 'dream big' with ambitious career aspirations; however, they consistently reduce these when considering the realities of the lives of those who surround them.

Educational and career trajectories

In the trajectories presented here we can see discourses which oscillate around the narrow views of neo-liberal feminine identity on offer. We see discourses which situate the young women as successful socially-mobile subjects contrasting with discourses that situate the young women amidst demonised views of working class feminine identity.

Within my case study participants there were some who wanted to attend HE, including a number who felt they would not achieve the grades. Others chose vocational routes

post-16, in line with the policy that has served to 'Raise the Age of Participation' (Department of Education, 2016).

When asked about their choice over whether to attend HE, respondents often began by indicating that their parents had not previously done so. Atlanta states that 'no one in my family has gone to uni' and that she would like to attend, but that no specific course to train for the police was available at the age of 16. Atlanta wants to enter the police force but it is her understanding that she cannot do this through a university route, and she states: 'I'd love to go to uni but my course isn't at uni what I wanna do.'

Atlanta describes the research she has undertaken to support her educational planning:

> I looked more into my course for what I needed to do and went to the police station and asked and university wasn't an option really. There's not a course to take, you know like when you go to college you think oh there's a course to take to go in to the police force, there's actually not. The only thing you can do is volunteer. I think there should be a training course in police cadets, so I'm wasting a year at college to do public services, which isn't fully what I want to do. I've got to wait until I'm 18.

At no point does Atlanta describe the multiple graduate routes into the police force that do exist. No one has indicated to her that a career in the police force could also involve a university education or informed her of specific university courses which exist for police career trajectories.

Atlanta's definition of a successful life was to get a 'good job' as 'none of my family have got really good jobs.' Atlanta's family is known to social services and she had been expelled from other schools, arriving at Fairfield Academy in the previous year. She was added to the focus group list by the deputy head as he believed she was an 'exceptionally bright girl with a very challenging home life.' This difficult home life had made her challenging in the school context and he was worried about her future. He was trying to ensure she sat her exams as her attendance had been poor and he saw the research as an additional way to engage her.

When sharing her future plans it becomes apparent that Atlanta's career ambitions

emerge from her experience with her own family. She displays resistive discourses to the narrow working class versions of self on offer. She tackles her problematic background by aiming for a career in response to her mother's criminal history. She states her main concerns regarding her future career as:

> My mum's got a criminal record that's gonna put such a strain on me getting into the police force. I mean I heard it once before but I didn't believe it but then I spoke to my police cadet officer and she was 21 when she applied but she didn't get in until she was 25 because her parents had a criminal record. I sometimes get mad because I think why should I have to be held back because of the mistakes that my mum's made. Like I don't blame my mum so much now because she's changed her life, but that is part of the government as well. The government need to be putting their foot down and giving children more options, instead of doing all these cut backs, like cutting courses, cutting after school clubs.

Atlanta is passionate and politicised in her views, displaying a discursive resistance to being a working class girl from a family involved with the judicial system.

The theme of working class families potentially creating problems with future educational trajectories also emerges for Elisa from Fairfield Academy, who thought that attending university could be affected by: '…family problems, because…you might not want to leave them or they might not want you to leave them, so you might not be able to focus at university because they're causing so much problems for you.'

Orla, from Borough College, states that no one in her family has previously attended HE, and cites this as a central reason for wanting to attend herself. It was her intension to study sociology, psychology and art at A-level and then to attend a local university to study psychology and crime:

> I've had a lot of issues in myself. I suffer from depression and anxiety so I have panic attacks and stuff and, I suppose, because I've gone through that I want to help people in the same way that I was and people going through mental disorders or whatever, just help them get better and help them realise that it's not all bad.

She depicts a clear educational pathway to her a career in criminal psychology. Her aspirations and the pathway to achieving them are well-informed, which is unusual among this cohort. However she remains concerned regarding her academic potential:

> I don't think that I'll be able to pass my A levels due to be, like being worse than everybody but, obviously I do want to pass my A levels and go to university, so yeah…I'm just gonna have to try.

Orla suggests an altruistic professional career pathway as aiding her desire to help people, but she still lacks confidence in securing the academic grades to achieve her goals. Her learner identity is unconfident, and she has concerns that her ambitions could go un-realised.

Gordon et al (2005) indicate that ambition is narrowed through views of financial constraints. The ongoing increases in women's HE attendance (Universities and Colleges Admissions Service, 2017a) are overshadowing the near static access into HE for white working class girls (Universities and Colleges Admissions Service, 2017). Policy makers and the media have cited that increased HE attendance, since the introduction of fees, means financial concerns have had a limited impact on young people's decisions to attend.

The young women in my study come from the lowest socio-economic groups, with the lowest HE access rates of any ethnicity. I suggest that these young women are perpetually overlooked in their static access to HE and display significant concerns regarding the financial implications of attending. Claire states her financial concerns regarding university attendance as follows:

> You are in debt for the majority of the rest of your life really. It's a big decision because it can effect like not just the time that you're in university but for the rest of your life. You've gotta make sure that your earning good money to be able to pay that money back.

Claire makes the comparison between her financial concerns and the lack of concerns of other young people from wealthier socio-economic groups:

Like, some people they've got a good background it's like there for 'em, like they ain't gotta really work for it, they get it all paid for by like their parents, obviously their parents will pay for them. So they'll have it like placed on a plate in front of them, but whereas like some of us we like can't do that, we have to think about how were gonna pay it back, we have to think more wisely about our choices, whereas some people don't.

A large number of other respondents across both schools indicated in their questionnaires that they could not afford to go to university and that they would not receive any parental financial support if they did.

In the context of the focus groups there was no judgement by other peers regarding participants' decisions over whether or not to attend HE. The discussion was pragmatic; they needed to do the best they could with the options they had, weighing up the financial and social implications.

Hayley was the only other case study respondent, along with Orla, who gave a clear articulation of her desire to attend university and a clear view of the educational pathway required to do so. She wants to become a teacher, but while she did have some concerns over achieving the grades and financing her university career, she believes she will find solutions. Hayley's mum works in a care home and her step-dad is a builder. She considers her family to be 'well off'. She describes that her mother

… never did anything like go to university and I'm, like, the eldest granddaughter and there are fifteen of us, so I want to be the first to do it and experience it so I can tell the rest what it's like and I want to do it because it's just an experience that's so good to go to university.

Hayley believes attending HE will inspire the 14 younger family members of her generation. She is ambitious and wants to succeed in her life in order to help people, and cites reasons for this such as ensuring 'that other children don't get bullied' as she did. Yet however clear her pathway to HE is in her mind, she still doubts her capacity to achieve this: 'Like, university because of the cost of it, it's quite expensive. I think it's hard to get there but even if I don't there are other options to get where I want to be.'

Hayley's teachers introduced her to the idea of qualifying to teach. She draws on the experience of professionals around her to model her career planning. Hayley also describes her 'back–up plan' as being able to rely on finding work with her mum in the care home. She describes the educational route of her sister:

> There's always something out there even if it ain't your dream job, like, my step-sister wanted to be a carer, but she never got into college so she works at Next now, so it's still a job, it's not where she wanted to be but there's always something out there that you can do until maybe you do reach your dreams.

Hayley describes aspirations to live outside of her classed parameters, although these emerge with her back-up plan. Her aspirations emerge as modeled upon the professionals surrounding her in the school context. She engages in discourses which situate her as a neo-liberally socially mobile woman. She also re-purposes working class failure discourses when she considers that her sister can still find respectability by having any job.

Two of the 13 case study respondents provide examples where other family members have attended HE; both of these respondents attend Fairfield Academy. Claire has a step-sister who has recently completed her degree in performing arts and Ruth's aunt has studied '…psychology, science something like that.' While neither of the young women were clear on the details of the courses their relatives had studied, the fact that someone in their family had attended was significant, and made the idea of attending university seem potentially realistic.

Ruth's aunt had taken her to visit her university the previous year. Ruth describes this positively:

> She went to pick up some work and like all of her friends were there, they was all talking about their classes and I just found it a very good experience. Listening to them and how much they enjoy it and I guess it's just a better further education to get a better degree.

Her aunt has offered to support her with the expense of attending but Ruth is unsure: 'If I still don't know what I want to do after I've left school then I'll just go to college and

re-sit Maths, English and Science.' Ruth's potential inability to secure the grades to attend university is a primary concern. However, knowing her aunt has attended university meant this remains a potential option for her in the future, even if she has to go through re-sits.

Claire's step-sister influences her decision to consider HE. However, Claire also:

> …wanted to consider where I can get to without uni, obviously I want to go to college because that's the only next step that you can do. I'd love to go to uni for the experience but only if I know I was going to get somewhere through uni, for me it's more of the expense to get me to there…travel down there because I haven't got no other financial support and if we can't get like a job after college then you've got nothing else that you can do. So you have to get yourself comfortable before you can go because I don't wanna be like oh mum can you help me pay or anything like that, it just ain't right.

Claire's key concern relates to how she could finance a HE course. She doesn't consider it right to ask her mother for financial support. Claire is a FSM pupil and her mother works in a supermarket. Claire's desire for the experience of university is obvious but she is willing to try to see how far she can get without this form of education due to the financial implications of attending HE.

Her mother has discussed the employment options available to Claire and encouraged her to attend HE:

> Cos mum said "there's no jobs out there so when you get to whatever age and there's still no jobs what are you gonna do? I don't want you to do nothing" and I said I don't want to do that either, I'll probably work if I don't go to uni…Some people that have like been to uni and got like further education. They might have more doors open to them because people might choose them over somebody who hasn't been to uni. But sometimes it can be the other way sometimes people aren't just looking for an education, they're looking at what you are, how your personality is.

Claire experiences parental encouragement to attend HE but feels unable to ask for any

financial assistance. Here, she engages in positive discourses of not attending HE. She describes career opportunities which do not require HE with employers who recognise personality above qualification.

Respondents also describe a reverse idea to the 'back-up plan' when they discuss attempts to obtain a secure future without the additional financial risk involved in attending HE. Others cite financial concerns, indicating that the benefit of the experience of attending HE is not worth being left with a 'lifetime of debt.' Decisions to attend HE are pragmatic, borne out of necessity for particular career paths. However, ultimately the young women depict choices that are grounded in concerns over the financial implications, including the implications of the financial position they would find themselves in afterwards.

The young women find ways to protect themselves through discourses which reposition success outside of the realms of a future secured through academic advancement. Anya is pragmatic and emphasises the notion of university as a valuable life experience, but indicates that it was not worth attending solely for '…the experience…if it wasn't going to benefit my future and just leave me with loads of debt.'

Orla describes planning a professional trajectory which involves helping others. She views a successful future as behaving as a socially-responsible adult. Her version of success includes career, financial and familial goals that are not aligned with versions of success often seen in neo-liberal individualised biographies. She states a desire to:

> …influence people that the world's not as bad as it looks, like, in society...professionally, I just want to help people and make them realise that there's a lot more to the world than what it comes across as there's a lot more to it.

As with Orla, a number of other respondents indicate altruism in their career planning, with a social conscience emerging within many of their chosen career paths. They also regularly refer to a desire to financially support their families.

The notion of a financial and career altruism aligns with Hey (2009) who cites Evans (2009) when surmising that working class girls display a desire to access HE for far

more altruistic reasons than notions of individualisation allow for. My concern here is that, in citing altruism in the young women's career considerations, I risk displaying gender essentialist versions of feminine identity. Altruism could be considered a characteristic of gendering or simply a demonstration of a classed consciousness, which displays a heightened sense of the challenging circumstances of others.

Walkerdine takes this argument beyond the concept of neo-liberal personal biographies, indicating that aspiration in working class children requires fantasy and imagination: '…that such students may not lack a way of fantasising a set of desires for the future, but are not well supported in education to mobilise these into an imagination which can be acted upon' (Walkerdine, 2011, p256). This supports my argument that my study respondents present with a wealth of ambition, yet vie for discursive positions which are protectionist, that find credibility and respectability in the choices they have on offer. Having a 'back-up plan' and trying to see how much can be achieved without HE are practical mechanisms to allow individuals to live their realities, and act as discursive modes of self-protection against knowing that one's dreams and aspirations may not be realised.

The decision over whether to attend HE I present here aligns to Evans (2009), who suggests that attempts to democratise HE access do not address young women's concerns that university is a middle class institution which may be socially and financially out of their reach.

Lucey, Melody and Walkerdine (2003) suggest that working class women can display profound unease when achieving educational success involves 'becoming and being profoundly different from your family or peer group' (p286). Policy makers, those who disseminate policy and practitioners side-step the idea that research and policy show little trace of the negative effects of transitions away from a working class identity. Instead, they conceive of middle class aspirations as a necessary and positive evolution. The assumption being that everyone wants to leave working class personhood behind.

Many of the narratives which emerge in my study display an aspiration by respondents to achieve better lives than their parents, accessed through educational routes. However, here, as with the examples provided in chapters 6 and 7, the young women display trajectories which maintain their family and community bonds.

Classed and gendered career trends

The views of the young women in my study align with the findings depicted in the literature (chapter 3) in their presentation of classed and gendered career trajectories. My study respondents' planned trajectories include the repetition of particular FE choices, including courses in health and social care and hairdressing and beauty therapy. These are either the main focus or their choices or their 'back-up plan.' When career aspirations for my study cohort sit outside of those 'usual' for the demographic, they still present through a discourse emerging from class position.

Budgeon (2015) describes the central drivers enabling neo-liberalism and post feminism as:

> …individualization, feminization, co-optation and depoliticization…that, in concert, these forces constitute an idealized version of femininity remade through a language of choice and autonomy but decoupled from feminism. By celebrating individual acts of choice as empowering for women, choice feminism uncritically endorses this form of femininity. It is argued here that this tendency, which circulates throughout many claims made by choice feminism, works to reinforce a regressive form of "neo-liberal feminism" (Budgeon, 2015, p305).

The classed and gendered aspects of the career and life trajectories the respondents describe here must be considered within the notion of neo-liberal forms of feminine identity. Narrow neo-liberal classed versions of feminine identity, as depicted in the literature review (chapter 3, section 3), define the versions of personhood that become performatively enacted by the young women here. There is an ascription to working class modes of femininity and/or to the aspiration of middle class versions of self.

Jenny and Anya indicate that a course in health and social care is their back-up plan. Emma states this would also be her educational route, with her rationale emerging from her relationship with her younger cousin who has behavioral problems. She believes she is the only one who can '…calm him down…and I quite enjoy it because I help him to see the better side of, like, of what he could do for himself…he don't think good of

himself and I think he's just really angry.' Emma finds a positive discourse to situate herself within her planned trajectory of childcare. She will be in a position to help people as she does within her own family. When asked if she could foresee any issues which might prevent her from achieving her goals, Emma answers: 'No, I don't think so because I've got basic targets, like, get a job, a house…it will be hard but I think I'll be able to achieve it.' Emma's positive discourse is grounded in an awareness of her class position. Her goals are communicated as 'basic' and therefore achievable, inferring that her biggest obstacle is 'to find a job, and even harder to find a job you like.' This language of future trajectories amongst most of the young women often refers to 'jobs' and not 'careers.' Future planning detailed one's ability to get a job and earn enough money to be self-reliant.

Sarah intends to pursue hairdressing and beauty therapy. It interests her, and she describes herself as 'good at it.' She also describes an altruistic discourse of helping other people. She views her intellectual capacity positively, and considers herself to be 'really clever' and also 'very girly.' She suggests that she receives support from teachers but indicates that they insist that she have a back-up plan, as hairdressing does not 'earn well unless I'm very successful.' The career aspiration she displays are classed and gendered in specialism, with her perceived life trajectory also displaying a consideration of her gender.

Sarah describes a desire to:

> …get engaged but not married. Once I've got money, car, a nice house, when
> I've sorted everything out and I've still got loads of money left then I would
> plan for making the family bigger but I would have to be with a boyfriend for a
> long time to do that. Like I'd do stuff for myself before I'm ready to have a
> baby, like I'd probably wait 'til I'm twenty-five or later than that. I want to have
> my life first then I can provide and make a better life for the baby instead of
> messing both of us up. I want to do well for myself and make everyone that
> doubted me…I want to say "Ha! I done it!" Instead of doing nothing and then
> getting pregnant and then still having nothing and finding it really difficult.

Sarah considers her future to include motherhood. She displays a resistance to the negative discoursing of teenage working class motherhood in her desire to wait until at

least 25, which is still relatively young in middle-class terms. Her desire to prove everyone wrong is her motivation. Her planned future trajectory emerges from an awareness of discourses of working class educational underachievement, which drives her resistance.

The HE routes the young women describe also present as gendered. Jenny indicates examples of careers achieved through attending HE: 'like midwife you have to go to university and I think you have to be a teacher as well but if you wanted your job you'd do what you have to do.' Susy outlines two potential trajectories:

> going to college to study photography or hair and beauty…when I was younger I used to love doing hair and make-up, I played with my mum's hair, I'd do peoples make-up, I'd love it, it's a girly thing. And with photography I love taking pictures, experiencing all the effects and stuff and now doing photography for GCSEs encouraged me a bit more, like, learning about dark rooms and stuff.

She describes a career path after college. She will try to 'get a job in a salon or if not I want to do my own photography from home, go on events and stuff and then just live my life like that, doing photography and hair and beauty.' Susy cannot describe a potential route through studying photography, but is aware of a transitional route into level 1 and 2 Hair and Beauty. She cannot articulate how a career in photography might progress beyond it being a hobby alongside her real job. There is a deficit in her knowledge of the career trajectory of photography, although she can clearly describe the information she has received at school to continue in hair and beauty.

Janine, from Borough College, is a confident learner as is reflected in her desire to continue on an academic route and through her planned career trajectory. She is the highest academic achiever of the case study participants with very good predicted grades for GCSE. Janine lives at home with her mum who is undertaking a teaching qualification at the time of the data capture. Janine's career pathway is still undecided. She describes a range of careers that interest her: 'Journalism, then fashion magazine, law or sort of like in the middle of this one, like detective work, like in the secret service or something that interests me.' Janine is sure of her A-Level choices as a necessary step to those possible careers:

Sociology, psychology and media studies and then I'll take on them and then get a degree in them, hopefully. And then when I'm old I'll get a degree in Zoology because I adore animals. So when I'm like getting to my retirement sort of age, I'll go and umm…'cos if I'm rich I'll be able to afford to do it.

Janine decides to pursue social sciences as the more realistic career; she describes not wanting to say '…like, oh I'm gonna be an astronaut.' She chose 'something that I can achieve, if I set myself a goal.' Janine is a student with a confident learner identity, however there are still uncertainties reflected in her planed trajectory, and an apparent lack of confidence emerging from her classed position:

I mean I have my doubts all the time, I'm not gonna get the A stars that I want. I don't know if I'll achieve what I want 'cos I want to go to Cambridge or Oxford, something high, but within the social classes then I'm not exactly middle class, more private school children are gonna go to higher colleges because of that social status that they have, giving them that advantage in the world so I don't know if I'll be able to do exactly do what I want to do.

Within her aspiration to attend Oxbridge she remains aware of the challenges faced by children from her social position. Here, as with Reay (2003), individualisation and its proposed project of the self opportunities do not take into account the realities of the lived experience of working class girls transitioning to HE.

A number of the respondents align with the 'successful girls' discourse, and indicate that boys' attitudes are different towards their learning. Emma describes the differences she perceives between boys and girls experiences:

I think boys have a totally different mindset. My boyfriend says "I don't really care, I'm not bothered," like when he's asked "what do you want to be when you're older" and he says "I don't care, I can do anything." I think boys are less confident than girls. Like, some girls'll put up their hands and say they need help but boys won't. I think a lot of boys are like that…I think boys get distracted by other boys and do things that other boys do so they go a different way to what girls go, like, I think they give the "I don't care" attitude until the

last couple of months and then they do it. But I think some boys are different, some boys can do it, some boys in this school are better than what some girls are.

Emma considers that boys don't care as much as girls:

> Some boys don't really care what they want to do in life, like, they don't think they've got to do anything, they don't think that they've got to work hard. So I think that some boys in their own minds, yeah, they don't want to do it, so they're not gonna do it, so they don't push themselves but I think most girls do.

Here, Emma perceives that girls are more committed to their education and show more of a willingness to try.

The comments from Janine below align with discourses of poor performance of boys within the school context. Janine displays a sophisticated grasp of how any poor performance by boys at GCSE is outstripped by boys taking over professionally as their career develops:

> Boys…like, it's been said that boys don't do as well as girls do in GCSEs but I think they still do go as far even further because you have more male doctors, not nurses, lawyers; like there's still sexism as well but…dunno, it's because they're supposed to be the more dominant of the two, I think more people rely on them more than a woman, women just seem to cook, clean, have kids.

Here, I argue that both Emma and Janine display an awareness of the successful girl discourse, with Janine recognising the binary position of boys conceived of as 'failing' at GCSE.

Janine also describes a sophisticated view of feminism, stating that 'there is deep division of labour between men and women.' She considers that both men and women go to work, but that '…the woman is supposed to do everything else like cook, clean, look after the kids and work as well.' When asked about feminism's relationship to her life Janine replies:

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I mean I wouldn't describe myself as a feminist but I would say that women do more of the stuff than men do. Like, my mum and dad go out and work but my mum cooks, cleans and looks after us.

Here, Janine, even with her thorough grasp of feminism and its implications in the life of her mother, still does not align herself with being a feminist. This reinforces the arguments made earlier in this chapter that the respondents see little necessity for feminism in their lives.

In line with my explanation in the literature review (chapter 3) Thompson and Holland (2002) indicate that individualisation, as conceived of by Beck, suggests 'that traditionally gendered identities and life courses have not disappeared' (p337). Thompson and Holland state that, 'Although Beck describes men and women as being freed from "gender fates," in practice, consciousness of change outstrips material changes between men and women' (Thompson and Holland, 2002, p337). While discourses of 'post-equality' and 'post-feminism' exist, the realities of difference between the lives of men and women continue to create conflicts between the rhetoric and reality of gender equality. In this way an 'equalisation of prerequisites in education and law have raised expectations among women' (Thompson and Holland, 2002, p337-338) but those expectations do not correlate with lived reality. This moves us away from discourses depicting an awareness of patriarchy which remains prevalent today, and further marginalises, when gender intersects with class and racial position.

Educational and career planning

The young women in my study describe a mixture of views regarding the quality of educational and career planning support they receive. The ambition and aspiration of the young women is not matched by the information available to them. A feeling of failure attached to not being in work draws them toward careers which they perceive to be achievable rather than aspirational. Respondents cite support in educational and career planning from school and family members. However, career advice provided at school presents as limited. Their parents, while supportive, often draw from their own education and experience when giving advice. The young women do however try to seek out the knowledge required to plan for careers outside of their contexts.

Emma, Janine and Susy, all from Borough College, state they receive good career advice within school, with opportunities for FE planning secured through visits, careers events, mock applications and interview processes. Ruth and Elisa, both from Fairfield Academy, indicate that they attend '...assemblies where people have come in telling us about what the kind of things we've got to look forward to in the future.' They describe receiving educational advice, followed up by visits from FE representatives.

Earlier, I introduced Jenny from Fairfield Academy. She initially states a desire to attend college to study health and social care. Later, she changes her mind and states that she intends to join the police force. When asked to explain this change, she describes an original wish to be 'a police women or paramedic' but, when career planning at school, she shows indecision between those options and health and social care:

> My teacher literally laid it (health and social care) on a plate and said if you want to do this you have to do this, like literally, not set my future out but that's when it changed 'cos I thought it's just gonna be a roll in the park.

She demonstrates a narrowing of her future plan from police officer to one involving childcare achieved through a health and social care qualification. The clarity of information available regarding that trajectory made it seem easier. It was only her chance encounter with a police officer which reintroduced her original career plan.

Some of the young women feel the support they receive is inadequate. Orla and Anya, both from Borough College, are critical of the support offered. Orla feels she has been left to 'do all of the research myself,' whilst Anya states: 'I don't get spoken to much by anyone' regarding career guidance.

Ruth, from Fairfield Academy, describes an acceptance of her chosen career path without question:

> Because the teachers are just accepting they're not giving them advice on what they want, they just agree and don't try to change it…at one point I said that I wanted to be a hairdresser and then she just accepted it and moved on to the next person. I think she should've given more advice and helped us a bit.

As has been seen in the trajectories outlined so far, respondents describe a disconnect between their ambition and the information available to support their career planning.

Budget cuts are cited by the young women as leading to reduced availability of careers advice within both schools. Opportunities for respondents to undertake work experience had also reduced as a result of budgetary and time restraints. This reinforces the findings from the *Time for Change* (Department for Education, 2017) report that cites the removal of credible career guidance throughout the preceding twenty years. At Borough College the students repeatedly believed that a lack of work experience would inhibit their opportunities in the job market.

Roberts, Clark and Wallace's (1994) concept of 'structured individualisation' (p51) applies the individualisation premise to research into young people's educational career trajectories. They suggest that their recipients depict individualised choices as autonomous self-directed pathways within their biographies. Their choices lie within narrow parameters, 'sold' as egalitarian options to students through individualised policy rhetoric. Young people are 'governed by the familiar predictors – family background, sex, place of residence, and attainments in secondary education' (Roberts, Clark and Wallace, 1994, p31). Here, young people can be seen as 'prototypical' (Roberts, Clark and Wallace, 1994, p31) cases of structured individualisation.

In my study, respondents describe examples of individualised choices being 'sold' to them as egalitarian. They are engaged in 'choice' discourses alluding to the meritocratic, but those 'choices' present as classed and gendered, and often go unchallenged in the school context. As with Thompson (2011), in some cases a focus on progression outweighs the quality or diversity of progression. The focus on academic outcomes stressed by the current rigors of assessment mean that those who 'fail' academically are often directed to the only remaining available routes to ensure they do not completely fall out of the system.

The findings in my study suggest limited access to professional or careers advice at home and school. Students are left with a limited understanding of how to overcome any school age academic 'failings' to achieve their ambitions. The aspirations of the students are then diminished, resulting in them being directed to classed and gendered

employment routes. The employment routes they cite are arguably contemporary equivalents of the employment opportunities afforded to working class women throughout history.

In my study, respondents who succeed academically also use the language of 'a back-up plan' in case of failure which, although well-intended, seems to undermine their confidence. This, along with real material concerns, impedes upon their versions of future selves and their ambitions for their futures.

The young women in my study indicate the key impact of meeting people in particular careers as crafting their decision-making. Earlier in this chapter, Jenny stated an encounter with a police woman as the moment she changed her mind back to police work as a potential career option. Hayley refers to advice from her teacher in her choice to work towards becoming a teacher herself.

Ruth, from Fairfield Academy, explains that her mother works at her school and is completing her Level 3 Diploma to become a teaching assistant: 'She's already doing her placement…level 3 so she knows what I need to do. She's doing level 3 to become a teaching assistant, she wants to go to uni after.' Ruth is proud of her mother's success and cites her mother's educational achievements, being employed within the school, as driving her own career aspirations.

Ruth was in a minority of respondents whose parents had any post-compulsory education. Others have parents who have either not completed compulsory schooling or only completed schooling to 16, with only two that had completed post-16 qualifications. The young women draw from examples of individuals within their immediate frame of reference. Limited access to professionals from a broader range of disciplines and limited career planning appears to narrow their view. They often do not have access to the knowledge to support them in accessing their imagined futures.

The school context

The students are, in part, very proud of their schools but are also aware of perceptions of the schools as 'failing,' as was depicted in the methodology chapter. The idea of learner identities lacking confidence, explored in the last section, is further compounded

by concepts of attending schools which are positioned negatively.

In 2011 the then UK Prime Minister, David Cameron, when articulating his views on the issues of disaffected youth and his rationale for the UK riots of 2011, described: 'Children without fathers. Schools without discipline. Rights without responsibilities. Communities without control' (Cameron, 2011). The young women in my study demonstrate subjectivities that emerge that enable them to exist within institutions, families and communities often demonised in this way. This discursive filtration of negative political rhetoric leads to moments when they display shame. They also display moments of resistance, seen here as they navigate discursive depictions of their school experience.

Reay (2017) describes the experiences of working class students as arising from limited options. Working class children are often only able to access schools of low status, demonised by others and, in some cases, by the students themselves. In the literature review and methodology chapters I have described how schools are characterised as 'failing' through Ofsted's categorisation and educational league table performance. Research suggests that failure discourses impact negatively upon teachers and students alike.

In my study, resistive discourses emerge when respondents depict their schools in relation to the negative views of others. Negative perceptions of their schools as having a low quality learning offer are often contrasted with the ways the young women feel about the quality of education they receive. They also performatively reinforce negative discourses of school failure through their critique of their schools' behaviour management systems and teachers.

A number of the respondents recognise the 'failing school' perceptions of others. Sarah, from Fairfield Academy, states:

> You get a bad reputation if you tell them you've gone somewhere, like "oh, God do you go to that school, that's rubbish" and all that, 'cos it's, no one thinks it's a good school. Everyone thinks hardly anyone will do well and that the teachers ain't the best quality either.

Emma, also from Fairfield, reinforces this position:

> Some people don't really like the school because of some of the people in it, but not really the school itself, but because they know some people are really naughty at the school, but I think that people have a good view on it but others have a bad view on some of the people in it.

Emma feels that the negative perceptions of her school emerge from views of some of the individuals attending, but she believes she had a 'good relationship with teachers.'

Elisa, from Fairfield Academy, is less positive, believing that others' views of her school stem from its Ofsted status. When asked about others' perceptions of her school she indicates:

> Elisa - 'bad, because of the Ofsted reports and that.'
> Interviewer - 'Does that change how you feel about it?'
> Elisa - 'Well, it does, but I can't do anything about it now 'cos I've already started my GCSEs so I can't move out of this school.'

She describes having to complete her education at the school, but that perceptions were 'mostly bad because obviously the ratings are low.'

Ruth, also from Fairfield Academy, considers that others' views emerge from:

> …what other people have told them about the school but I think if you just look at the school from your point of view it looks quite sophisticated, posh, but if people give you their opinion then it will change your view on how you see it. If someone says the school's not very good and they don't do anything then it's not very good and the way you're gonna see it is as a not very good school, but if someone gives it a really good view, like, "yeah, it's really good" then they go "yeah, I could send my kids there."

Here, Ruth suggests that the school itself is not the problem, and recognises the negative discourse of 'failure' surrounding the school which influences the perception of others.

A number of the young women at Borough College also display an awareness of the negative perceptions of others. Kealy states that:

> To other people in other schools it's seen as a bad school, I don't know why, but, there's rumours that there's drugs but there's not really or that it's a rough school, a bad school 'cos apparently we don't learn, so, some people say it's good but we do get others saying it's bad.

Kealy aligns the negative perceptions of the school with public perceptions of criminal behaviour by some students but she also moves to discredit this. She aligns the criticism of the school with its educational outcomes.

Anya describes her school resources:

> Children in the school they have problems; all schools have problems but I think because other school's got new buildings and stuff they kind of feel we haven't and we're not as good but to be honest I don't think that at all and I think our school does quite well and has good high grades as well.

Anya is aware of a 'failing school' discourse, and finds ways to resist that through her depiction of the school's strengths. She suggests they have:

> …a wide range of clubs after school clubs, clubs at lunchtime, which I think is really good and I do enjoy the school, people are friendly and you don't have to worry about bullying or anything 'cos not much goes on.

Anya describes her view that the people within the school are not the problem. She believes some improvements to the school facilities would improve the quality of their learning experience.

Orla describes her belief that her school is viewed positively by others, but that securing positive public perceptions for the school were too much of a priority. She states: 'I think that's what they mostly focus on.' Orla demonstrates that public perceptions can emerge in teachers' rhetoric and that concern for school reputation and performance infiltrates students' views as a result.

At Fairfield Academy, a number of the respondents cite ineffective behaviour management systems as aligning with external perceptions of the school as 'failing.' A number of the students cite a traffic light system that is used to address poor behaviour. Hayley suggests:

> The behaviour system, they don't help at all. Like when the traffic light system, when it first came out it was a game for everyone for us to get on with and everyone took it as a joke. Like if you go on red you go out, you get a detention, no one does the detention and then they still come in and they're still annoying, so they still mess about and then they get sent out again, you just go out, come back in, mess about again.

This view was shared by nearly all of the respondents at the school. Emma indicates that:

> It's just stupid because nobody goes by it, like, it's a good idea but for people in the school it's not good enough, like, some people in it, like, if they get put on the traffic light system they don't care because it is a detention and they don't go to it and nothing happens anyway.

Concerns were raised from students at Fairfield Academy regarding the need for teachers to be stricter. Ruth suggests that:

> I think I'd make some of the teachers a bit more strict because there's a few teachers who are a bit soft and let kids get away with things and I'd make all the students equal so no-one can be better than anyone else.

The Ofsted report at Fairfield Academy had indicated concerns regarding behaviour management. The school had a policy of inclusion and refraining from expulsion, with an inclusion unit called 'Raven' on the school site where students who were particularly challenging could attend. This could be considered egalitarian in principle, however the inclusion unit in the school presented as having a negative effect on the students who were committed to learning.

Hayley describes the situation as follows:

> There are some kids, then if they're naughty they go down to Raven and that makes it a bit different for us because they've still got to stay here and they get to come in after school and it sets in your mind "why are they doing things different," some of them come after school and do twilights instead and do lessons after school. They kick up a fuss and then they have 3 hours, I think, after school while we put in the effort to do the whole school day and it sets in your mind a bit that it's different from what we're doing. They're out of school doing different things during the day while we make the effort and everyone else is still here.

A number of students share Hayley's feeling of injustice, citing that their hard work isn't recognised. Emma indicates that 'it's good that we try and help people,' but also considers that the alternative provision for challenging students lacks fairness.

Young people aged 15, regardless of school status, will often criticise aspects of their educational environments. What seemed particularly relevant here, regarding the students discursive positioning in relation to the school context, were moments when the respondents aligned with criticism presented within their school's Ofsted reports.

Hayley refers to her teachers as being 'really young' and 'loads of them not staying long.' She aligns her criticism with her school's Ofsted report. She sees this as school-specific as one would expect from the position of a student at the school. However, the issues she describes are national concerns affecting staff retention at 'failing' schools, but also reflective of teacher dissatisfaction and poor staff retention evident across the profession.

Sarah, from Fairfield Academy, believes that staff members do not identify with the classed positions of the students at the school, suggesting there was a need to:

> …get teachers that have had difficulties in life 'cos then they can tell us about the struggle instead of teachers who've had it all good and have had straight A's. Because they know what they failed in and they know how to improve it so

when they see us failing in what they failed themselves they can tell us how it impacted on them.

Sarah describes a disconnect between the educational attainments of her teachers as not being in line with educational difficulties that she faces. This corresponds with the evidence presented in the literature review chapter (chapter 3) which conceives of schools as middle class institutions, with problems faced when whole school populations are considered to be working class.

School staffing bodies also receive much praise from the young women. Emma, Jenny and Elisa, all from Fairfield Academy, state they have good teachers who support them. Emma indicates that 'all the teachers are positive influences, they all try and push us.' Students at both schools describe occasions when teachers and support staff offer them emotional and educational support. Anya, from Borough College, feels that '[t]eachers can be really supportive, I can turn to them for help, ask them questions, they're always offering advice and help.'

Respondents often display resistive discourses to the 'failing school' context. A number of respondents at Fairfield Academy contradict the negative behaviour narratives. Jenny feels that her school is:

> …really good at helping you with your education. You can have really good friendships with the teachers, as well. Which I think helps you, but, not strives you but makes you want to do work because obviously you've got good teachers and you don't want to let them down which then helps you with your education and that kind of helps them 'cos they know they must be doing something right.

In resistance to the discourses of 'failing schools,' the young women describe mutually supportive teacher-student relationships. This, I argue, is an emotional necessity when navigating the criticism that staff, students and the school face externally.

Hayley, who has concerns over the poor behaviour management at her school, also considers that:

…there's always someone there you can talk to, you can always go into lessons to learn, there's always someone to learn you what you need to know. There's always someone to answer your question if you want to know something.

Janine, from Borough College, constructs views of the school context from her own educational development and the views of her family:

I think it's seen like a good school, like my parents and family members have seen it and they all think it's a really good school, 'cos of the improvement I've made in my grades. My little sister's friends want to come here because they think it's a good school…They really help me to pursue the highest possible grades I can get.

Conclusion

In my study, the young women's subjectivities are constructed through discourses emerging from 'post-feminist' and 'post-equality' terrains. As described in this chapter, they clearly depict self-responsibility above all else for failure and success. 'Equality of opportunity' policy rhetoric becomes a reality, clearly understood and accepted as a given in relation to the young women's perceptions of gender equality. The young women depict racial difference and social inequality as contributing to a lack of opportunity, and often present this as being external to them and only relevant in their conception of others. They conceive of racial inequality as an issue of ethnicity, aligned to perceptions of cultural differences between their peers and families. Respondents consider their in-school offer to be equal and, interestingly, the positioning of their school as 'failing' does not feature in their concepts of equality.

Discourses to emerge from a 'post-feminist' terrain are apparent through the lack of gender inequality cited in the respondents' narratives, yet gender underlines their educational, career and future assertions of self. Their detachment from a necessity for feminism also highlights their 'post-feminist' positioning. However, the young women still construct versions of personhood within the real parameters of classed and gendered inequality of choice-making available.

Respondents navigate depictions of failure and success, shifting the parameters of the educational and social policy distinctions imposed upon them, in order to establish pathways to a 'successful' future. They relate to the aspirational neo-liberal agenda which defines current educational, media and social policy rhetoric, and often endorse neo-liberal versions of aspirational identity so as to position themselves safely away from working class failure discourses. When highlighting ambitions and aspirations that do not align to middle class lives, they offer further resistance to the negative depictions of working classness, reasserting and repositioning success within the reality of their potential trajectories.

The socio-political construct of working class youth as being without aspiration is not supported by the findings of my study. As with the research outlined in the literature chapter (chapters 3), the trajectories the young women share are not without ambition; they are aspirational. The 'reality' of their choice-making emerges from the narrow parameters of the information they have available. They depict the role of schooling as being focused on ensuring they all do 'well enough.'

None of the young women here are from families of professionals, those defined as 'credentialed.' Some respondents cite extended family members as having achieved academic or career success, but there is a lack of career guidance or insight into professions outside their family, educational or social frames of reference. This often prevents them from asking key questions or understanding the routes towards achieving their professional aspirations.

Material constraints, including concerns over needing to secure an income that ensures they become financially self-sufficient, affect respondents' decisions over whether to enter HE. They also share concerns that HE could lead to a lifetime of debt with no real shift in their career opportunities. This argument is realistic when we consider the findings of Reay et al (2001) or Reay (2017) in that HE choice, institution, under and post-graduate experiences and opportunities differ dramatically across ethnicities and social groups.

Questions were posed to elicit whether the young women perceived of any issues relating to marginalisation which could restrict them. In line with individualised policy rhetoric that surrounded them, they rarely perceive this to be the case.

The theme of gender-limiting choices is one of the least cited explanations offered, further establishing the argument that the young women inhabit a socio-political and media constructed 'post-feminist' terrain. However, the trajectories they depict can be seen as classed and gendered. Their definitions of 'success' in life take into account gendered educational and career choices and, as will be shown in chapter 6, that traditional gender maternal roles can significantly affect planning for career and employment pathways.

Respondents who name professional career aspirations are unsure of the educational trajectory needed to achieve those careers or where the relevant information could be found. Concerns regarding the achievement of necessary grades emerge from learner identities which lack confidence. The young women who achieve well academically also display recognition of external perceptions and an internalised construct of subjectivities which define them as educational underachievers. This results in students ensuring they have a more 'realistic' back-up plan, which is predominantly gendered and driven by socioeconomic status. Those with clearer professional ambitions also seem to lack practical knowledge of how to take the next steps towards achieving their goals. A clearer understanding of the necessary choices may emerge as they develop their plans in future, however at this point in their lives this is often unknown.

Hey (2009) suggests that empirical evidence, drawn from the analysis of the lives of girls and young women, sits at odds with grand narratives of individualisation. Here, in my study, 'equality of opportunity' becomes a mechanism of individualisation emerging through a process of governmentality. Equality is individualised as a power technology and is further legitimised as a self-technology, which leads the young women's modes of self-management.

The UK education system legitimises and promotes 'equal' access to all forms of public education, including that of HE. The dominant political hegemony of neo-liberalism manifests within educational policy. Public concepts of success are defined by the ability of the individual to choose the 'best' opportunities from available choices. Within this context the young women in my study find themselves presented with a false reality.

My study's respondents are currently statistically situated (see the historical and current context of working class girls' education, chapter 2) as the most underperforming female ethnic group across school age education, with the lowest HE access rates. I suggest that white working class girls are situated within a pseudo-meritocracy, only able to performatively ascribe to life choices depicted through the narrow classed neo-liberal parameters of feminine identity available. Where resistance does occur, the respondents reposition the negative discourses regarding their classed and socially situated educational and career options, including the classificatory systems which situate their school.

In my study the young women engage in discursive resistance within the narrow versions of feminine identity available to them. They re-define ambition and aspiration, success and failure. If they cannot realise their aspirations then they will re-define those aspirations to ensure they can engage in self-responsible success discourses. In this way, they conform to neo-liberal individualised versions of success even if, in many ways, their brand of individualisation is often far more altruistic than the theoretical notion initially suggests.

Chapter 6

Familial guidance and influence, narratives of maternal struggle, familial responsibilities and maternal trajectories

In this chapter I examine how the young women in my study are positioned within discourses emerging from familial positions. During the course of the interviews and focus groups, I asked the participants questions which allowed them to articulate the role of family in their lives, and their family's relationship to their education and future planned trajectories. In the emerging narratives the young women offer responses which indicate the impact of gender on their future career and domestic lives, with gendered implications emerging as intrinsically intertwined with issues of socio-economic position.

Skeggs (1997) depicts women as seen and constituted through a classed lens. Skeggs (2005) and Tyler (2008) establish how white working class women have been conceived of as the constitutional limit to public morality and used to reinforce forms (norms) of identity formation essential to the economic and social model espoused by neo-liberalism.

Walkerdine, Lucey and Melody (2001), McRobbie (2009), Allen and Osgood (2009), Hey and George (2016) support my findings as discussed further below, when they identify discourses which reflect politically and culturally-driven narrow neo-liberal versions of the feminine working-class self.

When asked about whom they looked up to, my study respondents repeatedly cited their mothers, aunts and grandmothers. These maternal care givers, throughout the stories of adversity which the respondents spoke of during the research, maintained their love and support for the respondents. Walkerdine's (2015) theorising of the passing on of classed positions as traumatised events through the maternal line is, I suggest, present within the lives of my study's respondents. The young women, through their articulation of their maternal relationships, demonstrate confusion. They engage in resistive discourses of maternal struggle when they consider the strength of their mothers in the face of adversity.

The portrayal of vilified teenage motherhood described in the literature review chapter (chapter 3) emerges as one of a number of discursive points of contention here. Many of the young women in my study state that their mothers were teenagers when they were born and confirm that their families are in receipt of state welfare. They also recognise their mothers as those often vilified in the press as social failures. The demonising of working classness within media and socio-political rhetoric directly impacts on how they discursively engage in the performativity of their working class subjectivity. Surely they cannot aspire to be like the heroines in their own stories if those heroines are viewed by others as society's biggest failures?

The respondents' views of pregnancy and perceptions of teenage mothers are conceived with contradiction. Their narratives contribute to emacipatory discourses of maternal struggle with resistive discourses of maternal survival. Teenage peers within their own context who fall pregnant receive a form of 'othering' (Scharf, 2011). The respondents distance themselves from those girls who do not manage their sexual or reproductive health in line with new emergent forms of neo-liberalised young womanhood.

Familial guidance and influence

This section identifies the contribution of familial guidance and influence to the respondents' constructions of subjectivity. Here we consider discourses of parental failure and success, including how these discourses establish the young women's views on future planning. This analysis takes into account the wider familial context of the respondents, and draws from their concepts of womanhood as constructed through discourses animated by the roles and experiences of the women in their lives.

As introduced in the literature review chapter (chapter 3), Gillies (2007) suggests there is often an assumed necessity for legislative and policy intervention into the educational lives of working class children, with an assumed deficit in the parenting of the working classes. Gillies (2006) identifies the variations in the value systems of working and middle-class parents, which contests the view of a lack of parental care or interest.

Allen (2014) highlights that there has been a propagation of the rhetoric of aspiration, as is seen in New Labour's education and family policies, through the application of terms such as 'social justice' and 'social inclusion.' More recently, this can be seen in the

liberal-conservative government's focus on aspiration as achieved through social mobility strategies.

Allen argues that '"aspiration" plays a pivotal role in institutionalizing neoliberal forms of governance which have reshaped class relations in contemporary Britain' (Allen, 2014, p761). Tyler (2013) and Skeggs (2004) argue that the devaluing of working classness and the rhetoric of aspiration are necessary to ensure the production of the collective assumption that one should wish to escape one's working classness. The vilification of the working classes through media, social and political descriptions of individuals' and families creates caricatured versions of an underclass, which is now often referred to as the 'workless poor.' Skeggs, Thumin and Wood (2008) indicate a normalising of middle class values through the criticism and caricaturing of working classness within reality TV and the journalistic media. Skeggs (2009) argues that working class people, predominantly women, are shown to have 'not just deficit culture, but also deficit subjectivity' (Skeggs, 2009, p638).

In the literature review chapter (chapters 3) I introduced the notion of a lack of aspiration being cited as responsible for working class notions of underachievement. Walkerdine (2011) indicates that policy positions foreground aspiration as a key issue in working class children's educational 'failure.' She posits that unjustly multi-generational layers of deprivation are cited as having caused a lack of aspiration in working class children and young people.

Allen (2014) indicates that a focus on a lack of aspiration is often cited as central to the failings of working class children. My thesis positions its respondents as encountering detrimental neo-liberal individualised forms of educational and social policy rhetoric. 'Aspiration' becomes another concept the young women are misrepresented as 'failing' at. There is considerable research, including that of Allen and Hollingworth (2013), Roberts and Evans (2012) and Irwin and Elley (2013), which argues that a lack of aspiration is not evidenced within working class children or in working class families' aspirations for their children.

In chapter 5 I identified classed and gendered educational and career trends, and highlighted that material inhibitory factors of education and career trajectory do not stem from a lack of working class familial aspiration. This study does not directly

engage with the parents of the respondents and therefore does not assume a rationale on behalf of working class parents. However, I have examined how young women feel the impact of parental support or otherwise.

Luttrell (1993) cites the centrality of maternal narratives in the lives of working class young women. My study participants cite support from the men in their families such as fathers and uncles, however a majority of respondents described the women in their families, i.e. mothers, grandmothers, sisters and aunts, as their core role models and primary caregivers.

When questioned on planning for their future the majority of the participants cite the roles of women in their families as those who helped them to navigate their educational planning. Two participants state they have no contact with their fathers, with many others simply citing the roles of female family members as the most significant. Parental educational and personal support is primarily received from their mothers.

We begin with a number of the young women citing the prevalence of the maternal in their depictions of future planning:

> Emma - My mum, because she tells me what route to go down.
> Orla - Just me mum, that's it. She just like kind of helping but she's kind of making me make my choice.
> Susy - My mum because she like talks about what I wanna be and tells me the pay and that.
>
> Hayley - My auntie tells me like what's the best route to go, because she's like quite young and my mum just tells me if I'm right or wrong.

Participants describe how the women in their families offer technical and practical support for their educational and career planning. Often the extent of the advice and support is reflective of the educational experiences of those offering it. Hayley states:

> My mum's not very good really 'cos when she was at school she did work experience as a carer but then she was offered a full time job so she didn't do any exams so she doesn't really understand what we do and what we have to do

nowadays.

None of the 1:1 case study respondents' mothers or fathers have attended Higher Education (HE). Some have gained vocational qualifications in the workplace. A small number of the young women cite other family members who have undertaken Further Education (FE) and two respondents describe having extended family members who have attended HE.

When asked who provides support at home with planning for their future, respondents often cite their mothers as those who care for their emotional needs above all else. Kealy lives at home with her mother and sister. Her response to the question about planning for the future takes the direction of how she navigates the anxieties involved:

> My family, because whenever I'm down they'll sit there and talk about it with me and they'll try and find the path that would stop me being upset about it. So they're really good…we just all stick together and help each other. My mum and my sister, I don't have a dad.

Kealy's response to the ways in which her family support her foregrounded emotional support rather than the practical or technical aspects of educational planning. Gillies (2006) argues that the value systems and behaviours demonstrated by working class mothers, whose children experienced the educational environment with more difficulties and challenges than their middle class peers, centres on 'keeping their children safe. She suggests that they offer support for their children through soothing feelings of failure and low self-worth, and challenging injustice' (Gillies, 2006, p281), both within the social and educational context of the school.

Gillies (2006) argues that working class mothers' social and emotional commitments to their children are shaped by material and social contexts. She suggests that the depiction of working class motherhood as 'lacking or insensitive…belie the powerful emotional commitments such mothers make to their children' (Gillies, 2006, p283) in supporting them to do their best to survive and thrive in their education.

Janine also describes how she is supported emotionally at home, which directly links to her mother's struggles as a young single parent:

At home my mum supports me a lot, because she was a really young mum and then my dad left, so she was like, on her own for part of her teenage years so she has supported me for everything and she's like, grown up with me so she supports me in anything I want to do if…if I wanted to be something then she'd support me in that.

During the 1:1 interviews a large number of respondents describe that their mothers had children at a young age, with several describing that their mothers were teenagers when they had their children. This discourse of the classed and gendered struggle of the young women's mothers is central to how the young women conceive of their mothers' support. A discourse of their own mothers' maternal struggle is repeatedly cited when the young women discuss their own future educational and life plans. The young women draw on discourses of parental failure, including the theme of 'not repeating the same mistakes.'

The young women show an awareness of the limitations their mothers had in their understanding of FE or HE due to limited experience of those arenas. However, readings of working class parental involvement solely through the gaze of educational planning can prove to be misleading. Edwards and Alldred (2000) describe how children's perceptions of parental involvement differ significantly from the perceptions of the school environment. Parents considered to have a minimal role by educators actually played a far more significant role in supporting their children when the children were consulted about parental contribution. This notion is reinforced in my study when respondents describe their educational planning in the context of emotional support provided by their families.

A perceived failure to achieve the 'right' kind of parental involvement resonates with the policy rhetoric of poor educational involvement by working class parents, as cited in the literature review chapter (chapters 3). The dominant hegemonic discourse of a lack of working class parental support permeates the subjectivity of the young women. Sarah articulates a discourse of failure avoidance which emerges within working class families' discussions relating to their children's educational futures:

Sarah - My mum and dad.

Interviewer - And they're supporting you by?

Sarah - Showing me what they've done, what mistakes they've made to make me not make them.

Here, the discourse of working class failure is interpreted positively by Sarah, who cites learning from the experiences of those close to her, with her parents ensuring that she does not repeat the same mistakes they made. This is communicated as mutually recognised between parent and child.

Sarah provides a further example of learning from her sister's experience of leaving college:

My sister, she dropped out of college, she said she don't wanna do that course no more and they won't give her another one so she's gonna drop out. And she's nearly nineteen and she's still not had a job, for me I saw her struggle that she can't use the money that she has to get what she needs, she has to pick between things. Me, I wouldn't want to be in that situation. I want to be able to have enough money to not struggle, be like oh right this is the bills; this is what I can get and then keep myself as I go. I don't wanna drop out of college, so that affects my choices, what she did.

Sarah recounts the experiences of her sister 'dropping out' of college, and recognises that she does not want to make the same mistakes as those in her immediate family; this motivates her to succeed.

Also apparent is a direct correlation between educational commitment and the capacity to financially support oneself. Respondents often report financial independence as being central to their choice-making. I suggest this is another example of the young women aligning their subjectivities with available discourses of the neo-liberal, self-reliant and enterprising self.

Another example of the discourse of working class failure re-appropriated to one of positive planning for future trajectory emerges from Emma who indicates that her mother and family are positive influences:

Well, even though my mum don't work she is a strong person, she is a positive influence because she doesn't go out drinking, she doesn't do drugs, like, she's a good influence, she's not perfect, like, she's not a perfect person, she's not been…like, my family we're very, like, we're not a posh family, we're not like that we're, like, how you get us is how you see us and I think that's good and I think they're all a positive influence on me but they're not all perfect and they've not all done good in life and they have made mistakes, but I think they are good influences because they do push me to achieve what I want to achieve and they don't lead me down the wrong path and they don't give me bad examples.

Here, Emma displays insight into others' social positioning of her family as 'not posh people,' recognising that others may view her family's social position in a negative way. She considers that not all of her family have 'done good' in life, and equates this with educational and professional success. She draws on discourses of working class failure when discussing her family, but resists the negative discourse of others' perceptions of working class failure through her explanations of the support her family provide. They are 'good influences' because they push her to achieve. Emma re-appropriates working class educational failure in the example of not wanting to repeat her parent's mistakes. She describes her mother as being a good parent as she supports her in mobilising towards a good future.

Emma, later, draws upon discourses of working class parental failure and success in the positive re-framing of her father's alcoholism. She explains that her father, who does not live in the family home, behaves in a manner that she would not want to emulate:

Whereas my dad, he's an alcoholic, and he has been on drugs and I think he is a bad influence because he does work but he is a bad influence because that shows us that…I don't know…I wouldn't want to be like that but it shows we have an option to be like that, where we don't want to be but it is a bad influence because of the way he puts himself across and it is a bad influence because we don't want to be like that, but it shows that he does and he's comfortable with being like that and it is a bad influence because of the way he is.

While she cites her father as a bad influence, she draws positively from this in order to position herself as not wanting to emulate that 'failure.'

Atlanta, a student at Fairfield Academy, introduced in chapter 5, has a complicated familial background well-known to the school. Here, she repurposes working class parental failure discourse positively, from the position of her own perceptions of her mother's failings:

> My mum was always in trouble with the police, always. Criminal record, fighting all the time. Then when I came here the school actually gave us an opportunity to join the police cadets. And then when I came I thought I'm gonna prove you all wrong, I'm gonna do something ace. Why, why should I follow in your footsteps? Everyone thinks I'm gonna be like my mum, I'm gonna be nothing like me mum. I despise her, why would I want to be anything like her. Her, what's she's done's made me wanna prove myself even more…as my mum's got a criminal record that's gonna put such a strain on me getting into the police force. I mean, I heard it once before but I didn't believe it, but then I spoke to my police cadet officer and she was 21 when she applied, but she didn't get in until she was 25 because her parents had a criminal record. I sometimes get mad because I think why should I have to be held back because of the mistakes that my mum's made, like I don't blame my mum so much now because she works in security, she's changed her life.

The discourse of working class parental failure materialises in the young women's lives through media and politically-driven rhetoric. Atlanta and Emma describe issues of criminality and substance misuse which we align with working-classness. These difficulties mirror 'figuratively' (Tyler, 2008) constructed versions of working classness used to demonise and demonstrate parental failure.

Although the young women demonstrate awareness of discourses of working class parental failure, they find positives when communicating them. Firstly, they use what they deem to be poor role modelling as a stimulus to succeed and, secondly, they describe how their families overcome struggles in order to offer support. Emma exemplifies this through the recognition that, while her family may not be considered as a success in the eyes of others, they offer her the support and encouragement that she needs. Atlanta highlights this when she acknowledges that she doesn't 'blame her mum' as her mother has now 'changed her life' for the better.

Narratives of maternal struggle

In previous chapters I have articulated the history of social, educational and familial struggles of working class women. Skeggs suggests that 'white working-class women are figured as the constitutive limit – in proximity – to national public morality' (Skeggs, 2005, p965). Skeggs (1997) also describes that working class women live daily with the insecurities and doubts emerging from one's social positioning of working classness.

Skeggs (2004) describes the struggle for working class women's legitimacy as situated in working class women being 'symbolically positioned' (Skeggs, 2004, p2). Skeggs (2004) describes the 'moral symbolic' as one's ability to communicate ideas about one's moral value, with the capacity to generate moral worth as core to classification values placed on people throughout history. Those who are not positioned with moral value and authority become positioned as 'the constitutive limit to the good citizen of the nation,' with 'few outlets for symbolic challenge' (Skeggs and Loveday, 2012, p473) that could enable them to disrupt their position.

Skeggs describes the symbolic positioning of white working class women, as framing how women physically and metaphorically navigate social spaces. In her view, the historically-inscribed values placed on women were conceived of as situated through a bodily inscription of class. Skeggs (2004) adds that it is the inscription of others' views of female working classness which is seen in the subjectivities of the women. My study draws from this notion, arguing that the dominant hegemonic discourses of working class feminine identity contribute to the subjective construction of my study participants.

Walkerdine (2015) examines the intergenerational transmission of class through the development of an understanding of the lived history of class using a psychoanalytical model, which deals with 'affective transmission through bodies, in locations and in history' (Walkerdine, 2015, p167). Walkerdine's study suggests ways in which one can 'produce a complex account which does not pathologise the experience of the previous generation (usually the mother)' (Walkerdine, 2015, p167). This concept of working class women's subjectivities, constructed discursively through the embodied experienced of intergenerational familial trauma is demonstrated here.

Respondents' narratives of maternal struggle are described in the majority of the interviews. The demographic positioning and material disadvantages these young women face cannot depict the far more complex and nuanced impact of working classness as a lived psychological experience. I believe the working class subjectivities present here emerge, in part, from a discourse of maternal struggle. One cannot ignore the emotional imprint of the lives of previous generations of women in their families. This aligns with Walkerdine's articulation of the embodiment of intergenerational trauma, supporting the theory that one's classed and gendered lineage contributes to subjectivity through maternal discourses of suffering and survival.

The responses below arise from my asking the young women two particular questions: 'who offers you support with planning for your future?' and 'who do you look up to and respect and why?' The participants' answers rarely include anyone in a position of perceived leadership or in the public eye. The young women's mothers and grandmothers are instead highlighted, that is, women who have supported the participants throughout their own adversity. I believe that maternal discourses of struggle and survival are instrumental in the formation of the respondents' subjectivities.

Susy, when asked about her family's contribution to planning for the future, demonstrates the complexities of conflicting maternal discourses:

> My mum could be a positive influence 'cos of her going to get her education now and actually growing up and doing something, but she could be a negative as well because of the fact that she got pregnant at a young age, it's like people would look at me and go "oh, well, if your mum did then you're gonna do it" and it's like I've got to prove them wrong.

Susy directly references the external views of others in relation to the public perception of her mother as a working class teenage mother. What emerges is a survival discourse, a desire to prove people wrong. The difficulty here is when Susy's pride in the discourse of maternal struggle against adversity clashes with the discourses of the demonised working class teenage mother.

In the 'Demonisation of (white) working classes' section in the literature review chapter (chapter 3) I depicted a theme of vilified teenage motherhood. This view is presented here as part of the narrow neo-liberal versions of feminine identity available to young working class women.

When asked about the people who support her at home, school or in the wider world, Susy states:

> My mum cos she's, like, hard working and to watch someone who's hard working encourages me to do what I want to do, to become what I want to be.

Susy displays a desire to model her behaviour on that of her mother, but only in the aspects fitting the neo-liberal middle class versions of self she 'should' aspire to, what Walkerdine (2003) argues are the ideal feminine identities created in the image of middle classness.

Individualisation is also present here, as Susy performatively ascribes to the maternal discourse of 'hard working and supportive,' those attributes leading to a mobilising of self. She is also formed through her performative engagement in the discourse of the socially and politically constructed vilified 'teenage mother.' The teenage mother discourse, while acting as a power technology, also becomes a self-technology which supports Susy's self-regulation of her sexuality and fertility.

Earlier, we observed the emotional support offered to Kealy when planning for her future. Kealy later explained that her mother had attended the same school as a teenager, but had needed to leave school before she completed her exams as she was pregnant with Kealy:

> Most people don't really understand and they say bad things about my mum…my mum actually came to this school when she was having me; she had people throwing things at her belly and things.

The adverse experiences of Kealy's mother emerge within Kealy's answers about who she looks up to and why. Kealy clearly displays an awareness of her mother's pain during her time at school. When asked about who she looks up to and why, she

articulates the struggle of her mother as the reason for her respect for her.

An interpretation of Walkerdine's (2015) theorising of the transmission of intergenerational trauma, I argue, was present in the emotion Kealy conveys during the interview. After the moment when Kealy shared the experiences of her mother, she paused during the interview and was visibly upset when describing the abuse her mother had received at the same school years earlier. Not only was she emotionally upset by the thoughts of her mother's suffering but there was also an awareness of the historicised versions of vilified teenage mother. This re-emerges within a number of the interviews that follow.

Kealy displays an acute awareness of the vilified social perceptions of her mother as a working class pregnant teenager, a discourse which resonates with Tyler's (2008) conception of 'chav mum.' Tyler indicates that 'chav mum' categorisations provide new bodily ways for women to be classified through acceptable and unacceptable forms of reproduction, she suggests that very little has changed in the last 30 years regarding the opportunities for new conceptions of marginalised groups.

Kealy demonstrates a discourse resistive to this vilification; valuing her mother as the person she respects the most:

> Interviewer - Who do you look up to respect, and why?
> Kealy - Probably my mum, 'cos she's had a really rough background and she's still probably the nicest person you would know. But her background hasn't changed her, it's just made her tougher, so I look up to my mum.
> Interviewer - 'Anyone else you can think of?
> Kealy - Possibly my Nan for the same reasons.
> Interviewer - What particular qualities is it that you look up to in your mum and your Nan?
> Kealy - They're strong people…um…and they're very outgoing, like, if there's someone in trouble they'd help them and I respect that.
> Kealy - My mum had me at 14.
> Interviewer - You beat my mum, no-one beats my mum! My dad was 15 and mum 16 when they had kids.
> Kealy - My dad had his first kid at 13. My Nan had her first kid at 16 as well.

This exchange was a knowing conversation between Kealy and myself as the interviewer; we made a joke about whose parents were the youngest and Kealy won. The conversation with Kealy felt like an exchange that could only take place between two people who had felt the transmission of some of the social stigma and vilification of teenage motherhood felt by their mothers. We held a commonality in both being privy to our mother's pain in the re-telling of stories and discourses of maternal struggle, and also shared recognition of the sheer power of our mothers as the women who had overcome the huge emotional and material difficulties they faced in order to raise us.

Kealy demonstrates an emerging resistive discourse of maternal survival. This theme is expressed by other respondents in their acknowledgement of the negative discourse of working class teenage pregnancy, whilst also simultaneously articulating the struggle and strength of their own mothers.

Hayley articulates her mother's survival against adversity:

> I look up to my mum, because obviously my dad, he used to beat her and do horrible things like that, he burgled her house and took all her stuff, but she still got back with me and my sister and carried on and she still did the best for us, she never let us see any of that, we never had a bad life, we never had to go without. She always carried on no matter what the situation is; she would never put us below, like, if she's arguing with somebody she'd never show us what's going on because she says it's not for you to see. So she's an inspiration because she always carried on and got back up and carried on with us. That's about it really.

Hayley describes feeling protected from her mother's trauma. Here, I believe, her recollection of her mother's traumatic experiences indicates that her discursive maternal struggle has been transmitted to her subjective understanding of self. Discourses of suffering and survival have emerged, through her family context, so that the struggles of her mother become struggles of her own.

Shelly, when asked about who she respected and looked up to, indicates: 'My mum because she's had such a struggle, being a single parent for the past five years and she's still getting on with it, she doesn't let anything show, she just does it, so definitely my

mum.' Janine also engages in a resistive discourse of maternal survival:

> My mum because I respect the fact that she's had a baby at a young age and
> been able to, like, she had to work for it, she didn't have it easy and she's, like,
> made herself who she is today. I wouldn't say we're wealthy but we're not
> poor…we can afford stuff, like, she's happy now, now that she's had my brother
> and sister, the kids are getting older so now she's taking a course in
> education. So I respect the fact she's brought us up and grown up with us and
> now realises she needs to pursue her dream of what she wants to do, so I really
> respect that.

Janine takes the notion of a resistive discourse of maternal survival further by indicating that she respects her mother as a woman who had children early and had to work for her success. Janine, as with other respondents in the study, demonstrates a clear understanding that her mother grew up alongside her children.

Tyler (2008) outlines the dominant hegemonic discourse of the vilified teenage mother through her explanation of 'chav mum' and further introduces the now widespread use of the word 'pramface' in mainstream media: '…a popular term of abuse outlined in the urban dictionary (n.d.) defines "pramface" as "a woman who looks so young she ought to be pushing a pram around a council estate in the shittiest part of town"' (Tyler, 2008, p26). This aggressive articulation may be extreme, yet the terminology is now widely recognised and, through its alignment to discourses of teenage motherhood, has become a valid part of the demonisation of working class feminine identity.

I return to this theme when respondents describe the youthfulness of their parents, re-purposing the negative available discourses. They use the age of their parents, and their subsequent capacity to cope with such large responsibilities, to demonstrate their respect within the resistive discourses of maternal survival. These discourses, I believe, are a central aspect of the young women's' subjectivities.

In the literature review I argued that Butler (2014) and other post-structural feminists (Davies, 1997) find room for discursive agency, re-addressing the positioning of power and subversion within discourse. Butler (2014) explains that one's refusal to identify

oneself as a particular available identity could be read as the action to initiate a new form of identity. However, she cautions against the understanding that subjectivity should be reduced down to a version of identity.

Subjectivity, in this thesis's analytic context, is a fluid state, and this fluidity infers the possibility of resistance. Butler, in her vodcast, indicates that the shaping of new subjectivities is a site for agency within subjectivity formation:

> Is there a compliance or a refusal in relation to the police demand and, if there is refusal, how does that become part of creating and informing new modes of subjectivity that retain and sustain that refusal as part of the task of subject formation? (Butler, 2014).

In my study regarding working class motherhood, resistive maternal discourses of survival among the young women are modes of performative 'refusal' (Butler, 2014). I argue that the young women's subjectivity is discursively constructed through their mother's conceptions of maternal struggle and survival, imbued through the intergenerational familial passing on of these struggles and survivals.

In examining the discourses generated through maternal narratives, I identified the conflicting moments between performative reinforcement of hegemonic discourses of narrow neo-liberalised working class motherhood, and resistive discourses of maternal struggle. These allow the young women to recognise the strength of their mothers as parents and role models, which enables an opportunity for them to take pride in the roles and contributions of their mothers.

Maternal trajectories and familial responsibilities

This section continues with the notion of maternal narratives taking the form of the maternal trajectories of the young women themselves. Narrow neo-liberal discourses of working class feminine maternal subjectivity can, I argue, become modes of self-regulation when considered in relation to the young women's future conceptions of self. The management of sexuality and fertility become 'self-technologies.' This is demonstrated through the respondents' explanations surrounding teenage pregnancy, including how they experience teenage peers in their school environment.

In the literature review chapter (chapter 3) in the section 'reflexive modernity and individualisation,' I argued that the individualised agenda of neo-liberalism offers us the idea that every young person desires financial independence, grounded in consumerism, with a desire for a personal biography of success. I have also introduced feminist literature which contests this notion of subjective construction, conceived of as solely individualised without consideration of family, community and peers. The findings emerging from this thesis are aligned to this contestation in that, although respondents aspire to financial stability, they do so in part to support those around them. There is an altruism not wholly articulated through a neo-liberal individualised conception of subjectivity. The young women's future plans include financially supporting their families, that is, those persons who have struggled to support them. They also consider the financial implications of supporting any children they may have in the future, alongside a need to maintain a family without reliance on state welfare.

Skeggs (1997) describes the 'massification' of working class young women, and considers how versions of working class femininity are used to re-draw moral boundaries of right and wrong. These new moral boundaries utilise old rhetoric of the deserving and undeserving poor, which leads to an 'underclass discourse to produce historical division of respectable and abject within the working class' (Skeggs, 2005, p972).

McRobbie (2009) builds on this with her explanations of the negative working class mother discourse:

> …the young, single mother will be understood to be an abject person with a 'mismanaged life'. She is a social category, a certain type of girl whose bodily features and disposition betray her lowly status. This marks a reversal of the language of welfare liberal values for whom the teenage mother was someone to be provided with support. A new virulent form of class antagonism finds expression through the public denigration of the bodily failings of the girl who at a too young age embraces motherhood (McRobbie, 2009, p133).

In the literature review I depict McRobbie's (2009) 'new sexual contract,' that is, the notion that young women in the West must indulge in new forms of neo-liberal individualised, classed and aspirational subjectivities. In this thesis I argue for an

empirical verification of McRobbie's theory, in order to demonstrate that individualisation means that young women are conceived of as being required to mobilise themselves and make good of the opportunities available to them. This is achieved through the acquisition of qualifications, fertility management and their capacity to be financially able to enter in to consumer culture. McRobbie describes this as 'a defining feature of contemporary modes of feminine citizenship' (2009, p54).

The narrowing of discursive possibilities for young women in relation to motherhood informs the management of their fertility. Fertility management is conceived of as taking working class young women from imagining futures moving from welfare to workfare (McRobbie, 2000). This is necessary when they are performatively enacting narrow neo-liberal forms of working class maternal subjectivity.

The term 'chav mum,' introduced earlier is now widely used in contemporary vernacular. Tyler (2008) explains this that term is '…produced through disgust reactions as an intensely affective figure that embodies historically familiar and contemporary anxieties about sexuality, reproduction and fertility' (Tyler, 2008, p18). Similarly, McRobbie refers to media and socio-political negative descriptions of those 'cheating the welfare system, bringing up delinquent children, never having had a job' (McRobbie, 2013, p9). Sitting in opposition to 'chav mum' is the construction of middle class maternal subjectivity. McRobbie (2013) describes this as:

> …affluent, feminine maternity. This idea of active, (i.e. en route to the gym) sexually confident motherhood…the ambitious and aspirational young working woman. It is also consistently pitched against an image of the abject, slovenly and benefit-dependent "underclass" single mother (McRobbie, 2013, p1).

In my study, when asked about how they view media portrayals of young women, participants highlight a feeling of being misunderstood. Janine, from Borough College, introduces the notion of 'chav' in our discussion:

> In some cases they just see us as chavs and if you look at films we're just going out, smoking on the streets, young girls gonna get pregnant. They never really put out there the good stuff about young people, they just, like, put out bad stuff so if a girl got pregnant then that would be in the news…They just try and make up the bad.

Janine displays an awareness of the negative discoursing of young working class women, specifically mothers.

An explanation of the origins of 'chav' is detailed in the literature review section 'demonisation of (white) working classes,' and I return to the complexities of young women's conceptions of 'chav' more broadly in the next chapter 7. That discussion will examine how the term is used by the young women as a form of description of how others see them and their 'communities,' but also how it is used by the young women themselves to describe an 'othered' (Scharf, 2011) component within their own community.

The schools in my study are similar to each other in terms of socio-economic and cultural demographic. However, the structure and governance of the schools is significantly different. Borough College is an inner city secondary school, and secular in origin, while Fairfield Academy is non-secular with the ethos of the school firmly based on Christian values.

The schools have adopted different policies to sexual heath and the management of teenage pregnancy. Borough College introduced an on-site health service, with a designated room staffed by a nurse from a local clinic. This provides general and sexual health advice, including access to contraceptives. A senior member of staff indicated that, since the clinic had opened, they had reduced their rate of teenage pregnancy by over 75%, with only one student in their post-16 provision currently pregnant.

A senior manager at Fairfield Academy indicated that the geographical area of the school had a high proportion of teenage pregnancies in relation to the national average, which was reflected in the student population. They did not provide on-site sexual

health advice, but responded to the issue of teenage pregnancy through specific educational provision for young parents. Students at the school who became pregnant during their studies were encouraged to attend until they gave birth; they could then return to school to continue their studies in a supportive environment. The school provided additional teaching support and the flexibility required for students to complete their compulsory education alongside parenting responsibilities.

This thesis does not cite these varying approaches to teenage parenthood to impose any moral judgement on the schools' approaches. The policy and practice differences are highlighted here to illuminate the differences regarding the proximity of teenage pregnancy in the minds of the young women within each school. Teenage pregnancy emerges repeatedly within the focus group discussions at Fairfield Academy. The young women at Borough College cite an avoidance of teenage motherhood in their 1:1s, but mainly raise motherhood in the context of their planned life trajectories.

The following conversation emerged during focus group 2 with Fairfield Academy. Students were asked 'How do you feel about your school?' The young women introduce the topic of teenage pregnancy. Interestingly, there was no mention of the role of teenage boys in parenting. In line with the senior manager's comments that teenage pregnancy was a significant problem in the geographical area of the school, respondents introduce the topic of teenage pregnancy in the school context. They suggest there are a significant number of teenage mothers present at the school throughout their pregnancy, with these mothers retuning to the school following the birth of their babies.

Fairfield Academy's intake ranges from Reception through to Year 11. The group describe their views on teenage pregnancy, including how this is visible and seen by younger students at the school:

> Emma - About the pregnancy thing. I think its like they're entitled like, yeah they've had a child but they still wanna get their education, that's fine, that's good that they still wanna get their education but we're like role models to the younger kids and if they're like looking up to people that are pregnant…
> Hayley - They're, like, eight year olds.
> Emma - And there's girls that are pregnant already before they've even finished their education, it's not really a good influence on them. They're gonna grow up

thinking that it's right. And like, that's what the teachers are always telling us, they're always telling us that we're role models for the youngers, but people our age walking around pregnant its not a good influence. Because like, don't get me wrong, I'm not dissing them or owt, like they can do what they want with their life, it's their choice but I just think like that they should think before they do it and the school should think, as well, about what it looks like.

Respondents state that teachers are supportive of returning teenage mothers. Emma believes it is right that teenage mothers at the school are still entitled to an education but feels that, as 'role models' to the younger students, the presence of teenage mothers at the school is 'not a good influence.' Hayley replies that '…kids are having kids at this school,' and feels that teachers being supportive is a concern. Emma suggests that 'it's wrong with the teachers being like supportive and that.' Hayley finishes this sentence with 'like I'll be your mentor' then with sarcasm stated, 'and I've bought some clothes for ya baby.' They voice their concerns that teenage pregnancy is being normalised in their school environment. They are concerned that the teenage mothers are not good role models and that teachers may be displaying inappropriate teacher-student relationships. Other students highlight that, while they support the decision of the school to maintain their education, this should be achieved away from the school site, away from other younger students.

Here, I believe, we see emerging negative neo-liberal discourses of working class feminine maternal subjectivity. The young women articulate concerns regarding their schools embracing what they consider to be poor fertility management, a demonstration of what Skeggs (1997) recognises as 'respectability' on the part of the respondents.

As with Skeggs (1997), the women in my study are also aware of their social positioning, this constantly informs their responses. This is what Skeggs refers to as 'the recognition of others,' (Skeggs, 1997, p4) and is shown by the young women in their concepts of their social position. They display a form of collective shame in the visual presence, within the school, of an extreme form of negative working class discourse of womanhood, the vilified teenage mother.

One can understand the rationale of the young women grasping the material difficulties of teenage motherhood and sympathise with their feelings of reluctance to normalise

teenage motherhood. However, their feelings towards teachers and staff at the school offering necessary support to the young women to complete their education, I suggest, demonstrates the shame emerging from existing negative working class maternal discourses of teenage motherhood. The young women here performatively reinforce the negative discursive construction of teenage motherhood.

Fertility management is a central way in which my study respondents can be conceived of as 'failing' to conform to a neo-liberalised ideal of young aspirational womanhood. This discourse acts as a 'self-technology,' reinforcing the notion of binary versions of classed neo-liberal feminine maternal identity available to them. What is particularly interesting here is that a number of them were born to young mothers. This aligns with my earlier argument of conflicting views of working class maternal motherhood versus neo-liberal feminine versions of the aspirational, enterprising self as providing a confusing discursive terrain.

There appears to be a complexity in the composition of motherhood for the young women in my study, which sees them vilifying their peers, the contemporary versions of their heralded maternal figures. The respondents do not recognise the juxtaposition of their explanations between the respect they have for their maternal figures, teenage mothers themselves, and their peers who find themselves in the same position. This exemplifies the governmental, self-technology of fertility management alongside resistive discourses of maternal struggle.

Respondents describe one particular student within their school year:

> Emma - It's like, like Melissa.
> Sarah - Oh, God.
> Emma - Because she wants to go to college but the college said that, like a month after she's had the baby, they want her to go to college, but she'll want to have like bonding time with the baby, she ain't gonna be able to bond with her baby after going college straight after school. So she's having to hold back a year to go to college. To be able to bond with her child because she's gonna be a mum.
> Sarah - I think it's people putting their own, like "oh yeah I want a baby, I want a family" like when really you should think about the child, like if you're still

young and you've, like, still gotta go to college. You're not gonna get a good
bond with it if you're not gonna be there all the time. Like, your child's like "I
want this to happen." You're gonna be like "yeah well I've gotta go to college,"
you've just gotta think about others.

The young women articulate that 'Melissa' will be emotionally unavailable for her
child, and this is viewed as Melissa being emotionally neglectful.

The young women agree that, once a child is born, the mother will be required to
contribute all her energy into raising them. There was little grasp of a shared parental
approach to parenting, or the role of childcare provision, in supporting the model of
parenting they have in mind. This can be aligned with a youthful naivety on the part of
the respondents, but also alludes to models of parenting which many of them experience
themselves.

Sarah describes a discourse of maternal struggle and survival emerging in her own
future maternal narrative:

My dad had a kid at fifteen and he said it's difficult, your relationship breaks up
and you end up with no-one, especially for a girl cos a woman says "it's my
baby" it grew inside me and you have more responsibility and the more care and
you only focus on the baby.

When discussing Melissa, the young women suggest that she will not meet the needs of
the child if she continues with her studies. This view aligns with idealised notions of
neo-liberal, middle class maternal feminine subjectivity. This is similar to the idea of a
middle class mother utilising her maternity leave from her successful career in order to
properly bond with her child, asserting that she has the established enough wealth in
order to stop working during the child's infancy. From this viewpoint, Melissa is
already set up to fail her child as she is unable to practically inhabit this middle class
discursive space. She will also be judged as failing if she enters a 'working class
teenage mother in receipt of welfare' space.

These discussions appear to reinforce the negative discourse that a teenage mother
cannot be sufficient for a child. We see this view emerging predominantly in political

and policy rhetoric. We live in an age when teenage motherhood statistics are in decline, however there remains a 'moral panic' (Cohen, 1972) surrounding the impact this phenomenon will have on the children born and wider society. In the literature review I shared Wilson and Huntington's (2006) review of policy and research literature surrounding teenage motherhood. They infer that teenage mothers are vilified not because of poor outcomes of their parenting, but because they establish themselves outside of neo-liberal versions of feminine identity that will enable economic growth.

Allen and Osgood (2009) examine how maternal discourses are normalised and mobilised. They argue for a need to understand maternal discourses as 'truths which gain their status through their cumulative effect' (Allen and Osgood, 2009, p4). These 'truths' emerge from welfare policy for young mothers and through media references, as outlined earlier.

The creation of narrow, discursively established classed binaries provides little space for the young women in my study to devise identities beyond gender and social position. Discourses of working class feminine maternal identity are generated with their performative reinforcement in the shared shame of the visual spectacle of the figures within the school context. Respondents also describe contrasting views regarding the support given to their pregnant peers to receive an education in order to better provide for their children, whilst indicating that not being fully 'available' for their new babies is 'selfish.' A commitment to either position will cause teenage mothers to fail, even within the early stages of motherhood.

Another aspect of the role of family described in this thesis involves the young women conceiving of their future selves in relation to familial responsibilities, and supporting their immediate and future families emotionally and financially.

A number of the respondents provide examples of how they consider the financial responsibilities of supporting their families as an important factor in their futures. Kealy makes the suggestion:

> So when I turn 16 I'll probably go to college, get a part-time job so I can pay my way and help my mum a bit and I'll start my driving test…so I thought if I get a job that I actually enjoy doing I probably won't have money struggles like

family members do and then I could probably help them as well, so that's probably why.

As with Amy, who was mentioned in the literature review, other respondents cite wanting to help their families through securing employment. Hayley, when discussing the financial aspects of her future, states that she does not want to 'have to ask my mum and dad for no help,' as 'it's just not right.'

Here we see an emerging theme of familial responsibility. Arguably, this notion of working class children wanting to support parents financially and not increase their financial concerns, emerges from an older conception of working classness not wholly enabled by neo-liberal individualised versions of subjective construction.

Thomson, Henderson and Holland (2003) argue that individualisation theorists '…underplay the importance of relationships and forms of reciprocity and obligation that are embedded within them for understanding the identities and practices in which individuals engage' (Thomson, Henderson and Holland, 2003, p44). I argue that this feeling of responsibility towards families forms a resistive discourse to that of negative working class maternal narratives. This aligns with older concepts of the historically-perceived strong working class woman.

My study participants display a clear sense of financial self-reliance in keeping with the notion of the neo-liberalised self. However, a need for financial independence does not always result from a desire to engage in consumer forms of neo-liberal feminine subjectivity. There is a resistance to any form of welfare dependency, a performative ascription to the negative working class forms of maternal subjectivity available. This can also be conceived of as an emergent resistive discourse which allows the young women to construct positive future selves within narrow parameters.

Atlanta describes her desire to not be welfare-reliant: 'I think succeeding and knowing, like my mum was on the dole for a couple of years from being young. I wouldn't wanna do that.' She articulates a desire to support herself as she would 'never want to be on the dole.' She does not want to criticise those in receipt of state benefits, but wants to avoid this herself. She describes her fears for the future:

> My biggest worry is not being able to financially support myself. Let alone ever
> having a child and not being able to support my child. Having a family and
> having a house of my own. Me and my mum share a bedroom, we're cramped
> up in a house with my Nan because we can't financially afford to move out.

Atlanta cites lack of financial independence as her 'biggest worry.'

The respondents describe their future aspirations of success to include motherhood and a financial capacity to 'afford' children without state support. In the age of the 'chav mum' or 'pramface,' these young women display a heightened awareness of not being reliant on benefits and ensuring that they are financially capable of looking after themselves and their future children.

When discussing a successful future, Gemma reinforces Atlanta's position, and describes 'having enough money to bring up your kids if you have them' as a key feature of a successful life. Sarah describes her future trajectory and its inclusion of a future family:

> I want to have my life first then I can provide and make a better life for the baby
> instead of messing both of us up. I want to do well for myself and make
> everyone that doubted me…I want to say "Ha! I done it!" Instead of doing
> nothing and then getting pregnant and then still having nothing and finding it
> really difficult, I want to find it easier.

Many of the young women cite having children in their future narratives. The gendered aspects of their lives and that of their peers regarding motherhood are already clear considerations in their discursive construction.

Allen and Osgood conducted a review of existing literature with the theoretical understanding that class infiltrates the discursive ways in which we constitute motherhood as having 'good' and 'bad' forms. They make the suggestion that middle class girls perceive motherhood to be a 'non-ambition' which secures their social status, while working class girls demonstrate the maternal trajectories within their life as 'valued life choices' (Allen and Osgood, 2009, p13). The findings in my study support this notion. I argue that the respondents highlight future narratives of 'good'

motherhood for themselves when discursively engaged in depicting future aspirational neo-liberalised individualised trajectories.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have explored how the young women in my study oscillate around discourses of working class parenting and motherhood. Themes of familial guidance and influence emerge through respondents' depictions of their maternal caregivers as those who offer them emotional support and guidance in their lives, even when this is not coached in the academic arena.

My findings align with the work of Gillies (2006) and others, outlined in the literature review chapter (chapter 3), in the argument that working class parents display support for their children's futures through different value systems to those of middle class parents. The emerging discourses convey how parents engage with their children to support them to not repeat their perceived mistakes. This adds to the existing body of evidence that working class parents aim for better lives for their children than those they have experienced themselves.

When parenting is deemed as insufficient by the young women in my study, they re-purpose any perception of parental failure as motivation to mobilise towards what I consider to be neo-liberal future trajectories.

Narratives of maternal struggle emerge in my study when the young women encounter and performatively engage in negative working class maternal discourses. These discourses position and regulate the young women, their mothers and their peers, within narrow versions of working class femininity.

Fertility management is generated as a neo-liberally constructed 'power technology,' which the respondents performatively reinforce when they consider the lives of their pregnant teenage peers. This is incorporated as a 'self-technology' when they conceive of their own fertility management. Moments of discursive resistance emerge where the young women repurpose negative discourses, finding characteristics of strength and respectability. The transmission of trauma, as experienced by the respondents' mothers, becomes another way in which gendered, classed identities are carried forward to new

generations.

The young women in my study conceive of futures which communicate classed and gendered positions. They consider the need to be successful professionally in order to financially support their own families, rather than ascribing only to neo-liberally defined versions of material success. This can be viewed as a resistance to neo-liberal individualised discourses which often define their generation.

Respondents' concepts of their own maternal trajectories and future family responsibilities present their performative ascription to aspects of planned motherhood. These align them with successful versions of neo-liberal feminine identity. When discussing themselves as mothers within their future trajectories, financial independence is central to their plans, performatively reinforcing neo-liberal successful discourses of maternal feminine identity.

The young women in my study, I argue, display complex discursive constructions of the maternal, and draw from the external dominant hegemony established through media and socio-political externalities. These merge with localised responses to their own peer group in school and aspects of their family contexts.

Chapter 7

Communities and their constructions of meaning and values

In this chapter I examine how the young women in my study construct themselves in relation to their communities. The notion of community, for this research, is conceived in two ways:

1) Local community is considered geographically. First I will examine the respondents' views of those who live in their locality alongside their conceptions of others' views of their locality and its residents. The respondents' views are contextualised with examples of discourses which emerge politically, socially and within the media. I will argue that the young women's perceptions emerge from media, government and wider public discourses which critique those in social housing and those in receipt of state welfare. This section first examines the depictions of the locality of the respondents' communities, and then introduces the concept of those communities as being polarised within discourses of good and bad, 'deserving' (Tyler, 2015, p503) and 'undeserving' (Tyler, 2015, p495) and 'respectable and unrespectable' (Skeggs, 1997, p131). Reay and Lucey (2000a) also argue the notion of working class children living in social housing as discursively vying for respectability. The young women identify individuals within their communities, and draw out examples of mature working class 'respectable' women who they cite as people they look up to and respect.

2) The notion of peer community, as used in this chapter, considers the young women's views of their peers, and their relationship with the young people with whom they share their emotional and geographical spaces. Exploring the depiction of 'youth' within the respondents' surroundings, they draw upon external discursive constructions of working class youth which influence their depictions of self. Moments of resistance and compliance emerge. Respondents place their peers into binary categories of 'good' and 'bad,' 'respectable' and 'unrespectable.' There is an apparent 'othering' (Sharff, 2011) of some of the young people living in their localities. In their identification of certain individuals as 'unrespectable' the young women secure their own positions outside of negative conceptions of working class youth. In doing this they resist the perception that their whole community is problematic.

This analysis supports the arguments made in the literature review chapter (chapter 3) surrounding the vilification of working class communities. My findings reveal disparities between the participants' positive views of their communities and their residents compared with the negative perceptions held by others. Discourses of worklessness and denigrated working class identity emerge. Negative discourses of working classness act as pivotal points.

As with Savage, Bagnall and Longhurst (2001), social positions emerge for the young women in their concepts of the dominant hegemonic depictions available to them. At times the respondents reinforce dominant hegemonic socio-political and media-generated views. Also emerging are moments when the young women resist the negative re-positioning of their 'communities' with protective and compassionate viewpoints.

Savage, Bagnall and Longhurst (2001) argue that class identity emerges when individuals articulate leadership and political infrastructure. The findings of this chapter support this theory. The young women display an awareness of class distinction through their articulations of the available discourses emerging from socio-political and media realms. I suggest that the respondents identify ways in which they can mobilise positive versions of working class feminine identity. They positively position themselves outside of the negative classifications of working class feminine identity which are the mainstay of the dominant hegemony.

Local Community

The UK Conservative-Liberal Democrat coalition government came into power in 2011 at a time of global economic recession. The policies of austerity which have followed involve a plethora of cuts to public spending and social welfare. Political rhetoric filtering into the mainstream media and social discourse mirrors the historic descriptions of 'deserving and undeserving poor.' This contributes to the denigration of families and communities from low socio-economic groups in need of state financial support. Media depictions of the working classes have enabled discourses which contextualise the moment of this thesis's research and, as I describe below, become part of the subjectivities of the research respondents.

At the time of the general election and the establishment of the coalition government in 2011, there was an emergence of policy rhetoric in relation to the 'Big Society.' This is a socio-political ideology described by Scott (2011) 'as a triumph in articulating and updating the neo-liberal settlement' (2011, p132). The concept of Big Society saw a passing back of the management of social inequality to communities faced with the most significant economic and social difficulties.

Levitas describes this period of cuts and austerity as 'a neo-liberal shock doctrine providing an excuse for the further appropriation of social resources by the rich' (Levitas, 2012, p322). The ensuing discourses of financial hardship and a country depicted as in need of austerity emerging from political and media depictions, directly informs the discourses of working class denigration engaging in by the respondents.

Bauman (2001) asks why humans seek community, and argues that current notions of community act as a mechanism which allows us to seek safety during insecure times. He purports that it is our emergent lack of community which drives our desire to pursue it. In my study, the safety the young women seek does not relate to the psychical concerns of violence, crime or substance misuse which are often representations of life on council estates. Instead, they refer to the lack of safety which emerges from the precarious conditions of life within a neo-liberal economic and socio-political arena.

Rose (1999) argues that the accumulated political depictions of those reliant on the welfare state is depicted though

> …dependency, an underclass, the marginalized, the excluded. Each term was attached to a different politics. But each treated those "on the social" as inhabiting a form of life that was purely negative: negative for those who inhabit it (Rose, 1999, p100).

Negative depictions of life in social housing and those in receipt of state welfare allow for the attribution of the categories of 'deserving and undeserving' poor. Families who rely on social housing and financial assistance are viewed as undeserving through their inability to take advantage of the opportunities afforded to them within the neo-liberal meritocracy. Tyler (2015) argues that '…one of the imperatives of neoliberal policies is class decomposition through individualization, involving intensive forms of government

which stimulate competition over resources in every area of social life' (Tyler, 2015, p497). Re-categorisation into deserving and undeserving poor emerges within divisive political rhetoric.

In a speech given at the London School of Economics in 2011, the UK Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, Iain Duncan Smith, stated:

> …in getting to grips with a culture of dependency, we need to end the feeling of entitlement. By focusing on income levels rather than life chances we have created pockets of our society where too many know only of money which is given, rather than earned (Duncan Smith, 2011, in a speech given at the London School Economics).

In an interview with the *Daily Express* newspaper in 2014, Duncan Smith references '…that stubborn part of the out-of-work group who are in housing estates and unwilling to work' (Duncan Smith, 2014).

MacDonald, Shildrick and Furlong (2013) suggest we live in age where working class young people find themselves being depicted as responsible for their own lack of opportunity. One way in which the transition of working class to workless poor is compounded within the young women's discursive terrains is through the British media's benefit-shaming reality TV culture. My findings introduce the idea that the respondents find their communities depicted within what Tyler (2008) describes as publicly imagined, contorted and 'caricatured' (p18) figurative forms. This leaves them with limited discursive opportunities to communicate respectability. They vie for the respectable, displaying components of community life which are not entirely individualised. They allude to notions of working class collectivity which remind us of the requirements of a classed sociological lens.

Discourses which negatively construct working class communities emerge from socio-political and media depictions. Examinations of the media (Tyler and Bennett, 2010) identify how class is re-conceived to demarcate the deserving from the undeserving poor. Tyler (2015) refers to reality television programmes such as 'Benefits Street:'

> …[an] accumulation and repetition of televisual figures of "the undeserving

poor" exerts powerful limits on the political imagination by establishing a consensus that Britain, in the words of one viewer, is "crawling with workshy malingerers" (in thread response to Webber, 2014). In this way, programmes like Benefits Street establish new rules for the "audio-visual policing" of precariat populations (Tyler, 2015, p495).

Tyler (2015) states that national abjects such as '"the benefit cheat" are mobilized as *technologies* of social control through which the transition from welfare to "post-welfare" states is effected' (Peck, 1998, p62*)* (Tyler, 2015, p495).

The demographic of the communities of my research partner schools are depicted in the methodology chapter (chapter 4) as those encountering multiple deprivations. Students from Borough College were drawn from a cluster of social housing which includes high-rise housing and smaller 1960s estates. As is common in London, pockets of multiple deprivations are located close to pockets of extreme wealth.

The students at Fairfield Academy in the Midlands are drawn from an intake from two large council housing estates. These are mostly individual dwellings built in the 1960s covering a significant geographical area, without interjecting pockets of wealth.

As evidenced in the methodology chapter, all of my research participants sit within the lowest two socio-economic group categories, with a large proportion of their families in receipt of state welfare.

The respondents were asked 'Can you tell me about the community in which you live?' and 'How do you think living there helps or hinders you?' My intention here was to enable the young women to communicate their own perceptions of 'local community,' in order to explore the potentially complex feelings of fear and revulsion alongside loyalty and respect. I wanted them to share their perceptions of others' views regarding their local community to better understand what effect the construction of others' versions of 'local community' has on their subjectivities.

I asked participants 'How is the government working to support you, your school and your family?' Narratives of denigrated social housing and welfare recipients emerged, highlighting the 'benefit shaming' depicted in earlier chapters. Demonised notions of

working class communities, as articulated here, infiltrate the subjective construction of the participants with discourses of denigrated communities becoming a place for the respondents to navigate and conceive of their own class positions.

Hayley (below) is a student at Fairfield Academy. Her parents are separated and both live with new partners. She lives with her mother, step-father and siblings. Her parents are employed in un-credentialed jobs and do not hold any qualifications. Her narrative describes the realities of hardships for families who are in work but remain quantified as being in the lowest two socio-economic brackets. She establishes the material hardship of many of the children within her community as follows:

> But with benefits I don't think they're very good 'cos we live with my Nana and with my step-dad at times, and my mum works and she doesn't get benefits and she struggles, she has a good week and she'll have a bad week but they don't help, they're not bothered, they're not interested, like, people that don't work they give money to, but people that work they don't give nothing to, there's never anything available. So I think they're more about the people that don't work and I think they should help the people that do work and push people to work, because it's not fair because my mum does work and she gets no benefits, only child benefits for having us. Like, there's no help there, school dinners, mum has to pay for all them and there's 3 of us and it's 30 pounds a week, that's a lot to take out of her wages every week, so I think she should be able to get that, like, she's only a part-time worker, she should get that, like, they should give people free school meals.

At Fairfield Academy the number of students in receipt of Free School Meals (FSM) was far higher than the national average. Hayley depicts her family as financially struggling but not in receipt of state welfare and compares her situation with that of others in her community. She reinforces a discourse of the 'undeserving poor' (Tyler 2015, p495), those described by Ian Duncan Smith as living on housing estates and unwilling to work.

Hayley articulates the problems encountered by a number of students at the school who do not qualify for FSM but who are unable to eat either at home or school:

…what about some kids that don't have enough money for dinner, they don't eat…so I think they should help in that way for people who go home and don't have a dinner so I think we should be entitled to at least one dinner a day here.

Standing (2011) depicts the growing precariat as being made up of families with limited financial stability, such as those in zero hours contracts with insecure housing. My study respondents often described a politicised view of the poverty within their communities, and suggest that central government is out of touch with their needs. Hayley describes her views on this subject:

I think it will get harder but I don't think the government actually understands how hard it is for people. With benefits, I don't think they're much good on that, like, one of the government men lived on benefits that someone gets and he did it, but just 'cos you do it doesn't mean that someone else can. I don't think they understand how people go about things in life, because they don't live the life. I don't think they actually understand how life is for people out here.

Hayley refers to the media story of Ian Duncan Smith in the previous week stating he 'would live on £53 a week if I had to' (Henley, 2013). This declaration came after Labour MP Helen Goodman (Goodman, 2013) attempted to live on £18 per week, the amount which she argued would be left for a large number of her constituents after the introduction of the 'Bedroom Tax.' This name was given by the media to a policy development within the Welfare Reform Act (2012) which reduced the amount of housing benefit available to families or individuals who were considered to be in a property larger than required for the number of residents. Here, Hayley displays an awareness of political debates played out in the media.

Hayley depicts an awareness of hardships that have arisen through the government's introduction of an austerity-cloaked overhaul of the welfare state. There are other instances where my study respondents show an ambivalence or lack of connection to the role of government in their lives. At other times they become angry and highly vocal about the disparity between their lives as compared with those in power.
Sarah, from Fairfield Academy, lives with her mother, father and two older sisters. Sarah's dad works full-time and they are not in receipt of state welfare. When

describing the government, Sarah becomes visibly angry: 'They're idiots. Twats! 'Cos they're really wealthy and they've done well, they don't ask the society what we want, what's best for all of us, they don't focus on us, they focus on themselves.'

Emma, also from Fairfield Academy, lives with her mother and sister. Her mother is unemployed, has completed her GCSEs and also holds qualifications in hairdressing. Emma receives FSM and describes the struggles faced by her family through the changes made to disability benefit:

> Well, because my mum's got problems with her back and she's got, like, a lot of illnesses and she can't work, but the government are going to make her try to find work so she has been going to job classes and things like that, but I think that it's a bit of a push too far, like, if she isn't capable of doing it…like, my mum said she wants to work, but it's finding a job that wants somebody that ain't as capable as other people to work there. Like, they're gonna choose a young healthy person over someone who's got a lot of illnesses. So it would be hard to find a job and she don't want a low job, she wants to be able to achieve, like, she does want a good job and she does want to work. Like, she did work before she had children but it was hard because when she gave birth it broke her disc in her back and she nearly had a brain hemorrhage and she has a lot of illnesses that stop her from being able to do a job and be able to work hard enough, because she'd have to stop and have breaks and have to take her tablets and it would be difficult and I don't think the government see that, they just want everyone working where some people aren't capable of it.

Emma provides a thorough explanation of the physical disabilities her mother faces and displays concerns that the government's requirement for her to be in work may be 'a push too far…if she isn't capable of doing it.' She articulates her mother's desire to be able to work but lists the issues she faces as a woman with multiple disabilities in the context of reduced employment opportunities. Her explanation is a justification of her mother having to pursue state financial assistance.

Emma displays the discourses of the undeserving poor through her passionate justification of why her mother had to receive financial assistance. She also shows a nuanced grasp of the government's desire to return the long-term disabled back to the

work place. At the time of our interview, the government was implementing a series of reforms to disability benefit, with widespread media scrutiny.

Shelley, from Fairfield Academy, lives with her mother and sister and her family receive state welfare. Her mother is unemployed and studying part-time at college. She describes the process of having to move house due to the 'Bedroom Tax:'

> Like the Bedroom Tax, that's gone now, so…we had to move because of that and then to find we could have stayed there. We were in a five bedroom house, now we're in a three. So we had to move because of it.

Shelly uses the term 'Bedroom Tax,' exemplifying how media language can be incorporated into the young women's vocabularies. These terms begin to define particular discourses, and in this instance the language of austerity supports discourses of the undeserving poor.

PACES OF URBAN

Vying for the respectable

Skeggs and Loveday (2012) describe that class relations are:

> …lived through a struggle, not only against economic limitation but a struggle against unjustifiable judgment and authority and for dignified relationality…a struggle at the very core of ontology, demonstrating how the denigrated defend and make their lives liveable; an issue at the heart of current austerity politics which may have increased significance for the future (Skeggs and Loveday, 2012, p472).

The following narratives display moments when the respondents find resistive localised discourses supporting them in 'making their lives liveable.' Conversely, they also find opportunities to comply with hegemonic discourses contributing to their process of neo-liberal reinvention.

Participants in my study describe positive and negative attributes of their locality, with several discussing the realities of their lives on council estates. Reay and Lucey (2000a) describe the feelings of children on inner-city council estates as '…characterised by

ambivalence, and conflicting feelings of longing, belonging and abhorrence' (Reay and Lucey, 2000a, p412). My study's findings align with this theme of conflict on the part of the young women. Negative working class discourses merge with moments when the participants reject the positioning of their communities as undeserving and unrespectable. They move between points of performative reinforcement and resistance in relation to the pervading negative versions of working class identity available.

Skeggs describes respectability as '…an amalgam of signs, economics and practices, assessed from different positions from within and outside of respectability' (Skeggs, 1997, p15). In my study, vying for the respectable emerges in how the young women situate themselves in relation to what they consider to be the negative aspects of their locale. They assert the positive attributes of their communities and their residents as opportunities to assert the 'respectable.'

Orla, from Borough College, is in receipt FSM and her parents are unemployed, with one parent unable to work due to illness. She describes her community as follows:

> Umm, I think part of it's very positive, like, it's very brought together but then there is a lot of crime, racism, but I think that's kind of understandable in society, but I think the community is very positive, like, everybody works together.

Orla engages in respectability discourse through her assertion of the community as positive and the notion of working together. She frames the negative aspects of crime and racism with positivity:

> I live on an estate and it's an estate that everybody knows and when people ask you "where do you live?" and you say there, they kind of back off from you and it's horrible, like, 'cos you feel so judged, like, they judge you for just where you live and I think once I move on to A-level and degrees I don't want people to judge me from just where I live.

Orla articulates how her estate is derided by others. She displays a classification of herself though the classification of others. She looks forward to the time when she can move on from her community in order to leave behind the negative classed positions

afforded to her.

Emma earlier described her mother's struggles with employment due to disabilities. She later displays an understanding of the classed position of her community through the positioning of others:

> The community to me is alright, because I know most of the people in it, but to others it's not good as a community. Like, what they suggest because obviously they don't live here, so they don't know the people, but if they saw the people they'd think "oh, they're a bit dodgy" but because they don't know them, but it does give this bad view, because it's some of the people they see and some of the stories they hear about it and stuff.

Emma vies for respectability through her denouncement of that classification. She asserts that her community was 'good' because everybody was together:

> …but it is a good community, like, because everybody's together. They don't disagree with one another but some people that come into the community, like others, they don't know; they think it's a bit dodgy because of the way they look. They don't really know who they are, but it is a good community, like, there is things to offer like the community centre and the youth club places and stuff like that. It's a good community.

Emma challenges the dominant hegemonic view of her council estate, and provides examples of the resources it has to offer.

Reay and Lucy (2000a), when describing their study of children living on council estates in London, observe that '[m]ost striking is these children's constant struggle to preserve a sense of themselves as "respectable" in the face of overwhelming odds' (Reay and Lucey, 2000a, p422). In my study, Emma displays what Skeggs describes as a 'denial of the representation of their positioning' (Skeggs, 1997, p74), with class here shown as central to her subjective construction through her grasp of the misreading of her neighbours by others.

Here, Emma shares what she considers to be respectable aspects of her local

community. Emma has previously described her family as 'not a posh family' and explained how her mother and family offered her support and how she relied upon them. She describes the issues they faced as characteristics of a 'respectable' family. As with the descriptions of her mother's desire to work, her explanations recognise negative working class demonisation, although she resists those discourses.

Kealy, from Borough College, lives with her mum who is unemployed but 'looking for work.' She has previously articulated the difficulties faced by her mother as a teenage mum. She describes her local community as follows:

> Oh, the place I live in? It's a good community 'cos if someone's in trouble, 'cos I know most people who live around that area, if I was in trouble they'd be able to help me. So yeah, it's a good community 'cos where I live it had a positive effect on me to help others.

Kealy describes a 'good community' as somewhere people are prepared to help and support one another, a community who know one another and that this mutual support has taught her to do the same for others.

Further discoursing of 'chav'

This section returns to a consideration of the negative discursive definition of 'chav.' Respondents use this term to describe other members of their community, and engage in a form of 'othering' (Scharff, 2011) of those failing in the project of self. In doing this they distance themselves from negative media, political and social depictions of certain individuals within their communities in order to shore up the community's overall 'respectability.'

Tyler (2008) applies 'figurative methodology' (p18) to support her identification of the ways in which different social types and groupings become caricatured and 'figured' in public. Tyler attaches the term 'chav' to an intrinsic part of a larger process of 'class making.' This provides the middle and upper classes with an opportunity to distinguish themselves from the white poor. 'Chav' is used as a definition, symbolic in the 'deepening economic inequality and class polarisation in Britain' (Tyler, 2008, p18).

Sarah, from Fairfield Academy, applies the term 'chav' when she describes her community:

> Interviewer - Can you tell me about the community in which you live?
>
> Sarah - Hmmm, er, full of chavs…
>
> Interviewer - Go on?
>
> Sarah - Er…
>
> Interviewer - Where do you live?
>
> Sarah - Er…I live on Mount Crescent; it's really chavvy down there, full of wannabes that don't succeed a lot.
>
> Interviewer - What's a wannabe?
>
> Sarah - Like, you're in this little pay gang and you want to be all high and stuff but they're just not, they're just nothing and they believe they're something, 'cos they walk round in tracksuits and rob phones and stuff.

Sarah's uses 'chav' to describe a particular element of her estate which she perceives to be unsuccessful. She engages in a negative discourse of working class denigration from an exterior position. She refers to 'others' on her estate as being in an unrespectable category. She secures her own class position through her ascription of others as negative.

Sarah also resists the negative conceptions of working classness:

> Erm, you know everyone so you can create a bond of a lot of people, you've just got to trust them and everyone's nice down there unless you get on their bad side then it's chaos and families and friends'll stick up for each other instead of one person arguing, it's like a family and like a family it builds up massive, it's just annoying.

She describes an environment where being known brings a sense of safety. This isolates the 'chavs' who reinforce negative working class discourse, and enables her to depict her neighborhood as generally good. It is one which looks after its own, in her description, where families and friends defend each other with the requirement of trust between neighbours.

Sarah continues further:

> You see a lot of people struggle 'cos they live there, but when you see people struggle you see that you don't want to be there, you don't want to be at their point so it makes you build and work harder so you can be somebody, instead of just saying "I'm just this person from Mount Crescent who hasn't got a good job." 'Cos you see them, they're like, they've not got good GCSEs, it's difficult to get a job, difficult to live in the real world and then you see that you don't want it to be difficult, you want it to be the easy options and you don't have a lot of options so it pushes you a little further to do well for yourself.

In describing members of her community as 'just people from Mount Crescent estate,' Sarah reinforces the discursive language of council estate vilification. She recognises others' negative classification of her community, which she reinforces. She protects herself within this negative discourse through her assertion of her status as an aspirational subject.

The young women in my study often distance themselves from discourses which define them as working class, including media and socio-political definitions of those in receipt of state welfare and social housing. They generate discourses of respectability for themselves.

An extension of this theme can be seen in how the young women define their families' financial positions. Reay and Lucey (2000a), in their study of children from council housing estates, find that:

> All of the children considered here devised tactics to preserve a sense of themselves as decent and respectable, which was why so many sometimes claimed to be middle-class in spite of living in households where all of the adults were both un-credentialled and unemployed. Indeed when asked which class they belonged to, the majority of children living on the estates said they were middle-class (Reay and Lucey, 2000a, p415).

My research questionnaire asked the young women 'Do you feel there is a class system in this country?' The majority of respondents stated there was not.

My questionnaire also asked the young women to situate themselves in relation to their family's financial position. Only one of the case study participants indicates they 'struggle to live on the money we have,' with the majority indicating they have 'enough money to live comfortably.' One respondent considered themselves as 'reasonably wealthy,' with one other considering their family to be 'wealthy.'

Reay and Lucey (2000a) find that children living on council estates often measure themselves against other children in their environments who have less than themselves. They indicate that the children:

> …grapple with a conceptualisation of "the poor", which seems infinitely reducible to a constituency which stops short of their own experience. It is increasingly difficult in the pervasive late 1990s culture of individualism and self-sufficiency to be decent and poor (Reay and Lucey, 2000a, p416).

The young women in my study rarely conceive of themselves as poor. Their financial position is articulated through questionnaire responses including parental employment status and receipt of state welfare. Their descriptions of financial stability often contrast with the reality of their circumstances and challenges which later emerged in dialogue.

Atlanta, from Fairfield Academy, earlier described the financial difficulties facing her and her mother, and that they have needed to move in with her grandmother as her family could not afford housing. Atlanta is also a student who categorises her family within the questionnaire as having enough money to live comfortably.

This theme also emerges when we consider Janine, from Borough College, who describes her family as: 'I wouldn't say we're wealthy but we're not poor, we can afford stuff.' In her questionnaire, Janine indicates that she is currently in receipt of FSM. However, she does not consider her family's financial position to be difficult. She also cites their position as 'reasonably wealthy' in her questionnaire responses.

Respondents positioning themselves as being financially comfortable can be interpreted in a number of ways. For example, the young women do not position themselves as poor as this would mean ascribing to an unrespectable status. The respondents' views of

their own families as not being the poorest of their community provides a distinction between them and the version of demonised working classness they encounter.

Alternatively, the young women in my study live in a growing 'massified' (Skeggs, 1997, p3) group of working class people. The 'precariat,' described by Standing as a 'distinctive socio-economic group' (Standing, 2011, p11), are the growing emergent underclass resulting from a neo-liberalised financial, political and social agenda. The young women in my study find themselves within this growing group. However, as Standing indicates, this grouping is not without descriptive limitations. Within the notion of precariat lies varying levels of financial instability. Similarly, my study respondents can be considered to make distinctions between themselves and those living within their community with financially less than them.

My research partner schools both receive a high proportion of students from families who have recently migrated to the UK (Ofsted, 2013a, 2013b). Although those students do not appear in the case study interviews, their experiences create the wider school and community context for the research respondents. The families of non-UK nationals who have recently arrived in the UK do not receive state welfare in parity with those families who are UK nationals (Kennedy, 2015). Those awaiting confirmation of their right to remain in the UK are also unable to work, leading to a proportion of the school community suffering financial hardship beyond that of my research cohort.

Both schools also receive an increasing number of students from families who have seen economic austerity policies lead to homelessness. Senior staff members at both schools indicated that a number of children were living in temporary housing and were statistically considered to be homeless. My study respondents are surrounded by others worse off than themselves, highlighted by Hayley, earlier in this section, as those who don't eat at school or at home.

Positive historicised forms of working class feminine identity

I have previously outlined the responses of the young women when asked 'Who do you look up to and respect and why?' The answers they gave describe the roles of their mothers, sisters and other family members, with emerging resistive discourses allowing

them to navigate the narrow depictions of working class feminine identity available. In the discussion below, I suggest further examples of the young women reinforcing and resisting negative depictions of feminine working class identity.

Earlier in this thesis, teachers were cited as role models by the study's respondents, however the issue of a perceived class position of members of staff also emerged. My study respondents have, at times, suggested that staff from similar social backgrounds to their own could offer more support and understanding than teachers they considered to have 'had it easy in life.'

A consistent factor within my study respondents' discourses of role-modelling was that, in all but one case, they gave examples of individuals, predominantly women, from the same social position as themselves. This theme emerges again with Hayley and Susy when they identify positive role models within their community. They find examples of credible, respectable older women, individuals who support the respondents depictions of their communities as respectable, this allows them a more expansive articulation of working class feminine identity.

Hayley and Emma both cite older women living on their estates as having played significant roles in their lives. These are matriarchal figures, outside of their own families, who they describe with tenderness, respect and admiration. These are the traditional working class, hard-working female depictions which can be conceived as existing before neo-liberal narrowed versions of working class feminine self emerged in contemporary political, policy and media discourses.

Hayley, from Fairfield Academy, describes her friendship with an elderly neighbour, June: 'There's an old lady next door, she's ninety-seven, she died recently and I did a lot for her, showered her, cleaned her and took her shopping. I did a lot for her and she relied on me for a lot.' Hayley had supported June practically and emotionally. Hayley also highlights the emotional support, inspiration and admiration she took from this friendship:

> She still went around when she was eighty, she still worked in a bank when she was 80, when she was alive she was a role model, she showed you could have things you wanted to do when you're old, like, she worked to eighty and you see

people on the dole and they say they can't work for this company or they can't work for that company and she worked to eighty with an arched back and frail legs. She still got out of bed at six o'clock and went to work and got something out of life, like, she still did stuff even when she was poorly, like, she still knew what she was talking about, she still had dreams, like I want to do this, or she still looked forward to what she was going to have and she was very thankful for what everyone did for her, like, she was never ungrateful, and it shows that if you do try hard like she did, and she went through World War One and Two and it shows… If you do carry on then you do get better things in life and she said having me do for her what I did, and the lady who lived across the road and what we did for her, and she said if you talk to people, communicate with people you get a bond with them, you get a relationship that's healthier. That's what she always said, if you connect with people they'll connect with you and they'll always help you.

Hayley describes how June proves that hard work and kindness are enough to gain the things that you need and want in life. She performatively ascribes to a neo-liberal notion of meritocracy, drawing on the dominant hegemonic discourses of the workless poor in her explanation of those members of her community who are 'on the dole, who say they can't work for this company or that company.' She also describes a bygone era of the working classes through a member of her community who had been through both World War One and World War Two, and who had, through hard work, respect and care for others, achieved a 'successful' and 'respectable' life.

Nettleingham (2017) describes that a community can be 'constructed in memory or can be an idea projected into the past and future' (Nettleingham, 2017, p1-2), enabling the re-introduction of respectable notions of working-classness. She indicates that community:

> …allows the articulation of the lived experience of these processes, of social problems, of power and resistance. Community is reified through a sense of locality, their equation articulating personal connections to the past that inform relational and communal identities in the present (Nettleingham, 2017, p13).

Nettleingham's notion of community, as drawn from past conceptions, can be seen

above in how Hayley describes June.

Grounded in embodied forms of classed histories, this sense of 'community' can also be seen in the work of Walkerdine through her notion of 'affective histories' (2016a, p699). Walkerdine suggests one can explore the 'present of class' through an examination of the 'embodied responses to historical events' (Walkerdine, 2016a, p700), transmitted to descendants within the community. Walkerdine examines the ways in which events have been embodied by members of a community in the present.

Walkerdine suggests that relationships need to be conceived of as the product of '…sociality and historical processes rather than simply providing a context or backdrop for them' (Walkerdine, 2016a, p700). The analysis in this thesis is not a work on 'affect' (Walkerdine, 2010), however I refer to Walkerdine's interdisciplinary methods of analysis in chapter 6 through the application of her work on the intergenerational passing of trauma, conceived of as being passed down the maternal line. I draw from Walkerdine's 'affective histories' to illuminate the construction of historicised discourses of working class feminine identity which emerge from the relationships Hayley describes.

June lived next door to Hayley on the same estate and her financial circumstances could be considered as 'unsuccessful.' June was a resident of social housing during the last stage of her life which, as I have depicted throughout this section, carries its own stigma. Neo-liberal social mobility suggests that one should spend one's life working towards 'escaping' social housing.

Hayley finds an opportunity to counter the 'misrepresentation' of the values working class communities hold; values that McKensie (2015) suggests are regularly overlooked. She continues to describe her memories of June:

> She was ever so funny, bless her. When the doctor came to the old lady and told her to stop smoking she said "get out, don't tell me that!" and the doctor said smoking's not doing you any good so she said "I smoke one a day, get out!" She was ever so honest, she told everyone what she thought. Her hairdresser was ever so fat and when she came in she said "look at her wobble!" She was ever so honest. The lady across the road had her bank card, 'cos June would give

anybody anything, and she said "here comes the boss, here comes the gaffer"
and she could hear her but she didn't care but she'd tell it like it is. We've got a
little dog, a little poodle and she says "that dog's not right, you don't feed it"
and she'd give it chicken drumsticks, everything…even when she was dying in
her bed she'd say "come on Ted" to the dog and I'd say "look at you," bless her.

Hayley describes June with warmth and affection, and depicts her as having the
characteristics of honesty and openness. The idea that June would give 'anyone
anything' resonates with a nostalgic view of the working classes. Here, Hayley re-
establishes her community as 'respectable' through her depiction of a traditional,
matriarchal working class woman, long removed from the political, media and policy
depictions which define council estate residents today.

Susy, from Borough College, was asked to describe her role models. She also highlights
a relationship with an elderly neighbour who Susy respects due to her kindness and
honesty:

My neighbour, I didn't even mention her because she's old, but yeah, because I
respect her because she's genuinely nice and if she thinks you're in the wrong
then she'll tell you and if she thinks you've done something good then she'll tell
you, and she just makes you feel like you're doing the right thing and if you're
not she'll tell you and help you to make it better.

Susy depicts a version of working class feminine identity which can be considered to
draw upon historical versions of a respectable working class. Community respectability
then becomes embodied in a member of their community, someone that would have
physically inhabited historicised versions of working class respectability. Hayley and
Susy both describe maintaining 'respectability' in the face of the harsh realities of life in
their locality. Their foregrounding of positive, historicised forms of working class
feminine identity display a performative resistance to the denigration of contemporary
forms of working class feminine identity.

Peer Communities

This section continues to construct the respondents' subjective positioning within a neo-liberalised field, bringing forward depictions of working class youth present at the time of the research. The UK riots in August 2011 took place just three years before my research interviews. Young people involved in the riots were presented in the media and by politicians as a degenerate section of the population. This can be seen as an example of the discursive zeitgeist afforded to working class young women at that time.

Themes of moral panic in relation to the depiction of youth are nothing new and a historical perspective is important to consider here. Increased employment opportunities during the Industrial Revolution led to 'moral panic' in relation to newly-liberated, socialised young men and women gaining autonomy outside of the traditional patriarchal family unit. Cohen (2002) describes moral panic as occurring when:

> [a] condition, episode, person or group of persons emerges to become defined as a threat to societal values and interests; its nature is presented in a stylized and stereotypical fashion by the mass media; the moral barricades are manned by editors, bishops, politicians and other right-thinking people; socially accredited experts pronounce their diagnoses and solutions; ways of coping are evolved or (more often) resorted to; the condition then disappears, submerges or deteriorates (Cohen, 2002, p1).

Cohen relates his early work on moral panic to the contemporary sociology of Beck's (1992) 'Risk Society.'

The self-reflection of Beck's individualisation premise creates a new context for moral panic (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2002). Cohen indicates that the risk society, as described by Beck, is predicated on fear and there is a natural alignment to the subsequent emergence of moral panic in relation to this fear. I suggest that the fear emerging from newly established formations of risk reinforces negative discourses surrounding the denigration of working class young people.

Pitts (2011) suggests that the media were quick to align themselves with the Conservative leadership's view that the riots emerged through a 'a moral breakdown,' the result of 'broken families' (p82), incentivised through excessive state handouts. This is in contrast to a more progressive explanation that those responsible were 'bored, thwarted consumers on the social margins, the margins of society' who then turned their rage on the consumer society that thwarted them' (Pitts, 2011, p82).

The year 2011 saw a number of high profile events and related news stories, including the phone hacking scandal, which revealed collusion between the press and preceding Governments. That year also saw the MP's expenses scandal, which revealed fraudulent claims on the public purse from members of political parties; and the public bailout of the banking sector after the near collapse of the British banking infrastructure.

The following statement from Prime Minister David Cameron came immediately after the riots of August 2011. Maintaining the individualised discourse of personal and familial failure, and the neo-liberal agenda of a reduction of state welfare feeding a moral panic that the mainstream media were quick to collude with and provoke, Cameron stated:

> Irresponsibility. Selfishness. Behaving as if your choices have no consequence. Children without fathers. Schools without discipline. Reward without effort. Crime without punishment. Rights without responsibilities. Communities without control. Some of the worst aspects of human nature tolerated, indulged – sometimes even incentivised – by a state and its agencies that in part have become literally de-moralised (David Cameron, in a statement to the press directly after the August 2011 riots, in Pitts, 2011, p82).

Against this backdrop, the young women in my study communicate working class youth discourses. Kealy, from Borough College, indicates a media depiction of young people as criminalised:

> I think they can be quite stereotypical, to be honest, and they always say…sometimes I've seen in the news about the bad things, like, a lot of us are on drugs or something. They think like that. Sometimes I think they can give a bad impression so people stereotype us, like, if you go in a shop some of the

guards will follow you around which would obviously annoy us 'cos we know they think we're gonna steal, when we're not, we're actually gonna buy something. So I think they can actually give people the wrong perspective.

Kealy defines a 'stereotype' of young people involved in substance misuse and shoplifting as driven by the media. The negative media depictions of working class young people as criminals also become instrumental through her experiences of being a suspected shoplifter.

The discourse of youth criminality emerges again with Shelly, from Fairfield Academy: 'I think they all treat us as one, so if one does something bad they have the overall view of us all, like crime, they see us all as one group.' Emma, from Fairfield Academy, considers the media to be central to the creation of negative perceptions of youth:

> I think, like, eighty per cent they do give young people a bad reputation, because all they're thinking is they're young so they're doing these things and, like, a lot of young people are on drugs and smoke and drink and stuff like that, so them people do give the rest of young people a bad name 'cos it makes them think that that's what all young people are like. I think they do put them across as that…but there is a small percentage that do think good of young people and do try to help young people and give them a good name and try to help them get a better reputation, but I think most of the time they're given a bad name and I think that they think that young people are just useless in this generation, like, they don't think good of young people.

Emma indicates that the media generates negative discourses of substance misuse and criminality but she considers the reality that some young people are engaged in those practices. She suggests this causes the public to consider her whole generation as 'useless,' and drawing from the 'criminalised' discourse she concedes that 'a lot of young people are on drugs and smoke and drink and stuff like that.'

At the time of my research interviews, data taken from an annual research report of 11-15 year olds in 174 schools published by NatCen, an independent social research agency, and the National Federation for Educational Research (NFER), highlighted that:

- The prevalence of illegal drug use in 2013 was at similar levels to 2011 and 2012, though considerably lower than in 2001, when the current method of measurement was first used. 16 per cent of pupils had ever taken drugs, 11 per cent had taken them in the last year and 6 per cent in the last month

- In 2013, less than a quarter of pupils said that they had smoked at least once. At 22 per cent, this was the lowest level recorded since the survey began in 1982, and continues the decline since 2003, when 42 per cent of pupils had tried smoking

- 3 per cent of pupils in 2013 reported that they smoked at least one cigarette a week compared to 9 per cent in 2003

- In 2013, 9 per cent of pupils had drunk alcohol in the last week, compared to 25 per cent in 2003 (National Health Service, 2014)

This reduction in substance misuse by children and young people suggests that a minority of young people are engaging in these activities. However, the depiction of drug and alcohol misuse among young people continues to be a sensationalised media subject, deployed to instigate moral panic and reinforce negative classed and gendered youth discourses.

Emma's view that only a minority of the public look to help young people displays a sense of isolation from the socially-mobile aspirational young people conceived through the notion of 'post-equality.'

Hayley, from Fairfield Academy, alludes to the theme of moral panic in her explanation of media constructions of young people:

> Say someone's done something wrong, on the telly, someone's murdered somebody, they think everybody's like that. When you go into town and you see people, they're all afraid young people are going to hurt them but really not everybody's like that. There's better people out there than some people's seen. They make it, like, if one person does something wrong they take it, like, everybody's going to do that sort of crime, they portray everybody like that and

they shouldn't think like that because we're all different and we all have different ambitions of what we want to do.

Hayley's depictions of youth criminality, and her belief that it is misrepresented as a danger to the public, displays a discursive resistance. She suggests that young people should not be generalised as dangerous and situates young people as ambitious. She draws from neo-liberal socially-mobile discourses to counter the blanket conception of youth she believes is portrayed by the media.

Hayley proceeds to discuss opportunities available to her and other young people on her estate:

> There's a lot to do, like the youth club and all that kind of stuff, I think it's ok, ain't too bad…Umm, like, the youth club and that gets you out of trouble so there's always something to do, keep you safe 'cos there's a lot of adults and stuff like that.

Hayley highlights positive attributes of her community, describing how young people's behaviour can be modified through the intervention of adults, including those in attendance at her youth club. She infers that the youth club can keep her and others out of trouble.

Reay and Lucy (2000a) highlight that:

> …prevalent anxieties about gangs, yob culture, feckless working class youth, a black crime wave and out of control drug consumption all focus exclusively on youth cultures. Within these landscapes of concern, children living on large inner city council estates are constructed as both "at risk" and as potential risk to others (Reay and Lucey, 2000a, p411).

Hayley recognises that she was constructed as one of those 'at risk.' Her description of the youth club 'that gets you out of trouble' indicates an awareness of both the realities of the potential dangers on her estate and the danger posed by being perceived as 'one of those youths' posing a risk to others.
Susy lives with her parents and sisters on a council estate near to Borough College. She

describes young people on her estate in negative terms, alluding to the dangers posed by an 'othered' young people:

> Susy - I don't know, I just don't like it, no, just the people that live there are not nice, like, you get some that are nice but you get some around the area, but when you go to the shops and there are all teenagers hanging about and they're not really nice and they're horrible sometimes and they laugh about you, but it's good that you have shops around to go to otherwise you'd have to go far to the shops and that.
>
> Interviewer - How do you think living there helps or hinders you?
>
> Susy - I don't know…I don't really see it as helping me…
>
> Interviewer - Is there any way you think it may cause you problems?
>
> Susy - Umm…they don't cause me problems.

Hayley shares her concerns for her younger brother Jack:

> There's a lot of, like, youth around there so I think they influence in a bad way so, my brother Jack, he's 10, he's up the shop and seen smoking and stuff like that. It's not very nice, like, we don't want him doing that but when there's kids around doing it they just seem to follow, don't they? My step-brother, he's 20 something, when we go to my dad's house Jack sees what he does like swearing, he'll do the things, like he influences, so I think that's a bad thing, so I think there's a lot of youths around and people smoking and doing things they shouldn't be.

Hayley and Susy identify a small number of problematic young people on their estates. Hayley applies the term 'youth' which presents as the adoption of policy-driven rhetoric and not a natural description of the young people she knows. Hayley and Susy both describe issues of feeling unsafe, bullied or potentially led astray by a minority who could draw others into unacceptable, unrespectable behaviour. Susy does not feel that those people are a threat or cause her any particular problems; however, Hayley describes the influences of an 'othered youth' towards her brother.

Hayley's description moves from a notion of youth as 'othered' to concern for her own

extended family. She aligns the behaviour of her older step-brother to the 'youths' she sees on her estate, causing her concern for her younger brother's safety. Markers of poor behaviour, according to Hayley, are smoking and swearing; she alludes to other unacceptable behaviour but this is not clarified. These concerns present as Hayley not wanting her little brother to be categorised as one of the 'others.' She appears to have already positioned her step-brother as the 'other,' the unrespectable, displaying unacceptable behaviours. In this instance Hayley creates a boundary of 'respectable' and 'unrespectable' within her own siblings. She discursively vies for respectability for herself and her younger brother in view of the dangers of them being constructed as 'youth.'

Claire, from Fairfield Academy, introduces new forms of media as another mechanism in the generation of negative youth discourses. She depicts constructions of 'youth' as slaves to technology, a generation obsessed with social media:

> Then there's media that goes "get off the phone, we need to learn more, blah, blah, blah." Because this is all new to our parents as well, because obviously we didn't have all this high tech technology before…I think our generation is varied, I don't think we are put in a box, I don't think we are the lazy people, I don't think we like to lay around and eat pizza, sometimes we do but we don't always have our headphones in, we don't always be on our phone, we're not always on social networking sights, we do go out, we have lives, like, we have families, we have people to see, places to go…we're just normal kids.

Claire resists the negative discourses of modern young people as technology-obsessed and lazy. She reads others' views of young people as massified and de-humanised. She resists this, arguing that young people are emotionally invested, and refers to them as 'just normal kids.'

Earlier in chapter 5 I argued that there is a dichotomy between the 'post-equality of opportunity,' 'post-feminist,' neo-liberalised pseudo-meritocratic situation of my study respondents and the reality of the gendered discourses of educational, career and life trajectories available to them.

Sarah, from Fairfield Academy, highlights the role gender plays in the construction of young people, and speaks about how it is intertwined with discourses of laziness and

fear of youth:

> Sarah - A lot of them think the teenagers are scary or think about other things like friends and argue with their family and stuff, and a lot of them don't focus and they put a negative point on us but half of us could actually push to do really well and we could all end up as Prime Minister or something but they don't see us as it was years ago, they believe that we're slacking in a lot of things which is annoying 'cos we're not, some of us are but not everyone is. They all see us as the same as well but everyone's different
>
> Interviewer - And what about how the media portray young women?
>
> Sarah - Umm, like we're weak and we can only help by having kids and doing little jobs and a lot of us are just about make-up and fashion and stuff but some of us actually stronger than men in many ways but we want to do better for ourselves before we have our future and have kids, marriage and all this. Some of us want to work and get money, do well for ourselves and make other people proud.

Sarah offers an example of a resistance to the worklessness discourses identified earlier in this chapter. Her use of the term 'slacking' aligns with a perception of inherent laziness contributing to negative discourses of working class youth. She complies with the neo-liberal meritocratic notion of hard work for great reward, displaying admirable ambition in the potential goals for herself and her peers. She also recognises that negative discursive trends have intensified for her generation. She highlights gendered classed discourses of women perceived as 'weak…only useful for having babies and doing little jobs,' recognising the perception that young women are preoccupied with 'make up and fashion.'

Sarah's explanation of her ability to achieve more can be read as a 'performative resistance' to the limiting discourses of working class feminine identities aligned with teenage motherhood and vilified, dangerous working class youth. There is a reinforcement of discourses of neo-liberal social mobility when she depicts an idealised middle-class life. She reinforces the meritocratic when she considers that many of her friends *could* do well. This becomes complicated when she identifies the discursive construction of working class young people in the eyes of the media.

Butler rationalises the 'linguistic conventions of authority' (Butler, 1997, p51) as legacies of citations, indicating that no terminology or statement within discursive definitions can exist without the accumulated history it has acquired. She indicates that the 'power' within a discourse emerges only due to the repetition, the 'citation' of the language, the 'speech act' (Butler, 1997, p51). As exemplified throughout this chapter, the young women in my study do not comply with the 'policing of identity in the scene,' and display a refusal 'in relation to the police demand' (Butler, 2014). This refusal enables them to begin to formulate new versions of self outside of the denigrated working class notions of youth.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have described how classed versions of identity are established through media and socio-politically generated discourses. Working class communities and individuals have encountered demonisation throughout history. As a society we continue to generate new modes of denigrated classification. The young women in my study describe their local communities partly with trepidation. They see the realities of the crime and racism, however they contextualise those issues against a backdrop of financial hardship. They rarely consider themselves to be the least fortunate in financial terms. This could be seen as a mechanism of self-protection in relation to ensuring distance from those considered to be failing in the neo-liberal state. However, this could also infer recognition of the financial hardships the austerity agenda has placed on members of their community whom they consider to be more marginalised than themselves.

My study respondents, at times, describe characteristics of their working class communities as criminalised, lazy, scrounging members of society, those on drugs, those having sex and babies too young. These are depictions of youth which breed fear in the minds of the public. In this way, I suggest, neo-liberalised rhetoric has infiltrated their social imaginary, acting as an axis on which to position themselves.

The respondents' constructions of communities emerge from a layering of discourses, both resistant and compliant to the dominant hegemony. They display resistance through the generation of positive discourses. In some instances, this drew from historicised positive versions of working class feminine identity through depictions of

individual and localised value systems which contest the negative and increasingly polarised dominant hegemonic view of the demonised working classes.

In the face of this, the young women navigate compliance or resistance to the negative rhetoric of working class identity, but only ever within the available sphere. Neo-liberal political and social discourses interface with the realities of their lived experiences, requiring them to secure their own, their families and their communities' respectability and humanity in the face of widespread condemnation.

Chapter 8

Conclusion

Reconsideration of purpose

Drawing on sociological and social stratification theories, this research has understood the research participants within my study as holding marginalised positions within the UK statutory education context. They are, at the time of writing, the lowest performing group at age 16 of all female groups within the statutory education system. The educational offer afforded to those from the lowest-socio-economic groups in the UK, compared with the adverse educational, economic and social situations afforded to young women in the developing world, evidences the significant developments that have been made in this country in the last few decades. However, I believe, as a country whose Global Domestic Product is in the global top ten, the ongoing marginalisation of the poor across ethnicity and gender categorisations within the UK education system is wholly unacceptable.

The purpose of my study was to establish how white working class young women within the UK educational context are socially constructed and positioned. This thesis adds to the existing body of knowledge which focuses upon the construction of the subjectivities of white working class young women. I have identified how my study respondents' views and values emerge from this positioning to inform their educational and social choices, leading to development of a clearer understanding of the ongoing position of white working class young women as one of the groups least supported to achieve, academically, in the UK.

I began this thesis with a set of suppositions emerging from my own and my family's educational experiences. My research model emerged from these experiences, but took on new directions I had not previously considered once the research cohort became engaged in the process.

My research has identified commonalities of experience across a small cohort of white working class girls, along with differences specific to the complexities of their individual lives and the complex power relationships which construct their identities. Through their narratives of educational, career and personal planning I have shown how the socio-political context, argued as neo-liberal in its formation, converges with their life experiences to establish the research cohort as subjects.

The research analysis within this thesis is situated within, and draws upon, the current socio-political, neo-liberal ideological context in the UK. Neo-liberalism is identified here though an examination of individualised political and policy rhetoric. I argue that the young women in my study inhabit a 'post-feminist' and 'post-equality' terrain, leading to a neo-liberally crafted 'social imaginary' (Rizvi and Lingard, 2009) that is pseudo-meritocratic. The idea of a meritocracy leading to a plethora of choice and opportunity was at the forefront of the young women's minds. Their depictions of equality as achieved, including their disconnection from notions of feminism, reinforced perceptions of their planned trajectories as meritocratic.

My application of the term 'pseudo-meritocracy' was not borne from prior knowledge but was developed during the early phase of this research process. I have since discovered that this term has also been suggested by Reay (2017). I now consider my work to be aligned with her depictions of the term.

In order to situate my research, I examined how working class children and women have been conceived of throughout history in relation to education. What has become apparent is that at no point in history, nor in recent policy, has there been a prioritisation of working class girls and young women's educational development. Their educational opportunities emerged after the establishment of those for children from wealthier families and from boys from the same socio-economic groups.

When a national model of primary education was introduced in the late 19th century, many working class girls still could not access the limited opportunities available. The same occurred with the introduction of compulsory state

secondary education in 1944 and with the increase in Higher Education (HE) from the 1970s onwards. Working class girls have consistently been the last to benefit from educational developments. The opportunities afforded to them include gendered and classed conditions, with inequalities designed to prepare them for a life of domesticity and low paid employment.

My examination of the current educational context for working class girls, specifically white working class girls, has highlighted some recognition of a need for improvements in the educational offer available to this research cohort. Equality legislation has led to the opening up of a curriculum providing access points to all subjects, even though gendered selection continues. Girls have begun to perform as well as, or better than, their male counterparts within school age education, FE and HE. However, the media and policy responses to the achievements of white middle class girls within the statutory educational context, including an increase in them attending HE, is a significant factor which has overshadowed white working class girls' static position in relation to educational development.

The 'successful girls' discourse does not only prevail in educational rhetoric. Media and political rhetoric continues to depict the successes of a small minority of women. This has promoted neo-liberal socially-mobile versions of femininity emerging as a requirement of a successful future. In the case of this study's respondents, this version of neo-liberal success conceived of as achieved through educational advancement and the careers that follow are often inaccessible.

Research alignment to UK government's current policy position

In the historical and current context of working class girls' education chapter (chapter 2) I introduced the recognition of the underperformance of white working class girls by Ofsted and the subsequent launch of the Department for Education's (DfE) inquiry 'Underachievement in Education by white working class children,' which led to the publication of the education select committee's report of the same name (Department for Education, 2014). The report reviews existing research and

performance data including invited contributions from experts in the field. It highlights the issues faced by white working class children and their educational institutions throughout KS1-5. The report presents its findings and makes recommendations for research, policy and practice interventions. It is the most comprehensive examination of white working class underachievement made by the UK government to date.

Recommendations from this report include a need for better 'Defining and targeting disadvantage' (Department for Education, 2014, p2), suggesting a greater need for a more nuanced and advanced system of categorisation of socio-economic status beyond free school meals (FSM). There is a greater need for identifying those facing financial hardship and encountering variations of marginalisation as result of gender, ethnicity and socio-economic status. Limiting our data capture to those in receipt of free school meals (FSM) inhibits our ability to identify disadvantage and the subsequent impact upon groups who may fall outside of this category but who still face financial, educational and social marginalisation. While the report makes recommendation for central government to begin to use other national indices to define socio-economic status, the lack of data surrounding white working class girls' performance and circumstances remains a key concern.

My research navigated this issue through the application of NS-CEC definitions of social status and not just through categorisation of FSM. In my review of available literature relevant to my research cohort, the issue of a lack of clarity of categorisation across government departments and within academic research continually emerged. This lack of credible data capture weakens our ability to make concise arguments for how to meet the needs of a group who can present as amorphous. The education select committee endorsed a need for greater research examining how data can be shared across government departments in the future in order to target students in need of support. My research suggests that applying the NS-CEC categorisation can help to ensure we capture relevant experiences of white working class girls within the lowest socio-economic categories but not in receipt of FSM.

The select committee report refers to an overall lack of data presentation and

application of even FSM students within all published accounts of educational performance and, in particular, a lack of evidence of KS5 student trajectories. This, along with the issue of FSM being a reductive tool for identifying disadvantage, requires immediate attention. The review of literature for this thesis demonstrated a paucity of evidence to display the commonalties of educational or career trajectories for my research cohort nationally post-16. I concur with the committee's report in that there is limited presentation of data displaying the trajectories of white working class girls. I suggest further research into the national trends in white working class girls post 16 educational experience is urgently needed.

A key feature of the report was 'The importance of schools' (Department for Education, 2014, p5) in improving white working class attainment. There is recognition of the capabilities of Ofsted 'good' and 'outstanding' schools' achievements in improved results for white working class students. The DfE suggest that around 80% of all schools were now judged 'good' or 'outstanding' and that this has led to a reduction of 250,000 students being taught in schools considered to be failing (Department for Education, 2014, p5).

One solution presented for school improvement was the introduction of academisation, cited as a key initiative tasked with the school improvement agenda. However, Andrews and Perera (2017) in their review of research by the London School of Economics and the Education Policy Institute, assert that varying models of academisation do not 'provide an automatic solution to school improvement…there is significant variation in performance at both different types of academies and Multi-Academy Trusts' (Andrews and Perera, 2017, p6). Andrews and Perera suggest that, early on in the academisation programme, some improvement in school performance could be seen but this is agued to be the result of the increase in funding that was originally attached to the initiative. This improvement has not been sustained due to reductions of spending and resource allocation.

The DfE education select committee make a recommendation that pupil premium finding (PPF) be better regulated to reflect socio-economic position

(Department for Education, 2014, p8). The report suggests meeting the issue of white working class underachievement through improved allocation of PPF, in particular to schools considered to be 'failing' in order to better support the needs of white working class children. However, at the time of writing, the categories for receipt of PPF remain as FSM, children in care or children of service men and women. Nothing has been done to provide additional funding to white working class children and young people outside of these categories, those who fall into the category of the lowest socio-economic group, but not in receipt of state welfare.

The allocation of funding to address the specific needs of my research cohort is a primary concern. Without additional funding many 'failing' schools, at a time of sustained reduction in whole school funding, find themselves unable to engage in many of the recommendations made by the education select committee, those made here or presented in the research of others reviewed in this thesis. This is continually stated in the media and by professional bodies and I must re-emphasise this here. Without sustained investment in the pedagogic or social interventions proposed to make change, education cannot begin to contribute to the broader social shifts required to genuinely reduce the social inequality facing the UK at this time.

The DfE report recognises the need address the disparities between 'Parental skills and language in the home' (Department for Education, 2014, p6) for white working class children and those from other minority groups. Recommendations are made for early intervention in oracy and literacy for white working class children. In this study I address the development of negative learner identities within students that present as having developed early on in their school lives. I welcome the report's intention to develop interventional approaches and longitudinal studies to examine the impact of this. However there remains a need to consider interventions for students who are already engaged in their school lives at KS1, 2 and 3. It is my recommendation that additional resources be allocated in order to close this gap within primary and secondary education. My proposals for pedagogic intervention in response to this follow in the 'recommendations' section below.

The DfE report recognises significant gains made by schools within greater London and the requirement to 'Tackling regional variation' (Department for Education, 2014, p9) in the performance of white working class students. The London Challenge Programme saw significant improvements in the performance of all students through the introduction of school leadership development and individual professional development programmes for teachers. It also brought together high and low performing schools across regional areas in order to promote knowledge and the sharing of good practice.

My research worked with partner schools in the Midlands and London. In both locations the schools were placed similarly in performance tables and their Ofsted status of 'requires improvement'. My research worked with a small cohort of white working class girls and did not attempt to make any comparison in regional variance between participants. I propose further research, working with a nationally representative cohort of white working class girls, to examine any variations in more detail, with the analytical approach taken within my research applied to a national data set. This would enable a national research model with improved quantitative data collection depicting trends in the trajectories of white working class girls pre and post-16. A larger cohort of qualitative participants could be interviewed nationally in order to grasp regional or local variances in trajectories.

The 'Underachievement in Education by white working class children' report suggests a need for 'Best practice in schools' (Department for Education, 2014, p11) relating to meeting the needs of white working class students. A key area suggested is an extension and reorganising of the school day. An ability to increase the time spent on self-directed school work and provide extra tuition for those students exemplified within my research cohort is a key recommendation of this thesis.

In accordance with the 'Underachievement in Education by white working class children' report (Department for Education, 2014), I believe the 'Deployment of teachers' (Department for Education, 2014, p12) and their retention is a significant problem for schools with poor Ofsted ratings. The students in my study consistently highlighted that the teachers they had were young and

inexperienced. They saw a high staff turnover and this was felt to be a concern adding to their conception of their school as 'failing'.

The education select committee findings address 'Parental engagement' (Department for Education, 2014, p13) of white working class parents, highlighting the connection between what they deem to be poor parental engagement with reduced performance of white working class children in receipt of FSM. The select committee provided minimal evidence to support a claim of a lack white working class parental engagement; however they cited evidence to suggest that white working class parents may be disengaged as a result of their own lack of educational experience, knowledge of the system and poor literary skills. These points are reinforced by the findings of my research in this thesis.

The 'Underachievement in Education by white working class children' report (Department for Education, 2014) foregrounds the need for educational approaches mitigating a perceived lack of parental engagement. I recommend a need for further research examining how policy makers and practitioners perceive a lack of white working class engagement, as any approaches to 're-engage' white working class parents' currently emerge from a very limited understanding of the experiences of white working class parents and their children. My findings contribute to this required aspect of research. The young women in my study display their conceptions of parental involvement, foregrounding emotional support above all else with recognition of some of the areas of practical support which might be missing from their familial model.

As a result of the education select committee's work to understand the ongoing issues in poorer results for white working class students, a commitment was made to collate a compendium of available research in this area to inform any future policy and practice. The report 'A compendium of evidence on ethnic minority resilience to the effects of deprivation on attainment' (Department of Education, 2015) attempts to identify examples of research and practice which display the resilience of children and young people from other ethnic minority groups within the same socio-economic brackets as those from white working class homes.

The 'compendium of evidence on ethnic minority resilience to the effects of deprivation on attainment' (Department of Education, 2015) highlights much of the evidence that has been reviewed within this thesis. It reflects an accumulation of evidence focusing on student, school and familial factors. These contribute to lower educational achievement of white working class students throughout their schooling in the UK context compared with their peers from other ethnic minority backgrounds. The report concludes that there are variations in parental aspirations which could play a key role in the difference in attainment however they recognise a paucity of evidence to support this theory.

Within the synopsis of findings presented in the research compendium (Department of Education, 2015) it is proposed that current research suggests white working class parents are often younger than those of other ethnic minority groups, that they hold a lack of belief in the value of education and that they have larger rates of parental unemployment. However, they acknowledge that research in this area is inconclusive and that other research in line with that presented in the literature chapter (chapter 3) of this thesis identifies no lack of ambition on the part of white working class parents. Another key area identified considers the aspirations of students' themselves. They cite that higher levels of aspiration can support increased rates of attainment, but that mitigating factors for poor attainment of white working class students include increased rates of absence and school exclusion. Overall the report indicates parental, familial and student factors play a larger role than school intervention.

The 'compendium of evidence on ethnic minority resilience to the effects of deprivation on attainment' (Department of Education, 2015) also specifies that significant attention has been paid to white working class boys underachievement with a relative lack of research or policy intervention addressing white working class girls. They indicate that further investigation of girls' experiences is essential to any future work in this area.

The following synopsis of research findings from my study provides essential insight into white working class girls' experiences within the current educational and socio-political climate. They consist of a small cohort of case studies,

however I believe they provide valuable insights into areas requiring further research and investigation.

Findings

The findings of my research suggest that the 'failing school' context permeates the lives of my study respondents, who are aware of their school's Ofsted status and place in league tables. In some cases they recognise that the negative rhetoric of school failure does not accurately depict their school experience. This evokes protectionist versions of their schools, which they construct to secure their experiences against public criticism. I argue that within the 'failing school' context learner identities become insecure, even amongst those who are achieving academically. Ultimately, respondents' learner identities suffer as a result of how others demonise their schools. In some instances they reinforce the discourse of failure through their own assertions of a poor educational offer, or they align the external perceptions with a lack of resources or inadequate facilities. Negative perceptions are also resisted through the young women demonstrating how they value the educational offer they receive.

They recognise that external perceptions of their schools are a pre-occupation for school educators. They cite concerns correlating with their Ofsted reports highlighting poor staff retention and young, inexperienced staffing bodies. I believe these issues, in accordance with the evidence presented in the DfE's (2014) examination of white working class underachievement, are critical to consider when addressing school improvement.

The young women consider themselves to have a multiplicity of choices available to them. However, in line with Ball, Maguire and Macrae (2000), Thompson et al. (2002), Thompson and Holland (2002) and Roberts, Clark and Wallace (1994), this notion of choice is socially situated and restricted. In the case of this study's participants, choices predominantly present as highly classed and gendered.

The experiences of working class young people in education include a multiplicity of gendered, classed and racial characteristics of marginalisation. This is evidenced by other research in the field of educational inequality including that of Gaine and George (1999), Ball, Maguire and Macrae (2000), Walkerdine, Lucey and Melody (2001), Reay (2017) and many others.

The young women in my study reinforce the notion of a pseudo-meritocracy through their belief that many aspects of equality have been achieved. However, this is juxtaposed with their recognition of the marginalisation of their peers, families and, occasionally, themselves, although this is expressed less frequently.

My findings suggest that the young women in my study primarily hold themselves responsible for their success or failure and, to use Ringrose's term, engage in 'self-responsibilitization' (Ringrose, 2007, p480). They are situated within new and emerging fields adding to their subjectivation, but these new fields remain aligned with issues of class, gender and racial difference. They present a disarticulation from feminism at a time when the conditions of their lives look to be more threatened than they have been in the preceding decades.

The educational and life plans my study respondents share are full of aspiration, ambition and, in some cases, define a clear pathway to achieving their goals. In others, this aspiration and ambition is undermined by a lack of knowledge regarding how to practically access their goals. Learner identities emerged which presented as insecure. Limited career information at school leads the young women away from their aspirations into what they consider to be realistic jobs. 'Back up plans' are cited by respondents and this language emerges from their dialogue with educators who steer them towards opportunities they can access with poorer academic grades.

This thesis cannot make definitive conclusions as it did not observe teacher-student dialogue. However respondents' suggestions of limited teacher expectations and limiting career advice urgently requires further research. The suggestion of securing 'realistic' educational and career options leads the respondents away

from pursuing more ambitious plans. Career options are cited as being grounded in securing employment with an income as quickly as the young women can; this further deters them from more ambitious trajectories which would require a longer period spent in FE and HE. Academic 'failure' at GCSE is predicted to end many of their desired career aspirations and very few of the respondents indicate they could re-take exams and find alternative routes to pursue their ambitions.

Respondents cite emotional support from their families, predominantly their mothers, in supporting their educational planning. They recognise their families' limited educational experiences can prevent them being able to offer informed guidance and support. The young women also suggest that their parents intend for their children not to repeat the same mistakes they consider themselves to have made; they cite this as an additional driver in wanting to succeed academically. Parental educational 'failure' becomes something re-appropriated to a positive as it motivates their parents and themselves to strive for better academic and career outcomes. When negative examples of parental role models emerge from the respondents, they reposition these as a chance to learn from their parents failings.

The young women in my study cite their mothers as their key role models, individuals who they look up to and respect above all others, who raised them often in adversity. They imbue the struggles of their mothers within their own narratives, struggles and hardships which add to the respect the young women hold for their maternal caregivers. The young women also recognise how society categorise their mothers as failing and they display clear narratives of not wanting to repeat their mother's experiences.

In line with Walkerdine (2015), I argue that the traumatic experiences of the young women's mothers were being passed on to them, as an embodied 'experience of oppression and exploitation' (Walkerdine, 2015, p168) of the working class young women that preceded them. As with Tyler (2008), the young women encountered classification through the positioning of their mothers as the 'constitutional limit to public morality' (Tyler 2008), but sought to resist this classification in their depictions of the positive roles their mothers had played in their lives.

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The historic and current struggles of the young women's mothers and wider families emerged as a point of resistance. The young women reacted to the strengths of their families and depicted them within value systems which did not conform to vilified public perceptions. This became complicated when the young women needed to protect themselves from further vilification, such as when respondents at Fairfield Academy engaged in a form of 'othering' (Scharf, 2011) by criticising members of their school population who had become pregnant in their teens.

Survival discourses emerge in my study; respondents describe a need to prove others wrong that they will not fail and become teenage mothers themselves. The young women assert a need for respectability when reporting concern with teenage mothers accessing the school offer on-site before and after their babies are born. The visibility of this failure in fertility management is seen as a danger, a potential area of public criticism of themselves and their schools. There is a contradiction here which the young women do not seem to recognise, whereby their vilification of their pregnant peers sits at odds with the moral value they place on their mothers as the heroines of their own narratives.

The subject of fertility management allowed respondents to align with the concept of the socially-mobile self. The management of the young women's sexuality and fertility become tools of self-management. Those who have successfully managed their fertility are considered 'safe.' Others could be positioned as morally abject in order for the young women to feel secure themselves. This affirmation of neo-liberal versions of feminine identity parallels the work of McRobbie (2009) who considers that western women conceive of, and secure their concepts of equality, in relation to the depiction of women's inequality drawn from the developing world.

Another aspect of motherhood emerges when respondents' continually cite a need to develop financial self-reliance, highlighting their desire to raise their own children

without state welfare. The young women define a need to engage in the neo-liberal project of personal biographies with every available choice open to them.

Financial self-reliance apprears to include more altruistic reasoning than individualisation theory usually allows for. Career aspirations cited by my study respondents included securing jobs and life trajectories which give back to society. They aspire to provide financial support for their immediate families, ensuring they can support any family they may have themselves. This can be considered to be a resistive discourse in which the young women move away from the material versions of personal success espoused through a neo-liberal ideology. It can also be considered to reinforce neo-liberally-driven versions of personhood, displaying a need to not become 'benefit scrounging' mothers, the embodiment of the vilified working class white woman.

The future role of motherhood is seen as a valuable life choice as with Allen and Osgood (2009). The respondents construct their future trajectories keenly, feeling the responsibility to raise their children financially independently of the state. They also consider their roles as mothers within the educational and career choices they make, a clear example of gender informing their career planning.

When the young women convey theirs and others perceptions of their 'communities' there is evidence of the negative depictions of working class subjective positions. These externalities become imbued into their versions or personhood, generated through media and socio-political constructions of working class identity.

My findings align with those of other theorists regarding the binary notions of 'deserving and undeserving' (Tyler, 2015) and 'respectable and unrespectable' (Skeggs, 1997) when the young women describe how subjectivities are constructed within modes of classification.

The young women display an awareness of class distinction through their consideration of others' descriptions of their communities. These are, in part, reinforced but also resisted through their examples of positive community life. They are

protective and compassionate about the material and social hardships which other members of their communities experience.

The language of media and socio-political rhetoric of the 'undeserving poor' are present in the young women's vocabularies and they engage in discourses acknowledging working class demonisation. This can be seen through the justifications they make regarding their own families' financial positions as being in receipt of state welfare and through their criticism of those around them who they consider to be undeserving.

The young women in my study described how they established role models from within their school and community. These role models are situated within the same class position as the young women themselves. Educational staff role models come from similar backgrounds and some respondents cite role models as being mature working class women from their estates. In each case they depict versions of feminine working class identity which enable them to positively reconstitute working class feminine identity.

When communicating their views and public perceptions of young people in their communities, respondents provide examples of an awareness of damaging discourses of working class youth. The young women reassert the negative aspects of their communities through creating small minorities of examples of 'chavs' and criminalised youths. They see the dangers of being perceived as working class youths themselves as more dangerous than any notions of the physical dangers that living in their communities present. Respondents recognise that not all 'youths' fall into this category but feel like they are all often categorised as such. In order to secure their socially mobile position within the meritocracy, respondents distance themselves from individuals who they aligned to the public and political demonisation of working class youth.

There are examples in my study where the young women stated they had enough money to live comfortably, but when questioned during 1:1 interview they revealed the financial difficulties their families faced. This could be seen as distancing

themselves from the undeserving poor and the negative subjective position this creates, but also how the young women recognise the hardships of other in their communities as worse than their own.

The young women in my study face challenges when the plans for their lives and their positive readings of their environments oppose the perceptions of others. They are aware of the negative value judgments placed on the quality of their schools, communities and families, views they often do not share. In some instances they resist negative discourses of feminine working class identity and generate resistive discourses. In other instances they contribute to the performative reinforcement of negative classed and gendered discourse, securing a place of safety under a neo-liberal gaze. What is clearly apparent is that their versions of self and the trajectories they engage in emerge within the narrow parameters of the material and social restrictions and 'social imaginary' (Rizvi and Lingard, 2009) defined by the neo-liberal age they inhabit.

Relationship with previous research

The findings of this thesis confront the feminist critique of the role that individualisation plays in contributing to explanations of contemporary feminine identity. I suggest there is a necessity for sociology or socio-psychic enquiry to establish ways to explain subjectification though the dissemination of neo-liberal ideology which permeates the lived experience. I conceive this as a need for macro explanations. The respondents in my study discursively encounter neo-liberal ideologies through classed and gendered identities they performatively ascribe to and through policies which create rhetoric of failure and success.

Feminist theory has critiqued the notion that gender and class differentiations become sociological casualties under individualisation. However, Beck (1992) articulates the contradictions within the individualisation thesis for women as creating distinctions between the gendered reality of young women's lives and a false reality established by individualisation. I suggest that Beck (1992) recognises the

contradiction of individualisation when considering feminine versions of subjectivity construction.

In my study, individualisation situates the young women in a 'post-equality' and 'post-feminist' context with gendered, classed and racial discourses intersecting with a notion of individualised responsibility for success. The respondents discursively reposition themselves away from a generation that can 'have it all,' and create versions of the future where 'having it all' is repurposed to 'having enough.'

Individualisation acts as a mechanism to explain the socio-political and media propagation of equality, reinforcing the notion of a meritocracy, which defines our approach to projects of self. The acceptance of a need to establish our own existence in an individualised way, has allowed for new trends in the demonisation of the working classes, establishing oppositional 'figuratively' (Tyler, 2008, 2015) constructed classed caricatures of identity. These are positioned between those morally repugnant, unable to engage in the neo-liberal project, and the aspirational, mobilising self, which reinforces neo-liberal ideology (McRobbie, 2009). Individualisation has allowed for the dissemination of divisive economic and social policies which move away from forms of collective social responsibility.

This thesis has identified a necessity to apply sociological tools which provide localised ways to view subjective construction. Feminist post-structural critique and feminist critical discourse analysis have enabled me to identify moments when resistance occurred. The young women identifying and drawing from working class female role models is an example of this. Such a process allows them to provide divergent ways of presenting working class feminine identity outside of the demonised.

The application of feminist post-structural sociological theory in this thesis allows for an exploration of the complexities of power relationships and their formation through discourse. I have referred to these as micro forms of analysis. This has required both the macro theory of individualisation and the micro to intersect in order to situate my study respondents in their current context and to show the convergences

in subjectivation and subjectification.

Limitations of the research and revision of the method

My research has specifically addressed white working class girls in the UK context of a neo-liberal ideology. It is now widely accepted that socio-economic background continues to be the most significant aspect of predicting educational attainment in the UK context (Gillborn and Mirza, 2000; Reay, 2017). Existing bodies of research also address socio-economic position and gender, and includes studies which address white racial identity, social class and educational attainment. A number of these studies are referenced within this thesis. However there are limited studies correlating white racial identity, gender and socio-economic position in relation to educational and personal trajectories. Therefore, I believe there is a requirement for further studies to follow the approach of my thesis.

The DfE's (Department for Education, 2015) recognition of the need to better understand how white working class parents' and students' aspirations affect their educational attainment can only be met through a more nuanced understanding of attitudes and behaviours emerging from material and social positioning. I argue that further qualitative psychosocial studies are essential to developing this understanding.

This thesis includes a collection of case studies. By definition this draws from the uniqueness of individual experiences. However, the repetition of the working class young women's experiences, shared in the historic and policy contextual references, demonstrate repetition of the experience of other working class young women in history. In this way, the qualitative and quantitative aspects of my study aim to validate each other. What they cannot do is argue that this study depicts the lives of all working class girls situated within the current context.

The data capture took place over one year and, while the study depicts future planned trajectories, it was not a longitudinal study which followed up on the

young women's progress. Therefore, it can only be conceived of as a window into how the respondents were situated and their choice-making at that time, and not an assertion of the life trajectory of working class women. Following up on their predictions would no doubt establish divergent themes outside of those depicted at age 14-15 years.

If I were to pursue similar research into this cohort in future I would make revisions to the model. My study applied quantitative data analysis in order to situate the respondents in relation to their educational performance and their socio-economic position within the national UK context. While this created a picture of the current context of the small case study cohort featured, it did not draw from a national sample to collate the primary evidence under analysis. I would complete further research across a larger number of geographical locations in the UK to include a larger representative sample of white working class girls. I would also extend the data capture period to cover KS3 and KS5, including longitudinal follow-up of the young women beyond their schooling.

My PhD research was limited by financial and time constraints. As a single researcher, the number of respondents in my study was also limited. An increase in the number of respondents across the geography of the UK within a longitudinal study would require more resources but, I believe, would help to provide a compelling case regarding how to improve the social, familial and educational experiences of white working class girls. A commitment to further research into the cohort was acknowledged in the DfE's select committee report, as detailed above, and the improvements to the research model I have outlined would be required to make stronger justifications for the policy and practice interventions I recommend below.

My research applied quantitative methods of data analysis in order to establish the demographic position of the respondents and their families. Statistical analysis was drawn upon to identify the position of the schools in reference to Ofsted's categorisation, and their characterisation as 'failing'. The quantitative analysis presented in the methodology chapter (chapter 4) and in section three of the historical and current context of working class girls' education chapter (chapter 2) drew

from data relating to this study's data capture in 2014. The evidence presented in this thesis cannot account for any significant shifts in performance which have occurred since then.

Recommendations

My recommendations for policy and practice improvements relate to the white working class girls featured within this study and more broadly for those featured within the review of national performance data. The acknowledgments, by Ofsted and the DfE, of an urgent need to address the issue of lower attainment of white working class students, specifically white working class girls, provides us with an opportunity to develop necessary interventionist forms of research and practice in future.

Early intervention is highlighted by the DfE (Department of Education, 2015) as necessary in improving the literacy, oracy and the overall educational performance of white working class children; this must be a requirement of further research, analysis and policy intervention. I recommend providing solutions to girls and young women who have already entered KS3 as there remains time to improve experiences and outcomes of these groups.

Improving the experiences for young women such as those in my study could, I suggest, occur through a number of areas of policy change: firstly, through changing school admission policies. Research consistently indicates that socially and ethnically-diverse educational environments promote social cohesion and improve the educational opportunities for marginalised students. The current government's approach to this issue can be seen in the DfE's Integrated Communities Strategy (Department for Education, 2018a). One can only hope this will enact positive change.

I acknowledge that every 'solution' presented in this context can be challenged with a counter argument. Research suggests that even when schools ensure a diverse intake, streaming by educational performance is informed by social

stratification. This is evidenced within emerging contemporary research (Francis et al., 2017b; Taylor et al., 2018). Unfortunately, I can offer no critique of how that could be improved here as my study worked with schools whose whole populations were categorised as working class and my research makes recommendations in relation to the study of that cohort.

In line with the recommendation of the DfE (Department for Education, 2014) I propose a need to restructure our educational approach to white working class children and young people. The DfE has identified a requirement to improve access to educational support to promote students' independent learning and improve their performance. They also assert a perceived lack of ambition in white working class students and parents but can make little recommendation as to how this can be mitigated.

A lack of ambition on behalf of students and parents was not found in my study. What was felt was a lack of access to the practical educational and career planning required to access credentailised careers. The context for the young women in my study limited their access to their aspirational career options. Educators tasked with ensuring that students continued in education post-16 were often felt to direct respondents away from trajectories their grades and financial circumstances would not support.

What is not mentioned by the DfE's (Department for Education, 2014, 15) reports detailed earlier in this chapter is a need to dramatically improve the careers advice provided for students from low income families. In *Time for Change: An Assessment of Government Policies on Social Mobility 1997-2017* (Department of Education, 2017) the social mobility commission suggested that contemporary education provides little to no careers advice, which they cite as having almost disappeared over the last 20 years. This lack of careers advice was a key concern voiced by respondents in my study. Respondents recognised that their parents often had a lack of knowledge of FE, HE or credentialised career pathways. What they did have was emotional and any available material support from their parents in order to choose directions in life.

It was also notable that the young women's career choices were highly

classed and gendered. When they depicted credentialised careers they were usually drawn from their immediate frame of reference, for example police officers and teachers. Their ambitions for credentialised career pathways outside of their immediate frame of social reference were not supported by knowledge of the routes required to achieve them.

The young women in my study needed the breadth of knowledge of potential career trajectories earlier in their education in order to begin to focus on the trajectories and grades required to achieve them. They need to be supported to merge their domestic support with practical, tangible and financial support provided by the education system.

The development of broad career aspirations with clearly demarcated pathways is only one aspect of ensuring parity for white working class young women. My study respondents present with negative learner identities which develop throughout their school lives. This culminates with a sense of failure emerging when they achieve lower grades than their peers during their GCSE years. I recommend that additional supported learning opportunities within and surrounding the school day are required in order for white working class girls to have the opportunity to focus on the learning required to improve their grades.. They should also be better supported in their educational choices within the school context, specifically establishing career plans with detailed educational choice pathways.

The DfE (Department for Education, 2015) have also indicated that research into white working class parents highlights that they attend less parent-teacher meetings and engage less in educational career choice making. While a model focusing on student development specifically would not mitigate this, an extension of students' learning experiences to develop on-site enhanced learning opportunities with a focus on improved academic attainment and radically improved career guidance could be considered to meet any perceived gap in parental lack of involvement.

I recommend an interventionist model within state education for working class girls at KS2, KS3 and KS4. I do not support an isolated approach to

white working class girls and believe such a model would provide shared benefits for all young women within lowest socio-economic groups. The aims of the programme would be to develop broader career aspirations and improve required education attainment, providing material and psychological support for participants to navigate any additional barriers they face. This programme would include additional supported learning opportunities on the school site. Including an extension of the school day for independent learning and broader early career guidance enabling young women to design clear career trajectories from an earlier age, with additional financial advice regarding educational pathways. Additional learning opportunities in-school focusing on the reality of the socio-political and economic context they find themselves within could empower the young women to navigate any limitations placed on their opportunities and ambitions.

Within my proposed model young women can be supported to develop language promoting positive concepts of working class feminine identity. The specificity of the relationship between their ethnicity and gender should be a central point for discussion. Young women across ethnicities need to support one another to understand the commonalities and divergences of their histories and current contexts. Activist models of feminism are emerging across the UK but are these models accessed by the most marginalised young women in our society? My instinct here is that this is not the case. Structured school and social care models working with young women within the lowest socio-economic groups would provide a foundation for them to consider the role of feminism within their lives.

The young women in this studies depiction of gender inequality were implicit in their stories and their family histories, but were not explicit in their understanding of the multiplicity of ways that they face marginalisation. There is a de-politicising of their experience within their educational context, which, I argue, places them in a vulnerable position. Many academics currently argue for a need to enact a more politicised model of education. In my study, the young women's acceptance of 'post-equality' and 'post-feminism' endorse this need. My proposed model would provide an opportunity for young working class women to develop their knowledge of

political and social constraints while supporting them to navigate these.

Socially-marginalised young women in the UK need to be supported to understand their past to inform their future. This transformation does not mean a rejection of working class status, or the notion that everyone aspires to a middle class life. However developing our knowledge and understanding of our position within the current socio-political and economic context is vital in understanding our identity and providing the information that we need to navigate the world. Our education system alone cannot take sole responsibility for tackling the UK 'social mobility' crisis but it can better support socially marginalised individuals passing through to improve their circumstances.

Walkerdine (2017) suggests that 'if we fail to understand the historicity of framing bodies, discourses, affects, subjectivities, we cannot support or understand change' (Walkerdine, 2017, p9). The findings of my study depict a group of young women who lack a language of agency within their educational and social realm. There is an inevitable conflict between wanting to support young women to undergo transformational educational experiences and how an awareness of their position as marginalised could re-marginalise them. As with Walkerdine (2017), a recommendation I make here is for the introduction of politicised models of education for working class young women.

Walkerdine suggests that:

> Feminism needs to engage with the complex affective histories and territories of classed Britain. It needs to find ways to approach the feminist study of class using a wide variety of approaches and disciplines, from arts and humanities to social sciences. We must address complex social, material and affective questions. We can perform class, we can tell its stories, explore its intimacies and its great sweeps. We can work with communities to support them in voicing their demands through a wide variety of methods and media. All of this is possible. All of this is urgently needed (Walkerdine, 2017, p12).

The process of my research enabled the young women to conceive of their futures within the current socio-political context. This allowed them to think about their trajectories in relation to their world-view and the challenges they faced in achieving their goals. In this respect, my research was conceived of as having a 'transformative quest' rather than an 'emancipatory agenda' (Baxter, 2008, p245). However, I do not consider this research to have transformed the lives of its participants. What it did allow was space and time to consider educational and career pathways, providing an opportunity for participants to share their emotional experiences, allowing them to consider issues they might face in achieving their ambitions. My proposal supports a formalised approach to supporting these areas of personal development.

Contribution to research

This thesis sits within a limited but growing body of evidence that examines white working class girls' educational experiences, including the intersection with formations of policy and media identity. This research and thesis can inform new debates which acknowledge the relationship between race, socio-economic position, gender and educational marginalisation. My findings deepen existing research by showing the impact of denigrating white working class discourses on white working class girls in the current UK climate, drawing upon media, socio-political and policy rhetoric manifesting as discourses imbued in to the young women's subjectivities.

My recommendations, as set out in this chapter, support the work required to improve our understanding of the subjectivities of white working class young women. I also make recommendations for interventionist models of practice to run concurrently within a larger longitudinal national study of white working class girls' educational and personal trajectories, planning and outcomes.

My research more broadly encourages new questions surrounding the ongoing class, gender and racial subjectification which maintains white working class feminine demonisation, and provides opportunities to investigate how such demonisation affects those subjectively positioned within those discourses.

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Goldsmiths
UNIVERSITY
OF LONDON

Students Future Plans - Questionnaire
Researcher: PhD Researcher Kelly Worwood, Goldsmiths College, University of London
Research Partner School:

This research intends to identify what your future plans are for education and work and to learn more about you and your background.

Please answer the questions as honestly and as thoroughly as you can. If you feel you can't answer any of the questions, don't feel comfortable doing so or feel they don't apply to you then please move on to the next question.

Some answers will require you to tick a box or multiple boxes from a list of options and others will ask you to answer with a short explanation.

The form should take about 1 hour to complete.

Thank you for agreeing to take part in this research project and for your time and honesty when completing this form. If you choose to not complete the form then this will be understood as opting not to participate in the research.

1. What is your name?
This questionnaire will only be seen by the researcher and no named individual's answers will be shared with your school staff, unless an answer you give indicates that you are in any danger in which case we will need to follow your school's Child Protection policy and inform a member of staff.

2. What is your sex?

Male ☐

Female ☐

3. What is your date of birth?

4. What is your postcode?

1

5. What is your country of birth?

England ☐

Wales ☐

Scotland ☐

Northern Ireland ☐

If another write below the current name of that country

☐

6. If you were not born in the United Kingdom please indicate the year you arrived in this country

☐

7. Were your parents born in the UK?

Yes ☐

No ☐

Don't know ☐

If your answer to question 7 was no please specify the country/countries of both parents below

Mother was born in……………………………………….

Father was born in ………………………………………..

2

8. How would you describe your ethnic group?

A. White

English / Welsh / Scottish / Northern Irish / British ☐

Irish ☐

Gypsy or Irish Traveller ☐

Any other White background, please write in below

☐

B. Mixed/multiple ethnic group

White and Black Caribbean ☐

White and Black African ☐

White and Black Asian ☐

Any other mixed multiple ethnic background, please write in below

☐

C. Asian/Asian British

Indian ☐

Pakistani ☐

Bangladeshi ☐

Chinese ☐

Any other Asian background, please write in below

☐

3

D. Other ethnic group

Arab ☐

Any other ethnic group, please write in below

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E. Black / African / Caribbean / Black British

African ☐

Caribbean ☐

Any other Black / African / Caribbean background, please write in below

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F. Other ethnic group

Arab ☐

Any other ethnic group, please write in below

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9. What is your main language?

English ☐

Another, please write in below

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4

10. What is your religion?

No religion ☐

Christian (including:
Church of England,
Catholic, Protestant
and all other Christian
denominations) ☐

Buddhist ☐

Hindu ☐

Jewish ☐

Muslim ☐

Sikh ☐

Any other, please write in below

11. Do you live with your family?

Yes ☐
No ☐

12. If your carer is a non-relative please write below their relationship to you e.g. foster parent, local authority appointed carers

5

13. Please tick the boxes that describe the adults that live in your household

Where used the term 'household' means the place in which you live. If you live across two households e.g. one for each parent then please tick two the households box below and give answers for the parents/carers in each household you live in

I live in two households	☐
Foster mother	☐
Foster father	☐
Care home staff	☐
Mother	☐
Father	☐
Two Fathers	☐
Two Mothers	☐
Step Parent	☐
Mother's partner	☐
Father's partner	☐

Other members of your extended family, please specify below

Any other adult living in your household, please specify below

6

14. Please indicate the level of education your parents/carers have if any, including any they gained outside of the UK. Please indicate for both households if you live across two

The term 'further education' is any course that comes after school age learning. 'Higher education' is any course that is post the age of 18 and delivered by a university

Please also include any incomplete courses that your parents/carers are currently undertaking

School age qualification e.g. GCSE or equivalent   ☐ ☐   ☐ ☐

Further education, A-levels or equivalent   ☐ ☐   ☐ ☐

Apprenticeship, qualifications gained at work to give them the skills they need for their job   ☐ ☐   ☐ ☐

Please explain the qualification

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Higher education, university qualification
e.g. Degree, Masters, PhD   ☐ ☐   ☐ ☐

Professional qualifications
e.g teaching, nursing, accountancy   ☐ ☐   ☐ ☐

Please explain the professional qualification

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No qualifications   ☐ ☐   ☐ ☐

Any other qualifications or work-based learning that you feel doesn't fit into those listed above please explain below

7

15. Are one or both of your parents/carers employed? Please tick the boxes that describe your situation. Please answer for both households if you live between two

Yes, both are employed	☐	☐	☐	☐
Yes, one is employed	☐	☐	☐	☐
No, they are both unemployed	☐	☐	☐	☐
One of my parents/carers is a full-time parent/carer	☐	☐	☐	☐
Both of my parents/ carers are full-time parents/carers	☐	☐	☐	☐
One is unable to work due to illness	☐	☐	☐	☐
Both are unable to work due to illness	☐	☐	☐	☐

If none of the above then please describe your parents' situation in the box below

If your answer is yes to one or both parents being employed then please answer Questions 16 and 17, if not please move on to question 18

16. How would you describe your parents/carers main job?

Please tick a box for each parent/carer in your household and for parents/carers in multiple households if you have them

Employed	☐	☐	☐	☐
Self-employed with employees	☐	☐	☐	☐
Self-employed without employees	☐	☐	☐	☐

8

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17. What are their job titles e.g. Nurse, Domestic Assistant, Teacher, Car Mechanic, Labourer

Please specify the job title below for each parent/carer currently employed in your household

18. What they do in their main jobs?

Please specify below for each parent/carer currently employed in your household

19. Do you have any brothers, sisters, step-brothers or step-sisters?

Yes ☐

No ☐

If your answer to Question 19 is yes please answer Question 20, if not please move on to Question 22

20. Have any of your brothers, sisters, step-brothers or step-sisters attended further and/or higher education?

Yes ☐

No ☐

9

If yes please answer Question 21, if no please move on to Question 22

21. Please indicate the level of education your brothers, sisters, step-brothers, or step-sisters have including any they gained outside of the UK

Please also include any incomplete courses that your brothers, sisters, step-brothers, or step-sisters are currently undertaking

School age qualification e.g. GCSE or equivalent ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

A-levels or equivalent e.g. GNVQ's ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

Apprenticeship or qualifications gained at work to give them the skills they need for their job ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

Please explain the qualification

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University qualification e.g. Degree, Masters, PhD ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

Professional qualifications
e.g. teaching, nursing, accountancy) ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

Please explain the professional qualification

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Any other qualifications that you feel don't fit into the ones listed please explain below

10

22. From the list below identify which description describes your family's financial position?

Please answer for both households if you live across two

Wealthy	☐	☐
Reasonably wealthy	☐	☐
Enough money to live comfortably	☐	☐
Not enough money to live comfortably	☐	☐
Struggle to live on the money we have	☐	☐

23. Do you receive free school meals?

Yes ☐

No ☐

24. Have you decided what you're going to do when you leave school?

Yes ☐

No ☐

25. From the list below please identify which one describes you best

On leaving school I will get a full-time job ☐

On leaving school I will go to college to study A-Levels ☐

I will stay on at school and complete A-Levels ☐

I will stay on at school and train for a job ☐

On leaving school I will go to college to train for a job ☐

On leaving school I don't know what I'll do, I

11

haven't decided what to do yet

If none of the above please describe your plans below

26. If you have indicated in question 25 that you will be staying on in further education please specify the course/s below

27. If you have indicated in question 25 that you will be getting a full-time job please write where you intend to work below

28. Do you intend to go to university at any point in the future?

Yes

No

Please explain your answer below

29. Please rate each of the statements below choosing only one box for each statement

"I couldn't go to university, I'm not clever enough."
Strongly disagree ☐   Tend to disagree ☐   Tend to agree ☐   Strongly agree ☐

"I could go to university if I wanted to but I'd rather do something else."
Strongly disagree ☐   Tend to disagree ☐   Tend to agree ☐   Strongly agree ☐

"I've never been interested in staying on in education."
Strongly disagree ☐   Tend to disagree ☐   Tend to agree ☐   Strongly agree ☐

"I haven't ever really thought about going to university."
Strongly disagree ☐   Tend to disagree ☐   Tend to agree ☐   Strongly agree ☐

"I've always known that I would go to university."
Strongly disagree ☐   Tend to disagree ☐   Tend to agree ☐   Strongly agree ☐

"I'm definitely going to university."
Strongly disagree ☐   Tend to disagree ☐   Tend to agree ☐   Strongly agree ☐

"I don't think I can afford to go to university."
Strongly disagree ☐   Tend to disagree ☐   Tend to agree ☐   Strongly agree ☐

"My parents will help to pay for me to go to university."
Strongly disagree ☐   Tend to disagree ☐   Tend to agree ☐   Strongly agree ☐

"I'll go to university if I get the grades to get in."
Strongly disagree ☐   Tend to disagree ☐   Tend to agree ☐   Strongly agree ☐

"I really want to go to university but I'm not sure I'll get in."
Strongly disagree ☐   Tend to disagree ☐   Tend to agree ☐   Strongly agree ☐

13

30. Have you ever heard of the term "raising the participation age"?

Yes ☐

No ☐

If your answer to Question 30 is yes please briefly explain what the term 'raising the participation age' means below

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31. Do you feel there is a class system in this country?

Yes ☐

No ☐

32. If yes, what do you consider to be a class system and how do think this will affect your future?

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33. Do you feel you have had any positive role models in your life?

Yes ☐

☐

14

No

If you answered "yes" please answer question 34, if "no" please move on to Question 35.

34. Please indicate who you feel have been positive role models in your life. You can tick multiple options.

Parents ☐

Carers ☐

Extended family members ☐

Teachers ☐

Youth workers ☐

Social workers ☐

Friends ☐

Famous people ☐

If anyone else, please specify below

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35. Do you think you have had any negative role models in your life?

Yes ☐

No ☐

If yes please specify below who you feel have been negative role models

[blank box]

36. When you visualise the future (thinking about where you live, who you live with, what you will be doing day-to-day) where do you see yourself in 3 years time? Please write in the box below

[blank box]

37. When you visualise the future (thinking about where you live, who you live with, what you will be doing day-to-day) where do you see yourself in 10 years time? Please write in the box below

[blank box]

Thank you again for your honesty, time and your valuable contribution to this research.

Appendix 2 - Focus Group Questions

- Who at home, school or elsewhere are helping you to plan for the future? How?
  - Follow on - potential to drill down to individuals instances of encouragement and discouragement, why and how?

- Can you tell me about the positive and negative influences that have helped you to achieve/ not achieve the things that you wanted to in life so far?

- What options are open to you as individuals at 16?
  - May require further unpacking; thinking about your individual circumstances, your grades, your family, your lives, repeat question. What Options are available to you as individuals at 16?

- What would you consider to be a successful future?

- What might stand in the way of you having a successful future?

- What might help you to achieve success?

- Does anyone know of any ways the government are or aren't working to support young people at the moment?

- Do you want to go to University?

- When did you decide you did or didn't want to go to University?

  - Why did you make that decision?

- Do you think that going to University will give you a different life to not going to university?

- What could those around you do to improve or better support your planning for the future?

Appendix 3 - Case Study 1:1 Interview Questions

1	How do you feel about your school and what they offer you?
	Follow on – Do you feel able to learn here?
	Follow on - What prevents you/supports you learning here?
2	How do think your school is seen by others?
3	What would you do to improve your school if you could?
4	Can you explain what changes have been made to your schools curriculum?
	Follow on - Has this affected what you want to do at school or when you leave here?
5	What career advice have you had from school?
	Follow on - How has your school supported you in planning for the future so far?
6	Can you tell me about the community in which you live?
	Follow on - How does living there help or hinder you?
	Follow on - Can you give me an example of that?
7	Can you tell me about your family's contribution to planning for your future?
	Follow on - How do they help or hinder you?
	Follow on - Can you give me an example of that?
8	How do you feel you are perceived, by peers, friends, educators, parents?
9	How would you describe yourself?
10	How do the media portray young people?
	Follow on - How do you feel about the media portrayal of young people?

11	Can you tell me about the individuals that support you at home, school in the wider world?
	Follow on - How do they support you?
	Follow on - Can you give ma any examples of this happening?
12	Who do you look up to, respect and why?
13	What are your goals and ambitions?
14	What issues to do you face in terms of achieving the goals/ambitions you've set for yourself?
15	Can you tell me about the things that are, or might in the future prevent you form achieving your goals and ambitions?
	Follow on - Can you give me any examples of this happening so far?
16	Can you explain why you have chosen the route you have?
17	Is there anything you want/wanted to achieve but don't feel/haven't been able to?
18	Are options different for different groups of young people? E.g. boys, students from other backgrounds, other cultures?
	Follow on – in what ways are they different, can you describe an example that shows this?
19	What do you know about how your school is responding to the government's policy of keeping everyone in education or training until they are 18?
	Follow on - How do you feel about the options you have at 16?
20	How do you feel about our government?
	Follow on - How are they working to support you, your school, and your family?
21	How would you describe feminism?
	Follow on - How do you feel about it?
	Follow on - Is it relevant to you?
22	Can you tell me what you think the term 'equal opportunities' means?

	Follow on - Do you feel there are 'equal opportunities' around you at home or school in other areas of your life?
23	Would you like to discuss anything that we've missed?

Appendix 4 - Table of Respondents

	Ethnicity	Household employment status and NC-SES social stratification	In receipt of Free School Meals	Family Background	Family Education	Educational Plans
Anya Borough College	White British	One parent employed as a builder NC-SES L13	Yes	Lives with mother father and two sisters	Parents have no formal education post-16 Siblings both cited as completing A-levels/GNVQ	Doesn't plan on attending university
Amy Borough College	White British	One parent is employed as a domestic assistant is a home for disabled adults NC-SES L13	No	Lives with her mother	Parents both educated to GCSE. Older siblings have GNVQs	Wants to complete A-Levels and attend drama school
Atlanta Fairfield Academy	White British	Mother works in security, father works in customer services NC-SES L13	No	Lives between two households, main residence with mother, nanna, granddad and uncle	Parents have no formal education post-16 Siblings have GCSEs	Wants to attend college to study public services to join the police force
Claire Fairfield Academy	White British	Mum works at Tesco NC-SES L13	Yes	Lives between two households Mother, brother Dad, step-mum and step-sister	Both parents completed GCSEs with no formal qualifications post-16 Brother is completing an apprenticeship Step-sister is completing a BA	Wants to attend college to study performing arts and plans on attending university

Elisa Fairfield Academy	White British	Mum employed works in a care home, step father unemployed– (full-time carer) NC-SES 13 Dad is unemployed, step mother is at college NC-SES 14	No	Lives between two households predominantly with her mother, step-father siblings Fathers, step-mother, siblings	No qualifications listed for parents of siblings	Interested in sociology but unsure of attending university
Emma Fairfield Academy	White British	Mum is unemployed due to illness NC-SES 14 Father is employed in unskilled labour NC-SES 14	Yes	Lives with mother and sister	Mother completed GCSEs and has a hairdressing qualification	Wants to attend college to study health and social care
Hayley Fairfield Academy	White British	Both parents are employed, mother works as a care nurse in a residential home NC-SES 14 Step-father unskilled labour NC-SES 14	No	Lives with mother, step-dad, step-sister and step-brother	Parents have no formal qualifications post-16	Wants to attend college to complete A-Levels and attend University to qualify as a teacher
Janine Borough College	White British	Mother is unemployed but attending college NS-CEC 14 Step father works as chauffeur NS-CEC 13	Yes	Lives with mother, step-father	Step-father has an apprenticeship	Wants to complete A-Levels and attend university

Kealy Borough College	White British	Mother is unemployed NS-CEC 14	No	Lives with mother	Mother completed GCSEs	Unsure of what she want to do at 16 States she couldn't attend university as she doesn't believe she's clever enough
Orla Borough College	White British	Both parents are unemployed, one due to illness NC-CEC 14	Yes	Lives with mother, mother's partner and brother	Parents have no formal qualifications post-16	Wants to study A-Level psychology, sociology and attend university
Ruth Fairfield Academy	White British	Mum is a teaching Assistant NS-CEC 12	No	Lives with her mother, mother's partner, sister and brother	Mother has GNVQ qualifications and is currently attending college	Wants to attend college to train for a job
Sarah Fairfield Academy	White British	Mum is employed, cleaner NC-SEC 13	No	Lives with mother, father and two sisters	Parents have no formal qualifications post-16 Siblings have GCSEs and GNVQs	Wants to study hairdressing and beauty therapy
Shelley Fairfield Academy	White British	Mum is unemployed but attending college part-time NC-CEC L14	Yes	Lives with mother and two sisters	Parents have school-age qualifications	Wants to study psychologyand attend university
Susy Borough College	White British	Mother unemployed, father, self-employed as a garden rubbish clearer NC-SEC 13 and 14	Yes	Lives with mother, father and two sisters	None specified	Feels she couldn't attend university as believes she isn't clever enough

Jenny Fairfield Academy	White British	Mother unemployed NC-SES 14	Yes	Lives with mother	Parents have no formal qualifications post-16	Wants to attend college for GNVQs then join the police force.

Jenny Fairfield Academy	White British	Mother unemployed NC-SES 14	Yes	Lives with mother	Parents have no formal qualifications post-16	Wants to attend college for GNVQs then join the police force.