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Margaret Anne Robinson

**Working it out for yourself: how young
people use strategies and resources to
reshape or reinvent identities which they
experience as problematic and/or
limiting in their progress towards
adulthood**

**A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy**

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Abstract

Adulthood is not a destination. Youth research has shown how 'becoming adult' is an active relational process of identity change which, in the post-millennium world, is highly individualised. Young people's choices, however, are contingent on their life circumstances and what they consider, for them, to be 'plausible' (Skeggs, 2004) or within reach. In this study I set out to explore ways in which young people exercise agency, especially in situations that offer fewer options and thinner resources that they can call upon. My concern is to uncover the strategies and resources they use to reshape or reinvent identities that they find get in the way of subjectively feeling 'adult' and being recognised as such by others.

Rather than recruiting participants already 'marked' by the systems of education, youth justice or public care, I met young people through volunteering in three youth work projects. I was thus able to engage young people from 13-19 years with markedly different social experiences and characteristics. I approached the analysis of varied data gathered from narrative interviews, creative activities and ethnographic observation with theoretical tools including, but not limited to, Bourdieu's concepts of *field*, *capital* and *habitus*, generating insights into developing femininities, masculinities, ethnicities and friendships.

Researching across three sites also enabled me to examine how young people access youth work as a resource in and of itself *and* as a means of bridging to further resources, whether practical or for use in their 'identity-work'. 'Relationships of trust' with youth work organisations and practitioners can especially benefit young people where these are otherwise absent from their lives. However, the findings suggest that young people in many different circumstances for diverse reasons value youth-friendly space and the relative equality that characterises youth work relationships. This adds weight to arguments for expanding both universal open access provision and flexible delivery of targeted provision.

Statement of copyright

The copyright of this thesis rests with the author. No quotation from it should be published without the author's prior written consent and information derived from it should be acknowledged.

I am deeply grateful to the young people who participated in the research in different ways, and especially to those who gave up their time for interviews. I would also like to express my thanks to the youth organisations and youth workers who supported the research and made it possible. I have tried to treat what I saw, what young people told me and the nature of the projects with respect. In order to protect identities and confidentiality all names and locations have been changed and, where appropriate, other identifying details have been omitted or replaced with close equivalents. With these exceptions I have sought to represent as faithfully as possible and to interpret as truthfully as possible the young people, the youth work projects, what happens when they interact and the different meanings that might have in young people's lives.

I must also express my appreciation to my supervisors, Roger Smith and Hannah King, for their constant support and encouragement as well as their wisdom.

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Introduction

Preamble

‘Youth’ is a curious category – legally defined in that duties and entitlements increase with chronological age, and socially constructed as a set of experiences and expectations of the period between the protections of childhood and the responsibilities of adulthood (Jones, 2009). It is elastic in the sense that youth is understood in historical, geographical and social context. Consequently, structural arrangements around welfare, education and other services appear in many permutations from one country or region of the globe to another, and from one period of time to another. Young people also have differing relationships to the labour market. Certainly, there is – and historically has been - huge variation in the point at which they enter the world of work (Furlong and Cartmel, 2007). Broad brush approaches are invaluable in uncovering general trends, such as the move towards individualisation in modernity and the changing parameters of gender roles (Beck, 1992; Giddens, 1991). However, whatever markers they put down, they cannot adequately account for the peculiarity of any individual young person’s experiences which take place, not in a vacuum, but in specific temporal, spatial and social locations.

That being the case, this doctoral study focuses on young people growing up in the North of England in the 2010s, exploring the particularities of their experiences whilst at the same time relating these to patterns evident across Western society in recent decades and pointing to facets of transitions and social practices that have remained stable over time. Before outlining the specific concerns for this study, I lay out brief comments about what led me to focus upon ‘youth’ and young people, my interest in how they make meaning from their experiences and craft them into self-stories – the starting point for the study - and the framing of analysis through the conceptual tools offered by Bourdieu (1977; 1986; 1990; 1998).

Motivations for the study

Naturally, one key motivator is my own experience, in this instance, of a rural up-bringing, of living away from home during the week from the age of 16 whilst in sixth form, and of travelling to the South West to study at 18. These latter were major disruptions and, for all the benefits of a prestigious university, my experience there confirmed my class and regional identity whilst also exposing what I later came to understand as a relative lack of social and cultural capital. I went on to work in youth housing projects and as a probation officer, mainly with young people. That professional background gave me entry to a second career as a criminologist where I have pursued my interest in youth justice, but also have been exposed to – and have actively sought out – the debates largely missing from the youth justice literature about young people, the problematic categories of risk and vulnerability, and the critical questions of dignity, respect and rights for them as social actors. The major longitudinal studies featured in this thesis – among them *Inventing Adulthoods* (Henderson et al., 2007) and *Disconnected Youth?* (MacDonald and Marsh, 2005) – have each left an imprint.

Given that my first degree is in English Literature, I have been especially attracted to narrative forms of research enquiry (Lieblich et al., 1998; Reissman, 2008; Diaute, 2014). Of these, Shadd Maruna's (2001) seminal book, *Making Good: How Ex-offenders Reform and Rebuild Their Lives* has been most significant in leading me to the work of Dan McAdams (1993) and the ideas around the narrative construction of identity. This immediately struck a chord: even the way I have set out this introduction demonstrates how I understand the world through stories, and why would that not apply to understandings of self? As social beings, could that not also apply to the way that we present ourselves to others?

That said, engaging with young people as I have done over years of direct work and, more recently, indirectly through empirical research, leads to the stark conclusion that some young people have far less by way of resources from which to craft positive self-stories. That means experiences to form the

substance of stories, but critically, too, vital opportunities to develop skills, to rehearse stories and to access cultural symbols and metaphors to enrich them. Moreover, as I also knew from years in practice, processing through education and contact with social work, youth justice, mental health and other services involves categorising and sorting young people in ways that suit professionals delivering a service but often carry negative associations. Here, I have found Richard Jenkins' (2014) framing of 'social identities' a necessary complement to narrative approaches and invaluable as a means of understanding complex social processes and the impacts of multiple interactions and ascribed identities on young people's developing subjectivities.

Young people – thankfully - do not inevitably accept the results of classification passively and uncritically. However, behaviours that express resistance or rejection of labels are often seen by adults as problematic because they are taken as an inappropriate 'performance of vulnerability' (Brown, 2015). Yet, for me, such behaviours are worthy of interest, especially where young people draw learning and strength from their experience of difficulties that become fashioned into stories of coping and resilience (Ungar, 2004). This may not happen unaided, and professionals can take more helpful roles than those indicated above. One of the concerns of this study is, consequently, how 'relationships of trust' with adults and with youth-friendly organisations can be used as resources by young people (as well as enabling what Wierenga (2009) refers to as 'resource-flows' for those who are resource-poor). This guided me towards youth work agencies for my fieldwork rather than taking possibly more obvious routes through statutory services such youth justice, education or the care system.

Aims of the study

With all of this in mind, the study set out to explore and illuminate the process of identity change as young people make their moves towards contemporary adulthood. Of course, what constitutes adulthood is contested, but here it is taken to be what young people themselves feel as being adult,

as reflected in their relationships and recognition of citizenship. I was interested in the ways that young people are able to use strategies and resources to reshape or reinvent identities that they experience as being problematic and/or limiting. I therefore set out with a set of six questions: how do young people

1. start to create biographical narratives and ascribe meaning to 'critical moments' and relationships in their lives?
2. identify resources in their social relationships and environments that they can use in self-enhancing ways?
3. develop strategies to maintain a positive sense of self in the face of difficulties or challenges?
4. respond to the expectations and assumptions of the social institutions that they interact with?
5. choose their identity investments and commitments (and why)?
6. develop visions of possible future selves that they can act upon?

I made contact with participants through three different youth work projects and from the outset I was intending to use observational data from the fieldwork sites to contextualise and enrich data from the narratives that young people offered. As explained in Chapter 4, and in part because the age range of participants was wider than anticipated, the ethnographic elements of the research became more significant than expected. Although my focus remained principally on the young people, I found myself exploring my core research questions specifically in relation to the youth work context. A further and more focused question therefore emerged from the data collected around, and in relation to, the youth work projects:

7. how do young people perceive youth work and use the experiences and the relationships nurtured in youth work environments in their 'identity-work'?

As a consequence, the research produced significant findings about the resources that youth work may offer young people, practically and for their

‘identity-work’, and the ways that they access and make use of youth work as a resource. This has biggest impact for those young people who have little by way of resources naturally arising from their environment. As will be seen from the examples of young people across the three projects, social class remains salient and, after a sustained period of austerity, working class young people – young men in particular (McDowell, 2000; 2004) – are increasingly pushed to the precarious end of the labour market (Shildrick et al., 2012). The intersections of gender, class, race, disability and sexual orientation may compound young people’s marginality, but may also bring opportunities for defining self and claiming positive identity. These opportunities, and young people’s willingness to take them, are also evident in the data from the study, in general terms and specifically observed in relation to youth work.

Turning attention from the young people to youth work in and of itself, a further question arose about the nature of its professional endeavour:

8. how does youth work present itself as a resource for young people that is accessible, relevant and meaningful to their lives and aspirations?

Whilst this eighth question is bracketed off in the presentation of findings, both agency and structure are implicated in all eight questions and, like many others, I have leant towards Bourdieu for concepts that help bridge the two. In Bourdieusian terms, *capital* (1977; 1986) is analogous to resources, but also allows a more nuanced view of the power and politics that attach to the accumulation and use of different types of capital. The institutions and systems of family, education and faith, for example, that young people engage with are captured in the sense of *field*, each with its distinct hierarchy of power and rules (1990; 1998). *Habitus* denotes the deeply embedded and embodied aspects of culture apparent in social practices and relations, expressed by Bourdieu (1977) as ‘systems of durable, transposable *dispositions*, structured structures pre-disposed to function as structuring structures’ (p. 72, emphasis in original). Practical circumstances constrain

choice and agency, but dispositions delimit without the need for rational thought what is felt to be appropriate or plausible ‘for someone like me’ (Skeggs, 2004). Although imperfect, Bourdieu thus offers analytical tools that go some distance to uncovering the complexities of human action and interactions. I therefore wish to establish the final key aim of this study as robust use of these concepts in dynamic interaction with a complementary range of other theoretical perspectives.

The organisation of the thesis

The thesis is structured as follows: exploration of the literature and empirical research that informs the study, the research questions and the concepts used in analysis; outline of the methodology and the study sites; presentation and analysis of data; summary of findings.

Chapter One, *Life in the 2000s*, establishes the contemporary context and the impacts of recent changes in education and the labour market on young people, the pressing concerns being: insecure forms of work rather than unemployment; the growing punitivism towards benefit claimants (Valentine and Harris, 2014); and the risks associated with non-participation in further and higher education (Harrison, 2019). The chapter goes on to consider the tone of youth policy under the coalition and Conservative governments, especially the position of youth work in the constellation of youth services.

The second chapter, *Growing Up as Young Women and Young Men*, takes a longer view of youth transitions and the debates in youth studies about ways of conceptualising contemporary routes to adulthood and their diversity. Focusing on empirical studies, the chapter initially explores biographical accounts of young people’s experiences of their teenage years before considering the impacts of schooling (as well as schools themselves) and friendship practices on gender and ethnic identities. These studies highlight how inequality and the intersections of gender, ethnicity and class affect young people’s lives and the resources – or capital – they have for their ‘identity-work’.

Chapter Three, *Identities in Transition*, gives a critical account of the concepts underpinning the study, not only from Bourdieu, as outlined above, but also the understandings of identity as constructed through narratives (McAdams, 1993) and through social interactions (Jenkins' (2014) 'social identity'). Further, Emirbayer and Mische's (1998) notions of agency as having past, present and future-projective dimensions are introduced as a complement to what is already a strong collection of conceptual tools.

At the beginning of Chapter 4, *Approaching the Research Study*, I return to the research questions and outline the assumptions underpinning the research approach informed by the literature review. Thereafter I explore the choices made and the research process, including the narrative and creative methods employed. Whilst in many instances interviews and creative activities are encompassed within an ethnographic approach, here I outline how the salience of the ethnographic elements emerged in the course of the study. The study was not designed to be an ethnography and I explore the implications for the data collected and its analysis. The research took place through my involvement with youth organisations and the chapter discusses the ethical questions raised by working through gatekeepers, not least about the nature of consent, and being a volunteer within a project.

Chapter 5, *The Research Sites*, presents case studies of the three sites in the study, already briefly introduced in Chapter 4, highlighting their main characteristics and the young people and staff involved in each instance. They each attracted young people of different ages so presenting each of the next three chapters with a focus on one of the sites enables a sense of development across adolescence and points of educational transition at the age of 16. The chapters each start with a reflective account of group process to underline the developing relationships and the investments that young people made in different ways and to different degrees to the three projects, before developing analysis that cross-references participants and events in the other projects.

Developing a Sense of Self focuses on an example of project work that attracted a pre-formed friendship group of Pakistani Muslim young women

who constituted the main participants. At 13-14 years, they were starting to explore their identity and the chapter examines the intersections of gender, faith and ethnicity, using other participants and older peer mentors as points of contrast. Emotional attachments to the project and to the youth workers, especially those involved in the early stages of the project, helped sustain commitment and the young women's sense of sharing formative experiences that strengthened the bonds of their friendships. The chapter begins by reflecting on young people's engagement over the life cycle of the project and, through unifying themes of identity, agency and personal investment, moves into analysis of narratives produced through the creative activities and the more extensive biographical accounts offered at interview.

Moving Forward into the Future explores young people's engagement with an open access youth club, the age group here being 16-17 years. That meant that the young people were leaving statutory schooling and were taking new directions, being relatively well supported and resourced to do so. The sorts of developments and explorations that might be expected in a 'normative' life-course are evident here, developments that see young people become more independent and autonomous. The inter-dependence of friendship is important too, and the chapter illustrates the use of humour and challenge in developing a sense of identity and social place through one specific friendship.

The third project featured in *Achieving Adulthood?* provides a sharp contrast in terms of the social relationships and resources available to a group of young men who were 'parked' in an alternative education facility and who faced huge barriers in moving forward in their lives. For these young people, questions of marginality and their ability to act as agentic and autonomous individuals come to the fore. As an example of 'boys work, the group processes and the topics covered allowed me to explore the meaning of masculinity and the limits on their opportunities for acceptable 'performance' which are further examined in the narratives of one young man (which are compared in terms of themes and tone with those of a female interviewee from the first project)

The three youth projects provided a variety of opportunities and resources for the young people involved, most importantly through the ‘relationships of trust’ that they forged with youth workers and with the organisations. Chapter Nine, *Youth Work and Its Uses for Young People*, brings together the learning from the three projects and locates them within the wider endeavour of youth work. This is treated separately in this chapter and explicitly laid out as findings distinct from those relating to the young people in the interests of clarity.

As a profession, youth work seeks to work through a social education approach that is informal and collaborative, in effect a constructive ‘conversation’ (Batsleer, 2008) with young people. The aims of empowerment and growth, often within the context of a group, have not chimed with recent youth policy that has been instrumental and performance-driven (de St Croix 2016; 2018). However, current fears in relation to youth violence, knife crime and drugs has reawakened interest so youth work may be on the verge of entering a new and more promising phase. These findings give weight to the voices calling for expansion and sustained support for youth work in all its guises – targeted, community-led, project-based or open access. This will be especially important in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic unfolding in the very final stages of writing up.

Chapter 10 presents findings and critical reflections in relation to young people in successive sections:

- i. their identifications and dis-identifications and the narratives – whether extended or brief – that young people create to account for, and to make sense of, them;
- ii. the intersections of gender, class and ethnicity affecting the ‘identity work’ and the resources and options available and accessible to young people;
- iii. marginality and vulnerability that impacts on self-belief and ability to act;

- iv. opportunity and mobility, linked to Bourdieusian notions of 'dispositions' and 'capital', as well as the sense and articulation of belonging reflected in self-stories; and finally,
- v. reflections on trust and empowerment.

The latter is connected to 'relationships of trust' which have wider relevance to young people's lives and social interactions, but specifically in conclusion brings discussion back to the value of relationships nurtured and sustained in the context of youth work. The broad recommendations that follow consequently draw heavily on the discussions in the previous chapter about the beneficial effects of youth-friendly environments and 'relationships of trust' for young people, especially those in disadvantaged and marginal positions.

This thesis makes a small but distinct contribution to a varied and active field of youth studies. It has value in illuminating the experiences of young people negotiating complex transitions in the contemporary world and striving to establish a secure sense of self and meaning in their lives from their specific locations. Youth work is one of the resources available to them and the view across three projects gives insights into how young people use youth work in different ways and to diverse ends.

Chapter 1 Life in the 2000s

Woodman and Wyn (2015), arguing that youth studies should adopt the frame of 'generation' emphasise the social climates, institutional processes and events that affect cohorts of young people growing up in the same period. At a deeper level, however,

Social generations, as opposed to generations of kin, are groupings that share fundamental social conditions during their youth, and in this context shape lasting dispositions and face opportunity structures that distinguish them from generations that have come before (Corsten,1999; Vincent, 2005). (2015, p. 55)

There is an obvious explanatory appeal in the idea of 'social generations' such as the young people born after the millennium who are the subject of this chapter. France and Roberts (2015), however, warn about the tendency to homogenise experiences and to see too great a similarity: research continues to evidence considerable disparities in young people's transitions to adulthood that become even more stark when young people in the Global South are considered too (Philipps, 2018). Indeed, the concept of transitions itself is downplayed in the 'social generation' perspective (France and Roberts, 2015), charged with being laden with normative assumptions that do not reflect the diversity of individualised pathways (Woodman and Wyn, 2015) and explorations of identity.

Furlong et al. (2011) acknowledge limitations in the 'social generation' approach in that it necessitates a long term view in order to separate out short-lived fads and trends and to examine patterns and subjectivities across the life course. This is a big ask of research programmes. They assert nevertheless the value of 'social generation' in the way that it raises questions about the relationship between youth and adulthood, and because of its

capacity to reveal local variations on global patterns: it enables us to understand the significance of subjectivities and unevenness of

capacity across groups (gender, class, race) and across time and place to enact these subjectivities. (2011, p. 366)

This is a bold assertion. Woodman and Wyn (2015) attempt to elucidate what takes place within and between groups by using the notion of 'generational units' (Mannheim, 1952) within the overall population. Yet it is unclear whether this offers more than the ideas explored in subcultural and post-subcultural research. This may then offer only a partial explanation of social change and perpetuation of inequality.

In contrast, France and Threadgold (2016), in proposing a political ecological view of 'youth', bring to the fore a sharper sense of the power dynamics and institutional processes that compound the disadvantage of some young people. They counter Côté's (2014) claim that young people's apparent buy-in to neoliberal individualism and meritocracy arises from 'false consciousness' by arguing that *habitus* and the extent to which young people have a 'feel for the game' are more fruitful ways of viewing young people's reflexive sense of how they are manipulated and exploited. From their different perspective, Woodman and Wyn (2015) also turn to the later works of Bourdieu (1999; 2000) in their discussion of 'generational habitus' to elaborate on how shared dispositions develop with all the subjective, embodied and cultural elements that young people use to create distinctions within their generation and between themselves and other generations. Through two cohorts of young people studied in the *Life Patterns* research programme, they explore the inter-relations between individual biographies and societal transformations, highlighting the conflicts and tensions that young people manage in the demands of their day to day life.

France and Threadgold (2016) and Woodman and Wyn (2015) might be differently orientated towards the nature of individualisation that young people in the West typically encounter, with the latter more inclined to accept the thinking of Beck (1992) as a 'provocative' starting point for examining contemporary youth. However, both recognise the importance of cultural, historical and social influences on young people's understandings and practices in the here and now – effectively the dispositions that form

‘generational habitus’. Social transformations and events since 2000 affecting the economy, security and environment have had global repercussions that have manifested in specific ways within the four UK jurisdictions.

The first short section here sketches out a few of the likely influences on the ‘generational habitus’ that develops inevitably against a backdrop of: advanced consumerism; economic restructuring in the wake of the 2008 global financial crisis, which hit young people disproportionately (Bell and Blanchflower, 2011); retrenchment of welfare provision, underpinned by clear divisions between deserving and undeserving claimants (Valentine and Harris, 2014); and growing concerns about damage to the environment and global warming. The following sections explore the implications of changes in work, education and training. The latter part of the chapter takes a broader view of youth-related policy, mainly but not exclusively in England, and questions the implications of the ideological direction and concerns of successive New Labour, coalition and Conservative administrations. Finally, the chapter closes with a consideration of youth work as a key service for young people and the potential for offering support and relationships of trust (Wierenga, 2009) according to the needs of different groups.

Notes on ‘generational habitus’

The following chapter explores shifts in the understandings and performance of gender and their effect on subjectivities. Relatedly, it is important to note the marked shifts in attitudes across the Western world to freedom of sexual expression and LGBT rights, seen in the celebration of diverse sexualities, greater openness about transgender identities and the recognition of same sex marriage in 28 legislatures to date since the Netherlands led the way in 2001. Austria, Ecuador and Taiwan have each enacted legislation during 2019 as momentum for change gathers. It is unsurprising then to see indications of greater understanding and tolerance among young people of sexual (McCormack and Anderson, 2010; McCormack, 2014) and ethnic diversity such that the popular Channel 4 series, *Ackley Bridge* is able to

feature prominent storylines that tackle inter-racial relations and sexual identities within the Muslim community.

The celebration of identity, however, does not apply equally to all ethnic groups and it is easy to identify contrasting discourses around threats of radicalisation and terrorism, recently focusing in Europe on 'home grown' problems of radicalised youth (Cole, 2019). Although official attention in the UK has now turned to far right activity, the effects of the Prevent agenda since the 9/11 and London bombings has been to construct Asian masculinity as problematic and criminal (Qasim, 2018) and to create a climate of mutual distrust. The present highly racialised moral panic about guns, knife crime and running drugs across 'county lines' acts to compound fears about black young men, denying the roots of these problems in discrimination, disadvantage and marginalised urban neighbourhoods (see Silvestri et al., 2009; Grimshaw and Ford, 2018 for analysis). Young people with such strongly ascribed – and problematised – identities clearly do not enjoy the freedoms to experiment and to determine their own identities in the way that so many of their peers now do.

Social media have become integral to young people's social lives and communications as they make sophisticated use of various platforms for different audiences and for different purposes (Boyd, 2014; Jaynes, 2019). Their ubiquity has created new vulnerabilities, for example to sexting and to online bullying, as well as undoubtedly facilitating radicalisation (Von Behr et al., 2013). However, the benefits for most young people far outweigh these risks, with the overwhelming majority extensively networked and accustomed to instant access to information, services and media. The speed and quantity of information flows have grown exponentially, as have the opportunities for young people to create social media content and to present themselves and aspects of their lives to others. The sense, then, of what is public and what is private may well be very different for the post-2000 generation (Lincoln, 2012; Boyd, 2014).

This is a necessarily selective view and many more influences are connected to the changes in economic structure and access to work and education

which France and Threadgold (2016) seek to explain through the frame of political ecology. In essence, they remind us that ‘the social environments the young operate within are highly political and formed through relationships and human action’ (p. 621), implicating powerful ideas and interests which are ‘nested’ in a way that affects all aspects of young people’s lives.

Engaging with education and employment

As a powerful illustration of France and Threadgold’s (2016) thesis, one striking observation from the data in the *Life Patterns* research (Woodman and Wyn, 2015) relates to what the second cohort who completed school in 2005/6 said about the temporal structures of their lives. The 24/7 economy offers increasingly fewer ‘standard jobs’ and, with greater flexibility required in study too, young people often found their schedules incompatible with those of friends. The effect of not being able to maintain friendships and to commit to regular activities is accumulative, and negative where young people are dealing with the unpredictable out of necessity not choice. Peer groups and collective experiences are resources for young people, so dislocation of this type may well affect the strength and durability of the ‘systems of social capital’ (Raffo and Reeves, 2000) that they are able to sustain.

These trends in employment, and the resulting effects on young people’s lives, are not unique to Australia where the research (Woodman and Wyn, 2015) took place, nor to the Global North. The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development’s (OECD, 2019) Economic Outlook 2019 analysis indicates that the labour market experiences of young people, especially those with less than tertiary education, has worsened in their 36 member countries. Job stability and length of time spent in post has decreased across the age groups but affect lower educated workers most. However, workers appear to be ‘milling and churning’ (Vaughan, 2003) between different jobs and training, rather than leaving the labour market.

Both the OECD (2019) and the International Labour Organisation (ILO, 2019) identify underemployment rather than unemployment as a major on-going concern, and it is disproportionately young people who meet the ILO definition of working involuntarily part-time. It is evident that jobs created in the recovery from the 2008 financial crash have consistently benefited older workers more than young people (ILO, 2019). The ILO (2019) suggests that this may be caused by young people opting to pursue education, but that may be an overly optimistic view. It is true that, in the UK, rates of unemployment and economic inactivity have been on a downward trend for the past five years (ONS, 2019a; ONS, 2019b) and youth unemployment is at historically low levels (and low in comparison to the EU as a whole) (Francis-Devine, 2019). However, the fact that 29% of all young people between 16-24 years registered as unemployed are in full time education (Francis-Devine, 2019) implies that many students would prefer to be in substantive work. This would seem to provide support for the ‘discouraged worker’ effect mentioned by Bell and Blanchflower (2011) in which individuals opt for tertiary education or vocational training (Ainley, 2017) simply because of the paucity of job options available.

The OECD report (2019) highlights changes in the structure of the labour market and the growing share taken by the service sector which drives the impetus towards short term and zero-hour contracts, as well as flexible and part time working. The market is becoming polarised in the sense of work clustering either at the low-paid insecure end of the continuum or at the high skilled end whilst offering reduced opportunities in the middle range (although, ironically, high skilled jobs often fall into the middle-pay bracket (OECD, 2019)). Job insecurity, of course, is not confined to lower paid jobs. Bone (2019), for example, explores the experiences of young academics affected by casualisation within Higher Education who’s domestic and relationship plans were on hold because of the uncertainty around on-going work.

Returning to the sorts of experiences described by participants in *Life Patterns* (Woodman and Wyn, 2015), Farrugia et al. (2018) were concerned to explore how subjectivities are affected by ‘front of house’ bar work, an

occupation that attracts young people from different class and educational backgrounds and, critically, where the distinctions between work and social life may be blurred. Interviewees were working unsocial hours but in bars in Melbourne similar to the places where they would socialise themselves, and they described finding pleasure in dancing and joking as they interacted with customers. The authors refer to this conscious creation of atmosphere, relaxation and 'vibe' as 'affective work' rather than 'emotional labour' (Hochschild, 1983) because of the authenticity of feelings involved. 'Affective work' is essential to the 'new economy' but makes real demands of workers in their connections with customers and in bodily (and gendered) ways as well through the premium placed on appearance and comportment. This sort of work superficially presents as transcending class but when the lifestyle associated with consumption and youthful leisure no longer fits, it is demonstrably easier for the better educated and more middle class young people to move on and to commit to employment pathways and positions that confer definitive adult status (Farrugia et al., 2018).

On the whole sectors such as retail and hospitality do not offer good progression routes or skills development which means that many young people in this work long term are unable to enter the housing market, for example, and to achieve independence. The limbo situation in which young people may find themselves is further illustrated by Roberts' (2011; 2012) study of retail work in the South East of England. The young men he interviewed were fortunate in having inter-personal skills that enabled them to find secure employment and, somewhat against expectation, they did not see this work as a threat to their masculinity. Bringing in a steady wage was more important to their sense of being a man than the nature of the work itself, and their earnings enabled them to recoup their masculine identities through their leisure and consumption practices (Roberts, 2012). In finding opportunities for gender performance outside of work, they were similar to Nayak's (2003) 'real Geordies', although they would not have aligned themselves with the traditional ideals of working class masculinity that Nayak's participants still ascribed to. This represents a shift towards what Anderson (2008) calls 'inclusive masculinity', but definitely not a shift towards

greater social mobility despite the white-collar nature of this work (Roberts, 2011)

These two studies are unusual in the focus of their attention as most of the literature around employment considers young people who are either high achievers or are on the margins or excluded from the labour market (Roberts, 2011). For example, Nixon (2009), echoing McDowell (2014), shows how the dispositions and demeanours of unemployed low skilled men debars them from jobs involving 'affective work' in the service sector described above. Less is known about those young people who are managing, cycling between jobs but not featuring for any length of time in unemployment statistics. Many of these are now self-employed and/or working in the expanding 'gig economy'. As McDowell (2019) notes, roles in transport and distribution may be favoured by young men over other service sector work because they are more in line with stereotypical embodied masculinity. Her narrative interviews with young people in 2001, 2011 and 2017 in three small towns in the South of England are illustrative of the changes since the millennium in low-paid work and the rise of the platform economy that, she argues, have deepened disadvantage. Better organised young people able to keep records and deal with tasks such as filing tax returns can meet the entrepreneurial expectations of that environment. Others fail and are excluded from these new forms of employment just as they are from customer service jobs. The impacts of this are most detrimental in the absence of family support (Hardgrove et al., 2015; McDowell, 2019) to tide young people over periods where they have little or no work.

Entering fulltime education may be one way of avoiding the risks and uncertainties of the youth labour market but is no guarantee of escaping marginalisation (Simmons et al., 2014; Ainley, 2017). Often young people – and not necessarily low achievers or 'troubled teenagers' - are 'churning' between training schemes and employability programmes with little prospect of work at the end (Simmons and Smyth, 2016). Higher education has conventionally been promoted as one option that involves greater investment of various types but brings more significant returns in future employment. It

has also tended to be viewed as a riskier option for young people from the working classes whose dispositions and cultural capital may be less easily transferable to the academic environment (France, 2007). Parental support has been shown to make a difference to young people's own perception of risk (Lehmann, 2004) but it is unsurprising that working class young people are most often found in the new rather than elite universities (Furlong and Cartmel, 2007; Harrison, 2019).

What is surprising, however, is that in the face of inflated tuition fees, the middle class seem more price-sensitive than working class students (Harrison, 2017). Harrison (2019) suggests that the reason for this may lie in a rather different risk calculus for young people than has hitherto been assumed. On the one hand, the job market for non-graduates has become more uncertain which reduces the salience of financial and social risks associated with Higher Education for disadvantaged young people. On the other hand, having a degree does improve the chances of finding employment although no longer necessarily at graduate level. Harrison (2019) therefore argues, that far from being the 'rational investors' constructed in education policy, young people from middle classes 'consume' the experience of Higher Education whilst those from less advantaged backgrounds use it to insure against future unemployment. In effect, gaining a degree enables these young people to maintain position rather than giving them a competitive advantage in the jobs market (Harrison, 2019). It remains to be seen but does seem probable that governmental emphasis on employability and degree-level apprenticeships will result in even more pragmatic choices being made at the end of compulsory education, with fewer working class young people opting for purely academic study.

Government action and its impacts

With the stagnation of the youth employment market (France, 2007), the trend of young people 'staying on' at school for longer has become firmly established across all OECD countries, not just the UK (Furlong and Cartmel, 2007). Whilst the official line from the New Labour government

attempted to suggest that greater participation in education would reduce inequality (Levitas, 2005), Hagell et al. (2014) question whether extended education could ever achieve that because 'this may mean very different things for different groups of young people on different educational 'tracks' in different kinds of educational provision' (p.114). Furthermore, they note how recent educational literature focuses on academic outcomes particularly for the older age group, 'ignoring the social and emotional aspects of life in education' (p. 114; see also McPherson, 2019).

Being in marginal places within the education system may compound rather than address marginalisation and may not provide young people with a coherent body of either vocational or academic knowledge (Simmons and Smyth, 2016). The lack of hope and positive opt-in at the bottom end of the educational market compares starkly with the expansion of parental choice and examination success at the top end (Hagell et al., 2012; Shildrick et al., 2012). Moreover, one of the effects of young people being in schools, colleges and training centres is that they are spending more time with peers and this type of age segregation limits the sorts of opportunities that young people have to build inter-generational relationships (Hagell et al., 2012) that provide them with role models and mentors (Wierenga, 2009).

The most dramatic change over the past 30 years is seen in the participation of 16 and 17 year olds in education and work. In 1985, almost half of 16-18 year olds in England were in employment and 20.7% were in jobs with no additional training component (Robinson, 2014). By 1994, this figure had reduced to 13.5% and again down to 7% at the end of 2011 (www.education.gov.uk), indicating a trend towards forms of work-based learning accompanied by the increase already noted in full time education. Data from the Youth Cohort Study/Longitudinal Study of Young People in England (DfE, 2010) which followed 15,000 young people from 16-18 years, found that a high proportion (75%) were initially in full time education but this decreased over the two year period so that, at the beginning of the academic year when they were 18, 45% were either in, or applying to go into, Higher Education. Meanwhile approximately 33% were in employment, only a third of which included additional training, 7% were in training schemes and 15%

were classified as NEET (Not in Education, Employment or Training). This indicates big variations in outcomes at age 18 that are partly determined by parental as well as the young person's prior educational attainment, whilst differences are also apparent between ethnic groups (DfE, 2010).

These trends are not just a product of developments in the labour market but a conscious strategy of successive governments from the 1970s onwards with initiatives such as the Youth Opportunities Programme and Youth Training Schemes, followed in 1988 by the removal of welfare benefits entitlement for all under 18s except those deemed to be 'in hardship'. The most recent significant move is the Raising of the Participation Age, enabled by New Labour legislation but phased in by the coalition government. This has ensured that, from 2015, all young people are required to stay in education or training until the age of 18, with 'training' mainly comprising the current advanced and intermediate apprenticeships (DfE, 2018a). Briefly, statistics for England (DfE, 2019a) indicate that at the end of 2018

- 87.9% of 16 year olds and 78.4% of 17 year olds were in full time education;
- Of these 64.4% were studying for a Level 3 qualification (A Level or equivalent) as their highest aim;
- At age 18, 50.5% were in full time education, 13.1% being in FE, tertiary and specialist colleges, and 31.6% in Higher Education;
- At age 18, the levels of apprenticeships have remained stable at 8.3%.

The question of skills and vocational training has been a vexed one for several decades since the first attempts in the 1980s to link young people to the job market through work experience programmes (France, 2007) and to replace what young people would previously had learnt through traditional apprenticeships and on the job training. It has been clearly recognised that developments to meet the needs of young people whose aptitudes and interests are practical have been markedly less successful than those wanting to follow an academic path. Birdwell et al. (2011) talked of this latter

constituency of young people as ‘the forgotten half’, neglected in schools who were focused on boosting GCSE achievement, and faced with a bewildering array of choices in vocational education. Sadly, New Labour had rejected the recommendations of the Working Group for 14-19 Reform (2004) in the ‘Tomlinson Report’ for an over-arching diploma. Instead they embarked on additions to what was already a confusing range of vocational qualifications that hold less prestige and recognition in the world of employment than academic equivalents (Birdwell et al., 2011). The Wolf Report (2010) further points to the mismatch between labour market requirements and vocational education, comparing young people in the 1970s with contemporary young people and finding that

It is clear that a significant proportion of the 14-19 cohort is being offered a *less effective path into employment than their predecessors* the value of lower level vocational qualifications fell precipitously in the late 1980s, and has remained extremely low and even negative ever since, even though we know there are many skills and qualifications that the labour market does value. *Things have got worse in part because of education and training policies which are at odds with labour market dynamics.*

(2010, p. 70, emphasis in original)

One of the issues highlighted in the Wolf Report (2010) was the inaccuracy of the acronym NEET to describe the experiences of young people who were often moving in and out of education, short term employment and inactivity. NEET is in fact a policy construct rather than a representation of reality (Thompson, 2011; 2017). Yet from its genesis in the UK with reference only to 16 and 17 year olds, it has gained traction and is now routinely used in relation to 16-24 year olds across Europe as well as the OECD countries (Simmons and Smyth, 2016; Powell, 2018). During New Labour’s first term of office, the category NEET chimed with their concerns about social exclusion and their interpretation of inclusion as achieved through education and labour market participation (Social Exclusion Unit, 1999). Levitas (2005)

defines this as a repudiation of their previous socialist adherence to the principles of redistribution in favour of a social integrationist discourse (SID) which better fitted the 'third way' philosophy that influenced their early thinking (Cook, 2006). New Labour thus disavowed the understanding of society as containing structural conflicts and ideologically aligned themselves with the market and meritocracy whilst at the same time advocating aspirations to social justice which 'in this context is then concerned with opportunity, not with tackling the root causes of social inequality' (France, 2007, p. 86). This highly individualised approach has remained to the fore ever since. Problems of unemployment are essentially seen as belonging to the individual rather than as a product of labour market conditions (Furlong and Cartmel, 2007), and the growing concerns about marginalisation and chronic underemployment discussed earlier (Shildrick et al., 2012) are simply not being recognised.

On the face of it, the downward trend in NEET figures for the UK would seem to be a good news story. Taking just the 16-24 age range, the proportion of young people who were NEET held steady from 2002 to the point of the financial crash in 2008, at which time it stood at 13.8%. The proportion subsequently rose to a peak of 16.9% in 2011 but has since reduced (Powell, 2018). The August 2019 figures (ONS, 2019c) indicate that 792,000 young people or 11.5% of the total relevant population were NEET. 41.6% of these were looking for, and were available to take up work, whilst others – and this is a growing proportion of young people (DfE, 2019b) – were economically inactive for reasons such as ill-health, disability and caring responsibilities. However, what this narrative does not reflect are the numbers of young people who, like Batchelor et al.'s (2017) young Glaswegians, are holding onto work but are socially and spatially excluded both from the trendy (and expensive) city centre and from the gentrified parts of their locality. The preoccupations with participation for 16-17 year olds and NEET status across the 16-24 age range pose unhelpful binaries that neglect considerations about quality, security and possibilities for progression in work (Thompson, 2017).

Youth policy in general, and NEET policy specifically, has diverged across the UK as the devolved government in Wales has taken a more holistic approach than England (King, 2016) and Scotland has pursued its own policy of *More Choices, More Chances* (Scottish Executive, 2006). However, concerns have been expressed across all three about the nature of the long term NEET group – or rather subgroups as young people with experience of the care system or with special educational needs, for example, are over-represented (DfE, 2018b). Whilst recognising some benefits in the attention paid to specific populations (Thompson, 2011), young people are not so easily categorised and often have multiple ‘problem’ characteristics, never mind the assumption that being NEET is negative and problematic in itself which is not inevitably the case (Finlay, et al., 2010). That does not suggest that the right support is necessarily reaching the right young people. As Simmons et al. (2014) comment

Policy decisions taken at local, national and international levels shape and order not only the allocation and availability of work, benefits and education, but the nature and delivery of targeted interventions aimed at young people on the margins of participation (p. 589)

The preoccupation with young people being disengaged from education and employment are seen across most neo-liberal regimes. Writing in New Zealand, Stratthdee (2013) identified three types of policy response – motivational, bridging and punitive – arguing that a sense of moral panic or crisis has been manufactured to legitimate the focus on individual young people rather than intervening in the labour market to create a better supply of high skill high way jobs. This clearly resonates with the UK experience. The introduction of the former Connexions service by New Labour was intended to encourage and motivate young people in seeking and entering an expanded range of educational and training provision, and to act as broker between young people and employers or training agencies (Simmons et al., 2014). There has also been a proliferation of third party organisations, often in the private sector, acting as ‘bridges’ and effectively providing a commodified version of the networks and contacts that young people may

have previously had in their communities and through families (Strathdee, 2013; Simmons et al., 2014).

What was apparent under the coalition and now is even more evident under the Conservative administration in England is a willingness to adopt disciplinarian approaches (Simmons and Smyth, 2016). New Labour had its authoritarian tendencies and was certainly not averse to the use of coercion (Simmons et al., 2014). However, current policy is more directly punitive, seemingly reflecting increasing societal tendencies to discriminate between 'strivers and skivers' and make moral evaluations of the worth of others. As Valentine and Harris' (2014) research has shown, there are worrying class and racialised dimensions to these new prejudices and, they argue, a hegemonic view of poverty and worklessness as a personal failing rather than resulting from the workings of capitalism. In Levitas' (2005) frame, public discourse has moved definitively in the direction of moral underclass (MUD) thinking.

This tougher line has permitted the stripping back of welfare benefit entitlement and the introduction of additional layers of conditionality into the system. Consequently, young claimants are often receiving sanctions for infringements of the requirements for Job Seekers Allowance and Universal Credit (Brooks, 2017; Rogers and Blackman, 2017). Depaul (2018), in its submission to the Sanctions Inquiry conducted by the Work and Pensions Select Committee, pointed to the room for discretion that Jobcentre advisors have to alter or turn off particular conditions to recognise people's special circumstances, (referred to as 'easements') which are not being used sufficiently. They also found that many advisors are unable to communicate with the homeless young people who are Depaul's concern as a charity, so are unable to motivate and support in the ways that were intended. Further research in London from the Young Women's Trust (Elliott and Dulieu, 2019) suggests that relationships between young people and Work Coaches are made more difficult by time pressures that are not conducive to young people discussing needs and areas of vulnerability that might be relevant to their ability to seek work. That means that intervention is often not individually tailored, and worryingly high proportions of young women in Elliott and

Dulieu's (2019) research said their experiences of using Jobcentre Plus were humiliating (52%), stressful (56%) and induced feelings of shame (53%).

From April 2017, the DWP has rolled-out a new flagship programme for young people, the Youth Obligation Support Programme (YOSP), which mandates intensive support for 18-21 year olds making a new claim for Universal Credit. 63,000 young people participated in the programme between October 2018 and April 2019 and the DWP has heralded it as a success, reporting that 56.3% found work within two months of entry (DWP, 2019). Information from other sources paints a less positive picture. Centrepoin's (2019) research with young claimants with complex needs found that they were unclear about what the YOSP involved and often were unable to read the written information they were given. Even where the relationship was positive, there was little sense that Work Coaches were able to offer enough, or the right kind of, support. Unsurprisingly, because of increased expectation of interaction with the Jobcentre, the rate of sanctions is increased, particularly for young people facing multiple difficulties who Centrepoin says are set up to fail, and then face punishment when they predictably do. Both Centrepoin (2019) and the Young Women's Trust (Elliott and Delieu, 2019) raise serious concerns about the appropriateness of this provision and the quality of the work and training opportunities being offered to young people. It seems a further initiative destined to make a bad situation worse.

Looking beyond education, employment and training

The above account indicates a shift in public mood that underscores the growing inequalities in austerity Britain and compounds experiences of 'advanced youth marginality' (Blackman and Rogers, 2017a; 2017b). Despite plentiful evidence to the contrary (Nayak, 2003; MacDonald and Marsh, 2005; Simmons et al., 2014; McDowell, 2014; Ruddy, 2017), deliberately or otherwise, policymakers have encouraged the perception that those who are not participating in the economy or in consumer society are lazy and unwilling:

What effectively has happened is that, cumulatively, the *emotion rules* governing the way the disadvantaged and welfare dependent are perceived by those in employment have been changed. (Rodger, 2008, p. 41, emphasis in original).

Paradoxically, New Labour, having brought the Human Rights Act 1998 into force, began a full scale retreat from human rights and full citizenship through its welfare to work and a myriad of other policies (Cook, 2006). Sadly, questions of desert and assumptions of 'less eligibility' are even more sharply in evidence 10 years after New Labour left office, and the spirit of their mantra of 'rights and responsibilities' (Cook, 2006) continues to resonate. As Squires and Goldsmith (2017) caustically comment, the current period 'is certainly not the first time that problems of poverty, inequality and disadvantage have been refracted through the moralising language of just deserts, culpability and irresponsible lifestyle choices' (p. 29).

The previous section illustrated the expectations of young people to seek work or participate in education, and broadly to make themselves 'job-ready'. The responsibilising of young people is also well rehearsed in the literature around youth justice (Muncie, 2015; Haines and Case, 2015; Hopkins-Burke, 2016) and anti-social behaviour (Squires and Stephen, 2005; Burney, 2005; Squires, 2008; Millie, 2009). New Labour instigated a variety of measures to ensure that young people curbed their behaviours (Muncie, 2015). Parents did not escape the disciplinary net either, caught by the threat of bindovers, parenting orders, sanctions if their children did not attend school (Robinson, 2014; Haines and Case, 2015) and Family Intervention Projects (FIPs). Despite the fallacy of assumptions about a direct causal link between 'faulty parenting' and anti-social behaviour (Nixon and Parr, 2009), the FIP formed the basis of the much expanded Troubled Family Programme. The TFP was promoted vigorously by PM David Cameron in the wake of the 2011 urban riots (Wincup, 2013) against a discourse of 'our broken society'. However, Squires and Goldsmith (2017) argue that what is broken may not be society itself but the essential contract at the heart of social citizenship. Young people are often described by words such as 'disengaged', 'disaffected', 'disconnected' or 'excluded', but

Sometimes it is a question of what young people are *connected to* rather than simple 'disconnection'. In place of the wider social contract, expressed in an idea of citizenship, young people as we have seen, are increasingly confronted by a formidable array of disciplinary contracts relating to behaviour, compliance and performance. Some are specifically tailored to the needs of individuals, others are more generic in nature or designed for designated groups, but all deploy sanctions, penalties and exclusions as a consequence of breach or non-compliance (2017, p. 32, emphasis in original).

This was not in fact the declared starting point for the coalition government after they came to power in 2010, although themes can be traced through the language of *Positive for Youth ; a new approach to cross-governmental policy for young people 13-18* (DfE, 2011) published early in their term of office. The tone was positive and upbeat, in some respects not too different from the sorts of aspirations articulated by New Labour:

The Government believes that its approach to young people should be guided by its core values of personal responsibility and social justice, and the principles of:

- supporting parents and families;
- promoting achievement and aspirations;
- promoting young people's responsibilities and rights;
- recognising the unique and diverse needs of different young people;
- improving opportunities and early support; and
- reaching out to those with fewest advantages.

(DfE, 2011, p. 11)

This was preceded in the overarching statement and Executive summary with a list of the roles that the various stakeholders would play which began with young people 'taking responsibility, making the most of every

opportunity available and speaking up on issues they care about'. This was followed by parents, carers and families who were charged with 'having the primary responsibility and influence to nurture young people through to adulthood' (DfE, 2012, p. 3). The list of other roles specifically included youth workers although the vision was not for strengthened local authority services but an array of provision from the third sector and faith groups (Buckland, nd). The policy therefore 'whilst promoting a well-known and tenacious English voluntarism, has little to say about *professional* youth work' (Bradford and Cullen, 2014, p. 94, emphasis in original). The coalition were more concerned to promote its new brainchild, the National Citizenship Service (NCS) in which PM David Cameron had a deep personal investment (de St Croix, 2011).

The NCS is indicative of a strong thread of thinking around citizenship and 'character-building' that also features, for example, in education policy (Brooks, 2013) and in the *Child Poverty Strategy 2014 to 2017* (HM Government, 2014). A whole section of *Positive for Youth* is devoted to the subject and the way this is introduced gives a flavour of the underlying thoughts and beliefs about what constitute desirable qualities and attributes:

Through the teenage years, young people continue to develop the values, attitudes and behaviours that shape their characters as adults, and to form ambitions for their adult lives. This process of personal and social development includes developing social, communication, and team working skills; the ability to learn from experience, control behaviours, and make good choices; and the self-esteem, resilience, and motivation to persist towards goals and overcome setbacks. These are qualities and skills that employers value. Personal and social development therefore supports young people's educational attainment and work readiness and reduces the likelihood of risky behaviours and the harm that can result from them.

(DfE, 2011, p. 32)

Positive for Youth was published only months after the 2011 riots which spread from London to other cities such as Birmingham, Bristol and Liverpool. Ian Duncan Smith, on the platform of the Conservative Party conference, had already attributed the causes of the riots to family breakdown and welfare dependency (Wincup, 2013). He thus reinforced the view which had taken hold throughout the New Labour period and was strongly implied in *Positive for Youth*, that not complying with accepted standards of behaviour and participation in work or education, as well as failing to exercise appropriate self-regulation, means forfeiting full citizenship and all the attendant rights. Because citizenship is linked to adulthood in increasingly complex ways as transitional pathways diverge (Hall et al., 1998; Thomson et al., 2004), this has serious implications for young people in marginal positions.

Haines and Case (2015) powerfully argue that young people who offend are still children and that their rights and needs as such should be recognised. However, young people who are 'risky' are not the only ones whose access to rights may be tenuous. Young people who are 'at risk' have also been targeted for attention and services, at different points child sexual exploitation, mental ill health, drug use, asylum status and young carers coming into view. Nevertheless, the concept, and the operationalising, of vulnerability has been subject to much less scrutiny than has 'risk' or 'riskiness' (Brown, 2015).

Vulnerability may be regarded as a universal condition, often attached to life stages such as childhood or old age, and, as such, it offers the potential to recast the relationship between citizen and state as one of interdependency (Brown, 2011; 2015). In practice, 'vulnerability' is more frequently used in a paternalistic way to differentiate and to separate out individuals or groups on the basis of perceived deficiencies or problems. Where vulnerability is seen as innate – as a property that a person possesses – it then becomes more difficult to recognise the situational and structural factors that might cause or increase vulnerability (Brown, 2015). Policy talk about resources being targeted at 'the most vulnerable' implies value judgements and the rationales in social policy neglect structural accounts of disadvantage and rights-based

understandings of citizenship. Brown (2015) argues that welfare assistance consequently becomes construed as a 'gift' rather than a 'right'.

That is not to ignore the reality that many young people have benefited from help and support in various forms. Being designated as vulnerable may also afford some leeway with benefits regimes and the like, effectively being a 'get out of jail free card' that can be used to negotiate the disciplinary measures described earlier. Yet the label is far from innocuous and, Brown's (2015) research suggests, is strongly connected with notions of 'deservingness' and diminished personhood. Moreover, young people who are vulnerable very often behave in challenging ways – ways that are demanding, aggressive, highly sexualised, perhaps, or involving problematic use of drugs and alcohol. Although that should not be surprising, Brown (2015) found that services responded more positively when young people adopted an appropriate 'performance' of vulnerability. Failure to do so may result in support being withdrawn or other sanctions, and she concludes that 'vulnerability' can operate as a gateway to extra assistance, but also as an entry point to social control. Her research into the informal processes in operation showed how

certain behavioural conditionalities are attached to vulnerability classifications. Effective 'performances' of vulnerability can lead to avoidance of sanctions or enhanced levels of support, thus classifications of vulnerability may well benefit those who with more 'conformist' behaviours and work in the direction of excluding from support those who are seen as 'non-compliant'. (2014, p. 382)

The result may be that many needy young people are falling through a safety net of services that is thinning in any case after years of austerity measures. Even where they are linked into provision, the support they receive may enable them to cope but may not best facilitate their growth, development and future citizenship. Of course, as promised (but not delivered) by *Positive for Youth* (DfE, 2011; Mason, 2015) youth work provision could step in and assist many of these young people in ways that are, by virtue of the nature of youth work, empowering. The next section considers where youth work has

been, and where it is currently, positioned in the light of the renewed interest that it is attracting in the efforts to tackle knife crime (Smith and Hughes, 2019).

Youth work as social education..... and more?

Within the arena of children and young people's services, youth work has found itself marginalised over the past two decades and has struggled to maintain its distinct identity and ethos (Nicholls, 2012; de St Croix, 2016). Nevertheless, it has powerful advocates who argue for its value in offering relationships to young people which are more equal in terms of power (McPherson, 2019) and more non-judgemental than those with teachers and other professionals. The nature of youth work itself – and certainly questions of whether voluntary participation is a key requirement (Ord, 2009; Davies, B., 2015) – is not entirely settled but there is agreement that it is essentially youth-centred and holistic, and that it works through relationships to create an environment that fosters informal social learning. Furthermore, the National Occupational Standards adds, 'to enable them to develop their voice, influence and place in society and to reach their full potential', aims that are notably missing from other youth initiatives such as the NCS.

At a critical juncture, Bernard Davies (2015) revisited his earlier work 'Youth Work: A Manifesto for Our Times' (2005), posing key questions that he feels define youth work. Of these, three are of note:

- Are *young people perceived and received as young people* rather than, as a requirement, through the filter of adult-imposed labels?
- Is the practice *starting where young people are starting*, particularly with their expectation that they will be able to relax, meet friends and enjoy themselves?
- Is the practice respectful of and actively responsive to *young people's peer networks*?

(2015, p. 100, emphasis in original)

Such questions are necessary in the face of demands on youth work to fulfil a variety of roles that have frequently required compromise and a shift in professional territory simply in order to survive. The very flexibility of youth work and its ambiguity as a profession has proved both helpful and risky as it has moved into new settings and is no longer centred on open access youth club provision (Bradford and Cullen, 2014; de St Croix, 2016).

Davies' questions point to the character of youth work that seeks to 'get alongside' young people, even – or perhaps especially – those who are 'risky' or 'at risk' discussed in the previous section. Brown (2015) talks of a 'vulnerability-transgression nexus' operating where young people's challenging behaviours could be viewed by services as one or the other depending on how far the young person was seen to be agentic in their actions and their level of contrition. It would be naïve to assume youth workers are always and inevitably understanding of young people's behaviours, but their professional stance is more likely to lead them to appreciate, and to work with, Brown's (2015) perception that in the face of extreme difficulties,

Transgressive behaviours such as criminal activities, antisocial behaviour or what young people called 'attitude' could be viewed as important 'identity work' to preserve dignity and self-worth or as a strategy for mitigating against social marginalisation. (p. 180)

Davies (2015) also refers to the history of youth work's engagement with young people in their peer groups, which is mourned by Jeffs and Smith (2002) as they acknowledge the current dominance of individualism. It is in the dynamic of groups that they and Hall et al. (1998) feel that young people learn experientially about democratic processes and can experiment with aspects of citizenship. For these, youth work is an essentially political activity, building on its roots in the emancipatory philosophy of Friere (1988; see also Friere and Shor, 1987). Whilst holding on to similar values, more recent academic writing on youth work (Nicholls, 2012; de St Croix, 2016)

has sought to grapple with the marketisation of provision and the tensions surrounding the move to targeted work with individuals rather than groups.

The history of youth work since the millennium has not seen a straightforward and easy trajectory. Youth work has traditionally prized its independence from other services, particularly law enforcement (de St Croix, 2016) but such independence was antithetical to the New Labour approach (Davies, B., 2009). Youth justice had already been reconfigured, operationally in the creation of multi-agency youth offending teams, and strategically in requiring agencies to come together at local authority level to tackle 'youth crime and disorder' (Muncie, 2015). Turning their attention to youth work, *Transforming Youth Work: Resourcing Excellent Youth Services* (DfES, 2002) promised an expansion of youth work but at the cost of adherence to managerial and performance imperatives (de St Croix, 2016). It appears that youth work was valued, not least for its ability to work with 'hard to reach' populations of young people. However, as it transpired, over time it was seen less as a vehicle for the empowerment of young people and more as a means of achieving New Labour's other agendas. This was most explicitly around the *Respect Action Plan* and reducing the numbers of young people who were NEET (Davies, B., 2009) (which were not unconnected as their thinking explicitly linked joblessness with risk of criminality) (Rodgers, 2008)).

New Labour were also exercised by the notion of 'joined up' services, and youth services were co-opted into partnership working on both the community safety side and with other children's services. The *Every Child Matters* (DfES, 2003) agenda and the notion of integrated working was a further impingement on the autonomy of youth work, but evidence suggests that there were benefits in making youth work more visible to other professionals (Davies and Merton, 2009) and in extending the reach of the youth service (Davies and Merton, 2010). The actions of the sector skills council, however, were less helpful in not recognising youth workers as having a distinct set of relational skills (Nicholls, 2012) and their proposal for a generic 'youth professional status' was specifically seen as a threat to youth work (Davies and Merton, 2009). Whilst this came to nothing as the

Children's Workforce Development Council (CWDC) lost funding shortly after the coalition government came into power, it underlines the fragility of the status of youth work. As Bradford and Cullen (2014) identify, youth work and the nature of its enterprise is unclear, given the range of settings in which it now works, the diversity of providers and variable age ranges for the young people within projects: 'Youth work's liminality and plasticity, whilst being an asset in the past, has apparently weakened its position' (2014, p. 94).

Although some advocates are unequivocal about the professional status of youth work and the ethical and value base that should underpin (Banks and Iman, 2000; Wylie, 2013; Pope, 2016), this is by no means universal. Professionalism is normally seen to imply both a degree of detachment and distance which is problematic when the essence of youth work is relational and based on intimacy, albeit carefully managed, with young people (Davies, R., 2016; see also questions raised in Murphy and Ord, 2013). Moreover, the non-statutory nature of youth work and the increasing use of part time and temporary contracts (de St Croix, 2016) as a cost saving measure under the coalition and Conservative governments has exacerbated feelings of instability and de-professionalisation among qualified youth workers (Mason, 2015; Price, 2017). Managerial practices and financial restrictions have played a significant part. One participant in Pope's (2016) research, for example, complained about having to submit business cases even for small items such as stamps. The further encroachment of performance cultures and impact measures, increasingly important in terms of commissioning and maintaining work, represent tighter governance and regulation of youth work activity (de St Croix, 2018). All these undermine youth work as a professional enterprise.

There are, however, contrary indicators, most evident in de St Croix's (2016) study of part time youth workers who have retained their passion for their work and the 'emotional labour' involved (de St Croix, 2013):

Putting relationships first is not merely a rhetorical aspiration; it involves creating spaces where young people feel welcome and included, and making time for them. Although this might be assumed

to be intrinsic to the youth work role, the growth of bureaucratic demands and pressure on resources means that both time and space are squeezed (Fusco et al., 2013). Despite these challenges, some of the participants in this study work in places where space and time remain priorities. Mickie works in a project for young people who are lesbian, gay, bi, trans or queer (LGBT); the project is particularly valued by this group who are excluded from many other spaces. (2016, p. 76)

This is worth quoting at some length to illustrate that positive youth work does exist even in what Wylie (2013) describes as a 'cold climate'. Commitment and emotional investment can clearly be exploited (de St Croix, 2013) but nevertheless there are signs of youth workers and youth services positively engaging with the new environment and exercising resistance against its worst excesses in order to maintain the confidentiality of young people and their trust (de St Croix, 2016). This clearly will be important for the next phase of youth work history.

So often change in social policy occurs as a reaction to events: the deaths of James Bulger, Stephen Lawrence, Victoria Climbié and Baby P, for example, all having different, but profound effects on subsequent policy. At the present time there is significant pressure following a spate of knife-related fatalities in England to abandon measures based on criminal justice and deterrence in favour of the sorts of public health approaches driven by the Violence Reduction Unit in Scotland (Grimshaw and Ford, 2018). Young people themselves have testified to the All Party Parliamentary Group on Knife Crime (Smith and Hughes, 2019), highlighting the benefits of mentoring and youth work. The Report of the Home Affairs Select Committee on Serious Youth Violence (House of Commons, 2019) also articulates the value of youth work, calling for a National Youth Service Guarantee that will provide a statutory minimum of youth service provision, both outreach and community-based, with full ring-fenced funding. This should be co-designed with young people so as to provide them with safe spaces and support to protect from violence.

While the above may be positive, it should be treated with cautious optimism given the current involvement of youth workers in targeted youth prevention and delivery of out of court disposals to young people (Robinson, 2020). An expanded role may not mean an increase in meaningful youth work. Nevertheless, there is also support from the All Party Parliamentary Group on Youth Affairs whose Inquiry into Youth Work (NYA, 2019) identified the need for an increase in open access services, the traditional 'bread and butter' of youth work that has been much eroded in the past two decades. In 2011/12 55.5% of expenditure was on universal services, whereas by 2017/18 this had reduced to 43.8%, but 43.8% of a much smaller amount. Between 2008/9 and 2017/18 the spend per head on youth services overall fell from £175 to £65 (a shocking real term reduction of £149). (NYA, 2019). The APPG, with this in mind, called for the government to make a greater investment in youth work and to designate a clear statutory duty that defines a minimum 'protected' level of service (NYA, 2019). The future, then, may hold opportunities and threats.

In summary

This chapter has traced developments that have impacted on the experiences of young people and have influenced what Woodman and Wyn suggest is their 'generational habitus'. Whilst giving most attention to education and work, these are not the only areas that life that matter and, in fact, it is evident that changes in one area have knock-on effects for others. *The Life Patterns* research (Woodman and Wyn, 2015) shows how young people are accustomed to fitting their socialising, exercise and other commitments around flexible work and, indeed, moves between one work setting and another. Globally expectations of work and the value of accredited learning have changed, and within the UK this is apparent in the increased numbers entering tertiary and Higher Education despite prospects in the labour market becoming more uncertain. The data presented here shows that, whilst unemployment has been reduced, many young people are underemployed – working at levels below their capacity and/or for fewer

hours. There has also been an expansion of jobs at the higher skilled end of the market, but little in-between, creating an hourglass effect with notably fewer of the secure middle range jobs that many young people in the past could rely upon (Wolf, 2010).

‘Generational habitus’ encourages appreciation of the shared cultural and social practices amongst an age cohort that do arise from responses to broad structural changes and their manifestations locally. The political ecology approach (France and Threadgold, 2016) enables a more biting analysis of the interplay of factors operating at macro, meso and micro levels – effectively the interaction of environment and politics. This also brings another factor, exo-systems, more definitively into the picture (France et al., 2012) in this case specifically the changes in the requirements attached to the benefits system and the Raising of the Participation Age. These are practical expressions of values and assumptions in the macro social environment around the undeservingness of welfare benefit claimants (Valentine and Harris, 2014) and the valorising of education as an individualised route to progression. Sharper delineations are made between the successes and the failures in this fragmented society and, as shown in this chapter, this clearly impacts on the growing numbers of young people in marginal and insecure positions (Blackman and Rogers, 2017a).

That is not to suggest that young people are passive in the face of difficulties nor that they have internalised a culture of individualisation in a complete and unquestioning way. Whilst talking about agency and self-making in terms of their own actions and choices, young people in research by Farthing (2015; 2016a; 2016b) were clear about the role of structure in the problems they observed and identified the need for collective solutions when asked to write their own anti-poverty policy:

All of these young people demonstrated a consistent ‘bi-lingualism’ when it came to writing in a role for non-agentic forces via policy. They wrote extensively and eloquently about the need to address structural problems that affected young people ‘like themselves’.....while these young people certainly perceived themselves as highly agentic, they

were also deeply aware of the chains of inter-dependence within which their agency was exercised. (2016a, p. 771)

This is only one study, but it does raise issues about subjectivities and young people's thinking about the political, institutional and social world around them, and the inequities within.

In many respects the world that these young people are growing up in is a less secure place and the risks of moving out of the mainstream are considerable when safety nets in terms of welfare benefits, support services and practical assistance from the state are removed. In this scenario, youth work clearly has a role, not just in enabling young people to cope, but in engaging fully with youth work's core task of building relationships of trust (Wierenga, 2009) with individuals and groups that look towards growth and development. As Tom Wylie (2013) asks, 'who will stick by troubled young people who may have few continuing, supportive relationships with adults?' (p. 64). Youth work is clearly not a panacea for deep-rooted structural problems but, properly funded and given status within the range of services available to young people, has real potential to support and empower young people on the margins, individually and – perhaps more importantly – collectively by giving them voice.

Chapter 2 Growing up as young women and young men

Some aspects of transitions for young people have endured whilst others have been transformed by shifts in education and labour markets affected by global trade, mobile workforces and technology (Furlong and Cartmel, 2007). Developing the contemporary picture already outlined, this chapter explores experiences of growing up in present-day societies in the West, identifying areas of continuity and change over a longer period and drawing out themes of risk and subjectivities.

As early as the 1990s, society had been characterised as increasingly based on individual endeavour and consciousness of risk. It was not that modern lives are necessarily objectively riskier but influential thinkers such as Anthony Giddens (1991) proposed that

the concept of risk becomes fundamental to the way both lay actors and technical specialists organise the social world. Under conditions of modernity, the future is continually drawn into the present by means of the reflexive organisation of knowledge environments. (p. 3)

Moreover, for each individual he argued that

in modern social life, the notion of lifestyle takes on a particular significance. The more tradition loses its hold, and the more daily life is reconstituted in terms of the dialectical interplay of the local and global, the more individuals are forced to negotiate lifestyle choices through a diversity of options. (p. 5)

Certainly, the need to be self-reflexive and the critical role of trust (or absence of trust) stressed by Giddens remains evident experientially and in empirical studies, but hardly the degree of agency and rational choice that he assumes are possible. Beck's (1992) 'elective or DIY biographies' further point to individualised responses to the ambiguity and unpredictability of

what were previously settled social roles and institutions (Woodman, 2009). Yet, as established in the previous chapter, he too underplays the class, gender, ethnic and other divisions that research has repeatedly suggested have been reconfigured for the present era and still resonate through young people's lives (Furlong and Cartmel, 2007; France, 2007; France et al., 2012).

This chapter reviews qualitative research that sheds light on contemporary transitions and young people's efforts to work towards viable adult identities in adolescence and through what has been described as an extended phase of 'emerging adulthood' (Arnett, 2004). The extent to which the individualisation thesis (Beck, 1992; Giddens, 1992; Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2002) captures twenty-first century experience in this phase is inevitably challenged by the data about peer networks and friendships, as well as young people's orientations to the labour market. Intense debates have consequently arisen in youth studies about the merits or otherwise of subcultural and post-subcultural thinking (Hesmondhalgh, 2005; Shildrick and MacDonald, 2006; Bennett, 2011) as analytical frames for understanding the complexities of young people's lives, in addition to the social generation (Furlong et al., 2011; Woodman and Wyn, 2015; France and Roberts, 2015) and political economy and ecology approaches (Côté, 2014; France and Roberts, 2015; France and Threadgold, 2016; Sukarieh and Tannock, 2016) already introduced.

Becoming adult

Arnett (2004), of course, celebrates young adults and the unprecedented freedoms and opportunities for experimentation that most now enjoy before commitment to jobs and partners. Other views are less sanguine, with Jones (2009) citing a crisis over the question of dependence: extended transitions are culturally and practically more comfortable for the middle classes and especially painful for those who are 'fast-tracked' into independence by unpropitious circumstances. The state has shifted the burden of support onto families and simultaneously created higher age thresholds for activities that

lead to meaningful citizenship (ironic in the light of the discourse around youth 'voice' (Jones, 2009)). The implicit – and at times explicit – expectations in neo-liberal regimes are that young people themselves take responsibility for shaping their lives and mobilising resources from their families and elsewhere to move forward. It is not surprising that young people who have internalised such expectations (Henderson et al., 2007) express greater awareness of the agency that they exercise than the constraints and social conditions that limit their choices and actions (Furlong and Cartmel, 2007; MacDonald et al., 2011).

It is evident that consumerist orientations to education and elsewhere have become normalised and promoted over collective efforts to ensure that opportunities and pathways are opened up and made accessible. For several decades individual young people, through their decisions and the exercise of prudential choice, have also been held responsible for avoidance of negative risks (Kemshall, 2009). The net result is that 'many of the most vulnerable young people lack support from family and state and are subject to new risks and uncertainties' (Furlong and Cartmel, 2007, p. 70). Facing precarious work (Shildrick et al., 2012) and austerity-level public services in the decade since Furlong and Cartmel wrote, a growing constituency of young people who may previously have shown resilience have been pushed to the margins of society (Blackman and Rogers, 2017a).

Many of the youth studies cited here are based on fieldwork that took place before the millennium, the concern of this chapter being to explore what helps and hinders young people's development and quest for positive identity. That this is an active process is most powerfully illustrated in *Inventing Adulthoods* (Henderson et al., 2007), a longitudinal study which set out to 'gain insight into the relationship between the unique life (biography), the context in which it is located (structure) and the processes that it is part of (e.g. history, social mobility, intergenerational transfers)' (p. 13).

At that time, it was unusual in youth studies to focus on individual biographies (Thomson et al., 2004) but the attempt to look at 'whole lives' is a feature of each of the three main studies outlined here. The *Inventing*

Adulthoods approach was theoretically underpinned by Giddens's (1991) idea of the 'reflexive project of self', cleverly combined with Bourdieu's (1986) concepts of capital (and to a lesser extent Putnam's (2000) bonding and bridging capital) to help uncover the differential levels of resources from family, school and community that young participants could access for their 'identity-work' and the construction of coherent self-narratives.

The research team started with a large cohort of young people across five sites in the UK which had contrasting social and economic characteristics. Their big achievement, though, was following a sub-group of 70 who took part in periodic interviews across their teenage years. The data is consequently diverse and rich and particularly underlines the salience of time and place to life trajectories. The young people involved demonstrated again and again how they were approaching adulthood in a relatively piecemeal way and that they had to work to achieve a sense of adult identity in the absence of conventional markers of adulthood. The research team examined the diversity of life paths created by participants and the wide spectrum of work, education, leisure and other experiences that they used to build a secure sense of self and move towards the transition to adulthood. These allowed young people to develop competence – the sense of mastery or the pleasure of doing something well – and, like Barry (2006), they note how impactful it is when competence is acknowledged and given legitimacy:

As we sought to understand how young people invent adulthood over time, we realised that they felt adult in different ways and different contexts and thinking of themselves as adult was related to their feelings of *competence*, and the *recognition* they received for that competence. (2007, p. 29, emphasis in original)

The insight that follows from this is that young people are motivated to invest in areas of life where they receive recognition for their capabilities (Thomson, et al., 2004), and are unwilling to engage where they feel either incompetent or where their competence goes unrecognised. It also connects to understandings of adulthood as relational, realised in self-perception and the

reactions of others, rather than a destination to be reached (Woodman and Wyn, 2015).

Being recognised as possessing capital is similarly important to young people as they seek adult status, and this is intimately associated with mobility. Physical and geographical mobility tend to contribute to social mobility and ease of movement is a hallmark of the 'cosmopolitan' orientation associated with the middle classes (Thomson and Taylor, 2005). Young people in the 'leafy suburb' were more likely to have the resources to gain a driving licence and a private car, for example, which then opened wider opportunities for part time work, study and social life (Henderson et al., 2007). In contrast, those in the 'inner city' site had more access to public transport while those in the 'isolated rural area' tended to have neither. Physical space and community may thus provide quite different (and different levels of) resources for young people and may represent possibilities for growth or, conversely, reasons to leave (Jamieson, 2000).

Location may carry powerful cultural implications too. In *Inventing Adulthoods* this was most telling in the Northern Ireland site where young people's movements were determined by sectarian boundaries and a complex understanding of the rules of living in divided communities – the same sort of 'feel for the game' that reverberates through Anna Burns' (2018) *Milkman*. However, the fieldwork was conducted at a slightly later point than the novel in the lead up to the Good Friday Agreement where young people from different religions were starting to meet in the neutral space of city centre venues. This illustrates the significance of historical moment and location for the life experiences of young people and the opportunities available to them in the immediate future as well as those they can envisage further ahead. In the latter case, the history of migration provided many of the young people in Northern Ireland with knowledge of, and access to, parts of mainland Britain – a further resource and perhaps for some an escape route (Henderson et al., 2007).

There were no comparable means of escape from 'East Kelby' for the young people in *Disconnected Youth?* MacDonald and Marsh's (2005) study of

growing up in Teesside. Again, the combination of time and place proved critical: the participants in this and connected research (Webster, 2004) were transitioning to adulthood in a context where the plentiful jobs previously available in the chemical and steel industries were no longer on offer and had been replaced, if at all, by forms of 'poor work' – primarily service sector jobs, casualised and insecure. The de-industrialisation of Teesside in the 1980s devastated its communities and left a ready market for drugs and sex work in its wake (MacDonald and Marsh, 2005). Relatedly, and making a critical distinction between biological generation and 'sociological' generation, MacDonald et al. (2011) note that

The Teesside cohort faced very particular conjunctions and predicaments of marginalisation and disrupted transitions to work and family formations, such that it is difficult to separate individual life and contemporary crises in historical development because the two help define each other. (p. 152)

One of the pertinent factors around the millennium was the designation of Teesside as socially excluded which meant that it 'was dealt the full house of area regeneration programmes' (MacDonald and Marsh, 2002, p. 28) available under New Labour. Consequently, the experiences of young people in 'East Kelby' were structured more significantly by schemes such as New Deal for Communities, Sure Start and New Deal for Young People than by substantial paid employment. Ironically, fieldwork from this period suggested that participants were not necessarily excluded from their communities, but that many had a strong sense of belonging. Supportive local networks were valuable in providing 'bonding capital' and practical help that ameliorated the worst consequences of poverty and marginalisation (Webster et al., 2004). However, similar to the position of young people in the more disadvantaged sites in *Inventing Adulthoods* (Henderson et al., 2007), this was double-edged in constraining activities and movements that might threaten precious social capital and group membership (MacDonald and Marsh, 2005). Moreover, young people were conspicuously lacking in forms of bridging and linking capital that would give them the confidence and the contacts to help them pursue education or jobs outside East Kelby if they had cultivated wider

ambitions. The authors conclude that the reflexivity encouraged in youth policy is not always a positive experience for young people, and particularly so where they are poorly equipped to plan purposefully ahead and suffer the emotional and psychic impacts of marginalisation (MacDonald and Marsh, 2005).

One of the striking features of the Teesside Studies is the suggestion that young people have multiple 'careers' or movement in different aspects of life that contribute to an individual biography: school to work; family; housing; criminal; drug-use; and leisure. MacDonald and Marsh (2005) argue that it is only by looking at the totality of these that we can gain an understanding of 'life as it is lived' (and Henderson et al. (2007) would no doubt concur). Focusing in detail on 'leisure careers', MacDonald and Shildrick (2007) describe the majority of their participants moving from the street-based leisure typical in adolescence to mainstream commercial venues when they became old enough and had the money to socialise in the town centre. A minority, however, were unable to make this transition and continued their commitment to 'street corner society' against an earlier background of frequent absences from school and involvement in crime (MacDonald and Marsh, 2005; MacDonald, 2006). Although only a small number 'crossed the Rubicon' (MacDonald and Marsh, 2002) into serious drug use, these young men described 'corkscrew heroin careers' (MacDonald et al., 2011) that caused their social worlds and future prospects dramatically to collapse. While mixing with other drug using peers perhaps provided them with bonding capital and networks of sorts, they must have also felt the detrimental impact of

allegiances and associations [that] reinforced transition pathways, narrative possibilities and social identities, progressively 'knifing off' limited legitimate social and economic opportunities and non-criminal identities. (p. 141).

What both of these studies illustrate is that there are broad structural conditions that young people in the same location at the same time have in common but respond to in different ways as a result of immediate school and

family experiences and also the events – or ‘critical moments’ (Thomson et al., 2002) – in their individual lives. Some face challenges that are overwhelming and drugs, mental ill-health and crime may take them down routes that repeatedly do damage to their identities and internal narratives of self. However, young people are not just passive recipients of experiences: their own characters, capabilities and choices matter too. As the researchers in *Inventing Adulthoods* (Henderson et al., 2007) comment,

Although they operate within highly constrained structures of opportunity, the contrasting biographies within and between localities suggest that personal agency and parental support are central resources in negotiating outcomes and chances. (p. 99)

The resources that young people have available and accessible to them are critical, and there is huge variation in the resilience they each have personally and in their environment, as well as their own capacities for resourcefulness. The question of resources and the ways that young people use them are explored in a third longitudinal study of transitions introduced in the next section.

Resources and resourcefulness

Ani Wierenga’s (2009) study, *Young People Making A Life*, was based in a small rural community of fewer than 1000 people on the southern tip of Tasmania. She had worked in this community for several years before embarking on ethnographic research in which she followed a cohort of 32 young people over their teenage years. She explored the question that had troubled her previously as a worker: “*Why and how are these young people so differently ‘making a life’? I am defining ‘making a life’ in terms of livelihood, meaning and social connectedness.*” (2009, p. 2, emphasis in original)

Echoing the insights into the significance of time and place in the previous two studies discussed, the rural nature of this community was central to this

research, as was its relative isolation. This gave Wierenga the opportunity to consider young people's strategies and use of agency in a very specific context, both in terms of the geographical location with its particular social, cultural and economic features, and in relation to the wider changes associated with modernity. This generation of young people were coping with local resources and practices at the same time as experiencing the impacts of global social transformations. She intended to shed light on both and to consider what they mean for young people's narratives of self. For her, storying is a key social practice, but one that, for each individual, is shaped by the resources and relationships at hand:

Among the young people in this project, a sense of 'place' or a sense of the 'known world' very strongly underpins stories of past, and stories of possibilities. Within respondents' stories, real-world spaces are actually functioning as boundaries on their imaginations. The known world sets the parameters of where the individual realistically sees themselves travelling. (2009, p. 51, emphasis in original)

Furthermore, her description of the narratives she elicited resonates with Emirbayer and Mische's (1998) notion of agency of having past, present and future dimensions, not least in the agentic selection of items to include:

These young people are constructing their stories by using the cultural resources (ideas, meanings, practices) already on offer. They glean and appropriate this cultural material from others (family, peers, school, community, mass media) but are piecing it together idiosyncratically. Every idea encountered and assimilated in history (or herstory) becomes a resource for imagination about futures. In this way, future plans are autobiographical. To ask about the future is to hear about the past. (2009, p. 51)

One key dilemma for Wierenga's participants was whether to stay in Myrtle Vale or leave to pursue wider opportunities becoming available in Hobart, the capital of Tasmania, or further afield. The social and cultural capital that

young people possessed affected how they approached this dilemma and the way in which they talked about their future visions. Wierenga thus developed and used as a framework for her analysis, a typology of young people's storytelling practices based on the extent to which they related to local or to global contexts and whether they are clear or unclear.

Stories of identity

		Clear	Unclear
<i>Focus</i>	<i>Global</i>	Exploring	Wandering
	<i>Local</i>	Settling	Retreating

Fig 1: Four ideal types of cultural orientation. Adapted from Wierenga (2009, p. 56)

Wierenga (2009) found notable patterns in terms of class and gender, with almost all the middle class girls falling into the group identified as 'exploring', characterised by wider networks and greater capacity for reflexivity. The 'settling' group were more typically male and concerned with forging identity through activity and traditional masculine occupations rooted in the local area. These young people faced challenges as globalisation and social change were making agriculture, logging and other work less available as a route to adulthood. In contrast, young people who are 'wandering' had wider visions connected to the outside world but without real strategies and realistic plans in place to achieve their dreams. The working class young women who were 'retreating' seemed fragile and unable to trust: significantly several opted out of later parts of the study.

Wierenga (2009) recognises that 'stories are political and involve power' (p. 67), arguing that storytelling is integral to how young people negotiate change, including the ways that they engage with organisations such as

schools, and access resources. She found young people who had difficulty creating narratives, and she notes that developing personal narratives was simply less important than survival for some ('it's not core business') and refers to crisis points at which some of her young people literally 'lost the plot'. She also considers those young women who left the study and comments that 'the ways in which young people do not talk to us can be as informative as the ways in which they do' (2009, p. 213), in this case perhaps communicating their feelings of alienation and powerlessness. Clearly young people grow up in circumstances that may enable narrative development to greater or lesser degrees (McAdams, 1993; McAdams and McLean, 2013), particularly the types of 'thick' story-telling that is encouraged through long-term relationships of trust.

Wierenga (2009) acknowledges that young people do not fit neatly into fixed social categories and that circumstances and events mean that lives do not necessarily take predictable courses: some young people whose inclination was to settle nevertheless made choices to stay on in education to enhance their prospects in the contemporary labour market, necessitating travel out of Myrtle Vale. Nevertheless, her description of the typical patterns for young people is insightful and, through her analysis, she extends this to consider the differences in how young people took what 'resources-in-hand' they had to help build their futures, the variety and sources of information that they used and the negotiating practices they developed.

Turning attention to the question of resources, it is relevant to note that storying and the opportunity to engage in storying self through the research interviews was an important resource in itself for her participants. Wierenga (2009) broadly categorises resources into

- Practical
- Concerned with meaning and symbol
- Embodied in habit and practice

The third category may include habits and practices around creating stories and reflection that were evident through some of the contact with family in this research. Although young people may have different types and varying

quantities of 'resources-at-hand', Wierenga (2009) suggests that in her study there were commonalities in that they became accessible to young people through 'relationships of trust'. Young people benefit from adults acting as coach, mentor, interpreter, translator, and find these relationships often occurring naturally within families and communities. However, this is not inevitably so and there are also differences in what adults can offer in their helping roles. Here Wierenga particularly points to the pain felt by working class families who were conscious that their local knowledge, contacts and bonds were less valuable to young people establishing themselves in the contemporary world would have been in the past (in contrast to families who were more 'cosmopolitan' in their outlook and practices).

In thinking about trusted relationships important to young people, Wierenga (2009) is careful to stress that these are not just person to person, but may be relationships with groups, institutions or systems. What matters are the relationships that help make a resource seem *relevant* to the young person and what she terms 'resource flows', that is, the channels through which resources of all types are made available as *meaningful possibilities*. Where social and family networks are not enough, professionals or volunteers may be a vital link in 'resource-flows', enabling young people to access the resources and social capital that they need. Significantly, Wierenga (2009) notes that 'resources are re-sources: their use involves re-visiting, remembering, re-applying, or re-turning to the things that trusted sources or allies have made available' (p. 148). These trusted sources or allies may provide role models who show that a particular activity or occupation is accessible for 'someone like me', connections through which other places become 'knowable', and exposure to new situations and experiences as well as opportunities for young people to try things out so that there is a 'been there, can do it again' attitude to moving further (Robinson, 2019).

Because resources are not equally available and accessible to all young people, she is able to point to the different sources of resources that young people used, with 'exploring' young people having the greatest diversity of sources, distant as well as close to hand. 'Settling' young people had more locally based resources in comparison, whereas 'wandering' and 'retreating'

young people had altogether fewer and ‘thinner’ types of resources to rely upon. There were also differences according to class and gender:

The things that women share with each other and access from each other are usually quite different to the resources that Myrtle Vale’s young men can access: More profoundly, though, the different resource flows explored in these chapters (especially within families) are the embodiment of class, that is, the different things that people do with resources and relationships. (2009, p. 173)

These ideas of resources and specifically ‘resources-in-hand’ as well as ‘relationships of trust’ are powerful when aligned with the concepts of capital and agency, as they are a way of showing in practical terms the variety of assets that young people have and the strategies they might employ to accrue more or to expend them to advantage.

Education and social distinction

While Wierenga’s (2009) *Young People Making A Life* evolved from an initial small-scale study, McLeod and Yates’ (2006) *12-18 Project* had a very different genesis, setting out to track a cohort of young people through their careers in four different schools in Australia. Rather than taking a grounded approach to theory, they began with a broadly feminist orientation to their methodology and the key questions of gender, social change and inequality that they wanted to explore. Their approach drew on a range of social theories about the modern period, without searching for any one universal explanation of the patterns in the attitudes and the social practices that they found. At different points their analysis therefore touches critically on concepts of individualisation, risk, de-traditionalisation (Beck, 1992; Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2002)) the making of personal biographies and ‘reflexive projects of self’ (Giddens, 1991), all relevant to this thesis. At other points they utilise concepts of capital, particularly cultural capital, as well as *habitus* and *field* from Bourdieu (1977, 1986, 1990). They also make use of Foucault’s (1988) ‘technology of the self’ and explore the developing

tendency for continual scrutiny through Nikolas Rose's (1989; 1996) ideas about the 'culture of the self' and the consequent increased possibilities for the self-regulation of neo-liberal subjects.

In contrast to the multiple aspects of young lives in the three studies already discussed, McLeod and Yates were interested in educational contexts specifically and young people's experiences of school. They adopted a longitudinal methodology as a way of exploring 'biographies in interaction with schooling' (2006, p. 16) across four different establishments, returning to the cohort of 26 at six monthly intervals throughout their time at secondary school. The schools differed in type, in the population they served and in their individual *habitus*, although it was clear that what was communicated through social practices often differed from what was overtly articulated about the school's aims and ethos.

The four schools were

- City Academy – elite private school in the state capital;
- Suburban High – inclusive and socially diverse school again located in the state capital – described as a 'therapeutic school';
- Regional Tech – well equipped vocationally orientated school based in a regional city serving a less affluent population; and
- Regional High – more aspiring school in the same regional city, described as an 'enterprise school' because of its focus on young people creating their own futures and relevant portfolios of experience.

The repeat nature of the interviews allowed the researchers to return to core questions such as 'how would you describe yourself?'. They were thus able to pay attention to the embodied and emotional aspects of developing subjectivities, which they saw as more than the product of subject positions and roles such as son/daughter or achieving student. It also allowed for specific concerns to be raised, most interestingly in one set of interviews in relation to race, ethnicity and political awareness (which has specific resonance in the Australian context). They found, unsurprisingly, that young people reflected the discourses that they heard in their schools and families,

most evidently in the easy liberality found in City Academy. However, whilst all the young people disavowed racism, 'them and us' binaries were still evident in their thinking and identifications. Intriguingly, though, the groups that fell into the 'them' and 'us' categories tended to differ, particularly in relation to indigenous communities and recent immigrants from parts of Asia. Views depended in part on the young person's own ethnic background, but also very significantly according to school.

Patterns were also apparent in young people's responses to questions about unemployment although these were generally much less sophisticated than the responses about race. McLeod and Yates therefore reflect upon the meaning of class and class identifications for contemporary young people. Their participants from Regional High and City Academy, both of which valorised individual 'projects of self' and enterprise, tended to frame the unemployed as lacking and/or unmotivated. In contrast, students from Suburban High were more willing to identify social and structural causes. The authors suggest, nonetheless, that class subjectivity is still active in young people's awareness of social differentiations and assessment of how well their own forms of social and cultural capital match the norms for their schools (2006), an insight certainly relevant to a diverse and highly stratified UK context (see Stahl, 2012).

The messages about gender are also of note and resonate with Wierenga's (2009) and Henderson et al.'s (2007) findings. First, this data suggests that the young women were very much influenced by their mothers who were of a generation of women who were moving or who had moved out of domesticity into the workplace. Many of the young women talked in their interviews about their mothers re-entering study or changing occupation during the lifetime of the research. For the young women who were less socially advantaged, this seemed to have encouraged dreams and plans as they were building their own strategies for independence.

Second, as young women become more oriented towards work as well as family, in McLeod and Yates' view their dilemmas about autonomy versus connection are not straightforward. Of course, young men may also be torn

by the same dilemma but for them choices in favour of autonomy are still more culturally normative (McLeod, 2002). The quest for autonomy may mean that young women put themselves under considerable pressure and self-scrutiny as they strive to achieve, adopting a mode of being that benefits them in negotiating their working lives but potentially undermines confidence and well-being (2006) as they experience the 'norm of autonomy' to be in tension with the on-going sense of obligation to others (McLeod, 2002).

Third, what follows from this is the sense that social change has impinged upon young women more than young men and that they have worked harder to fit the image of the 'new worker' needed for these 'New Times'. This is reflected both in the assumptions underpinning education policy and in the interview data:

While masculinity was regarded as innate and as not influenced by social norms and changes, femininity and girls were seen as open to change and needing to undergo some reshaping as we enter a different social and economic period. They carried the responsibility of feminist and social change. It was girls' futures, their decisions, their choices that were subject to more scrutiny, and greater expectations for change. (2006, p. 196)

Finally, the authors note that vocational training is officially promoted as a route to 'flexible lifelong learning' just as much as academic routes but that it fails to live up to these aspirations:

The contrast between the interviews as well as the pathways of the girls at City Academy and the boys at Regional Tech points to the irony that a powerful discourse in relation to those in non-university-based jobs calls up as desired attributes what might be seen as gender-class dispositions rather than teachable orientations. (2006, p. 227)

Social change – and changes specifically in relation to gender – are experienced unevenly, testing the resources of young men trying to hold on to traditional forms of masculinity associated with work and locality and

reinforcing class-based inequalities in this Australian sample just as in the *Disconnected Youth?* research (MacDonald and Marsh, 2005). This analysis suggests that young women (especially those from the middle classes) are better equipped to be adaptable and able to build 'portfolios' of experience although their relative success in new labour markets is shown to be double-edged (McLeod and Yates, 2006).

Gendered subjectivities

The scale and impact of change in gender roles and expectations has not slowed since the 1990s when Wierenga (2009) and McLeod and Yates (2006) conducted their fieldwork. Arguably, the reflexivity noted in that research has become normalised as "a habit of gender in late modernity" (Adkins, 2003, p. 192), absorbed into the generalised *habitus*. For Adkins (2003), this type of reflexivity does not involve the critical deconstruction of gender rules, norms and power relations and the refashioning of gendered behaviours suggested by liberal thinkers, but something closer to Bourdieu's ideas of social practice that is both situated and embedded in the habits of the everyday world. In this view, changes are wrought from the disjunction between *habitus* and *field* caused by the recasting of the labour market and the boundaries of public and private persona as women increasingly balance home and work lives.

The crucial point from this perspective is that the pace of structural change – that is, in objective conditions – has outstripped subjective change in dispositions and habits. This is evident in women still bearing the burden of emotional responsibilities despite working and, indeed, in the ways that they engage in the workplace (McNay, 1999). Feminists inevitably take different positions on the extent to which (or even whether) gender has undergone transformation. Nonetheless McNay (1999), Adkins (2003) and McLeod (2005) all suggest that the concept of *habitus* in interaction with developing social fields helps explain the uneven patterns of detraditionalization and the re-working of gender and gender inequalities. Norms persist at least in part because they are deeply embedded in history. As gender is intrinsically

embodied, perhaps also because many gender practices carry potential for physical and sexual capital (Atkinson, 2016) which may be especially appealing for young people.

That is not to say that norms are entirely and ineluctably self-perpetuating because that is patently not the case. However, Coffey (2013) in her exploration of the 'body work' that young adults do, talks of

the body [as] a 'key site where gender divisions are constructed and played out' (Crossley, 2006, p.16), and through body work practices gender may be reiterated, reconstructed, and constituted. (p. 7)

To add complexity, there are many permutations of what it is to be male or female as gender intersects with race, sexual orientation, class position, disability and so on. Young people's 'body-work' also reflects the differences in time, money and cultural resource that they can use in display and self-presentation as much as it does their physical capacities and characteristics. Coffey (2013) found that young men as well as young women are now concerned with appearance as they described their 'body work practices' – a wide variety of choices and investments in exercise, diet, tattoos, cosmetic surgery and the like. These practices were shaped by images of 'ideal' feminine and masculine bodies but not uncritically so: some participants expressed conflicted feelings and relations to dominant discourses about gender that affected how they experienced their own bodies and, Coffey (2013) argues, the way that they produce gender.

Gender is performative (Butler 1990) rather than being a fixed property, which means that masculinities and femininities in all their different forms are being constantly constructed through powerful identifications and 'gender practices' (Nayak and Kehily, 2013). Many of these exist within the expanding zones of leisure and consumption in neo-liberal regimes:

Hyper-femininity is everywhere – to be lived and worn, produced and consumed. The visibility of young women and the reconfigured presence of the feminine as loud and 'out there' can be read as an attempt to bring the invisible labour of gender into public view. The

work of 'doing girl' is no longer hidden in the domestic or the confines of the bedroom. (p. 196)

Some young women, such as the 'geeks' in Currie et al.'s (2006) research in Vancouver, may position themselves against dominant and overt symbols of 'emphasised femininity'. Others may take a more political, socially aware view of sexualisation, but often the celebration of new freedoms is one of individualism, self-expression and 'girl power' that research (Nayak and Kehily, 2013; Currie, 2013) suggests may be antithetical to feminism and emancipatory discourses. Nayak and Kehily (2013) therefore argue, with reference to the class-based analysis of McRobbie (2002; 2004), that the contemporary world re-emphasises the body as essential to the making of gender and that normative femininities have been reshaped but still retain their hold. The diversity in ways of 'doing girl' reflects class as well as gender divisions, as illustrated by the push towards self-realisation through educational achievement and career trajectories for middle class girls compared to those from less advantaged backgrounds found by McLeod and Yates (2006) and Walkerdine et al. (2001), and sought by the latter through physical appearance and consumer goods (Skeggs, 1997).

Gender is produced and regulated in institutions such as schools through explicit rules that govern behaviours (Nayak and Kehily, 2013) but equally through the 'gender practices' that arise informally through the ethos or *habitus*. These define the boundaries of what is acceptable for young women and young men in that environment (McLeod and Yates, 2006) and serve to legitimate visions of future selves. Part of the dynamic here rests in the way that young people are active in resisting or subverting as well as conforming to 'official' expectations, and how they construct their own codes and alternative social orders. This insight is not new: rejection of middle class values of education and advancement was most famously described by Willis (1977) in *Learning to Labour*, where the working class young men formed solid bonds based on a counter school culture, aspirations to 'traditional' forms of male manual labour and casual misogyny. Elsewhere Lees (1986; 1993) analysed the power of the label 'slag' as a check on girls' behaviours, and Skeggs (1997) discusses the feared consequences of (loss

of) reputation for the working class women in her study and their pursuit of 'respectability'. Hey (1997) shows how young women worked out what it meant to be a girl and appropriate forms of femininity for their class position through complex interactions and negotiations with friends. Social and sexual mores may have moved on in the decades since these studies took place but the fact of young people collectively negotiating and regulating the boundaries of behaviours and their impact on social identities remains, inside and outside of school.

The strategic work of young people around relations with school and with peers is encapsulated in Shain's (2003) small study of South Asian young women at the age of 13-14 years. Their families came from various parts of the sub-continent and they were of different faiths (Islam, Hinduism and Sikhism). Shain was interested in the strategies they adopted and how they positioned themselves in relation to dominant discourses about Asian femininity. They certainly did not conform to widespread assumptions of passivity, but their patterns of resistance and relations to the cultural spaces they inhabited differed. Shain (2003) thus identified four groups:

- The 'gang girls' who practised what Shain refers to as 'resistance through culture', positively asserted their Asian identities and were relatively alienated from school. They were the most likely to break school rules and defined many of their experiences there with reference to racism, adopting a 'them and us' attitude to teachers and white pupils;
- The 'survivors' ostensibly conformed to a compliant stereotype but were generally pro-school and were pursuing a long term strategy of academic success to gain future opportunities;
- The 'rebels' tended to be critical of the values of their community and inequalities in gender relations, associating themselves positively with the school and the white teachers and expressing confidence about their goals in education;
- The 'faith girls' were also academically ambitious and had good relations with the school but were more concerned to defend their

religion and to build a positive identity through their religious cultures, reworked for the English context.

The differences between these groups played out in what they marked out about their identities, for example, in dress and use of home languages at school. The 'rebels' were most likely to adopt western clothes but, contrary to what their name implies, often with the assent of parents. They also socialised more freely, whereas the 'gang girls' were stricter in terms of their views of the appropriate gender practices for a 'proper Asian girl' and disapproved of mixing with boys, especially white boys (Shain, 2003).

At pilot stage Shain (2003) had encountered a fifth strategy that she termed 'resistance against culture' but this was not evident in the main study where all groups affirmed the importance of their religion. The 'rebels', however, were actively negotiating around their religion, being more selective in the practices they adopted and possibly starting to engage in the 'decoupling of faith from cultural beliefs and practices' found elsewhere in South Asian young adult women (Sanghera and Thapar-Björkert, 2017, p. 94). Their closer allegiance to school and to the dominant white culture there meant they were accepted. The assiduousness of the 'faith girls' and 'survivors' and the way they conformed to 'stereotypes of quiet, meek Asian girls' (Shain, 2003, p. 124) also ensured they were viewed positively.

The research in this area is sparse but it is relevant to note indicators of strong pressure in schools to produce a 'model Muslim female student' (Mirza and Meetoo, 2013). Facing expectations from school and from family, it is perhaps unsurprising that young women in Ramji's (2007) study

faced a difficult negotiation: by standing up for their rights as women, they could appear to be disloyal to their religious community. The strategy of redefining perceptions of good Islamic practice to secure themselves greater cultural capital as Muslim women seemed to be an effective way of overcoming this. (p. 1185)

Ramji goes on to suggest that 'Islamic cultural capital' may operate differently for young women and young men. The former can secure greater freedoms through the trust that they gain from religiosity and modesty,

‘responding to the demands of family and community through collaboration, acquiescence, co-option and subversion’ (p. 1185). This strategy may pay off in educational contexts too. In contrast, for Asian young men who were working class, religious cultural capital was more focused on maintaining position within their community and fulfilling the role of provider than achieving social mobility (Ramji, 2007).

Friends and peers

Social identity, for Jenkins (2014) is intrinsically bound up with processes of identification and the dialectic between sameness and difference. This is evident in how groups of young people respond to their ascribed identities within schools – as achievers or in the case of the ‘gang girls’ as troublesome – and in the various ways that the young women identified with their religion and culture (Shain, 2003). Friendships are also critical to young people’s self-definitions. The ‘gang girls’ were tightly bonded and shored up their identity with antagonism to white pupils and displays of ethnic solidarity. The other groups, notably the ‘rebels’, courted friendships with young people of other ethnicities. The strength and diversity of these relationships proved an effective buffer against the racist ‘micro-aggressions’ and ‘misrecognition’ frequently experienced by BAME young people (Arshad et al., 2017).

Young people are keenly aware of assumptions being made on the basis of skin colour rather than the ethnicities, nationalities and religions that make up their identities. Insightful research from Scotland shows how minority ethnic young people can be playful and can use this positively in their inter-actions. For example,

“...Most people actually do [think I am a Muslim]. Like, and our RE teacher once thought I was a Muslim because of my skin colour. Then, yeah, and when I first came to this school some of my friends now were shocked that I was a Catholic. They thought I was a Muslim as well”

(Donald, Indian, male, Greater Glasgow in Arshad et al., 2017, p. 5)

“I would use Scottish Muslim on my Instagram actually....yeah, I would say I am proud to be Scottish and Muslim at the same time. So, if I go to England, I’m automatically the minority and it does not matter if I’m Muslim or not, I’m still Scottish. So, I think being Scottish and Muslim is quite unique and plus I’m Indian and Pakistani as well so I’m a Scottish Muslim and Indian and Pakistani”

(Amber, Indian/Pakistani, female, rural Scotland in Arshad et al., 2017, p. 8)

Young people may become highly skilled in cultural negotiation and presentation, highlighting aspects of identity according to the place or social context they are in (and whether establishing sameness and connection is more advantageous than individuality and difference). This, however, is quite sophisticated and requires a relatively secure sense of self that research with young adults of Caribbean background (Reynolds, 2007) suggests may come initially through the identification, taken-for-granted understandings and bonding social capital gained from same-ethnicity friendships. While this finding may not transfer across different ethnic groups, it does resonate with Jenkins’ (2014) understanding of shared history and collective experience as fundamental to ethnic identity and the importance of group identifications. In this study, inter-ethnic friendships were characterised by looser connections and possibilities for bridging capital (Putnam, 2000), representing a different type of resource that young people tended to develop at the point where they were able to socialise away from parental control (Reynolds, 2007).

Family and kinship networks continue to offer resources but, as implied above, most young people become more purposeful during adolescence in seeking and exploiting newly available resources from their friendship and peer groups. Investing in relationships and collective activities allows them to create spaces where they are able to practise skills or perhaps experiment with leadership and other roles not available in the family context (Coleman, J., 2011). Close friendships also allow young people to develop intimacy and trusting relations that help foster well-being and positive sense of self. Not

that this necessarily happens smoothly and without trouble. The accounts of girls' friendships in Lees (1986, 1993) and Hey (1997) illuminate the intensity of emotions and the risks involved for girls as 'important and significant others' to each other. This may be exacerbated by the ubiquity of social media nowadays which means that young people may have little respite from communications, even in what was previously the private space of a bedroom (Lincoln, 2012). Nevertheless, young people learn and build their resilience through managing friendships and all the areas of conflict and contestation involved.

Groups for young people represent a source of collective power, attractive when they are not yet able to access prestige and social capital because of their ambiguous status as citizens (Barry, 2006; Henderson et al., 2007). Young people's lack of political voice and influence in society motivates them to come together to maximise their personal and social empowerment (Ungar, 2004). The social and cultural capital that young people gain in groups is neatly illustrated by Hollingworth (2015) in her portrayal of white middle class 'Smokers' compared to the predominantly black working class 'Football Crowd'. The latter tended to gain their 'subcultural capital' through verbal and physical performance with acceptance into the group being as contingent on humour and sociability as sporting prowess. The 'Smokers' were also a distinct set who gained kudos from a degree of rebelliousness and reputation for partying, that combined with approval for academic achievement in school meant that they had cultural capital that marked out their class, as well as their particular mode of masculinity. Hollingworth (2015) sees this as reflected in their tastes and embodied aesthetics, such that

'the subcultural style of the Smokers is read and tacitly understood by others as a classed style, associated with elite and privileged cultural practices and tastes, but with an urban inflexion that has currency in the field' (p. 1250)

Elsewhere, Hamilton and Deegan (2019) uncover the practices and strategic friendship choices that young women make, the effect of which similarly

perpetuates class differentials. The middle class young women had more diverse social networks and made distinctions between 'real friends' and 'contingency friends' – those who were helpful, for example, in supporting academic achievement.

Not all young people have that degree of advantage and ability to make social choices. At a practical level, many simply value acceptance and 'street cred' within a group which makes them feel safer and provides 'back-up' when needed on the streets (France et al., 2012). From an adult perspective, however, groups of young people in public space are often viewed with suspicion and seen as a threat to moral order (Hopkins, 2010). Sadly, policy has consistently associated peer groups with poor attitudes and misbehaviour (France et al., 2012) and has failed to distinguish clearly between groups and gangs (Pitts, 2008). The reality of peer relations is much more complex than the negatively inflected discourse suggests. As already shown in the research discussed here, peer influences are not uni-directional given that young people when they are together are engaged in active and interactional processes. Moreover, as Ungar (2004) argues, peer groups which are problematic or anti-social can still provide young people with psychological and social 'goods' and opportunities to learn. Young people enjoy social time with other young people and, although some of the activities they engage in may be 'risky', other things they do whilst 'hanging out' may bring positive benefits from togetherness and shared experience (Bottrell et al., 2010).

Undoubtedly young people stand to gain more long term from a variety of friendships and peer networks that provide 'bridging capital' bringing contacts, experiences and forms of knowledge that broaden opportunities and horizons (Boeck, 2009). However, the networks that young people can build are dependent on where they are physically and socially located. Restricted finances and limited mobility force some young people to rely on the resources and the cultural repertoires of the communities that they can access (Henderson et al., 2007). Those with less secure homes and family relationships to insulate against them negative aspects in the environment may find themselves thrown into street life of necessity rather than choice.

Here, from a young person's perspective, relationships with friends and peers are vital for learning how to 'get by' and have value because

Peer groups provide more than opportunities to experience the illicit: they are also sites of informal learning.....that are important to young people's competence and coping with the everyday problems that they face.(France et al., 2012, p. 85)

What young people on the street encounter is compellingly sketched out in qualitative data from the large cohort study, the *Edinburgh Study of Youth Transitions and Crime*. Focusing on a small sample of young people involved in offending behaviours, McAra and McVie (2012) explore the 'rules of engagement' and the strict codes of behaviour 'policed' and reproduced by young people in their street cultures. In interview, these young people drew a fine line between acceptable and unacceptable levels of aggression and offending which were closely related to gendered roles and identities:

Young people had to gauge their behaviour carefully. For example, aggressive behaviour amongst girls might increase their popularity with girls, but it might make a girl unpopular (and, therefore, undesirable, in the eyes of boys).....Boys also needed to ensure that they took on the "right" people (neither too tough nor too soft) so they were involved in just enough violence to keep their names in the headlines, but not so much it would lead to them being shunned by others. (p. 366)

Transgressive behaviours can enhance identity, at least in the short term, and provide young people with activities where they feel competent and bonded with a group. Stephen and Squires (2003), for example, described the young 'joyriders' in their research as seeking to making sense of the liminal status they endured in the absence of the paid employment that for them signified independence and conventional male adulthood. Stealing and driving cars provided a shared experience that fell somewhere between leisure and quasi-employment, giving their lives excitement and purpose.

The dilemma for such young people is the point at which these sorts of activities, rather than promoting inclusion and resilience, result in exclusion from peer groups. In the many complex interactions involved in street life, it is inevitable that some will fail to negotiate what is needed for acceptance and so breach informal rules. The *Edinburgh Study* data (McAra and McVie, 2012) suggests that young people who fall foul of their peers in this way are often the most vulnerable and challenging (and arguably the most in need of positive peer relationships). They also tend to be male, whereas something different happens for young women (Barry 2006) who attract official attention earlier for being 'at risk' as well as for offensive behaviour (Brown, 2015). Experiencing regulation by the formal systems of schooling and police is one thing but censure from peers may have other resounding effects on membership of groups and feelings of belonging or rejection, as well as relationships with the other sex.

In summary

This chapter has taken a selection of work from the youth studies field to explore the experiences of young people in transition. Four significant studies, three with attention to young people's biographies as they developed, provide insights across key periods of growth and development and 'critical moments' in young people's lives. Since the millennium, contributors to disciplinary debates have noted the separate strands of subcultural and transitions research in youth studies and have sought, in different ways, to create theoretical approaches that synthesise the two whilst also recognising the particular social features of an increasingly technological and globalised twenty-first century. In theoretical terms, youth studies is contested terrain (see for example, Furlong et al., 2011; France and Roberts, 2015; France and Threadgold, 2016; Johansson, 2016; Threadgold, 2019). In empirical terms, as evidenced by the longitudinal research featured in this chapter, the divisions are less stark. Indeed, the prime author of *Disconnected Youth?* (MacDonald and Marsh, 2005) has at different times mounted defences of transition (MacDonald et al., 2001) and

later versions of subcultural research (Shildrick and MacDonald, 2006). That study explicitly addresses the economic, environmental and social situation of young people growing up on Teesside at that specific historical moment, so this is a long way from the preoccupations of early subculturalists with 'spectacular' responses to oppression and adversity. Woodman and Wyn (2015) laud the benefits of biographical approaches in enabling cultural and transition perspectives to come together, so revealing the effects of agency and structure in young people's lives. Here in the four studies outlined at length, there are sincere attempts to present the complexities of young people managing their lives over time in the face of local conditions, large scale societal change and practical considerations as education, welfare and other transformations happen around them.

The reality of young people's progression towards adulthood and citizenship may never have been entirely straightforward and linear but it is now less so that it ever has been (Thomson et al., 2004; Wood, 2017). *Inventing Adulthoods* (Henderson et al., 2007) is indeed an appropriate way of framing the processes that these studies have illuminated, showing young people subject to structural conditions at micro and macro level but responding in their individual ways and moving forward in piecemeal fashion. They demonstrably do not have unlimited agency and, as France and Threadgold (2016) suggest, Bourdieu's concepts of *habitus* and *illusio* are helpful in thinking about young people's struggle for meaning and the basis on which they make decisions about their investments. Reflexivity does not necessitate objective evaluation of circumstances but subjective knowledge that allows for strategies to be enacted, whether in relation to friendships, engagement with school, resistance to family or religious convention, or specific gender practices. Such strategies are not always productive in the long term – prioritising socialising and fun over schoolwork, for example – but have a logic of sorts and lead young people in certain directions (whilst potentially closing off others).

The research discussed throughout this chapter informs the approach of this present study and the analysis of data. In particular, the sense of young people having not just one trajectory but multiple aspects of life that can be

described in terms of 'career' (MacDonald and Marsh, 2005) is valuable, not least in illustrating how some areas of life can stall while others are more fruitful, bringing opportunities for social recognition of competence and mastery of whatever kind. The ideas about resources explored in *Inventing Adulthoods* (Henderson et al., 2007) and taken further by Wierenga (2009) are also useful analytical tools, especially where allied to concepts of capital accumulation and expenditure (Bourdieu, 1986; Barry, 2006). Wierenga talks about 'resources-in-hand' and the critical role of 'resource flows' – trusted relationships and systems – in making resources available and accessible when they are not immediately within reach. Her emphasis on 'relationships of trust', whether with individuals, groups or institutions, resonates with the data presented in later chapters and is particularly relevant to the youth workers and youth organisations where fieldwork took place.

In sum, thinking about young people's developing identities and subjectivities, Amie Matthews (2016) encapsulates the sense that

They may be influenced by age, life stage or the generation they belong to. However, they are not the result of age, life stage or generation alone. Rather, the choices that young people make, the identities that they construct for themselves, the cultural practices they engage in and the groups they belong to, are also influenced by factors such as social class, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, education, religion, their neighbourhoods, leisure practices media consumption, families and peer network. (p. 84)

Whilst I am cautious about aligning too closely to the idea of 'social generation' (Woodman and Wyn, 2009), life for young people in the UK has evolved in the 2000s in significant respects, deepening some areas of inequality whilst encouraging greater freedoms in others. The questions that arise for me concern young people's subjectivities and what they can bring to their 'identity-work'.

Chapter 3 Identities in transition

This chapter does the heavy lifting, as it were, in establishing the framework for the analysis of identities and ‘identity work’ throughout the study and exploring the nature of subjectivities and their relation to social position, circumstance and historical moment. The concern is to illustrate how the concepts of *field*, *capital* and *habitus*, and later work inspired by, and seeking to refine, Bourdieu’s thinking (for example, Skeggs, 2004; Atkinson, 2016), are helpful in illuminating the fluidity of identity for young people who invest time and effort, consciously or otherwise, in establishing an internally coherent sense of self (McAdams, 1993) as well as social identity through relations with others and their place in the world.

Jenkins (2014) argues that self-concept and the actions and interactions of an embodied self with others are indivisible. On the same theme, Vignoles et al. (2011) remark that

Identities are inescapably *both* personal *and* social not only in their content, but also in the processes by which they are formed, maintained and changed over time. (p. 5, emphasis in original)

Young people in their liminal state of ‘youth’ or ‘youth-hood’ (Jones, 2009), are dealing with many aspects of identity that are ascribed, rather than self-fashioned, by virtue of their contact with education and other children’s services. Moreover, it is evident from the previous chapters that schools, communities and neighbourhoods are by no means different but equal. The character and circumstances of families vary tremendously too as do their location in social space (Bourdieu, 1998). Consequently, young people as individual agents have different types and levels of resources available and accessible to them to help negotiate and navigate towards what is understood – and recognised by self and others - as adulthood. The conceptual framework set out in this chapter develops the discussions of young people and transitions in the previous chapter, and specifically the relationships of trust (Wierenga, 2009) that young women and young men

build with key adults and the nature of peer friendship groups, particularly in relation to gender, class and ethnic identities. The end point of the chapter points to the issues of social difference and marginality explored in the analysis of data.

Exploring ‘identity work’ – what helps?

Contemporary thinking generally holds that identities are not fixed but have multiple aspects and are constantly being reworked or renegotiated. Of course, identity can be approached from many disciplinary vantage points (see Schwartz et al., 2011 for key approaches from sociology and psychology) and the associated literature is rich and complex. A few selected strands of thinking are presented here for the purposes of establishing the benefits of the two primary understandings of identity used in this study, that is, identity as constructed through narratives and through processes of social interaction and identification.

Erik Erikson’s (1959; 1968) work was fundamental to the first of these, but it also generated a separate theme in theoretical and empirical inquiry around the two key tasks he identified for late adolescents: choosing an occupation and forming a personal ideology incorporating values and beliefs (1950). Marcia (1966) thus focused on the idea of identity formation through *exploration* and *commitment*. Depending on young people’s engagement with these two dimensions, he proposed four identity statuses, describing these as *achieved*, *foreclosed*, *in moratorium* or, most problematically, *diffused*. Later refinements suggest a series of connected processes that young people may move through in linear fashion towards a ‘higher level’ of identity status (that is, achieved identity) (Kroger and Marcia, 2011; see also Schwarz, 2001). However, whilst recognising that prolonged deliberations may result in chronic uncertainty and feelings of ‘being stuck’, the surrounding literature neither addresses what motivates young people to engage in exploration and commitment nor gives sufficient attention to the wider social context that may encourage, sustain or undermine a range of motivations.

In contrast, as structural social interactionists, Burke and Stets (2009) give more attention to social context, believing that, for each individual, identity is constituted through personal meanings attached to particular roles, to membership of social groups or to a sense of being in some way unique. Here the individual is inherently reflexive, able to regard and evaluate the self as social object as well as subject. In other words, they suggest, she is able to take a view of herself and where she fits in the social world. This may then inform the actions she takes to manipulate or strategise towards – or against – specific identity outcomes. The emphasis here on the mutually constitutive nature of self and society, nevertheless, still gives primacy to the latter recognising that all humans are enmeshed in social relationships from birth (Serpe and Stryker, 2011). Moreover, each person has multiple identities – arising from family, occupation, faith and so on – that have differing degrees of salience over the course of the individual life (Burke and Stets, 2009).

The shifts in social roles and expectations experienced by young people in transition inevitably increase the potential for mismatch between their views of self and their capacities and what is recognised by others. Burke and Stets (2009) understand identity changes as a process of self-evaluation against a personal set of 'identity standards'. Simplifying somewhat, when 'reflected appraisals' from others do not meet 'identity standards' – for example, expectations of femininity – the individual must then adjust by either behaving or thinking differently to secure a closer fit between her view of self and what she understands to be the view of others. Burke and Stets (2009) do recognise emotion as either driving change or underlying resistance and other responses, pointing to feelings such as discomfort or shame caused by dissonance between self-perception and 'reflected appraisals' from elsewhere. Yet this still leaves considerable scope for deeper explorations of emotional aspects of identity and lacks a rounded sense of the individual in society and how social relations are absorbed into self-concepts.

Social identity perspectives are also diverse. Group affiliation and membership are readily recognised as critical in developing a sense of self and standing in relation to others. However, the theoretical emphasis may fall on group/collective processes and inter-relations, as in Social Identity

Theory (Spears, 2011) or take a wider view that seeks to account for an individual's social location, characteristics and experiences. In this latter vein, Côté and Levine's (2016) model of identity formation refers to three levels of ego, personal and social identities, with mediating processes or interactions between the three. This goes some way towards suggesting the complex negotiations and internal conversations inherent in developing identities. It further highlights the identity problems that might emerge as a result of discrepancies between a young person's self-definition versus other people's definition of her personal or social identities. However, the model does not sufficiently capture the intricacies of identity processes and negotiations. Nor does it fully examine how power relations might determine the ability of certain groups to confer 'master statuses' on others, or to limit opportunities to enhance the 'identity capital' they discuss.

Jenkins (1996; 2014) proposes a more unitary view of identity and its ontological aspects. For him, the crux is the constant tension between sameness and difference – that is, what connects an individual to others but also what makes that individual unique, even within a social collective. He highlights the significance of identification and makes a key distinction between nominal and virtual identifications, in effect between a label and the experiences of bearing that label, which may have symbolic as well as practical consequences. He also emphasises the embodied nature of identity and, in this regard as well as in his analysis of powers and legitimation, fits more closely with the concerns and the sociological perspectives of Bourdieu (1977; 1990; 1998) than the other theories of identity outlined.

For Jenkins (2014)

As a very basic starting point, identity is the human capacity – rooted in language – to know 'who's who' (and hence 'what's what'). This involves knowing who we are, knowing who others are, them knowing who we are, us knowing who they think we are and so on. (p. 6)

In this modern world, with greater mobility and engagement with multiple social groups, such knowledge is less certain and, consequently, stability

and ontological security may be threatened. The latter, for Giddens (1991) is connected to a feeling of biographical continuity and he further suggests that

The existential question of self-identity is bound up with the fragile nature of the biography that the individual 'supplies' about herself. A person's identity is not to be found in behaviour, nor – important though this is – the reactions of others, but in the capacity *to keep a particular narrative going*. (p. 54, emphasis in original)

Giddens' thesis, of course, does not rely on the plentiful empirical evidence of the significance and the role of narrative for different individuals at particular points in the life course. According to McAdams (2011), the narratives that we each create are fundamental to identity, being 'the internalised and evolving story of the self that a person constructs to make sense and meaning out of his or her life' (p. 99). He argues that purposeful and sustained self-narratives – what he calls 'personal myths' – are first formed during adolescence as young people are increasingly able to make sense of life experiences, to evaluate their significance and to identify connections and themes. It is an on-going project but not a wholly abstract one in the sense that

The personal fable is a very rough draft of an integrative and self-defining life story. It can be edited, rewritten, reworked and made more realistic as the young person becomes more knowledgeable about the opportunities and limitations of defining the self in his or her particular society. As we formulate more mature life stories in adulthood, we realise that our identities begin and must ultimately remain woven into a historical and social fabric. (1993, p. 80)

Compelling as McAdams' idea that '*identity is a life story*' (1993, p. 5, emphasis in original) might be, it is the body of work exploring narrative and its relation to identity that suggests its usefulness in exploring adolescent identity and 'identity work'. The next section explores this research pertaining

to young people, both in terms of developing individual life stories and of the various social uses of narrative, before returning to Jenkins (2014) and the debates around social identity.

Narratives in the construction of identity

At the outset, it must be acknowledged that the relationship between the narrative construction of self and identity is contested, with authors variously emphasising psycho-social processes, cultural repertoires and resources, or performance and social relations. Unsurprisingly, McAdams' (1993; 1996) view of narrative identity as a largely internal process sits at one end of Smith and Sparkes' (2008) suggested continuum. At the other, externalising versions see narrative identity as situated in specific social contexts and interactions. Moreover, there is diversity in narratives themselves. Humans are inescapably social beings who tell stories for a variety of purposes, some being 'small stories' about self (Bamberg, 2004; Bamberg and Georgakopoulou, 2008) and others extended biographical accounts. Life stories, in contrast to life histories rooted in fact, are generated from memories and reflections and are, therefore, by their very nature, subjective (Habermas and Bluck, 2000). The social and psychological elements of narrative identity in adolescence and the extent to which it is produced through internal processes or in response to external events and interactions, are questions that seem by no means settled. Nevertheless, although young people are agentic in their 'identity-work' in diverse ways, research suggests typical progress towards the developmental task of constructing a relatively stable, albeit not fixed, adult identity.

First, Habermas and Bluck's (2000) review of the few existing studies on the life stories of adolescents outlines the evidence of their growing capacity to bring events and experiences together to create an over-arching narrative which integrates diverse elements and displays increasing global coherence. They identify four key domains where cognitive development contributes to coherence: temporal; cultural; causal coherence; and thematic, including elements of evaluation and summary, as well as comparison across life

episodes (Habermas and Bluck, 2000). Growth in causal coherence is possibly the most significant (Bluck and Habermas, 2000) as a young person starts to employ the skills of autobiographical reasoning to explain her actions or suggest causes for events in terms of personality traits, needs or motivations that are continuous across time (Fivush et al., 2011). On occasions there is an opposing need to account for discrepancies or discontinuities. Again, the young person may associate herself with relatively stable personal qualities, but in this case to underline how a particular behaviour or event – perhaps drug use or an act of aggression - is atypical or out of character, essentially a ‘not like me’ event (Pasupathi et al., 2007, p. 105)

Second, both distance and perspective are needed to understand the past and its connection to the self (McLean, 2008) and these tend to come into play during adolescence as individuals start to identify the life events or ‘critical moments’ (Thomson et al., 2002) which have been most personally significant, what Fivush et al. (2011) call ‘self-defining memories’. This coincides with wider societal expectations of self-presentation in adolescence (Habermas and Bluck, 2000) which (in modern Western society at least) presuppose a high degree of reflexivity and active work on identity (McAdams, 1996; Henderson et al., 2007; McLeod and Yates, 2006). At this pivotal stage, young people may draw on their parents and families as a key resource to help them develop autobiographical content and co-construct identity from shared memories and stories. Access to shared familial stories, archetypes and understandings of how to present narratives to different audiences and for different purposes (McAdams, 1993) effectively denotes cultural competence (Fivush et al., 2011). Yet this precious cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1986) is patently not available in equal measure to all young people. The wider social environment may also provide young people with shared images, life scripts and master narratives that they can use in their efforts to understand and articulate their experiences and what they mean for self (Fivush et al., 2011). Again, this is not the case for all young people, given how their communities and sources of capital vary in character and richness (Bourdieu, 1986; 1998).

Third, Pasupathi et al. (2007) examined the relationship between life experiences and identity, exploring the developmental implications of 'self-event relations'. In many cases these are unremarkable, but in other instances experiences or 'critical moments' (Thomson et al., 2002) alter self-perception and not always in a positive direction. This research found that, after illness or assault for example, some young people developed narrative themes that were 'contaminating' and so personally diminishing, whilst others were able to talk about what they experienced in ways that were 'redemptive', indicating growth and resilience. Relatedly, conflict and conflict resolution has been shown elsewhere to be a key point for reflection and meaning-making (McLean and Thorne, 2003). Finding positive meaning in difficulties is important for well-being 'for good stories need to have happy endings' (McAdams and McLean, 2013, p. 235).

Fourth, Pasupathi et al. (2007) also identified a 'reveal' connection where an experience discloses something significant to the narrator that was previously unknown or unacknowledged. At the very least this is likely to prompt a reworking of 'self' to integrate the newly revealed element of identity – sexual orientation, for example. In other cases, new knowledge may result in a real fracturing of the sense of self - what Wierenga (2009) tellingly describes as 'losing the plot'.

Finally, applying these concepts of autobiographical reasoning (Habermas and Bluck, 2000) and self-event relations (Pasupathi et al., 2007), McLean (2008) examined the life narratives of young people (17-35 years) and older people (65-85 years), two groups typically experiencing change because of their life-stage. She anticipated that the young people in her sample would report more change connections and that these would relate to more recent autobiographical memories. As expected, she found that the older participants reported more thematic coherence in their life stories and tended to relate their individual stories back to general life themes or metaphors using explanatory connections (Pasupathi et al., 2007). What was unexpected were the similar levels of reflective processing of life events evident especially among females. McLean (2008), however, suggests that reflection may serve different functions for each group, with younger people

interested in self-exploration and self-understanding, and older people using narrative to provide a means for stability and resolution.

Throughout adolescence, young people work on developing the cognitive skills required for autobiographical reasoning and conceptual thinking, enabling more elaborate interpretations of life events as they are retrospectively reconstructed to bolster a coherent sense of self (Habermas and Bluck, 2000). They also become more accomplished in the construction of stories and the elements of plot, characterisation and resolution (Reissman, 2008; Daiute, 2014). Identities created through narrative thus typically become more complex, although not always developing in a straightforward direction given the nature of formative experiences and experiences of the 'reveal' type. Young people add to their life stories as they encounter new events and social relations, evaluating their significance and choosing appropriate self-event connections (Pasupathi et al., 2007). At the same time, their narrative repertoire and range of cultural references and tropes to enhance stories extend and diversify as they are simultaneously absorbing the culture around them. This allows them to learn the accepted ways of framing and presenting stories (McAdams and McLean, 2013) and to become familiar with master narratives that can be used in structuring reminiscence and as tools for evaluation (Fivush et al., 2011).

Young people, of course, use narratives in many ways that are not biographical and may not even have an element of self-presentation' although they may still have a bearing on 'identity-in-the-making'. Most of the studies cited above are within the discipline of psychology and adopt experimental methods so, even where they are exploring conversations and dialogues (McLean and Pasupathi, 2011; 2012) they are not in a natural environment. Bamberg (2006) suggests that biographical narratives tend to be 'elicited' in research, not naturally occurring, and that the focus on these 'Big Stories' overshadows the

kinds of stories we tell in everyday settings (not just research or therapeutic interviews). And these stories are most often about very mundane things and everyday occurrences, often even not particularly

interesting or tellable; stories that seem to pop up, not necessarily even recognised as stories, and quickly forgotten; nothing permanent or of particular importance – so it seems. (p. 63)

He further points to the value of ‘small stories’ and ‘chit chat’ for helping young people in their identity work, through interactions where a coherent, fully developed self-narrative is not a pre-requisite. In effect,

rather than seeing narratives as intrinsically oriented towards coherence and authenticity, and inconsistencies and equivocations an analytical nuisance, we turn the latter into what is most interesting. (2004, p. 3)

Bamberg’s interest is methodological but his argument for paying attention to short narratives and interactions has wider relevance and certainly points to the multiple social uses of narratives and the contexts in which they are told. Young people communicate differently among peers, within families and to adults in authority, for example, and the opportunity for these interactions, and their nature, have implications for identity.

Thoughts on social identity

Given the presence of narrative in social groups that fulfils different purposes in relation to identity, Richard Jenkins’ (2014) work on social identity helps fill the gaps left by a purely narrative approach, particularly one emphasising biographical narrative. He indicates the subtleties and complexities of identity:

If my argument is correct, all human identities are, by definition, *social* identities. Identifying ourselves, or others, is a matter of meaning, and meaning always involves interaction: agreement and disagreement, convention and innovation, communication and negotiation. (p. 18, emphasis in original)

For Jenkins, establishing identity (or identities) is an on-going active process which he characterises as a 'practical accomplishment'. While he shares Bourdieu's (1977; 1990) sense of a definitively embodied self who interacts with the world, for explanatory concepts he turns to Mead's 'generalised other' and the relationship between 'I' (the ego or acting self) and 'me' (effectively, the socialised self) to further his exploration of 'self' and 'mind'. Here, 'Me' is 'what 'I' act against, the voice in part of others, the foil that gives form and substance to the 'I' (2014, p. 65). The 'generalised other' can be taken as representing community or society. This implies a level of reflexivity such that each individual is conscious of herself and her own identity as 'constituted vis a vis others in terms of similarity and difference, without which she would not know who she was and hence would not be able to act' (2014, p. 75).

At an essential level Jenkins suggests that mind and self are not synonymous but are two parts of a unitary whole. In the creation of self and self-hood, an individual's experiences from birth of family members, friends and other carers provide opportunities for identification and the responses that confirm, refute or suggest alternatives to what she claims to be. Yet this is not an entirely one way process, because (following James, 2013) children are active participants in their socialisation and construct their identities, particularly as choice and repertoires of identifications widen with growing years. Self-hood, then, is a primary identity realised in relation to others and nurtured (or not) in the processes of primary socialisation where it is at its most fragile. As with gender, another primary identity he singles out, self-hood is generated, sustained and adapted through interaction with others throughout life.

Jenkins (2014, p. 19) sets out his key definitions:

- 'Identity' denotes the ways in which individuals and collectivities are distinguished in their relations with other individuals and collectivities;
- 'Identification' is the systematic establishment and signification, between individuals, between collectivities and between individuals and collectivities, of relationships of similarity and difference;

- Taken – as they can only be – together, similarity and difference are the dynamic principles of identification, and are at the heart of the human world.

Fundamental to this view is the need for the social world to be organised into complex systems of categories and classifications, although they do not operate in a mechanistic way. Jenkins (2014) suggests that individuals take a pragmatic and interpretive view of the world, which is constructed and experienced through three different ‘orders’: individual or ‘what-goes-on-in-their-heads’; interactional or ‘what-goes-on-between-people’; and institutional or organisational, effectively ‘established-ways-of-doing-things’ (p. 41-2). Also fundamental is that identity and identification are embodied:

The human body is simultaneously a referent of individual continuity, an index of collective similarity and differentiation and a canvas upon which identification can play. *Identification in isolation from embodiment is unimaginable.* (p. 43, author’s emphasis)

This is a bold claim but gender, race and disability, for example, are seen, felt and experienced through the body as are the effects of maturation and aging (albeit imbued with cultural and value-laden associations). Clothing, belongings, spaces inhabited or routinely visited, choices of food and drink may all act as signifiers of commitment, attachment or identification. In Bourdieusian (1984; 1998) terms they may also mark distinction or place within social space differentiated by power and capital resource.

Whilst owing a debt to the interactionist thinking of Mead (1934), Jenkins’ own view of society and its structures is much less consensual. For the purposes of this study, his analysis of organisations and how they group and label individuals is insightful, as is the attention he gives to the processes around boundaries and recruitment to membership. There may be powerful effects of inclusion or exclusion from organised collective identity that is affirmed through ritual and community activity. This is true of youth organisations and sports teams as much as companies and public services. As with other aspects of social life, experiences are internalised and set what

Jenkins refers to as the 'internal-external dialectic' of identification to work. This happens in the face of the many interactions that young people have with institutions too, whether the universal provision of schools and health, or intervention from the systems of public care, youth justice and others. Organisational behaviours are performative and, in his analysis of public image and persona, Jenkins draws on the seminal work of Erving Goffmann. Looking at identity at the level of the 'interaction order' and particularly in *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (Goffman, 1959), the metaphor of the drama and the notions of *front stage* and *backstage* are particularly powerful. Meeting new social situations, young people may be more or less adept at managing their self-presentation, at doing the back-stage work and understanding the *frames* or social settings with their particular expectations and rules of interaction. Goffman is also instructive in thinking about stigma (1968) and the 'spoiled identities' that may need to be managed, particularly relevant to young people in their peer groups as well as organisational contexts where reputation matters.

For Jenkins (2014), echoing wider criticisms (Swingewood, 2000), Goffman's version of interactionism is too focused on exteriority and does not give sufficient attention to the thoughts and feelings that arise from interactions and how these are absorbed into self-concept. He helpfully distinguishes between *nominal* and *virtual identifications*, the former being the label with which an individual is identified, the latter referring to the implications or the effects of that label experientially and practically over time. As he notes (p. 102, emphasis in original), 'identification is never just a matter of name or label: the meaning of an identity lies also in *the difference that it makes* in individual lives'.

There are, then, material consequences of 'external' identification by others as well as psychological, emotional and other effects of 'internal' self-identification. It is worth noting here that the type of reflexivity that Jenkins identifies as an on-going human process does not equate to the reflexivity underpinning the 'projects of self' described by Giddens (1991) as a consequence of modern de-traditionalised society. It does not assume the

same degree of rationality and strategising, although similarly individuals strive for coherence and self-awareness.

Linking back to the previous section, identity and identifications may be produced or reproduced through narratives and representations. While young people may not be in control of the discourses and narratives that others use, they can exercise their own agency and creativity, both in the stories that they fashion about themselves and in the attachments, associations and identifications to which they make commitments.

Young people as agentic selves

Before discussing Bourdieu's concepts of *field*, *capital* and *habitus* and their utility in analysing the findings of this study, this section considers human agency. Bourdieu, of course, grappled with fundamental questions about structure and agency and the major concepts associated with him were a response to these questions and an explicit rejection of the structuralist sociology that dominated the middle part of the twentieth century (Reed-Danahay, 2005). Nevertheless, his work tends to illuminate the workings of society and how power is cultivated and transmitted more than it assists in making sense of the lived experience of individual actors (Jenkins, 2002: Atkinson, 2016). Paradoxical as this may be given the centrality of reflexivity in his work and ethnography as a method, it does mean that it is necessary to look elsewhere for developed concepts to help draw a fuller picture of the social actor.

Human agency, of course, operates at multiple levels beyond simple physical and social actions, and is both relational and deliberative in the face of emergent situations. That means that agency involves more than a rational calculation of ends and means, which in Emirbayer and Mische's (1998) view allows agents to make 'imaginative and critical intervention in the diverse contexts in which they act' (p. 970). They set out in *What is agency?* (1998) to explore why and how individuals vary in their capacities to do so, differentiating three temporal dimensions for the purposes of their analysis:

What, then, is human agency? We define it as *the temporally constructed engagement by actors of different structural environments – the temporal-relational contexts of action – which, through the interplay of habit, imagination and judgement, both reproduces and transforms those structures in in interactive response to the problems posed by changing historical situations.* (p. 970, emphasis in original)

The constitutive elements they propose corresponding to past, future and present are: iterational; projective; and practical evaluative. Emirbayer and Mische represent the inter-relations between the three as a ‘chordal triad of agency’ and further suggest that

The ways in which people understand their own relationship to the past, future and present *make a difference* to their actions; changing conceptions of agentic possibility in relation to structural contexts profoundly influence how actors in different periods and places see their worlds as more or less responsive to human imagination, purpose and effort.(p. 973, emphasis in original)

In relation to young people specifically, *iterative agency* comes into play as they typically become more skilled and sophisticated in determining actions based on experience, habit and familiar repertoires. The authors suggest this rests on the schematisation of social experiences and that ‘the agentic dimension lies in *how actors selectively recognise, locate and implement* such schemata in their on-going and situated transactions’ (1998, p. 975, emphasis in original).

Over-reliance on habit, routine and taken-for-granted actions can be limiting, but they have a role in establishing stability and predictability in social relations, as well as competent cultural performances appropriate to setting. More positively, developing the abilities previously discussed to interpret and to create narrative meaning from past events creates potential for continuing to build on existing experiences or purposefully changing course. At the same time young people through adolescence become more sophisticated in

deploying *projective agency*. As they develop more complex visions of self, they are also able to project further into their future, imagining alternative possibilities and hypothesising about outcomes or resolutions. These anticipations might each engage powerful emotions such as hope, fear and desire, as well as rational expectation.

The third element - *practical evaluative* - is most pertinent to the here and now of young people's lives. This denotes an important range of cognitive, moral and practical capacities which typically grow during the mid-teens and early adulthood through experience and social relations. While the practical evaluative dimension exists within its immediate context, Emirbayer and Mische (1998) suggest that individuals draw on their past experience to understand their present situation, to recognise what may be problematic or unresolved, and to identify the nature or character of the 'problem'. Aspects of agency are also apparent in terms of deliberating over possible courses of action, making decisions and then executing or taking action. Again, this is not distinct from the temporal order, because

actors are always living simultaneously in the past, future and present.....they continuously engage patterns and repertoires from the past, project hypothetical pathways forward in time, and adjust their actions to the exigencies of emerging situations. (1998, p. 1012)

Nor is it distinct from the structural circumstances in which the individual finds herself, as these affect the situations and problems that might arise – conflict with others, precarious work or insecure housing – as well as the extent of opportunities, networks and resources to assist resolution.

Emirbayer and Mische's explication goes further in opening the 'black box' of agency (Coffey and Farrugia, 2014) than the alternative notions of 'bounded agency' (for example, Evans 2007) and is more insightful in how it relates to subjectivity. What they suggest is more complex than a mere explanation of choices made within the constraints of the environment, practical resources and cultural expectations. Theorised in this way, agency seen as

a generative process not located within the individual subject but comprised in inter-action with relations of force – the outcomes of which cannot be known in advance (Coleman, R., 2009) – provide[s] many avenues for exploration, analysis and expansion within the sociology of youth. (Coffey and Farrugia, 2014, p. 470)

The ‘chordal triad of agency’ (Emirbayer and Mische, 1998) is consequently used analytically within this study to give a sense of the internal workings of agency and, in conjunction with Bourdieu’s concepts of *field*, *capital* and *habitus*, permits a closer examination of the interactions of individuals within their subjective space and social circumstances.

‘Habitus’, ‘field’ and subjectivity

These understandings of agency, particularly in relation to identity and the meaning-making that is part of narrative construction, can be taken as a necessary complement to Bourdieu’s theories of social practice and practical knowledge. *Field*, *capital* and *habitus*, albeit powerful and hugely influential concepts, are not fully able to account on their own for the intricacies of human action and inter-relations with their motivations, choices and conscious weighing up of consequences. For all his attempts to break both with phenomenological knowledge and with objectivism (Bourdieu, 1977), he does not entirely escape the binary of subjectivity and objectivity (Jenkins, 2002) especially in his elaborations of *habitus* (King, 2000).

In the first developed version of *habitus* in *Theory of an Outline of Practice*, Bourdieu (1977) advances a complex definition that is worth citing at length:

The structures constitutive of a particular type of environment (e.g. the material conditions of existence characteristic of a class condition) produce *habitus*, systems of durable, transposable *dispositions*, structured structures pre-disposed to function as structuring structures, that is as principles of the generation and structuring of practices and representations which can be objectively ‘regulated’ and ‘regular’ without in any way being the product of obedience to rules,

objectively adapted to their goals without presupposing a conscious aiming at ends or an express mastery of the operations necessary to attain them and, being all of this, collectively orchestrated without being the product of the orchestrating action of a conductor. (p. 72, emphasis in original)

In this instance, the environment was the society among the Kabyle peoples of Algeria with its own rites, systems of power, customary behaviours and domestic arrangements, where he conducted fieldwork (1977). Their traditional way of life – and thus the ‘material conditions’ he describes in detail (1977; 1990) - was in transition at that time although, similar to his work in the rural communities of his native Bearn, Bourdieu’s interest was not the experience and challenges of change (Reed-Danahay, 2006). What he was seeking to uncover were the processes that produce stable social patterns through systems of deeply embedded beliefs and ways of acting, which in themselves provide principles, rather than rules, that shape social practice yet still allow for what he terms ‘regulated improvisation’ (1977, p. 78). It is in this capacity for improvisation and virtuosity within the parameters of what is seen as possible within the *habitus* that Bourdieu in his early work allows space, such as it is, for human agency.

Habitus, by definition, entails socialisation and cultural learning but is distinct from these in two respects important for this study. First, in its generative nature that ensures an almost circular process of social production and reproduction – so perceptions, beliefs and values, for example, are inculcated through experiences and relationships within the family and other social institutions, which in turn help determine the sorts of social practices and institutions that persist: ‘In short, the habitus, the product of history, produces individual and collective practices, and hence history, in accordance with the schemes engendered by history’ (1977, p. 82).

There is thus constancy in the social world that derives from familiarity and a sense of the natural order (although this ‘mis-recognises’ the reality of social distinctions and dominance). However, in both Kabylia and Bearn, Bourdieu

was considering societies that had been to that point stable and cohesive, with relatively little social mobility and few, but well established, institutions active (Reed-Danahay, 2006). He is thus able to argue that 'the singular *habitus* of members of the same class are united in a relationship of homology' (1990, p. 60), because the two correspond so completely. In contrast, the tensions between the *habitus* of the individual and the collective *habitus* - if there is even one collective *habitus* - are inevitably greater in pluralist societies which require movement between social environments and membership of multiple organisations (Jenkins, 2002). *Habitus* has consequently been conceived in youth studies as elsewhere as forming and being sustained in many more social contexts and among social groups than Bourdieu first envisaged.

The second point is that *habitus* is embodied, in the sense that it arises from material conditions and manifests itself in the physical actions and interactions involved in the practical mastery of tasks and situations, as well as in items of taste (preferences for styles of clothing or types of food, for example).

Bourdieu proposes that *habitus*, through the internalization of the structures of the external world, shapes the perceptions and cognitions of agents, and so reinforces compliance with social norms and expectations without necessitating rational and conscious decision-making. *Habitus* offers insights into social relations, specifically the on-going production and maintenance of social difference (King, 2000), and the distribution of agents across Bourdieu's 'espace social' or social space. It suggests the taken-for-granted nature of many aspects of social life or 'history turned into nature' (1977, p. 78) – indeed, if we did not rely on iterative knowledge of 'what is what' and 'what therefore follows' life would quickly become unmanageable.

Furthermore, each person's *habitus* provides her with a basis for strategies applicable to a wide variety of situations, although Bourdieu (1977) suggests that agents may not be using them for specific conscious ends:

The practices produced by the *habitus*, as the strategy-generating principle enabling agents to cope with unforeseen and ever-changing

situations, are only apparently determined by the future. If they seem determined by anticipation of their own consequences, thereby encouraging the finalist illusion, the fact is that, always tending to reproduce the objective structures of which they are the product, they are determined by the past structures that have produced the principle of their production. (p. 73)

Taking this further in *The Logic of Practice* (1990) he uses the analogy of the game – *illusio* – produced in the encounter between the *habitus* and the social field. Practical sense in the context of any specific field which has its own forms, rules and stakes – education might be an example - means being equipped with a ‘feel for the game’ and virtuosity in the range of appropriate responses to the ‘unforeseen and ever-changing situations’ referred to in the quote above. This attempts to portray some of the complexity of human action but by no means accords the human actor real agency.

The crux of the issue for Jenkins (2002) is the extent to which Bourdieu rejects action on the basis of explicit rationality which

risks throwing the baby out with the bathwater. We know on the basis of our own experience if nothing else, that actors do, some of the time, make decisions that they attempt to act upon and that they do, sometimes, formulate and adopt plans which they attempt to carry out. (p. 74)

Playing the game and strategising in the way that Bourdieu describes downplays the sorts of cognitive engagement with decisions and actions outlined in the ‘chordal triad of agency’ (Emirbayer and Mische, 1998). In his assertions that social actors are not consciously aware of their investments and pursuit of interests, the degree of ‘mis-recognition’ he assumes is also surely questionable. Moreover, modern Western societies demand high levels of individualism and consequently reflexivity (Giddens, 1991): young people may possess greater or lesser degrees of self-awareness but multiple studies (for example, Henderson et al., 2007; McLeod and Yates, 2006; MacDonald and Marsh, 2005; Wierenga, 2009) have shown them to be thoughtful about the choices they make about their lives and identities. The

present generation in their teens are growing up in a rapidly changing and globalized world, which raises another problem with *habitus*, that is, the difficulty that it has accounting for change (King, 2000), at a broad societal level and, in relation to the specific concern of this study, individual young people in transition.

Interestingly, King (2000) suggests that the value of Bourdieu's thinking lies not in the concept of *habitus* which must inevitably always refer back to objective structures, but in the 'practical theory' that he tantalizingly sets out in *Outline of a Theory of Practice* (1977). This is intrinsically organic, interactional and negotiated so, as a consequence, is more promising in terms of replacing the dualisms of structure and agency, society and the individual, and in offering an explanatory model for change. In King's (2000) view, Bourdieu does not exploit this potential and reinserts structure into his elaborations of *habitus*, although this is partially redeemed because

When Bourdieu connects the *habitus* to the 'field' by which he means the objective structure of unequal positions which accumulate around any form of practice, the flexibility which Bourdieu intends to be present in the concept of *habitus* – but which in fact is ruled out by the concept – appears.....Individuals begin to transform their *habitus* strategically, given their relations with others, in order to establish their distinction from other groups and individuals in the field. (p. 425)

Young people might thus adapt their *habitus* as a result of engaging with the structures they encounter in their environment to ensure a better 'fit', which is inevitably a constant process where they are exposed to many new situations in school and beyond.

Yet simply introducing the concept of *field* does not itself solve the difficulties. Bourdieu's *champ* represents a 'field of forces' that is also

a field of struggles within which agents confront each other, with differentiated means and ends according to their position in the structure of the fields of forces, thus contributing to conserving or transforming its structure. (1998, p. 32)

A social field is thus characterised by structures, hierarchies and its own processes of certification and validation (1998). Of course, the relative positions of power and legitimating authority within a *field* are not inevitable (even if they are accepted as such). Bourdieu's reference to the 'cultural arbitrary' intimates that value and cultural capital accrue through interactional rather than rational processes, and Atkinson (2016) seeks to take this further in talking about dynamic 'circuits of symbolic power' (p.31). In short, what is judged to be important or significant privileges the perspectives dominating the *field* (or intersection of fields). This certainly illuminates the interaction of objective and material structures – *fields* – and social relations and culture – *habitus* – when the two are brought together. However, four points helpfully extend what Bourdieu suggests so that this interaction can be applied more fully to the experiences of young people in this study:

- Bourdieu advocates a focus on a singular *field*, whereas Atkinson (2016) argues that each individual engages simultaneously with a number of *fields* and that recognising *multiplicity* is critical to our understanding:

Everyday experience, the dispositions and schemes of perception making us who we are, the pains and joys of life and our practices are never wholly structured by a single field, not even one as wide-ranging as the national social space, but by a *combination* of forces – sometimes harmonising, sometimes clashing – emanating from multiple fields. (p. 14)

- Atkinson (2016) also suggests that alongside the large social *field*, attention should be paid to the 'micro-fields' that each person engages with. As an example, this means not just the wider scope of education with its policies, politics and academic preferences, but the individual schools and education providers with whom young people are in interaction. This resonates with social ecological perspectives, effectively focusing on relationships at a meso-level (France and Roberts, 2015);

- This then gives opportunity for a more grounded view of the temporal and spatial aspects of young people's lives, in and out of school and the other environments they inhabit, which Atkinson (2016) argues influence dispositions and the possibilities open (or not) to young people;
- Jenkins (2002) also notes that Bourdieu's accounts of the various institutions he considers lacks detail. His own (2014) work offers a more thorough-going sense of how institutions work and the effects of institutional processing upon individuals socially and in terms of what they internalise from these experiences.

Returning to *habitus*, it is necessary to outline the different usages of the concept for this study and the way that *habitus* is seen to inter-relate with different social fields. First, each person develops an individual *habitus* that is the product of early socialisation although Atkinson (2016) argues that this is not a process of passive inculcation as Bourdieu suggests, but involves the infant actively engaging with the *illusio* in her first *field* i.e. the family. He posits a more dynamic sense of individual *habitus* and its development which takes greater account of the complex systems, organisations and routines that constitute daily life and help shape the perceptions and disposition of the individual as she is growing. These then affect her interactions with the collective *habitus* and the social norms and practices that exist in wider society and are mediated in her immediate environment (and, Woodman and Wyn (2015) argue, amongst young people in a 'generational *habitus*'). It is this active, relational, negotiated understanding of *habitus* and social practice that is used here in relation to young people because this better explains the reality of young lives and sits more comfortably with the notions of *fields*. Such negotiations may ultimately produce what Bourdieu in his later work (Reed-Danahey, 2006) identifies as a 'cleft' or 'split habitus', where an individual develops dispositions and practices to bridge different social and cultural expectations.

Second, later theoretical developments have suggested that collective *habitus* can develop in specific social contexts and, specifically, within the culture of organisations or occupations (for example, Jawitz, 2009; Spence et

al., 2015). This then illuminates how the shared beliefs, dispositions and practices attaching to a profession and internalised by committed practitioners – in this case, youth workers – have a quality that is richer and more substantial than culture alone. This professional *habitus* is not static in the sense that it must accommodate changes in the external environment and developments in connected *fields*. For example, Vasudevan (2019) analyses the *habitus* of visual journalists and their professional and aesthetic choices as they explore the potential of digital film-making. Similarly, as outlined in later chapters, youth workers have become used to working in different contexts and have maintained their distinct youth-centred ethos despite having to think flexibly around core principles such as voluntarism (Ord, 2009; Nicholls, 2012; de St Croix, 2016).

Finally, there is reference in the literature (for example, Coburn, 2011) to a notion of 'localised *habitus*' which in this – to my mind, more tenuous - use indicates how young people contribute to the atmosphere and norms within an individual setting such as a youth club or project, as much as they experience them. The social entity that they create endures beyond the point where individual young people cease to engage as the shared perceptions and ways of doing things persists. Such settings can facilitate the growth of social and other forms of capital discussed in the next section.

Thoughts on capital

Bourdieu's concept of capital is of most interest here in how it connects to the discussion of resources – personal, social and practical – that young people can access and use, and in that regard draws attention to the presence of power and inequality. Developing his thoughts on capital as a means of illuminating the struggles within *fields*, Bourdieu (1986) comments that

the structure of the different types and sub-types of capital at a given moment in time represent the immanent structure of the social world.....the structure of the field i.e. the unequal distribution of

capital, is the source of the special effects of capital i.e. the appropriation of profits and the power to impose the laws of functioning of the field most favourable to capital and its reproduction. (p. 241)

Possession of different amounts and types of capital enables actors to engage in the 'games of society' and to manoeuvre in relation to the stakes in a specific *field* using the value of their assets and attributes within that *field*. The powerful economic metaphor allows Bourdieu (1986) to clearly identify the relationship between economic capital and the ability to develop the social and cultural forms of capital that he outlines, not least because of the investment of time, effort and resources involved. Capital, consequently, is not neutral and can be deployed to bolster position and social status, and at the pinnacle gain the types of formal recognition and prestige through awards, the honours system and the like that confer symbolic capital.

In terms of social differentiation and location within social space, Bourdieu emphasises the primacy of economic and cultural forms of capital (1998). As elaborated in *Distinction* (1984), the structure of education serves to inculcate values and dispositions that reproduce existing social hierarchies, adding to the primary *habitus* already forming in the socio-cultural milieu of the family (Reed-Danahay, 2006). This was evident in McLeod's and Yates' (2006) study in four school sites outlined in the previous chapter, and in Stahl's (2012) exploration of the disjuncture of the *habitus* of white working class boys in a high performing, aspirational secondary school.

Cultural capital exists in three forms (Bourdieu,1986):

- The embodied state – expressed in style of dress, linguistic practices and ways of moving, for example, that are cultivated and, Bourdieu suggests, incorporated into the *habitus*;
- The objectified state – material objects such as books, technology and clothing (although connected to embodied cultural capital in presupposing the competence to 'use' these material goods);
- The institutionalised state – qualifications, membership of professional bodies and so on.

Within social space different *fields* of activity occupy various positions according to their power and influence. Individuals or collectivities also occupy positions in social space, and possession or absence of economic and cultural capital is critical in determining the status of classes of people. However, whether any one individual is a member of a dominant or dominated group is not necessarily clear cut, and indeed may vary across the multiple fields she engages with in modern society. Professional status, for example, may be especially ambiguous as expertise might 'count' in one context but have little currency in another. Nevertheless, social class remains a key determinant of position and power, which Skeggs (1997) suggests – along with gender, race and other characteristics – is read from the body and judged.

Similar to Bourdieu, Skeggs (1997; 2004) sees class as about the competing interests of different classes of people, but she is more concerned with class struggle and how individuals subjectively identify with their class position. Her analysis shows how sense of selfhood and personhood is implicated in class formation, not least in the ways that the working class are lumped together, symbolically, spatially and culturally (1997). She illustrates a sharp contrast between social classes in her exploration of cosmopolitanism, showing how the middle class have greater freedoms of movement and ability to use diverse cultural resources in their creation of identities (including a selective 'plundering' of the cultural resources of the working class to enhance their own cultural capital).

In *Formations of Class and Gender* (1997), Skeggs had drawn upon Bourdieu's analogy of the market to analyse the nature of exchange and ascriptions of value to different class positions. In *Class, Self and Culture* (2004), she takes this further to consider questions of investment and of culture as property that has exchange-value. Several points are significant in this. In contemporary society, exchange refers not only to economics and labour, but also to social and cultural factors that, in effect, can be 'cashed-in' for advantage. However, it is only those in certain social positions who have the ability and moral authority to determine and legitimate their value. This means that, although aspects of working class culture and practices still have

use-value (that is, practical immediate benefits), what is valued for the purposes of social and cultural exchange and long-term gain very much reflects the dominant culture. Skeggs (2004) argues that present-day societal expectations which emphasise individualisation and reflexivity assume that resources and opportunities are equally available to all and, in doing so, universalise the experiences of the middle class. Ultimately, the middle class have the skills and also the right dispositions, affects and attitudes to successfully create themselves as the type of worker who can thrive in the modern economy, whereas the working class are much less equipped to negotiate the shifting demands of the labour market. Consequently,

whilst class is being displaced by theories and claims of mobility, individualisation, reflexivity and identity, it is simultaneously being institutionalised and reproduced. This is, in effect, a re-legitimation and justification of the habitus of the middle-class that does not want to name itself, be recognised or accept responsibility for its own power. (2004, p. 60)

This points to a mis-recognition of middle class power and influence that, for Skeggs, is mirrored in the mis-recognition (by neglect or disparagement) of the value of working class life.

Skeggs and Bourdieu are both explicitly political in their analyses of the distinctions evident in social life and in the enhanced cultural and social capital available to the middle classes. Bourdieu (1986) himself defines social capital as

The aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalised relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition – or, in other words, to membership of a group – which provides each of its members with the backing of the collectivity-owned capital, a ‘credential’, which entitles them to credit, in the various senses of the word. (p. 249)

In the old adage, 'it's not what you know, it's who you know' which allows a privileged elite to dominate public life, their combination of connections and cultural capital ensuring their continuing prominence in elected offices, in NGOs and throughout the media. At the other end of the spectrum, Harding (2014) illustrates the role of social capital within street gangs in establishing status and belonging, and the strategies around calculated use of violence to avoid sanctions and maintain reputation. In both instances, positioning involves political acts and the reality that those who succeed have the greatest aptitude and 'feel for the game', with all the investments in managing relationships that implies.

This political sense of accumulating and expending social capital to gain advantage is not present in all conceptualisations, as a separate strand of thinking has developed out of concerns over civic participation and community cohesion in the US. This stands in sharp contrast to Bourdieu, being founded on the communitarian values embedded in American democracy, with little to say about power relations based on class, gender and ethnicity (Navarro, 2002) nor struggle and conflict (Siisiainen, 2000). Nevertheless, the ideas of Coleman, J. S. (1988; 1990) and Putnam (2000) in *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community*, have themselves been hugely influential. The vision is deeply normative and prizes consensus rather than the creative potential of collective struggle and purpose (Navarro, 2000). This naturally speaks more to the capital of communities than individuals, yet there are useful distinctions between

- i. *Bonding capital* which is about friendship, relationships and peer groups that provide a sense of belonging (and potentially support in adversity);
- ii. *Bridging capital* which is about creating links with people outside the immediate social circle or environment, broadening opportunities and horizons;
- iii. *Linking capital* which is about access to influential others and power structures.

(Adapted from Boeck, 2007)

Putnam (2000) further comments that 'bonding social capital is good for 'getting by' but bridging networks are crucial for 'getting ahead', (p. 23) perhaps therefore assuming value and salience for individuals at different times.

Bourdieu's association of social capital with dominance and the reproduction of class differs from Putnam's (2000) and certainly Coleman's belief that it is a public good (Coradini, 2010). However, given the widespread adoption of these ideas, inevitably attempts have been made to bring the insights from both schools of thought together, for example, in Boeck's (2009) work with marginalised young people. The notion of capital as resource or asset has also been expanded to include specific reference to, for example, 'identity capital' (Côté and Levine, 2016), 'Islamic cultural capital' (Ramji, 2007) and 'masculine capital' (Anderson, 2012)

Most relevant here is Raffo and Reeves' (2000) argument that the young people in their research could be described as having individualised 'systems of social capital' which can be weak, strong, changing and fluid. The latter is possibly the most positive in being dynamic, flexible and adaptable to circumstances and thus more resilient than the other systems. However, in advancing their typology, they stress that none of these systems or constellations of social relations are fixed and that networks around any one young person can change and evolve. Less positively, they note (2000) that

Some of our data suggest that young people can be in isolated situations with relatively weak individualised systems of social capital. In these situations there is evidence to suggest that our young people have few opportunities of learning from others in authentic situations and have great difficulties in coping with many everyday tasks, such as finding and securing employment, and few ideas about how to navigate their difficult pathways from adolescence to adulthood. (p. 153)

Raffo and Reeves further propose that there is an effect between each young person's individualised system of social capital and the situations they are presented with that allows a variety of responses to similar structural constraints. They conclude (2000) that for young people facing multiple risks,

the resources, both materially and symbolically, that are available for social capital enhancement are often limited and culturally inappropriate. The net result is that skills, knowledge and the vernacular that is developed within these particular networks will tend naturally to emphasise survival issues. (p. 165)

However, those young people whose systems of social capital have more flexibility and fluidity have greater chances of being able to grasp and make something of whatever opportunities for learning that do exist. Young people do still have choice and agency even in the most difficult circumstances and the way these are exercised by individual young people are not independent of their social relations. To come back to the beginning point of the chapter and the questions of agency-structure, this shines a clear light on how young people might view their capacities for action within their individual circumstances and what might enhance their abilities to make something of situations that might seem unpromising judged from an objective viewpoint.

In summary

This chapter has set out a view of young people and the development of subjective selves, drawing on theoretical and empirical work that suggests that they actively construct their identities, making use of the resources and capital they can access in more or less strategic ways to further their 'identity-work'. Many of these resources are common to young people at any given historical moment, the ubiquity of smartphones being an obvious contemporary example. However, even these are used in diverse ways in the presentation of self and in creating and sustaining social networks (Boyd, 2014). The challenge is to seek understandings of both shared social

practices and the heterogeneity of different responses, which together contribute to identity and ultimately trajectories into early adulthood.

Viewing young people as social actors does not imply they have unlimited agency, as is evident from the earlier discussions. However, it does suggest that young people are able to make choices in various aspects of life and in constructing their identities. Here it is argued that one key area relates to the narratives that young people create about themselves and their own personal biography (McAdams, 1993). Allowing for variation in social learning and the cultural resources that young people have at their disposal to enrich their stories (McAdams and McLean, 2013), agency is evident in the meanings that they draw from past experiences and how they are interpreted, as well as their visions for the future (McLean and Pasupathi, 2012; Pasupathi et al., 2007). More immediately, stories are crucial for their self-presentation and consistency in the accounts they give of themselves to others, essential in social relations and also in gaining a coherent internal sense of self (McAdams, 1993). Young people practice the cognitive, emotional and social skills involved in developing narratives, whether in short snippets or longer life stories, throughout adolescence, and become more attuned to when and how stories can be used and to what effect (Wierenga, 2009).

Adolescence is also fruitful for the development of social identity as young people re-orientate from family and immediate social groups towards more distant networks where they can exercise more choice in their investments and identifications (Jenkins, 2014). This is not necessarily separate from narrative development as stories are frequently the means of making sense of attachments and experiences within friendship groups or schools, for example, and of formulating plans for the future (Emirbayer and Mische, 1998). Young people are expected to participate in a wider social environment and to experience the demands of different *fields* (Bourdieu, 1990;1998), principally education, but, as Atkinson (2016) argues, potentially multiple 'micro-fields' such as schools, leisure pursuits, cultural activities or youth projects, each with their own rules and power relations. Young people's adjustments to these different settings and dynamics affects their

primary *habitus* as they accommodate new experiences, self-evaluations and opportunities for cultivating capital in their own right to add to whatever cultural, social and economic capital they have inherited from family.

It is relatively straightforward to apply the concept of *field* and ‘micro-fields’ to situations where young people are moving between different social contexts and exposure to new experiences. *Capital*, whether the version that conveys power and distinction (Bourdieu, 1984; 1986; 1998) or Putnam’s (2000) ideas of bonding and bridging capital, also provides a way of appreciating the resources and assets that young people may have within reach (or in Wierenga’s (2009) term, ‘resources-in- hand’). Raffo and Reeves (2000) notion of inter-locking systems of capital adds further insights, all of which aid understanding of how young people might thrive or be diminished by the challenges they face in growing up, their changing social status and the identities they have to maintain in a multiplicity of settings.

Habitus (Bourdieu, 1977) is more problematic when read as assuming that history determines future structures and practices, allowing little scope for innovation or resistance. This might have explanatory value in relatively static social circumstances, but that is not the social world experienced by the young people in this study. They are growing up in urban environments that are mixed socially and with all the influences of a global economy and media. Combined with changes in their social groups and the organisations they are involved with as they move through (or between) schools and colleges, this means that their individual *habitus* is in flux and might be seen as much as a ‘work in progress’ as their identities. Some young people experience a significant disjuncture between the context of their early lives and their later social engagements, crossing class, ethnic and other boundaries. Bourdieu nods towards the accommodations they might make in his later reflections on ‘cleft habitus’ but there is more to explore in this regard.

Habitus conceived as a collective set of social norms and practices is, however, mutable in the face of technological, political and other developments that over time means that the experiences of the present

generation of young people both corresponds and diverges from those coming before and after. In this sense, it denotes wider societal changes and has a general, rather than a specific, analytical value in exploring continuity and change.

Chapter 4 Approaching the research study

The previous chapters explored existing understandings of young people and the ways their identities may develop in the complex transitions to adulthood. As illustrated, there are competing views, not least in terms of how young people are active in developing their own identities within the contexts that they live and the structural constraints they experience, a central theme of this thesis. My concern is to explore how young people exercise agency and the ways in which they do so, given that choices are so contingent on life circumstances and what Skeggs (2004) terms 'plausibility structures', (or, put another way, what young people see as being within their reach).

In broad terms, the study, *Working it out for yourself*, set out with the following questions in mind: how do young people

1. start to create biographical narratives and ascribe meaning to 'critical moments' and relationships in their lives?
2. identify resources in their social relationships and environments that they can use in self-enhancing ways?
3. develop strategies to maintain a positive sense of self in the face of difficulties or challenges?
4. respond to the expectations and assumptions of the social institutions that they interact with?
5. choose their identity investments and commitments (and why)?
6. develop visions of possible future selves that they can act upon?

Drawing from the literature review, four assumptions have guided my approach to designing research to explore these questions with young people in their mid-teen years. These assumptions informed my initial choices about my approach to research and chosen methods within a broad qualitative methodology that is sensitive to the age and stage of development of participants. After a critical discussion of research with young people in the abstract, this chapter goes on to outline the research in practice, including

questions of access, working through three different youth projects and engaging participants. Inevitably, in operationalising research, there are compromises and opportunities that were not envisaged at the outset, the latter in this case presented by the time and space I had to experience young people in youth work settings. In relation to Questions 4-6, this enabled me on the one hand to focus on young people's responses to youth work as one specific social institution, and on the other to actively observe their identity investments, commitments and visions of future selves developing as they engaged with the projects, rather than relying on their accounts. Consequently, two further questions might be added to the original set:

7. how do young people perceive youth work and use the experiences and the relationships nurtured in youth work environments in their 'identity-work'?
8. how does youth work present itself as a resource for young people that is accessible, relevant and meaningful to their lives and aspirations?

Underlying assumptions, theoretical and practical

My first assumption is that young people possess an urge to progress into adulthood, with all the social, psychological and other benefits that pertain. Notwithstanding evidence from longitudinal studies (for example, MacDonald and Marsh, 2005; Henderson et al., 2007) that transitions have typically become extended and frequently more complex, if not more difficult, most young people want to move to a position where they have greater autonomy and independence. However, as these studies have also shown, the resources and relationships that enable young people to become confident independent social actors are unevenly distributed. For those young people with fewer 'resources in hand' (Wierenga, 2009), there are challenges; some may find themselves without the capacities or resilience to negotiate the 'roadblocks' they encounter, but others may show considerable ingenuity and creativity in finding ways to move forward in the face of setbacks. Although the notion of adulthood as a destination is questionable and growing up has

been shown to be neither a straightforward nor a linear process, my hypothesis is that there is an impulse towards adulthood and that most young people will find some means of getting to a place where they 'feel more adult'.

The second assumption is that creating narratives of self is a skilful process, involving practice but also learning from others. Where family environments encourage story-telling and where there is a habit of revisiting shared memories, young people are better equipped to develop sustained and coherent self-narratives (Fivush et al., 2011; McAdams and McLean, 2013). This naturally develops with age and the greater need for young people to tell others about themselves as their social circles widen (McAdams, 1993). Of necessity, then, over time, most young people become more sophisticated in their self-presentation and the stories they create for different audiences. However, again there is considerable variation in willingness and ability to create self-stories (Wierenga, 2009), whether these are sustained biographical accounts or the 'small stories' that we see in many everyday interactions (Bamberg, 2004; Bamberg and Georgakopoulou, 2008). This awareness influenced my wish to explore young people's narratives, of whatever kind and gathered over a period of time, not just for their interest in terms of what they say but in how they are saying it (and in some instances what they are not able - or not yet able – to articulate). It also influenced my decision to offer a variety of options to young people in addition to more conventional interviews, especially for younger participants.

The third assumption is that most young people markedly develop their ability to exercise forms of practical evaluative agency (Emirbayer and Mische, 1998) across their teenage years. This means that I expected to encounter young people actively weighing up options and finding means of problem-solving, for example, in more complex ways as they get older. With greater experience and knowledge, they have more to draw upon to inform their judgements and decisions; I anticipated that I would see evidence of this in how they talk about their life decisions, particularly in conversations that take place over successive months.

The final assumption - important in the light of the physical setting for the research in youth projects - is that trusted adults are important enablers for young people, providing opportunities, sources of social and cultural capital, and practical, as well as emotional, resources (Wierenga, 2009). Not all young people have family and informal social networks able to provide those sorts of support and/or bridging functions. For some, consequently, professional relationships and involvement with community-based organisations fill an important gap. I am interested in how young people are agentic in choosing how they invest (or not) in youth work and other relationships that are optional, in contrast to the statutory involvement of education, social work and youth justice.

These four assumptions guided my early plans for *Working it out for yourself* in specific ways:

1. *Age of participants for the project:* mid-adolescence has been conventionally seen as critical for developing identity and, in this modern era, it is also a point where young people's social status may be subject to change because of institutional transitions, for example in education, or through travel and leisure pursuits (MacDonald and Shildrick, 2007). Around the ages of 15-17 young people are also exploring new freedoms and considering choices in different areas of their life, so I reasoned that this would be an optimum age range for participants.
2. *Recruiting participants:* many youth studies recruit through schools or through the care or youth justice systems. However, my preference was to find participants who would volunteer to be part of the research rather than doing so because of agency expectations. I therefore chose to approach organisations working with young people through the medium of youth work and to make contact with young people as volunteer. Even from the outset, this did not remove the influence of the organisation and the effect of worker endorsement, but it did remove any potential element of compulsion and the workers selecting individuals in or out of the project (Heath et al., 2009).

3. *Continuity of contact with participants*: my intention was to build relationships with young people through volunteering and to recruit them to research activities – interviews or creative sessions – outside of the project where I first met them. The presence of an established relationship is important both in terms of familiarity, trust and therefore willingness to participate, and in terms of the additional understanding of the individual that might then inform the interpretation of data at a later stage. I also wanted to observe change, and young people's perceptions of change, over time. Consequently, from my initial contact with youth organisations I envisaged a significant commitment over months to each of the projects where I volunteered and anticipated an element of ethnography from the outset.
4. *Narrative interviews and creative methods*: narrative interviewing is well suited to research with young people as it is unstructured and allows the perspectives and concerns of participants to take centre stage (Heath et al., 2009). However, recognising that younger participants may not be comfortable with being asked to talk at length about themselves – it is, after all, a relatively unusual request from an adult – I incorporated creative and visual methods (drawing and photography) into my research plans. I hoped that this would be appealing to participants and that the indirect approach would encourage them to speak more openly, as well as producing images or artefacts which could be analysed in themselves (Mannay, 2016; Rose, 2016).
5. *Sampling strategy*: I set out to recruit a small number of participants (6-8) who would potentially commit to a series of up to three interviews/activity sessions, either individually or in pairs. These numbers are quite small, and I was reliant on young people being willing to take part so aiming for a fully representative sample did not seem realistic. Nevertheless, I wanted to achieve a gender balance and, if possible, a range of other characteristics.

Unsurprisingly, research designs do not map straightforwardly onto practice, particularly so in the messy and unpredictable world of youth organisations. Later in the chapter I reflect upon how I shifted and adapted plans along the way. Here it is enough to note that I was having to respond to the opportunities for involvement with projects that I was offered. One of these attracted a group of young women much younger than I was aiming for (typically 13-14 years). This was where I concentrated most of the creative activities, although, reflecting their age, they chose to participate as a group rather than individually. I also realised that the ethnographic elements of data collection were much more significant than I had envisaged and used records of my observations to develop analysis of group process and relationships to complement the insights from interview data. Ultimately, this produced a large quantity of data that is rich but complex in its diversity. However, before introducing the projects and my narrative of my own research process from conception through to analysis, I consider concerns affecting all research with young people.

Questions of competence, consent and confidentiality

While ethical standards are relevant to all research, there are additional considerations for young people by virtue of their age, level of understanding and lack of power relative to adults. Consent is a particularly contentious area: Wiles et al (2005) highlight the value of researchers being reflexive about what constitutes 'information', 'consent' and 'competence' and what meets the needs of given situations. Assumptions of incompetence and vulnerability may not reflect the reality of children's capabilities, with Morrow and Richards (1996) arguing that children's competencies compared to adults can be characterised as 'different' rather than lesser. As Punch (2002a) notes, their vocabulary may be more limited and care may be needed with both written and oral communication but, that aside, many children are able to make decisions about whether they want to participate in research (or not). Here it is important to recognise that informed consent is

an important principle in any research, never mind research with young people, but

it is questionable whether a researcher is ever able to *genuinely* secure fully informed consent given the difficulties of explaining the exact nature of the research process and its likely outcomes to research participants, unless they happen to be experienced researchers themselves. (Heath et al., 2009, p. 24, emphasis in original)

Interestingly in this regard, Morrow and Richards (1996) refer to the need to recognise 'informed dissent', allowing children or young people to opt out of research even where parents or institutional gatekeepers have given consent - or at least assent - to their participation.

Competence is a tricky concept and, in general, under the age of 16 in the UK rests on the assessment of whether young people have 'sufficient understanding' to give their consent, following the 1985 ruling in *Gillick v Wisbech AHA* (Masson, 2004). Such assessments are inevitably influenced by beliefs and view of children and childhood. Of the four 'ideal types' spelt out by James and James (2004), my own allegiance is to the 'social child' who is active and competent albeit in different ways to adults. However, in children's services such judgements often fall within the remit of professionals with possibly differing views of childhood and certainly with specific responsibilities for protection. Competence is consequently 'very much determined by processes of social interaction and negotiation' (France, 2004, p. 181). I found that this operates at an organisational as well as individual practitioner level when negotiating access to projects where there were clear expectations spelt out in policy based on age. In practice, parental consent was only sought for participants in the one project that involved a younger age group. Young people in the other two projects were already demonstrably capable of giving their own consent at age 16 or over (and in fact baulked at the suggestion that their parents might have any say!)

Notwithstanding the above, all research participants under the age of 18 are protected by the provisions of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child

1989. This supplements rather than replaces the ethical standards for all qualitative research relating to respect for the rights and dignity of participants and their privacy and confidentiality. It therefore follows that all youth researchers have the same duties and responsibilities to protect the welfare of their participants as any other workers with children and are obliged to pass information to relevant professionals where young people may be at risk of harm (Morrow and Richards, 1996).

For this study, ethical approval had been gained in the expectation that most of the fieldwork would take place outside of the youth work projects themselves, with appropriate attention to risk assessment and duty of care (see Appendix 1). In the event, as explained later, most of my contact with young people took place within the parameters of project activity or on agency premises, and in the presence of youth workers and other staff. Much of the research activity consequently fell within the ambit of the organisations' safeguarding arrangements and expectations, which broadly related to welfare, safety and what to do in the event of disclosure. However, I was conscious throughout that I had to differentiate between my responsibilities as a volunteer and the ethical concerns pertaining to my role as researcher. Interview data and written comments that were part of activities, for example, as well as individual private conversations are distinct from interactions visible to youth workers. In the event, I did not encounter concerns that caused me to breach confidentiality in the interests of any young person's welfare, but there were points where I found myself drawing on my past professional experience to make judgement calls.

Privacy and confidentiality present different challenges in relation to group context, but there is a distinction between what young people themselves might share about their involvement with others outside the group and what the researcher discloses. From an ethnographic perspective, photographs of group activities may be revealing but must be treated with care in their interpretation and with a view to protecting the identity of participants (Wiles et al., 2012; Rose, 2016). Images stay in the public domain for a long time and, although a young person may give consent for use at the time, they may not be aware of potential long term implications (Mannay, 2016). I have

consequently chosen not to reproduce images of young people themselves and to ensure that any photographs or descriptions of what they created in activities during the research have no identifying features (including details that might reveal specific locations (Mitchell, 2011)).

The information for participants and consent forms I have used, bearing all of the above in mind, are presented in Appendices IV-VII. Here I must note that signed consent is easier to obtain for specific interviews or activities. One of the consequences of the increased collection of ethnographic data as the research progressed was having to confront dilemmas about what aspects of group dynamics and interactions I could legitimately refer to and use in my analysis. Constantly asking for permission to quote interactions or to cite specific events is likely to be counter-productive and to test patience. However, recognising that consent is a process, not a single act (Saldana, 2003), it is necessary to revisit periodically and to make judgements in other instances about whether implied consent exists (and what exactly it can be safely assumed to cover).

Research relationships

In addition to these broad ethical questions, researchers must be sensitive to the nature of power relationships which are heightened in youth research by the differential status of young people compared to adults. There are potential implications for consent where young people feel the weight of adult expectation, so it is helpful to revisit consent throughout the research (Heath et al., 2009). Even at the outset Hill (2006) found that 'generally children and young people do not perceive attempts by adults to gain their views from a blank slate position.....most children are used to being asked questions for a wide range of purposes' (p. 74).

Where previous experiences of consultation or research are negative or simply passive, this may affect young people's willingness to engage. They are best involved where the purpose of the research is meaningful to them and where they can see a benefit, given Hill's (2006) suggestion that they

tend to be outcome-orientated and are disillusioned when nothing happens. That said, children and young people are diverse and may be motivated to engage for many reasons from intrinsic interest in the subject to having fun (Hill, 2006; Punch, 2002b). Researchers therefore often offer options within their research design, with some making a more explicit commitment to involving participants in the design itself (Heath et al., 2009).

Two observations are important here in relation to power. The first is that researchers may seek to redistribute power through their approach to research, involving participants at all stages including analysis of data and dissemination of findings (Tisdall et al., 2009). Even where that level of participant involvement is neither practical nor appropriate, the power differentials can be reduced through clear communications and providing information with a well-judged level of detail. This demonstrates the qualities of trust, openness and transparency necessary in good research relationships, along with warmth and genuine interest. Using creative or mobile methods, social media and so on within research may also alter the balance of power, enabling young people to express themselves or to show their familiarity with technology (see Punch, 2002b; Bagnoli, 2009; Ross et al., 2009; Harris et al., 2015 for examples). The caveat to this is that researchers should not assume that young people prefer these methods – some may but others equally may not, particularly where they are not confident about drawing or other skills. As Punch (2002a) also comments, innovative methods in themselves do not empower young people; the context and the relationships around the research and the use of these methods matter too.

The second observation is that adult power should not be viewed as wholly and necessarily bad. It may, of course, be misused, in serious ways that oppress or exploit young people. However,

Power can also be viewed as a productive, enabling force. The representation of children's lives by researchers can be seen as an exercise of power through the creation of knowledge. Looked at it this

way, power appears deeply ambivalent: both full of promise and fraught with danger. (Tisdall et al., 2009, p. 25)

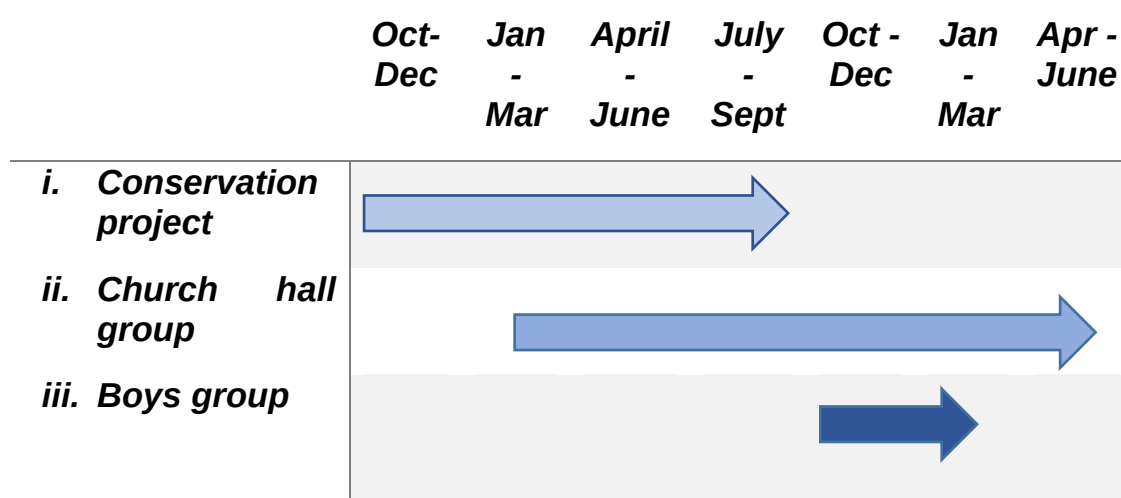
On the positive side of this equation, adult researchers may have contacts, sources of social capital, resources and opportunities that can become available to young people through participation in research. These may be a means of empowering young people, in addition to the skills they might gain through the research that involves creative methods or where young people act as researchers themselves (Murray, 2006). Moreover, research findings can be used to improve services, policy-making or, in an example cited by Hill (2006), participation in consultations.

These considerations informed my approach to research and how I identified potential settings for my research as outlined in the next sections.

Introduction to the research study

My account will initially outline the three projects where the research took place before going on to consider the research process and how the research unfolded over a period of more than 18 months. The projects varied in type, in target group of young people and in their location, the details of which are set out in Chapter 5.

Fig 2: Timeline of research



Briefly, the three projects were

- i. **‘the conservation project’** which was a partnership initiative running over 10 months hosted by an established children’s organisation in the voluntary sector with the aim of enhancing young people’s mental health through access to green spaces. The project was structured in such a way as to involve older peer mentors alongside younger participants. In practice the main group of participants was younger than the target group at 13-14 years and was an already established preformed friendship group of Pakistani Muslim young women – neither of which had been anticipated. The presence of such a strong core group affected the dynamic of the project, as did the fact that there were many more ‘indoor’ group sessions than originally envisaged, both in the community venue and in the premises of the host organisation.

As the project evolved in a way that transcended the original expectations, I was able to develop my research in ways that I had not anticipated. I had less buy-in than I had hoped from young people to individual involvement in research interviews and activities outside of the project. However, they were willing to engage in group sessions and I negotiated three of the evening sessions as well as ‘taster activities’ (making masks) for my research. This limited the potential for talking individually to each young person about what they had created, so resulting in fewer of the narratives I had hoped to gather from younger participants. However, I counter-balanced this by collecting a much greater amount and diversity of ethnographic data than I had expected, comprising specific observations on sessions and activities and my analysis of the life cycle of the project and the development of relationships within it. The young people were aware of this as the research unfolded but it is fair to say that it was easier to be more explicit in negotiations with Young Lives about the shift in data collection.

- ii. **‘the church hall group’** which is a long-standing weekly open access session linked to the local authority. This attracts a more fluid group of young people aged 15-17 which presented challenges in terms of

gathering data. Because the sessions are so unstructured, it was less easy than in the earlier project to introduce activities in the weekly time slot and it was clear that the young people would not be receptive to this; it was not in line with their expectations of the session nor their interests. In fact, the two young men who did come to interview outside of the session were more comfortable talking in a conventional format than agreeing any creative or technological aspect to their interviews. Nevertheless, they did map out their relationships and movements on paper, and at one point briefly interviewed each other.

In the middle period of the research group membership was fluid and several young people who initially agreed to interview disengaged or stopped attending altogether. Reflecting on the possibilities the situation offered, I realised that observing group dynamics and relationships would be as important as interview data and expanded my recording and notetaking of weekly sessions. Consequently, I had to wrestle with questions of consent and transparency, bearing in mind that my role in the session had not been negotiated and explained to the young people as one of ethnographer at the outset. Some young people were no longer present and I could not discuss this with them in retrospect, thereby curtailing details of interactions and disclosures that I could refer to in analysis. Certain observations were therefore excluded at the writing up stage while others are couched in general terms and not attached to named young people. However, I did seek understanding from the small group that formed the core of the session in the latter part of my involvement. This is a necessary but not an easy conversation, given that young people may know relatively little about research and how data is treated, and equally may be impatient with detailed explanations. Here I did benefit from having a long-standing relationship of trust which has been built up on the basis of how I had behaved and reacted to situations over months.

- iii. **‘the boys group’** which was run for young men in a training centre which they attended in lieu of conventional college. This was the only one of the three where members came to the project by referral and was a

structured intervention over 12 weeks. By the time the 'boys group' started I had already adapted my methodology to encompass a larger element of ethnography so was able to discuss this up-front with group members and seek their agreement to note-taking and observation at the outset and at several later points.

As a set of rather fragile individuals, being part of the group offered safety whereas individual interviews were perceived as more threatening. Possibly expectations of being able to narrate self-stories were also inappropriate for some young men in the group. In any event, by this time on the basis of experience in the previous two projects, I had realised that there was as much value in the interactions in and around the group and watching developments there as in what young people say explicitly about themselves. That shifted the emphasis from the thoughts and feelings about self that I was hoping I might discover to data more concerned with behaviours, social practices and relationships. In essence, then, more about externalities and performance than internal reflections, but still providing insights on the work that young people do and how they are agentic in creating their identities and sense of themselves as an actor in their social context. Context, of course, is everything and, for the young men in this third project, the context was appreciably less rich and promising than for the young people I met through the other two.

Summary of the three projects

Fig 3: Summary of the three projects

		
Conservation project	Church hall group	Boys group
local community venue outside visits young group (13-14 years) with older peer mentors participants largely from one BAME group two youth workers and several volunteers involved 10 months duration definite outcomes and achievements for the project my research - creative activities, mainly in group sessions, ethnographic observations, interviews with 2 peer mentors + 2 interviews related to creative activities	open access youth session on-going staffed by two youth workers fluid group of young people, mixed gender located in area of relative affluence in city unstructured sessions emphasis on relationships rather than youth work curriculum my research - ethnographic observation + interviews with 2 young people	in local town rather than city located in training centre participants referred rather than volunteers 12 sessions negotiated with group members one youth worker with me as co-worker focus on masculinity empowerment and help in moving on my research - ethnographic observation + interviews with one young person

Reflections on working through gate-keepers

In contemporary Western societies, young people's lives are shaped by the institutions that they engage with; educational establishments for most and, for smaller yet significant numbers, the services associated with areas of vulnerability such as mental health, child protection, fostering and youth justice. As Heath et al. (2009) note, a great deal of youth research is conducted in these organisational settings, where adult gate-keepers are responsible for the welfare and protection of young people in their care. They are charged with making decisions on young people's behalf and this

may well include decisions about the advisability or otherwise of allowing researchers access to the institution or service and to the young people within it. Consequently,

Researchers should expect gate-keepers to test their motives for wanting access, and to act as a barrier to poorly thought-out or potentially damaging research.....Positive support from gate-keepers can be very helpful.....However, gate-keepers can also use their power to censor children and young people. Researchers need to be sensitive to the gate-keeper's position and to understand the source and limits of their power. (Masson, 2004, p. 45)

In my own situation, I chose not to approach statutory services as a route to making contact with potential participants. I nevertheless found myself dealing with gate-keepers at two levels, in that I needed to negotiate with managers to gain access to projects, and subsequently to build relationships with youth workers and volunteers in the projects. Wincup draws from Burgess (1984) to suggest that researchers benefit from being specific in outlining the focus of their research, what they will be looking at and who they want to participate. She further adds that 'the accounts given need to be plausible to those involved. In other words, researchers should be explicit about the implications for the setting and those who work within it' (2017, p. 63). In practice, there was more space and receptivity from managers whereas I felt there was less opportunity for up-front discussions with practitioners, especially when practical arrangements and session plans were more immediately pressing.

It often helps in opening negotiations to offer to give something back to the organisation (Wincup, 2017), in my case my willingness to contribute time and effort as volunteer. This means there is a degree of reciprocity and mutual benefit although that is not necessarily enough in itself to guarantee success. Lofland and Lofland (1995) suggest there are four helpful considerations for researchers hoping to gain access to an organisation – connections, a clear explanation or account of the research, relevant knowledge and courtesy. In terms of connections, I was introduced to the

first organisation I approached by a professional contact and this was extremely helpful in 'getting in' (Lofland and Lofland, 1995) to an overstretched organisation and being matched to the 'conservation project'. I did not have a similar contact point or endorsement when I approached the larger organisation that runs the 'church hall group' and significantly it took longer to receive a response and to be placed with a project. What is even more telling is that the opportunity to become involved in the third project – 'the boys group' – arose because of the connection I had made with a youth worker in the course of the 'conservation project', showing the benefits of familiarity and established trust.

In relation to knowledge, Lofland and Lofland (1995) also note that

The getting in stage of research is one point where overplaying the learner can have negative, perhaps fatal, consequences. If you are to avoid being seen as frivolous or stupid and dismissed as such, you should have enough knowledge about the setting or people you wish to study *to appear competent to do so*. (p. 40, emphasis in original)

Here I was helped by my previous experience of working with young people albeit in a youth justice rather than youth work setting. I had to adjust to the relative informality of youth work but in other ways was culturally attuned to what the practitioners were trying to achieve and their ways of interpreting what was happening as young people started to engage. As I discuss in the next section, I am less sure that my practice background was an asset in the eyes of the young people, but it did assist me in establishing credibility with the 'conservation project' in particular, not least when concerns arose mid-project about meeting targets and performance indicators determined by the funders.

Relationships of trust are essential in work with young people. In the context of research, relationships of trust between the researcher and practitioners – in this case youth workers and the wider youth organisations – are also critical. Opportunities and further access may then follow. For example, at the outset of my work with the 'conservation project' I was told that the organisation would not have capacity to allow me to conduct interviews or

other activities in their premises. However, once embedded in the organisation with good will established, there was more flexibility than I had anticipated which made the practical arrangements for seeing young people relatively straightforward.

There are, of course, down-sides in working through organisations and I encountered certain of these during my study. Whilst both organisations were supportive of my research, they were inevitably driven by their own priorities and timeframes. For the 'conservation project' and 'the boys group' these were also determined by funding bodies or partnership organisations. In the latter case there was a long delay in agreeing a start date for the group with the training centre. Group sessions also had to take account of the calendar for the training centre and its close-down at half term and over the Christmas break. That was frustrating at a point where I wanted to conclude my fieldwork but, aware of the nature of inter-dependencies, I used the time to progress other aspects of the research.

The provisional nature of voluntary organisations and their employment practices is worthy of note too. Many youth workers are engaged part time and often through fixed term contracts. Consequently, with some practitioners there was limited scope to arrange meetings outside of project time or to put time aside for discussions before or after project sessions and I felt that this did impact on their understanding of what I was trying to achieve. There was also a high rate of staff turn-over, although, interestingly, when new workers came in to the 'conservation project', I did not feel that I was starting again with building relationships of trust. By that stage I had achieved acceptance by the organisation and had earned a generalised confidence such that I was viewed as a resource rather than an additional demand.

Myself and my identity in the research process

Reflexivity, defined as 'the thoughtful reflection of a researcher upon the impact of her or his research on the participants, their social world, on the

researcher her or himself and on the knowledge produced' (Tisdall et al., 2009, p. 229), is critical at all stages of the research process. It is especially so in youth research because researchers are typically older than their research participants and have at least some prestige from connection with an educational establishment, irrespective of any other differences in social status and characteristics (Heath et al., 2009). This then demands of the researcher a heightened awareness of themselves and where they are situated relative to the young people involved in their research.

Given the 'ethnographic turn' in my study, my identity and self-presentation were salient to how I interacted in each of the three project settings and how relationships developed. This inevitably affected the nature and extent of young people's engagement in interviews and creative activities, in helpful and less helpful ways. Moreover, as an active participant in each of the projects, over and above the research, I recognise that I am likely to have impacted on their lives to some degree. In this section I consider both questions and reflect upon my role and what it might mean for the findings from this research.

In terms of the categories that I inhabit, if you like, I am a heterosexual female from the North of England, of White British ethnicity. I qualified as a social worker more than 25 years ago and worked with young people in probation and in youth justice. However, for the past 15 years I have been employed in a university setting, for the most part concerned with professional education. According to Berger (2015), researcher positionality may impact upon their research in three ways. The first concerns access to the field which, initially, I found was helped by my practitioner background and, differently, by my contacts at the university. She also suggests that positionality may affect the nature of the relationship between the researcher and participants. Clearly my age (I am in my mid-50s) is significant here and one of my observations from the fieldwork is the greater intensity of attachments that young people formed to adults whose age was closer to their own (and where there was greater 'proximity' in other characteristics such as ethnicity and area of origin as well). In 'the conservation project' younger volunteers and staff had more in common with the young people in

terms of viewing habits, gaming, musical tastes and use of social media, for example, which formed key points of connection. Although I developed friendly and warm relationships with young people in all three projects, I recognised social distance and that - simply on the basis of age alone - I was further away from 'insider' status. I was able to turn this to my advantage to some extent by asking the naïve questions about new forms of social media, for example, and certainly found that I was examining social practices that a younger researcher might have taken for granted. Nevertheless, I was conscious of having to work quite hard to bridge the age gap (which felt more salient than differences in either gender or ethnicity).

Berger's (2015) third point about positionality is that the researcher's background and experience inevitably affects the way that she or he constructs the world and the language and concepts used to frame research questions and to filter the information gathered. By virtue of my professional life working with individuals and groups, I was familiar with looking at group processes and the life cycle of projects, as well as constructing case histories. This meant that I had a body of prior experience that was helpful for ethnographic analysis and for considering biographies. However, I had to guard against assumptions and neat prescriptions from my professional world and to ensure that I was remaining genuinely open to what I was seeing rather than what I was expecting to see. At the beginning of the 'conservation project' which was the first of the three, I was taking brief notes after each project session but as it became clear that observation would form a critical mass of the research data I recorded more extensively, including my interpretations of interactions and dynamics. This gave me opportunity to challenge myself and to consider different views.

One further pertinent aspect of my background is social class: while I come from a working class background, my education, professional life and income have moved me decisively to what would commonly be assumed to be middle class. This is reflected in my presentation and vocabulary as well as social interactions. I would also suggest that my physical appearance is typical of a relatively affluent, middle aged public sector professional, and that itself is not irrelevant. We give all sorts of clues about ourselves, our

personalities and our social location through our outer appearance, including what Wilkinson (2015) refers to as ‘embellishments’ such as jewellery, make up and nails. Her youthful appearance and style of dress was helpful in her research in a community radio station – it defied the categories of ‘student’ or ‘academic’ that the young volunteers might otherwise have ascribed to her. In my case, I suspect that some of the younger people in my study saw me as similar to teachers and other adults who were interested and helpful but existing in very different social space. Perhaps the ‘professional carapace’ that aided me in relationships with youth workers was less appropriate in efforts to develop relationships of intimacy with young people.

Nevertheless, young people have benefited from all three projects in themselves and in addition from the research activities. Chapter 5 contains case studies and each of the following three analysis chapters begins with an account of the group process in the project that is the focus of that chapter. There I discuss in more detail my own contribution, which was different in each instance. Certainly ‘the conservation project’ was busy with many disparate elements. My presence there was not a central part of the project but there were times in the life cycle where the continuity I offered was needed as was the practical assistance around site visits. The research activities added to the interest and diversity of the weekly group meetings. For the ‘church hall group’ the sessions are less structured and my role as volunteer could be seen as passive in one sense, although because relationships are long-standing there is more communication and gentle learning than is immediately apparent. With ‘the boys group’ I took a more active stance both in group sessions and in the time we spent in the café and elsewhere around the training centre. Separating out the role of participant from the role of researcher is tricky in all three instances, as they were so closely intertwined. The interviews that formed part of the research are more discrete and here the young people had space to reflect and to talk about themselves and thereby to make their own contribution. The five young people who came for multiple interviews were all happy to do so and were positive about the experience of being listened to and taken seriously.

Notes on methods

i. Narrative interviews

My aim as I planned this research was to gather young people's narratives of self and their accounts of their lives, with a view to exploring identity within the context of their individual biographies. As outlined in Chapter 3, narratives involve the linking of events and ideas, making connections and drawing out meaning (Reissman, 2008). They are in that sense mediated rather than raw experience. The story-teller is actively engaged in a construction (or co-construction with the interviewer depending on the nature of the encounter). Narratives, of course, can fulfil many functions but they are a social and relational activity: 'In a word, narratives are strategic, functional, and purposeful. Story-telling is selected over non-narrative forms of communication to accomplish certain ends' (Reissman, 2008, p. 8). Furthermore, although narratives may vary tremendously in length and complexity, they tend to have some structure and typically elements such as plot, characters, complicating actions and climax (Diaute, 2014). Indeed, Czarniawska (2008) argues that emplotment is a critical element that distinguishes narrative from a simple chronological account.

Narrative interviews are useful in enabling young people to foreground their experiences and perspectives (Heath et al, 2009). They allow space for reflection and the interviewer may prompt or suggest areas to consider rather than taking an interrogative approach. As Reissman (2008) notes,

The specific wording of a question is less important than the interviewer's emotional attentiveness and engagement and the degree of reciprocity in the conversation. ...It is preferable, in general, to ask questions that open up topics, and allow respondents to construct answers in ways they find meaningful. (pp. 24-25)

However, younger people may find themselves at a loss when faced with very open questions and unconfident about how to take the control of the interview space that the narrative researcher is seeking to hand over. That implies that some structure and leads are helpful. In line with Emirbayer and Mische's (1998) notion of agency as having three elements – iterative, practical evaluative and projective – I envisaged inviting each participant to a series of three interviews with a past, present and future focus. This was relatively easy to explain to young people and provided a link between the three narrative conversations. I asked participants to bring a photograph and a meaningful object to the first interview as a stimulus for discussion (two of the young women were very thoughtful about this). I also used a basic timeline for that first interview, inviting a life story to date which gave some idea of what my expectations might be without otherwise influencing the direction of the conversation.

The second interview was focused on current activities and social investments. Here I began to explore the nature and function of social media used by the young people and what they revealed as relatively sophisticated choices in that regard. I had prepared a series of cards with suggested topics to aid discussion and took along paper and pens as well so that we could create relational maps and illustrations of physical movements. Naturally, individuals vary in their ability and willingness to talk without prompts, so with some participants I found myself using these more than with others. Moving into the final interview I asked the young people to look forward into their future, initially short term and then a projection 20 years or more ahead. We also explored the resources that they have that might assist them in moving towards the future they envisage – specifically important people, activities or skills that they identify as important enablers or bridges.

Because I set out to recruit participants through the projects where I was volunteering, I envisaged being familiar with each interviewee from observations and interactions outside of the interviews

themselves. This would enable me to gain a more rounded view, counteracting some of the tendencies of narrative interviews in isolation to individualise the young person, and creating a more complete picture of their social context and the structural factors that might constrain their choices (Heath et al., 2009). My intention was to have the three interviews spaced out over several months to provide a longitudinal element and gain a sense of change over what I anticipated might be a period of rapid movement in young people's lives (Saldana, 2003). In reality, I had to work around young people's availability and motivation to engage which affected the timing of interviews. That said, I was involved in 'the conservation project' and the 'the church hall group' for many months and that enabled different, but equally, valid observations and conversations about the choices and changes that the young people interviewed were experiencing over time.

Of course, the discursive accounts given in the interviews were not the only narratives in the study relevant to identity. Chapter 3 also discusses what Bamburg and Georgakopoulou (2008) call '*small stories* both for literal (these tend to be brief stories) and metaphorical reasons (i.e. in the spirit of a late modern focus on the micro-, fleeting aspects of lived experience)' (p. 378, emphasis in original). The sorts of interactions and dialogues evident in the projects offered data potentially as significant as the interviews, requiring analytic attention to performance (Riessman, 2008), social context (Bamburg, 2006) and the evaluative or 'checking out' functions of stories of self (Bamburg, 2004). The greater emphasis on ethnographic recording in the later stages of the research allowed some insights from interactions to be presented to complement those from consciously elicited narratives.

ii. Creative and visual methods

Researchers often look to creative and visual methods when working with young people as a means of capturing their interest and

generating more age-appropriate ways of eliciting their views and feelings. Such methods cover a potentially wide spectrum of activities and innovative techniques (Mannay, 2016). It should not be assumed that these are automatically preferable or more appealing to young people (Punch, 2002a; Heath et al., 2009), and Punch (2002a) pertinently asks, 'are certain methods being used with young people purely because they are fun, or because they also generate useful and relevant data?' (p. 330). Being able to analyse and extract meaning from the data is, of course, essential. Nevertheless, non-traditional methods can be helpful in reducing the distance between young participants and adult researchers and may offer young people skills and other experiences that they value.

Here I am using the term creative and visual methods as a broad term encompassing what Punch (2002a) refers to as 'task-based methods' which may involve elements of writing as well as drawing, design and photography. These methods were mainly developed with participants in 'the conservation project' in mind, partly because of their younger age but also because of the nature of the project and the weekly group sessions, all of which had a focus and associated activities. As always methods must fit the context in which they are being applied and there were several features of 'the conservation project' which influenced what I proposed to do and what I ultimately put into practice.

The project was established to take young people out into green spaces around the city and to adopt a number of these as project sites. The indoor sessions were partly designed to facilitate learning about mental health and social connections, and partly focused on practical tasks such as designing leaflets, preparing presentations and planning future site visits. These sessions, with their dual purpose of raising awareness and building skills, became central to the project in a way that had not been envisaged. The project proposal had suggested they would be practical and functional, but as the project evolved a great deal more work and activities were undertaken in the

weekly sessions than anticipated. The sessions were therefore busy in terms of activity but also in terms of the relationships involved with multiple staff and volunteers.

I intended my research and the activities and interviews to be a spin-off from the main project. However, it quickly became clear that the project was asking quite a lot of the young people itself and was already supplying them with individual scrapbooks/diaries and action cameras for site visits (two methods that I might have chosen to use myself). There was also a strong group dynamic from early in its life cycle and, bearing these in mind, I realised it would be difficult to negotiate to see participants one to one outside of project sessions. I subsequently developed suggestions for activities that they could take away to complete themselves and spent part of one week's session talking through these, asking young people to select their preferences (or to suggest alternatives) and to write tags that could be hung on a tree (see Figure 4). In fact the only young people who pursued individual tasks were 'David' who created a front page of a magazine about himself, and two young women who put together 'memory boxes' because, by the following week, the group had decided that they wanted to design T shirts together as a group activity. In a piece of research happenstance, this coincided with a changeover in project staff and the opportunity for me to take over a number of the weekly sessions for my research activities, allowing for research artefacts and narratives to be produced 'in situ' (Mannay, 2016).



Fig 4: Young people's suggestions/ choices of activities

The three project sessions I designed roughly followed the sequence of the narrative interviews in being focused – albeit less directly – on past, present activities and hopes for the future. Chapter 6 discusses and analyses the specific activities in more detail but briefly they comprised:

Preparatory activity – young people asked to decorate cut out figure to represent feelings about self and a mask to illustrate how they might want to be seen by others

Session 1 – ice breaker – response to photo cards

T shirt design – young people asked to incorporate something about themselves or something meaningful to them in their design

Session 2 – washing line activity – hanging out small cards with responses to prompts (see Figure 5)

Map exercise in pairs – identifying movements and where young people spend time using a map of the city

'what is important to me?' – young people asked to position themselves across the room to indicate interest/importance of e.g. music, faith, friends

Take home activity – memory boxes so that young people could collect small items as prompts or reminders of themselves at this stage of their lives

Session 3 – Decorate craft post box with montage of photographs from the project

Young people asked to design a 'good luck' card for self at the point of leaving home or taking on a new challenge (medium term future)

Thank you cards to the group

'Dear future me' letter (long term future)

Washing Line Activity

Let's fill up the washing line with lots of things about ourselves

	Some thing or activity I love to share with others
	A place I like to visit or would like to go to
	A wish for my future
	Something special or important that has happened to me
	What I have got out of [conservation project]

Figure 5: Washing line activity from Session 2

Although each of these sessions had careful preparation, the messiness of the real world means that they do not necessarily run according to plan, particularly with a session that has typically as many as seven young people participating as well as peer mentors, other volunteers and two staff members. Specifically, the last activity in session 2 was derailed when one of the youth workers broke the news that she was leaving to the group. The two exercises in session 3 focused on the medium term and longer term futures were also conflated. Nevertheless, there was a good level of engagement overall with the sessions which is discussed, along with the engagement in additional tasks in Chapter 6. Because I was also conscious of contributing to the project as a whole, agreement was sought to use the decorated post box, the group thank you cards and a project scrapbook as part of project evaluation: the young people, being strongly attached to the project, were keen for this to happen, and the project staff and management were appreciative at the stage where the project was concluding and needing to report its outcomes.

iii. Collecting ethnographic data

From the outset I had recognised that my role as participant in the three projects would be critical in getting to know young people and securing their engagement. I therefore anticipated that developing relationships of trust and attending to the process of each of the groups would be important both in enabling me to collect data and in informing its analysis. However, I did not appreciate the extent to which close observations of the groups themselves would contribute to the research nor the importance of timeliness and judging the right point to make suggestions or to ask for involvement. That is perhaps an admission of naivety on my part, given what I know about organisations and about young people. Nevertheless, I was surprised with both ‘the conservation project’ and ‘the church hall group’ how long it took before it felt safe and appropriate to talk to the young people about my research. In both instances there were practical reasons, in the first case waiting until I was granted ethical approval,

and in the second, holding back whilst young people were concentrating on GCSEs. However, the other underlying reason was waiting until I judged that I had sufficient understanding and trust developed with the youth workers in the projects (not something that happens rapidly when contact is only at one point during the week). I found this frustrating at the time but in retrospect recognise the value of having time to gain an understanding of these groups of young people and the three very different types of youth projects. Interestingly, Mannay and Morgan (2015) identify the benefits of what they term the 'waiting field', and how ethnography can occupy the spaces between and around the use of specific research techniques, enabling the researcher to develop a more holistic view. Mannay (2016) also comments that it may compensate for over-investment in visual and narrative methods and the contemporary tendency to separate out individual techniques, rather than seeing them as part of a research whole. Rather than a problem, it became, then, an opportunity that I was able to use to advantage.

Certainly, narratives, photography, created images and so on may be part of a broad ethnographic approach. However, the genesis of this study meant that the other two elements were conceived and carried out as distinct entities with ethnography alongside, and in interaction, rather than over-arching the three. Ethnography itself has a long tradition and, although not precisely defined, it is generally assumed to involve observation of research subjects in natural contexts, which may involve greater or lesser degrees of researcher participation (Heath et al., 2009). Hammersley (2006) describes this as a methodological orientation leading to

a form of social and educational research that emphasises the importance of studying *at first-hand* what people do and say in particular contexts....Also crucial to ethnography, it seems to me, is a tension between what we might call participant and analytic perspectives. (p. 4, emphasis in original)

The attempt is for the researcher to seek to understand the perspective of participants and to earn 'intimate familiarity' (Lofland and Lofland, 1995) with whatever area of social life has piqued interest, but not to present these unfiltered. Clearly awareness of group dynamics, institutional processes and – relevant to young people – aspects of development and social transitions can be used to illuminate and perhaps to explain the particularities of experience.

My role as volunteer and participant differed across the three projects, so affecting the ethnographic data which was collected more systematically in the 'boys group' in the latter stage of fieldwork. Nevertheless, in ethnographic research writing is not left to the final stage (Light, 2010). I had made contemporaneous notes throughout all three projects and also, as part of the focusing into themes and topics (Lofland and Lofland, 1995; Scott-Jones and Watt, 2010), compiled from the various types and sources of data I had amassed:

- group timelines, including patterns of activity and attendance at projects;
- detailed accounts of the group process in retrospect; and
- case histories for each of the young people.

This leads on to considering the issues of interpretation, analysis and representation outlined in the next section.

Approaching analysis

The data generated in this study are varied, including field notes, photographs of site visits, interviews and artefacts created by the participants. The hybridity of the data is a challenge in itself, some being 'hard' evidence, others more subjective or interpretive (Pool, 2017). Moreover, each type of data brings its own challenges in terms of identifying what is significant and deriving meaning. The analysis chapters demonstrate how I approached analysis of different types of data whereas here I focus on

over-arching concerns about the search for authentic and truthful interpretations. By truthful I mean interpretations that lead to fair and legitimate views or judgements linked to, and supported by, the data. Recognising that there may be no 'right' interpretation and that 'truth' is impossible to establish, my attempt was to aim for the alternative qualities of 'trustworthiness' and coherence (Reissman, 2008). In other words, the story that I tell, whether crafted from ethnographic observation or derived from the stories of participants, needs to hang together in a persuasive way. Following Reissman (2008), I sought to 'present [my] narrative data in ways that demonstrate the data are genuine, and analytical interpretations of them are plausible, reasonable, and convincing' (p. 191). For Czarniawska (2004), this is about explication and contextualising of what has been said in ways that enable inspired or 'novel' readings of participants' accounts while still treating them with due respect.

Although Reissman's (2008) discussion is focused on narrative enquiry, the attempt to be 'plausible, reasonable and convincing' is equally relevant to data produced by other methods. It is perhaps by drawing on different types of data that perspectives can be developed and provisional claims confirmed or refined. Furthermore, rich possibilities for alternative narratives or explanations may open up where discrepancies or divergences become apparent, allowing space to exploit the ambiguities in complex and diverse data.

By its very nature qualitative research 'eschews notions of one single account of knowable reality, and instead emphasises notions of situated knowledge and subjective understandings' (Heath et al., p. 89). Across all the methods used in this study, there are tensions between the participants' perspectives or intentions and my own understandings of significance and meanings (Armstrong, 2008). As indicated at points in the analysis, these are heightened where elicitation interviews (Mannay, 2016) - perhaps to seek a young person's interpretation of an image they had created - were impractical in the group setting. I also recognised the impatience of young people when being asked to revisit earlier activities or discussions. As a consequence, opportunities for 'checking out' with young people directly

were sometimes limited: I found that I relied on informal discussions and also experience of young people over time, individually and in groups, to ground my interpretations and give them context. In other words, to develop 'ethnographic competence' (Amstrong, 2008, p. 62). Naturally, this required a great deal of care and attention to detail, as well as constant questioning of the knowledge and assumptions I brought to analysis. Yet, with effort, I was able to pull together data collected in different settings and over more than 18 months, to create my own sense of what might be happening for the young people involved.

Turning to the research interviews specifically, these were each recorded, transcribed and entered into a data analysis programme (N-Vivo) along with a selection of my field-notes for thematic analysis. However, my interest was as much in the form and structure of young people's narratives as in the subjects under discussion. With this in mind, alongside the exploration of themes I pursued a narrative analysis (Reissman, 2008) roughly corresponding to the holistic-form mode in Lieblich et al.'s (1998) typology of narrative readings. I was therefore examining elements of plot, characterisation and the sophistication and coherence in stories, as well as indications of how they were being adapted for me as an audience. To some extent, each interview was co-produced, and I wanted to probe how the rapport that developed between us influenced emerging stories (Reissman, 2008), whether extended biographical accounts (Roberts, 2002) or small snapshots of a life. As indicated in the literature review some of the sensitising concepts that I brought to this analysis derive from the thinking and concepts around narrative identity (McAdams, 1993; McAdams and McLean, 2013) and construction of self-narratives in adolescence and early adulthood (Habermas and Bluck, 2000; Fivush et al., 2011).

Chapter 3 also introduced the social identity perspective (Jenkins, 2014) which is useful for analysing the ethnographic data as much as for the narrative interviews. I did not code this data so extensively but in writing accounts of group process, for example, was noting many of the same themes relating to identity, such as ability to make choices, feelings about self and relationships with trusted adults (youth workers in this situation).

Although a matter of judgement and inherently subjective, I was able to test whether my interpretations were tentative or robust by cross-referencing or triangulating across the different sources of data. The intensity of feelings about friendships was thus evident when the photographs taken around the 'conservation project' were looked at en masse, was remarked upon in my fieldnotes and was highlighted by young people in their entries to the project scrapbook. The accounts of the three groups that open Chapters 6, 7 and 8 respectively are therefore 'thick descriptions': what is said, firstly, can be justified and traced back to the data (Pool, 2017) and, secondly, is put in a wider context (Light, 2010) (including here the nature of youth work and its professional endeavour).

The integration of different sources and types of research data during analysis is a process that goes beyond triangulation (Cronin et al., 2008). Although at the outset the narrative aspect of my methodology had clear precedence, as the study progressed the ethnographic data gained equal status. I used analytical approaches appropriate for each method, as already indicated, in the initial stage. Then, using themes raised in the interviews to focus attention I looked further at the ethnographic data and what young people had produced in the creative elements of the research. Roughly following the four stages of integrative analysis mapped by Cronin et al. (2008), I finally synthesised the 'threads' through the data into the discussions of developing identities and subjectivities set out in the analysis chapters.

Reflexivity – the critical awareness of self in shaping the research and assumptions that might be brought to analysis – is essential throughout but this is especially true in writing up (Light, 2010). So too is the use of theory for 'ethnography without a theoretical framework is just description' (Scott Jones and Watt, 2010, p. 165). I would say that both points apply equally to the data from narratives and from the sorts of creative activities used with the 'conservation project'.

In addition to my two main theoretical understandings of identity, I approached the data with a strong sense of the sociological concepts

developed by Pierre Bourdieu (1977, 1986, 1990, 1998) principally relating to social capital but also the associated ideas around *field* and *habitus*. In particular, I was alert to indications of the mixture of types of capital and the systems of capital (Raffo and Reeves, 2000) that were evident for young people, and also, following an alternative conceptualising of capital, their access to bonding, bridging and linking capital (Putnam, 2000). Both notions of capital and of developing self-narratives are capable of articulating with thinking about young people as agentic beings, accumulating and expending capital on the one hand, and being active in creating meanings from life events and presentations of self on the other. I therefore held Emirbayer and Mische's (1998) model of iterative, practical-evaluative and projective forms of agency at the forefront of my mind in analysis.

These are, however, quite broad conceptual categories and I was careful not to approach the data with filters that were too tightly defined, as it were. My intention was to understand my data through theory rather than to impose theory upon it and see it only through that lens. Nevertheless I was also conscious of my own long-standing interest in practice and as an academic in emerging gender identities and knew that, in addition to the above, I would be 'tuned into' questions of gender and gender practices (Nayak and Kehily, 2013) even before the third research site ('the boys group') was mooted as an option. Again, as a former practitioner, I found an immediate appeal in Wierenga's (2009) depictions of 'relationships of trust' and 'resource-flows' as enablers for young people. This all amounts to a rich mixture of ideas and models to draw upon in analysis, whilst still leaving sufficient space for new concepts and framings to emerge.

Final musing on methodology

Qualitative research is often a messy business and, where a broad methodology involves multiple methods, this is particularly so. There is benefit in that findings may be triangulated where data from different methods point in the same direction. Conversely, the diverse perspectives that come from different data can suggest new interpretations, unsettling the

neat conclusions that might be drawn from a simpler data set. To some extent the mixture of methods that I used represented pragmatic choices responding to the possibilities available in the three research settings and the relationships I was able to engender with young people, given who I am, my position in these youth organisations and the points of connection that I found. The ethical challenges, of course, changed and became more complex with the greater reliance on ethnographic data. However, as Mannay (2016) observes,

Learning to work ethically is an on-going process, no method is a panacea and we will not always foresee the unintended consequences of our fieldwork; but by accepting this, we can refine our craft and move beyond the 'indignity of speaking for others' (Spencer, 2011, p. 15) to working and speaking with our participants (p. 123)

That there were research compromises as the study progressed is not unusual, but then neither was the stumbling across opportunities not envisaged at the outset, such is the unpredictability of research encounters which can take the researcher in so many directions. The critical question, of course, is whether the new knowledge from my findings carries credibility and trustworthiness, evident in the rigour and validity of the data analysis. And I hope to demonstrate this in the following chapters.

Chapter 5 The research sites

This chapter presents three case studies covering each of the youth projects in this study. The following analysis chapters each focus on one of the projects which gives opportunity for critical reflection on group process and the development of relationships and, consequently, openings for social learning in each of the settings.

Case study A The ‘conservation project’

The ‘conservation project’ was located within a large and well-established children’s organisation in the city of Bransgate. Like many voluntary organisations (Wylie, 2009; de St Croix, 2016), Young Lives is enterprising in seeking sources of funding for its activities, in this case partnering with a local environmental charity. The genesis of the project arose from an earlier Young Lives group which had provided peer mentoring and befriending to vulnerable young people with the aim of reducing their involvement with formal mental health services. The idea for the ‘conservation project’ came from members of that group who developed plans for a project with three elements:

- a) Enabling young people to find quiet, inspiring places that they might use for refuge or for renewal;
- b) Celebrating the wildlife and heritage of sites identified by the project;
- c) Encouraging relationships between the older members of the project and young people who might access the sites.

In the event, by the time that the project gained grant-funding and was launched, the original group of young people – the intended ‘peer mentoring’ element - had disbanded. Participants were therefore recruited by the youth workers rather than by the peer mentors. The project proposal identified the target group of young people as 15-16 years, and the intention was to hold only a small number of sessions in a local community venue for the purposes

of planning and orientation. It was envisaged that the main part of the project would comprise site visits, practical conservation work and, in the latter stages, dissemination activities. The environmental charity attached a worker, Martin, to the project to facilitate these outdoor activities. Young Lives was keen to involve volunteers, so there were two younger volunteers contributing alongside me and the two youth workers employed through project funding.

Before the 'conservation project' began in October 2017, the lead youth worker, Kirsty, had visited and recruited potential participants from local schools, as well as volunteers from a nearby FE college. The prior publicity had been aimed at 15-16 year olds and it was hoped that what was on offer would appeal to young people who self-identified as vulnerable in terms of their mental health. What had not been anticipated was that the project would attract a strong pre-formed friendship group, some of whom developed intense attachments and became the core of the project throughout. The approach which was designed to encourage maximum participation (Sapin, 2013) was quickly adapted to accommodate their slightly younger age (at the start of the project they were all 13), and revised expectations of the extent to which they could realistically take responsibility and act independently in taking forward project work.

Early in the project an initial site visit was arranged to draw in the young people, and then a second only 3 weeks later, both taking place on a Saturday. By that stage it was late in the autumn and site visits were suspended in favour of weekly evening sessions. These were popular with the 6-7 young women involved but among the staff familiar points of difference began to appear over the appropriate balance between the task-orientation and the relationship-building and youth work element of the project (de St Croix, 2018).

The ultimate aim of the project was to enable participants to identify 10 local sites that could be adopted and promoted to other young people as places where they might go for refuge or renewal, especially when feeling vulnerable or under stress. The young women who initially engaged did not

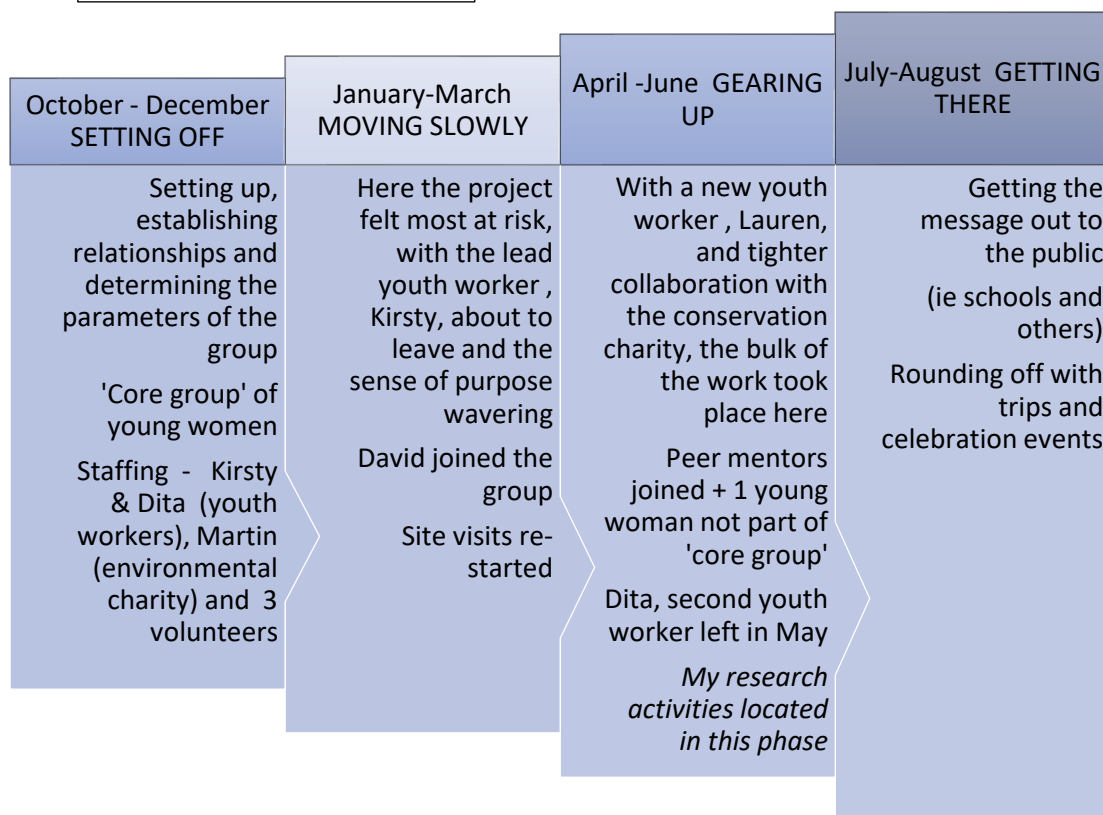
present as having obvious difficulties with mental health themselves (although some issues became apparent over the course of the project) and the peer mentor element took some time to negotiate and put in place. Anxieties were therefore growing over the Christmas and New Year period about whether the project would be able to reach its target group and achieve the milestones agreed with funders, reflecting the sorts of tensions that Haynes (2003, cited in Tyler, 2009) identifies as often encountered between the demands to be accountable, creative and responsive at the same time, all within tight timeframes.

Coinciding with a change in the youth work staff, site visits began again in March 2018. By this time the project was then joined by David who had been encouraged to move on to the 'conservation project' from another Young Lives group. Up to this point the project – with the exception of Martin as a staff member – had been female-oriented so David's arrival changed the dynamic and even more so because he was older, at age 16, and at a different stage in education approaching his GCSEs. He was also of white UK ethnicity whereas the core group of young women all shared a similar Pakistani heritage and Muslim faith.

The most active part of the project – including the three sessions I ran explicitly as part of my research – took place between May and July. Lauren, newly appointed as lead youth worker, recognised the skills and commitment of the young people involved and focused their energies on the goals that had been set for the end of project. Through David, another young woman, Marie, started to attend as well as five 17-18 year olds recruited from local colleges as peer mentors. Although only two of these stayed through into the summer, the sessions and site visits during this period felt very busy in terms of activities and relationships. This was epitomised by the emotions around the leaving party for the assistant youth worker, Dita, held in the Young Lives premises one evening in May.

Roughly speaking the project could be characterised as falling into four phases:

Fig 6: The four phases of 'the conservation project'



The project closed in two different ways. It came to fruition through a series of dissemination events in which certain of the young women visited schools to talk to an audience of young people about the project and the 10 sites identified. Several took a lead in creating a powerpoint used in the schools and in a public event and celebration at a community arts centre in the city. All the young people took part in designing a logo as well as display boards and leaflets, enabling them to participate at whatever level they could (Sapin, 2013) and ensuring that the work of the project had a life beyond the project itself. The project also ran a series of trips to reward the young people and celebrate their involvement in a personal way.

Case study B The ‘church hall group’

The ‘church hall group’ differed from the other two projects in this study in being open access – available to all young people – and open ended, representing the archetype of traditional youth work (NYA, 2019). There was no life cycle, as such, for the provision which was well established before I started volunteering and continues after I have left the project. The weekly session runs in a church hall well used by other people in the community, where the group has access to a large empty space in the hall, a kitchen designed to catering standard and storage facilities for pool, table tennis, computer gaming and other equipment. In that sense it more closely resembles a conventional youth club set up, although as is often the case the session does not take place in dedicated youth space (Batsleer, 2013). The session is unstructured and to varying degrees centres around the kitchen area, and at busier times indoor football in the hall. The main youth worker has been attached to the session for several years and was supported over the 15 months I volunteered there by two co-workers at different periods.

The young people attending the ‘conservation project’ tended to be brought to the sessions by parents as most did not live in the specific area where the project was based. Notably the ‘church hall group’ is much more attached to the locality, attracting young people who live in the area and knew each other initially through either primary or secondary school. The area itself is a relatively affluent part of Bransgate, the 2011 census indicating that 37.5% of residents in the ward are in professional occupations, with a further 22.9% being in professional roles in health, teaching or education. It has a small BAME population, and only 2.2% of residents identified themselves as Muslim, the vast majority being either Christian or no religion. While the young people who attended the session across the research period were not homogenous, on the whole they reflected the local area and talked often about holidays, involvement in sports and other structured leisure pursuits. This means that they are not looking for the youth work session to provide them with opportunities but with a space where they are free from organised, adult-led activities. They value being able to develop different, and more

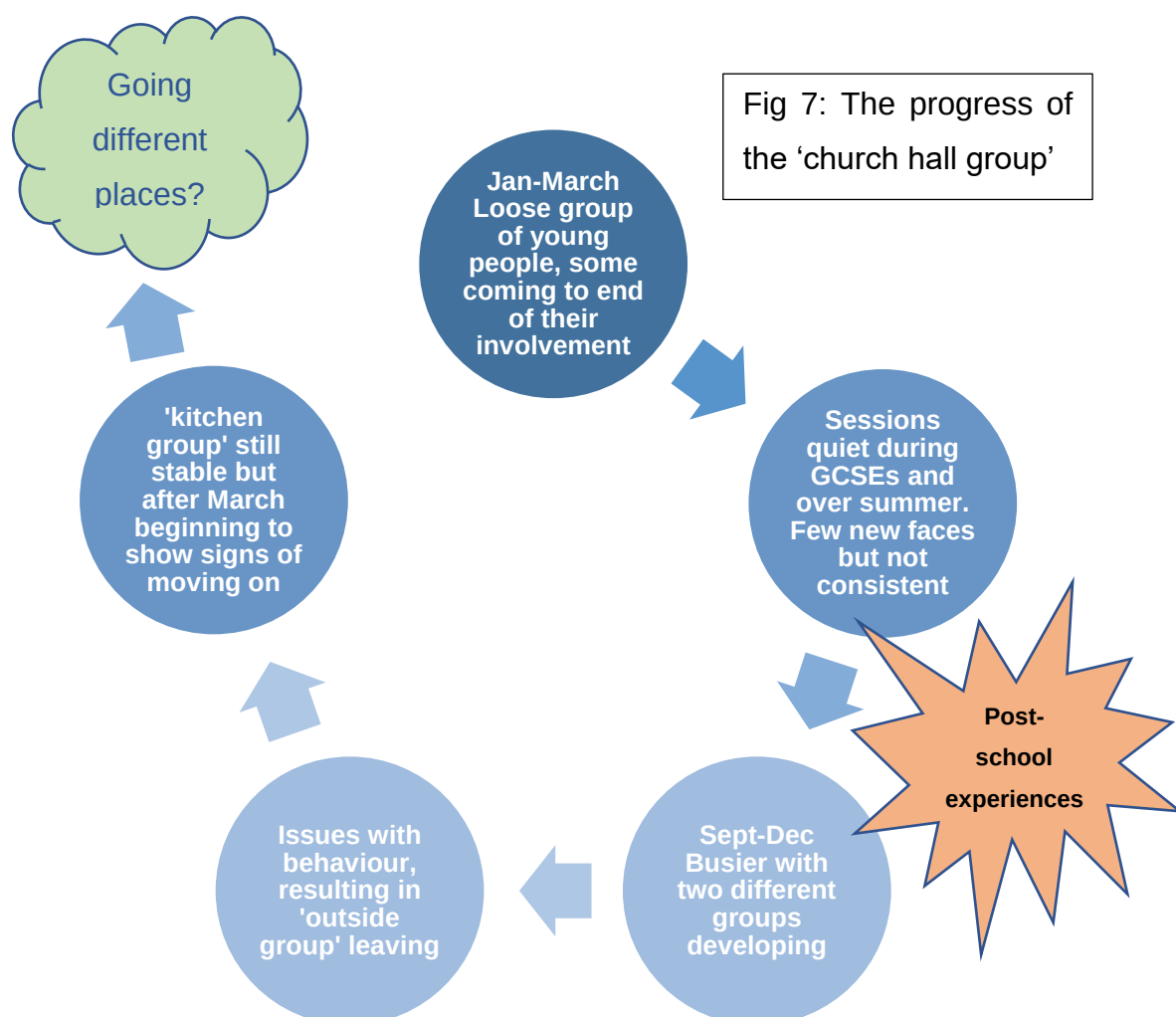
equal, relationships with adults in that context so it does offer a key ingredient that is not present in situations involving only peers.

Despite there being no defined project with a purpose and beginning and end points, there was nevertheless a discernible life cycle for the loose groupings of young people who attended the session over the study period. When I first joined in January 2017 a pool of 10-12 young people were involved, with others around the periphery. They were a mix of genders and they were active around the space in a spontaneous rather than organised way. Most were then in year 11 and either went to the same secondary school or knew each other from previous schools. Attendance dropped as the GCSE period approached and the group dwindled, with most of the young men drifting away by the end of March. A small number of young women attended more consistently throughout (although consistent here was rather different than for the 'conservation project' which by its very nature demanded commitment). From April new young people occasionally arrived at the session, but after exams and over the summer the club was quiet. From September the session became busier, with a new and more diverse group of young men, led by one individual older than most of the others. Alongside this, a smaller and tighter group – referred to here as the 'kitchen group' – was developing with some long-standing attenders and one who, encouraged to join by a friend, became part of the duo that was most attached to the club and to the youth workers. This 'kitchen group' remained in place after the others - the 'outside group' – were excluded from the session. However, even this group were coming less frequently by the middle of summer 2018.

Over this 18 month period, most of the young people were in transition from school to post-16 education, training or apprenticeships. Beginning with a relatively common experience before GCSEs they were all making decisions and taking preliminary steps towards their future. In most cases this involved engaging in bigger and more diverse institutional contexts such as college, and consequently they needed to build new sets of social relationships. The weekly session provided continuity at a point of change and offered the

young people relationships with adults who were concerned for them but not directive in the way that teachers, tutors and others might be.

The changes over 18 months are represented in the diagram below:



The 'church hall group' was staffed by two youth workers and much of the 'work' in the group was dependent on the relationships between the young people and the youth workers. Attempts to deliver a youth work curriculum as required (de St Croix, 2016; 2018), were not received well as most of these young people were relatively middle class and engaged in education. They expressed their unwillingness to engage with subjects such as drugs and sexual health that reminded them of school. This meant that the activity, especially over later months, mainly consisted of young people gathering in

the kitchen to chat and eat food. The informality worked well when the two permanent youth workers were in place, but the sessions were a different experience during the absence of one or another of the workers. Attaf, the lead youth worker, was away for some weeks shortly after I started attending and the back up youth worker then in post left for a new job so for a period relief workers were sent to the church hall, with very little continuity. Ifzal was then appointed as second youth worker and the staffing situation remained steady until the beginning of 2018 when relief youth workers were again used to cover Attaf's absence. The young people's responses to these different youth workers shed more light on the nature of trust in relationships, informal learning and attachments already seen in the 'conservation project'.

Case study C The 'boys group'

The over-riding feature of *Working it out for yourself* is the diversity of the research settings. The third project, the 'boys group', was a more discrete intervention that the other two, located in a training centre in a smaller town rather than the city. While Bransgate is characterised by a mixed population, with multiple ethnic groups and large numbers of students, the demographic of Addenford is strikingly different. At the time of the 2011 census, 97.9% of residents were of white ethnic background. In 2015 the borough was rated the 39th most deprived local authority area out of 326 in England. Although 2015 figures (ONS Annual Population Survey) indicate that economic inactivity at 22% is comparable to the national average, the percentage of students within this figure is less than half the average for England (13.1% compared to 26.2%) and the level of sickness is almost double (38.3% compared to 21%). Unlike the city, the town does not have a university and it has been less resilient socially and economically in the face of de-industrialisation. More recent figures (ONS, 2018) show that the borough still has almost double the national proportion of jobs in manufacturing (14.3%) but the picture is gloomy overall, with 6.4% of 18-21 year olds— twice the national rate – and 3.9% of the male population (compared to 2.6% nationally) claiming out of work benefits in August 2018.

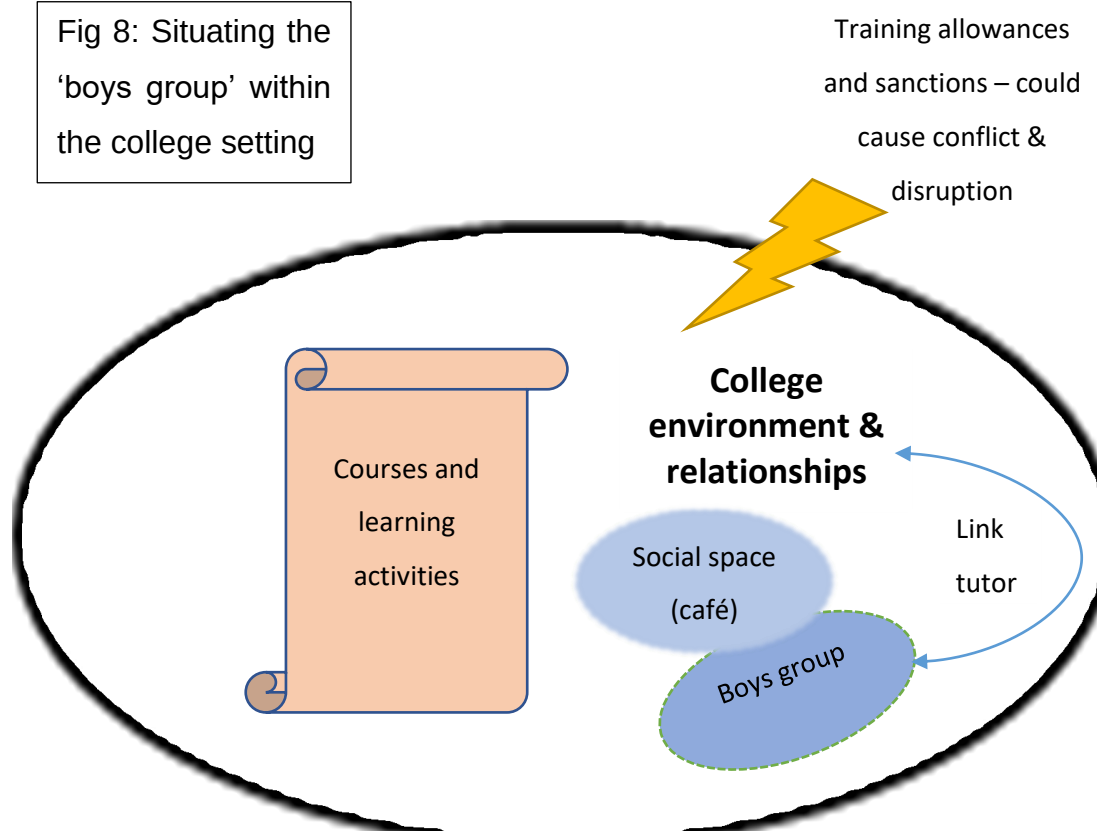
This forms the backdrop to the work of the training centre where the 'boys group' took place. As a specialist college, Mayhew Training has a wide brief to develop partnerships with employers to deliver apprenticeships and training courses, but also works in house with a smaller number of young people unable to thrive in conventional college situations for a variety of reasons. Although the environment was helpful and supportive to these young people, the opportunities in the town for young people were relatively limited and, for some, there was little prospect of progression from the centre into other education, work or volunteering. Responding to the sense that certain of their students were feeling 'stuck', the training centre negotiated a weekly intervention with the same children's organisation that hosted 'the conservation project'. It thus represented, in a small way, an 'interrupted space' (Bolzan and Gale, 2011b) for a cohort of seven young men who had been attending the college for some time but were identified as having difficulties in moving on. In that sense they had stalled in their progress in education or work and, arguably, in their transition to adulthood.

The group was distinct as an example of youth work in being located within an institution where it was part of participants' educational programme, with a weekly timetabled slot. They could face sanctions and lose money from their training allowances for poor attendance at college and required activities. Their initial choice to be part of the group was therefore negotiated rather than voluntary. However, the young men expected it to be different and 'more fun' than other courses on offer. The group was integrated within the college, with an allocated link tutor, which enabled the youth worker advocacy on behalf of young people over discipline or finances to be constructive rather than conflictual. Tutors were interested and engaged with the young people and welcoming of youth workers as outsiders coming into the college. The presence of staff from Young Lives was seen as a useful addition and a link to the outside world which could offer opportunities to the young people for whom they expressed care and commitment.

The diagram below illustrates where the group fitted within the college structure. The external boundaries of the college are depicted as impermeable for these young men (although possibly less so for other young

people attending the college for vocational training) which denotes their individual circumstances but also the wider social and economic impacts of austerity and the local job market.

Fig 8: Situating the 'boys group' within the college setting



At the outset the parameters of the group were set in terms of having twelve sessions for two hours on a set day of the week. The youth worker, Carlos, was experienced and attuned to 'boys work' as a specialist area of youth work and, in this instance, I was co-working as volunteer. The intention of the group was to focus on the young men's needs – social, emotional and practical – as young men, and to adopt an explicit agenda around gender. The aims were articulated in terms of building resilience, feelings of community or belonging, and 'vocabulary' (or expression, particularly of emotion). The subjects covered and the format was determined by the young people who decided that they wanted to consider their relationships, feelings, rights and future directions.

A core group of only five allowed a sense of safety and intimacy to grow across the weeks, encouraged by the informal beginning of each of the 11 sessions in the college café downstairs. As the group progressed, group members said that they viewed it as their favourite part of the college week, and their behaviours and interactions bore this out. The group space intentionally ‘tipped the balance’ of power (Davies, B., 2015) towards the young men and what they identified as their interests and concerns. The group thus created a space for social learning in and of itself in a classic youth work fashion (Jeffs and Smith, 2002) that set it apart from the directed and structured learning that the young men experienced elsewhere.

The wider context meant that, whilst the group was successful in its own terms, we faced a challenge in seeking to maintain the benefits for the young men beyond the short duration of the sessions. Consequently, this case study most explicitly illustrates the constraints both in the use of personal agency and the ‘opportunity structures’ (Thompson, 2017) that determine the choices available to individual young people.

Chapter 6 Developing a sense of self

Here analysis focuses on the project whose participants had the youngest age profile, exploring the beginnings of their conscious engagement with 'identity work' and the implications of ethnicity, gender and sexuality. These played out in their interactions with the youth project and its workers and volunteers, as well as in the social practices of a defined friendship group. The chapter examines how, through relationships of trust (Wierenga, 2009), the young people were able to use the project as a resource and source of capital, developing their autonomy and agency at a key point in adolescence. The end point of the chapter is a comparative analysis of the different narratives of self offered by younger participants and older peer mentors, evidencing how individual accounts of biography typically develop in tone and complexity with age.

Thoughts on group process – 'the conservation project'

At the first session of the 'conservation project' it was immediately apparent that the five young women who came knew each other and attended the same school. On seeing the presentation given by Kirsty in their school, they had decided collectively, as much as individually, to find out more about the project – a peer influence that was present throughout. They were sufficiently encouraged by what they experienced in terms of games and 'getting to know you' activities to come to an all-day planning meeting the following week (during half-term) and to the first site visit, through which they were able to gain a sense of the project as a whole and the practical, outdoor element specifically.

The presence of the friendship group was central to the progress of the project across its lifecycle. At the initial session two young people, Amira and Farida, had been strongest in vocalising their enthusiasm, and also some of their fears and uncertainty. My notes suggested that they might be key opinion formers within the group but this may have been a premature

judgement: over the initial weeks, Basima became the point of contact and was active in ensuring that the others knew about changes to meeting times and other arrangements, effectively using the ties of friendship to bond them to the project. By December, when the project took a break, two other young people, Laila and Parveen, had also joined, brought along by the original participants and forming a core group of five who remained with the project throughout. Others, such as Samira, Tasneem and, in the last weeks of the project, Farzana, had a more peripheral involvement.

The young women frequently referred to having discussions between sessions about the activities they liked and most especially about the staff members who had attracted their attention. Within a very short time group myths or narratives about individuals developed, particularly around Martin and Kirsty whose performance and humour during the early sessions was much appreciated. The young people reacted in different, but equally potent, ways to the volunteer, Clare, who joined in games and related easily to the young people, and to Dita, the assistant youth worker who was closest to them in age and ethnicity. The way that the young women communicated with each other about the project helped sustain their commitment and motivation. It was notable that when individual young people did not attend, the others would often call them on the phone or otherwise hold them to account. They constantly took and shared photographs of each other on their mobile phones. During one of the day trips at the end of the project, the group face-timed Amira who was on holiday. The young women used these communications to reinforce their emotional connection and the meaning that the project held for them.

In the scrap book that group members collated at the end of the project, they described enjoying their learning about mental health and spending time outdoors. However, there were also many comments reflecting the value that young people place on relationships, and especially their friendships (Hey, 1997). Basima, for example, wrote that “Together we have picked 10 safe spaces. Moreover, made special bonds and friendship” whilst Farzana liked “spending more time with my friends and making new friends”. This was an open scrap book that was used for project evaluation as well as for my

research, so the young people's comments were prepared for an audience and sentiments and phrases were repeated to some extent. Nevertheless, they seemed to reflect the young people's genuine pleasure in the relationships around the project. The 'core group' also recognised that they were more tightly connected to each other through their regular involvement in the project by jokily adopting a name, Team 10, partway through to capture their group identity.

David joined the project towards the end of February and his friend, Marie, 6 weeks later, adding an extra dimension to the group dynamic. When the peer mentors arrived during May, the energy changed again but, except for one volunteer who was Pakistani and Muslim, the 'core group' did not show a great deal of interest in pursuing one-to-one relationships with these older young women. They had demonstrably shifted their focus of attention inwards, so that they almost became a group within a group. It is striking that in the photographs that I took during the two day trips at the end of the project, there are many images of the 'core group' together, including some where they are interacting with Martin and Lauren, who was then the youth worker in post. However, there are very few showing individual interactions between 'core group' members and staff or volunteers, which contrasts with the multiple photographs of David and Marie talking or walking with staff. David and Marie also each insisted on sitting with their chosen staff on the minibus used for these trips whereas the 'core group' settled down together at the back of the vehicle.

To mark the end point in a personal way, in the last few weeks which coincided with school holidays, Young Lives ran two day trips to outside venues and held a party on the last evening to recognise all the work that had taken place, the positivity around the project and relationships with Young Lives in general. The project ended well in the sense that young people were observably ready to move on by the time it finished, into a new school year and, for David, a transfer into college. The informal learning in the project had involved aspects of democracy and citizenship-orientated work (Hall et al., 1998), which some had embraced more than others, but it was noticeable that all had developed soft skills, new competences and

confidence through the trusting relationships (Batsleer, 2013) that they had met there.

This account is, of course, just one version of how the project developed and the choices and investments that the young people made, which are further elaborated in the following sections. One area of interest is how the young people approached the opportunities that opened up to them through the project (including my research activities) and what encouraged and enabled them to explore new experiences.

New roles and experiences

During the teenage years young people are inevitably exposed to new experiences, and this is institutionalised in school settings and the range of activities offered, or required, across the school career. Whilst the 'conservation project' did provide these young people with opportunities for 'trying out' roles and taking responsibilities, in the first instance coming to the project itself may have been a rite of passage for the group of friends engaging with the initial sessions. It is quite conceivable that at the age of 13 these young women had not previously been part of a social group not connected to school, family or (faith) community. Although cautious about the risk of over-interpretation, I observed signs of a quiet pride in belonging to the group that was independent and where involvement was entirely their own choice. The young women, Amira especially, became animated by quite simple things like going to the shop and being able to decide on their refreshments for the evening, and generally by being listened to by the adults around the project. Indeed, Amira arrived at one of the early sessions with a powerpoint about her thoughts and expectations as a counterpoint to the project publicity which she found dull; her body language showed how she appreciated the positive response this received. These young women were responding to a micro-field (Atkinson, 2016) in which, through its interactions and the way it was structured, the balance of power relations was 'tipped towards young people' (Davies, B., 2015).

The first opportunities that the project offered were to visit open spaces and to make collective decisions about which could be adopted as part of the project. Sites were chosen in one sector of the city, starting with an area of woodland owned by the conservation charity itself and regularly used for introducing young people to fire-craft and other skills. With rare exceptions, none of these sites were previously known to the young women who regularly expressed surprise at finding so much accessible space in, or on the edges of, the city. The sites further away were also new to David but he did know green spaces close to his school and in fact suggested a new site himself, which he and I went to explore together. All the young people seemed to enjoy the physical aspects of the project and activities such as litter-picking and under-water filming using action cameras, becoming bolder after their initial, tentative, attempts.

At the beginning of the project the young women quickly developed connections and relationships of trust with the immediate project staff and settled into a comfortable pattern in terms of weekly early evening meetings (Spence and Devaney, 2013). However, Wierenga (2009) indicates how 'relationships of trust' might extend to institutions and organisations as well as individual people. It was apparent after the first six months that the trust that the young people placed in Kirsty, Martin and others was becoming transferable to Young Lives as a whole. This was partly due to involvement with other staff members, for instance, one youth worker who ran a Mental Health First Aid session to cover holiday for Kirsty. Having formed trust in the first people they met through the project the 'core group' was prepared for meeting and placing trust in others (which was enhanced by the knowledge that David already had of the wider organisation by being part of a previous project). The other significant factor was growing familiarity with the Young Lives premises which were used before and after sites visits and for celebratory events, such as the parties that were held when Kirsty and, some weeks later, Dita left. The young people thus gained a sense of ownership and comfort in the Young Lives environment and with the staff group that gave them 'safe enough spaces for the risks of learning to be taken' (Batsleer, 2013, p. 105).

This growing sense of ownership and ease within Young Lives meant that the managing director looked to the members of the 'conservation project' to assist with the service user element of a recruitment process for staff for another project. The suggestion of being able to participate in the organisation as well as in the 'conservation project' (Sapin, 2013) was enthusiastically received and they were happy to engage with the support they were offered. The young women and David thus took part in training and then conducted panel interviews for candidates over two days during their school holidays. They wanted to give back to Young Lives as an organisation because it had given them something they valued, and they appreciated the expression of trust in their commitment and capabilities (Henderson et al., 2007). This was consolidated towards the end of the project when they were invited to take part in a community consultation relating to a developing area of Young Lives work and, subsequently, another follow-on piece of work.

The dissemination events at the end of the project provided further challenges and opportunities for the young people. These included a presentation in the regular community venue for members of 'friends of groups, professionals and others around the parks and open spaces where the sites were located. Although this was not well attended, they found it useful as a 'dry run' in anticipation of the schedule of other talks already mapped out. Towards the end of the school term, three members of the 'core group' visited schools to talk to young people about the project. The final event was held at a community arts venue in the city and was attended by a wide variety of interested people and also, importantly, friends and family. Amira was particularly active in preparing for the presentations and together the young women embedded a video with their photographs and music into their powerpoint slides, powerfully expressing some of the emotions they had invested and what being together in the project had meant to them.

The activity around dissemination at the end of the project epitomised the 'journey' that young people had taken. Naturally, individuals differed in their readiness to speak to audiences and to engage with publicity and dissemination materials, but the 'core group', David and Marie were all

involved to some extent. The project represented an unthreatening space in which they could develop skills and confidence (Batsleer, 2013) such that Amira, Basima and Farida were able to address groups of people and, indeed, to adapt what they were saying to different audiences by the end of the 10 months. They visibly enjoyed the response that they received and the acknowledgement that they had worked hard and been a valued part of the project. The young women occasionally referred to the liaison with their school and the praise that they were given by the year head for their involvement. This suggests that had come to notice within the school setting and that the interaction of two key micro-fiends (Atkinson, 2016) enhanced the cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1986; 1990) they had accrued.

The young people further built their social capital (Bourdieu, 1986), through the many relationships they enjoyed around the 'conservation project', with adults, peer mentors and with each other. However, 'bonding social capital' (Putnam, 2000) might better explain the strengthening of the 'core group' observed over the months of the project, and evident through their interactions and how they sat together and moved around together as a group. It was noticeable that young people adopted positions within the 'core group', particularly in terms of emerging leadership where Amira contributed her initiative and Basima a capacity to bring people together (perhaps analogous to the 'shaper' and 'chair' in Belbin's (2004) typology of team roles). Conversely, Samira at points expressed reservations about the dominance of the 'core group' and their excitability, and, whereas others were agentic in choosing to make commitments, she was possibly equally agentic in absenting herself from parts of the project.

In contrast to the younger participants, the peer mentors approached the 'conservation project' with interest, but more detachment. For some, such as Nicola, aged 18 and at the start of her university career, this was just one of several organisations where she engaged as volunteer. During interviews, she described her enthusiasm for working with people and on social issues generally but was also very clear that she was making deliberate choices about the concerns, such as food poverty and mental health, to which she wanted to devote her energies. For her and for the other peer mentors,

greater age and social awareness meant that they were selecting options, perhaps on the basis of what they judged would suit their personalities, skills and values, but for instrumental reasons and with a view to CVs and experience that could be citable in the future as well. The appeal of the 'conservation project' was at least in part what it might offer by way of 'bridging capital' (Putnam, 2000) and a learning experience that was different to the learning of the younger participants. It could be said that the involvement of the latter was serendipitous – they were in the right place at the right time to hear about the project – and, for some, it appeared to be transformational. For the peer mentors, the project would not represent a 'critical moment' (Thomson et al., 2002) as it may have done for the young people. Their involvement and commitment may have been equally sincere, but their choices arose from deliberation rather than emotional connection.

The peer mentors also seemed more familiar – and comfortable – with the idea of taking part in research interviews. Whereas I had experienced some uncertainty from the young people when I explained my research and found that I needed to go to them with a choice of suggested activities, the peer mentors all immediately said that they would agree to interview and were quite open to the opportunity to talk about themselves. In practice, because of the timing and absences over the summer, only two came for a series of interviews, but it was striking how much less persuasion, if you like, they needed to consider taking part. This may be because of prior experience of consultation or research (Hill, 2006) but may also have been because they are more used to thinking about themselves and telling their self-stories, so for them, being asked to do so – and to do so to an adult - is simply less threatening.

'Naming and framing'

As described in Chapter 4, I revised my original expectation of the creative aspects of the research from individual activities with young people, to suggestions for activities they could take away and do themselves, and finally to group sessions, embedded within the project rather than a spin-off

from it. In part this was a product of timing as the point where I secured ethical approval and started to discuss my research with the young people coincided with an intense period for them. From their perspective, Kirsty leaving the project was a big, and sudden, event, and there was no break before Lauren came into post. They had to adapt very quickly to a new worker, respond to a rapid increase in visits to outdoor sites (the spring weather being more conducive) and engage with the staff recruitment in Young Lives I have already mentioned. Unsurprisingly, in this dynamic, I was finding it hard to claim any attention for my research as something separate from the project (except from David). However, I was pleased that the young people were keen to engage within the regular weekly timeslots for the project.

Before the three sessions I ran for my research, I was able to run a 'taster' activity which was intended to ensure that the young people understood and felt comfortable with the sorts of areas that might be explored in my sessions. It just happened that this session was the first attended by (four of the five) peer mentors, so the craft-based task was received very well as a light-hearted way of getting to know each other. What I had provided was a series of cut-out figures and cardboard masks, and colouring pens, glue, beads, feathers and so on. The only instruction was that each young person should decorate a figure in a way that represented how they see themselves and a mask showing how they wanted other people to see them. This caused some debate and in my field notes, I later commented that what I was asking was 'easier for the older ones to grasp evidently!'

The figures I had provided for the young people had been sourced from a craft store and, like many of the items there, tended to replicate social norms in terms of gender and ethnicity. Some of the outline figures were, for example, of women with A line skirts and bobbed hair and thus very different to the profiles of the 'core group' who all wore headscarves and tunics. Yet they worked with the figures that were presented to them without comment (at least as far as I was aware). In contrast two of the peer mentors (of white UK ethnicity) took up scissors and cut the figures so that they represented the shape they wanted. This may have been simply about the greater

confidence of the older young women, but they seemed much more definite about what they wanted to say and the aspects of themselves they were choosing to highlight.

Given there were four peer mentors and eight younger participants in the session, I was unable to have individual conversations with everyone about what they had intended to portray and what they had chosen. The young women noted personal qualities and tastes such as music (see Leila's figure overleaf and Farida's mask). However, what they produced might be notable for what is absent as much as what is there. For example, Basima said she is a unisex person, that she is funny, cheeky, loving and annoying as well as a 'phone addict'. She also wrote 'religion' on the torso of her figure, the only young person to do so. Interestingly, in the debrief before going home that evening, Lauren commented that the group she had been working with had discussed religion and the mosque but had been unsure how this might feature in their designs. This could be interpreted in various ways and there would likely have been a different conversation, and perhaps a different outcome, with a worker who shared their ethnic background and religion (Lauren is also of white UK ethnicity).

In Shain's (2003) study young women of a comparable age to the 'core group' talked in some detail about their background and culture to a researcher who was from a similar background. However, these young women may not have been at a point where they were able to articulate about their faith to others who are not of a South Asian ethnicity. Perhaps they had not yet needed to especially as they live in a multi-ethnic area of the city and attend a school where the majority of pupils are BAME. Research elsewhere with groups of slightly older Muslim young women has identified the Islamic cultural capital (Ramji, 2007) or religious cultural capital (Sanghera and Thapar- Björkert, 2017) that they gain through adherence to their faith and signifiers such as the wearing of the hijab. These studies suggest that, far from being subjugated by religion, these young adults see observance and being knowledgeable about their faith as a source of empowerment and a means by which they can resist elements of cultural



Fig 9 Left: Leila's depiction of self with iPod



Fig 10: Above: Farida's mask nb real name covered

conservatism within their community, particularly in challenging gender norms. For them, education and advancement were ways of becoming a 'better Muslim' and creating a more inclusive community, closer to the true egalitarian values of Islam (Ramji, 2007). The young women in my study were arguably not yet able to be so circumspect about their religion and its role in their lives, certainly in the presence of adults who were not of their own faith. Nevertheless, they recognised a commitment to their faith and religious culture as a marker of identity.

All the young women expressed this commitment. Even those such as Samira, who wore Westernised clothes and no headscarf, still took care to ensure that appropriate parts of her body were covered. During a site visit, one of the peer mentors, Jasrah, displayed sketches she had made of her own designs for clothes, saying that she felt very restricted with what was available in the shops and wanted to find her own ways of being able to dress modestly but without compromising style. My conversations with Samira and Jasrah were the most explicit in terms of exploring the negotiations around being a British Asian young woman. Elsewhere, the young women just quietly made compromises to accommodate cultural

expectations. For example, ordering food from a burger bar during a trip at the end of the project, they made no comment about halal meat but each selected fish from the menu.

Given the shared understandings among the young women, discussion about cultural practices, and specifically diet, were relatively muted. During Ramadan, however, they did talk about the extent to which each were engaging in the fast: at their age there was no expectation of fasting throughout. They also dressed in brighter shalwar kameez and coloured headscarves as Eid al Fitr approached at the end of June. They still seemed full of festival spirit a few days later when we held the presentation event for 'friends of' groups and others involved with the parks and open spaces where our project sites were located. The first hour of that session was preparation and for a large part of it the young women were practising their presentation and enjoying putting make up on each other. This – similar to the taste for coke (which they pronounced 'coak') and pizza – 'serves as a vivid reminder that 'Muslim teenage girls' are, after all, also teenage girls who are Muslim' (Rashid, 2016, p. 266). There is a mixture of experiences and influences that feature in the lives of young people bridging two cultures and drawing their emerging identity from them.

The young women were conscious of themselves as belonging to a religious group and certainly conversations around the project suggested they were very aware of family and community presence in regions of Pakistan (Sanghera and Thapar- Björkert, 2017). It may be that they are just beginning to work out what that means for them as British Asian young women and had not reached a stage where they could assert, rather than just inhabiting, their ethnicity and religion as part of their identity. Equally, the silence around these subjects may have been a product of interactions with the various agendas and ethnicities of non-Muslim workers and volunteers around the project. I explore in a later section how Jasrah, as another Pakistani Muslim young woman, provoked a qualitatively different reaction to the other peer mentors.

In comparison, David, older by two years, was much more able to identify the social groups and categories (Jenkins, 2014) that he belongs to. He was the only young person who engaged in one of the independent activities that I had suggested: he created the front sheet of a magazine about himself and his life. In this he identified the significance of an accident when he was young which left him needing to use a computer at school to write, and he introduced a picture of Sonic the Hedgehog to represent his early interest in gaming. Connected to this, he described himself explicitly as a 'you-tuber' as he collaborates with other gamers and accesses game reviews online. At two separate points he made it clear that he was unwilling to discuss his sexuality but included in his magazine an image of sheep, one being brightly coloured, with annotations saying that he (David) is "the rainbow sheep of my family", and the only one who is gay or bisexual. Later, when we were designing T-shirts, he came up with a striking image that he called a 'treebow' which incorporated the environmental spirit of the project in a tall tree with the rainbow colours denoting LGBT pride forming the trunk.



Fig 11:
David's T
shirt design

The project opened up as a safe and inclusive space for the young people, where they found and reproduced through their interactions a 'localised habitus' (Coburn, 2011) characterised by understanding and acceptance.

This was encouraged by the openness of the workers and volunteers, especially for one worker in relation to her own sexual identity, which became a key element in the developing ethos. The dynamic went in directions that were not envisaged at the outset, where Young Lives had anticipated bringing together relatively unconnected individuals who might form a group through the project, rather than having young people at its heart who shared so much in terms of social characteristics and spent time together outside, as well as within, the project. On a personal level, I was conscious of building a relationship with the 'core group' as an entity rather than with individual members (unlike David and Marie and one or two others at the periphery of the 'core group'). However, as Bolzan and Gale (2011a) note, researchers with young people need to 'expect the unexpected' and to work with what the research throws up, in this case, strong indicators of group practices and attachments.

Belonging and attachment

It is evident that relationships were central to the project from its inception. Of course, Young Lives and the environmental charity set out with ideas of goals and activities that had been agreed with the funders. These included targets for identifying outdoor sites and the tasks involved in making these accessible to others. Inevitably, for this work to begin, young people needed to be attracted to the project, to see it as relevant to them and to feel that it offered a safe space that they could occupy (perhaps psychologically as much as physically). Human interaction is key to establishing these qualities as young people first enter a new environment. As Davie, B. (2015) notes,

Even when [facilities] are very basic, however, young people may still be willing to engage because workers, working with the young people themselves, have developed an environment which is young people-oriented and to a significant degree young people-driven. (p. 105)

Moreover, bearing in mind that 'the relationships offered to young people by youth workers, and the relationships enabled among young people, are the

central vehicle for learning in youth and community work contexts' (Batsleer, 2013, p. 106), the way that these subsequently developed around the project is worth 'unpacking' in some detail.

The young women who attended the first project session had already met Kirsty when she visited their school for pre-project recruitment. The fact that she had done so seemed to have a significance for the 'core group' beyond just getting them through the door of the first session, particularly for Farida who most directly and consistently expressed her enthusiasm for the project. More than six months later, when asked as part of an activity what she had gained from her involvement, she wrote "meeting Dita, and Kirsty came to my school and told everyone about the ['conservation project']. And meeting new people". Relationships hooked young people into the project, if you like, but then acted as the incentive for them to stay.

The feelings about Kirsty were particularly intense and grew very quickly over the initial sessions leading up to the December break. There were three factors contributing to this. The first is that she represented something powerful for the young women in terms of being the gateway into the project and, more generally, the opportunities that it offered. The way they spoke about her – Bamburg's (2004) 'small stories' - suggested an element of symbolism that, after she left, occasionally had a tinge of mythic quality. The second was simply that she was fun and communicated a spontaneity that appealed to them. This was often mixed with social learning. For example, games of Chinese Whispers were a way of demonstrating attentive listening, so there was purpose in the play. Nevertheless, what she created was light-hearted space that was much appreciated when the young women's attention span and capacity for more serious activity was exhausted. The third factor stems from the inherent quality of youth work relationships which allow for more equality and intimacy than would normally be the case between young people and professionals (Ord, 2007). As trust developed Kirsty shared stories of her own life history and often presented herself as quite disorganised and scatty, quite distinct from the sort of authority figures that teachers, for example, represent (Murphy and Ord, 2013). In a telling moment, Farida in the garden at Young Lives on Kirsty's last day at work

there, was trying to attract her attention and shouting, “Kirsty is my friend, she is my friend”.

The project appealed to the young women because of the opportunity to develop relationships with adults that were warm and intimate, without the usual distance of generation or social position. The boundaries around this, of course, must be carefully managed because as one youth worker (quoted in Jaynes, 2019) expressed “You’ve gotta befriend them but not *be* their friend [.....] they’ve got to see you as an authority figure but not really” (p. 2). From the first session, the ‘core group’ connected well to Kirsty and to Martin from the environmental charity. However, they seemed to form a different type of connection to the adults closer to them in age and involvement in youth culture. At 23, Clare was able to move between ‘silliness’ and relative maturity depending on the mood of the session and what was appropriate: she could enter into the spirit of hide and seek, but she could also offer advice and the benefit of her experience, which was listened to all the more so because at other points she met the young women at their own level.

The response to Dita was different again. Although she was involved as youth worker, she carried the role lightly as a student with a very part time status. Whereas Clare was arguably accessible to the ‘core group’ as the sort of young adult that they might aspire to be, Dita was of another South Asian ethnicity, so was closer to them in that respect as well as in age (she was 19 at the start of the project). Relatedly, Hart (2016) suggests that youth work professionals maintain boundaries but that young people also establish their own boundaries which might determine who they talk to, how they relate to them and what they might reveal about themselves. In Dita’s case the boundaries seemed porous in both directions, as evidenced by their tendency to refer to her as ‘Auntie’. Their collective view of Dita was most striking at her leaving party when they arrived with cards, gifts and cakes with messages echoing the refrain ‘We will miss you’. The party was a large affair because by then Marie and David had joined the project as well as the five peer mentors. So, it was busy, but it was also very emotional. The build-up for the ‘core group’ was arguably intensified by unresolved grief about Kirsty’s departure where they were given little notice and there was less

opportunity to express their feelings. In any event, it was heartfelt and one of the defining moments of the project.

From this point, the commitment of the 'core group' perceptibly shifted to the project itself and Young Lives as a whole. They related well to Lauren but in a calmer way than to Kirsty. More revealingly, they were noticeably cool towards Hannah who replaced Dita until the very last project session when they found that she was on the same youth work training course and was friendly with Dita, prompting an abrupt change of attitude. It was almost as though they were experiencing attachment-fatigue, which may offer one explanation of why they interacted quite happily with the peer mentors yet did not show any interest in one-to-one buddying relationships. The notable exception to this was Jasrah.

Jasrah arrived at the project a week after the other four peer mentors and immediately seemed to stand out in the eyes of the young women because of her similar ethnicity and faith, but also because she possessed an unusual degree of poise. Amira singled her out and, at Dita's leaving party, quizzed her about the region of Pakistan she was connected to and aspects of her religious and cultural observance. Jasrah in return showed her a new way of arranging her head covering in a stylish, turban-like fashion which is what she wore herself. On Jasrah's one site visit, she was followed closely by Amira and it was one of the photographs that I took of them litter-picking together that Amira chose to incorporate into her page in the project scrapbook. Perhaps Jasrah was near enough to emulate - certainly to admire - as a British Asian young woman and had precious cultural capital in their eyes.

The two white young people in the project, David and Marie, related to project staff and volunteers in a different way that was not mediated through a group view of who and what was most relevant to them. Nevertheless, they expressed their own preferences, in David's case, for Lauren and, in Marie's, for Clare who was 'required' to sit next to her at every session. In comparison they seemed socially more isolated, and this was certainly brought into stark relief by the fact that the rest of the project participants were such a strong

friendship group. Whereas the 'core group' had capacity to use the project as a staging post to other opportunities, enabled by the relationships they had formed, David and Marie appeared more dependent on their relationships. For Marie, this perhaps reflected her maturity, as she was a year younger than the other young women, and the difficulties she had experienced at school. Both were openly asking for support and one-to-one interest from adults. David was always very keen for me to give him a lift home after evening sessions and this became a pattern for Marie as well despite her living within easy walking distance. Touchingly, their scrapbook entries said "I have been able to work with ['conservation project'] and be able not to be shy", "I have learnt you can always join someone who can except you" (Marie) and "gives me a chance to socialise" (David). It is significant that a year after the end of project, David still visited the Young Lives office whereas the 'core group' had moved on to other initiatives that were providing bridges and connections elsewhere.

Spaces and places

The 'conservation project' itself provided a space away from family, school and other institutions that allowed the young people to grow and develop. In that sense it represented a whole new social space for informal learning where they could take ownership. As outlined above, the 'core group' did this more decisively than others around the project and accrued benefits accordingly.

In terms of physical space, one of the obvious features of the project was its emphasis on open spaces and the environment. The site visits may have been an added bonus for the young people, rather than the key reason for them joining (none arrived with a burning passion for conservation or the environment). Nevertheless, through these visits they were expanding their knowledge of the city and its environs beyond the areas they routinely visited in daily life. The site owned by the environmental charity which was visited on the first project outing and again at Easter, was generally declared by the young people to be the one that they would most remember. David

especially said he enjoyed learning how to light fires and toasting marshmallows. The young women enthusiastically took photographs of each other at the sites, wanting a record of their shared experience there.

By the end of the project the 'core group' were also happy to attend unfamiliar venues, for example, for a community consultation at a centre perhaps a mile from the Young Lives office. It was noticeable that the young women were walking together to these venues and to Young Lives itself rather than being driven by parents, indicating greater confidence in themselves and from parents. There had been a degree of protectiveness around them, whether by virtue of age, culture, or a mixture of both, that was starting to relax, at least whilst they were in the safety of the friendship group and going to a trusted organisation. In this regard, Young Lives facilitated 'resource-flows' (Wierenga, 2009) through access to an expanded range of experiences and social environments.

From this Northern city in the UK, the availability of modern telecommunications means that contact can be maintained with family and friends in other countries. It was unclear whether, for these young women, transnationalism is a source of social capital as Sanghera and Thapar-Björkert (2017) suggest. However, there were signs throughout the project that Pakistan was very much present in their lives, in imaginary terms and as a physical place that they, or family members, would visit. Tasneem, for example, talked about helping her grandparents pack for their annual journey 'back home'. This implies that their family resources may be devoted regularly to travel to Pakistan and, on more special occasions, to religious sites in Saudi Arabia. The former at least was a source of some tension, as individual young women said they wanted to travel to other destinations such as Greece, Italy, Canada and Berlin as well, suggesting that as they grew older they have an urge to broaden their horizons.

As might be expected, the peer mentors at 17 and 18 were already expanding their horizons at college and, in most if not all cases, with a view to university. They were more obviously mobile, having to move between family, education, part time work and social life that were typically more

dispersed than for the younger age group. Within the analysis of this project, they provide many other points of comparison, certainly in terms of degrees of self-consciousness and reflection which are considered in the next sections. Here I move on from observing young people's choices, strategies and relationships to consider what they themselves say about their choices and strategies as well as the people, places and events that have shaped their lives so far.

Storying selves

The stories that people tell about themselves may concern their past, their present circumstances or dilemmas, and certainly may involve imaginings of the future (McAdams, 1993). In terms of what they said about themselves, the comments from the young women in the project were quite brief. Reflections, where they did appear, were on the whole episodic. The one exception to this came from one of the 'core group' who in two different sessions gave an elaborate account of being hospitalised and given antibiotics intravenously, talking at length about her own fear and the impact on her family. Unsurprisingly, the group setting did not encourage that sort of introspection. However, the research activities do shed light on the way that young people look back on their lives, as well as forward, deriving meaning from their experiences and 'self-event relations' (Pasupathi et al., 2007).

Marie, as she talked about the items that she had chosen to put in her 'time capsule', showed some understanding of what has been important in her life. She included a fir cone and blade of grass as a reminder of her grandfather who died earlier in the year. She used to go out with him collecting acorns, conkers and so on. She went on to say that the fir cone and grass were also "to explore how adventurous I am right now", explaining that by 'adventurous' she meant climbing trees and other physical challenges. She added a troll figure – "because it's my favourite movie" – and Pokeman ball, figures and key ring because she used to enjoy playing the videogame. She also sent herself a message which read "Dear Future Self – please make sure I get the right job and have a perfect life".

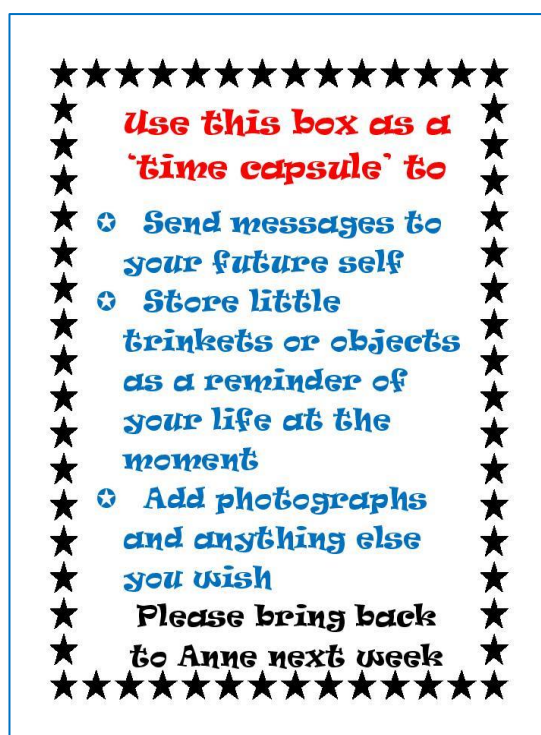


Fig 12: Example of instructions for one of the 'take home' activities for the young people.

Discussing her life more generally, Marie described caring for a younger relative who takes a lot of her attention and became quite animated when she talked about protecting another of her cousins in the transition to secondary school. (Marie did not explicitly make a connection, but when we were decorating T shirts, her design featured a very positive anti-bullying message). Looking into the future she was at first unsure, but later in our discussion felt she might like to work in an emergency services call centre. She said she might move to another nearby city as she went there with school for a reading competition but also talked of a different town which is not too far away and which she knows slightly. This suggests that it is easier to project your future self into a location that is to some extent familiar or where there is a connection that makes it seem less strange.

Amira's time capsule included a pin for her headscarf, and motivating statements, which she annotated: 'I am a unique and special person' ("I put this in cos I'm unique to others") and 'I have the ability within me to achieve anything I want in life' ("I love quotes so I put this in"). She also created a letter to her future self on paper that she deliberately tore and aged with tea:

“Dear future....

This is a little note for my future self that I have a goal in life which is to get good GCSE grades and achieve a degree/job. I am moving into year 10 now. Year 9 has been so good and I was happy to meet new people....I want to continue to do good. I have a bunch of great friends, Leila being my BFF. I want to always remain friends with Basima, Farida, Parveen, Farhana, Leila, Samira [and other names] all through life. There will be times where we won't talk but always will be friends for life. Thanks Leila and Basima for always helping me. I met Kirsty and Dita who taught me to be resilient. This is my goal – my friendship which I always want to maintain.”

It seems that the tone that Amira wanted to present is up-beat. Elsewhere, however, there are expressions of vulnerability and emotional highs and lows. For example, she had a short interview with one of the peer mentors after designing her T shirt in which she talked about the decoration around the neckline which was intended to resemble a henna pattern and which included pink and brown flowers because “she is a girly girl”. She also commented on other elements which referred to bullying and to mood swings. In a ‘letter to future self’ she revealingly said “Remember all the people who were mean to me that they can no longer affect me. I want to always remind myself that I can never forget that but I will not let them affect me. I do not want fake friends. I just want Team 10”.

Putting the emotional content of Amira’s ‘letter to future self’ aside, what is noticeable is how much it is a ‘stream of consciousness’, illustrating the jumble of things that make up a life. The front of the card is dedicated to ‘Leila & Amira BFF’, with hearts, flowers and glass beads. After a few remarks about exams and university she then says,

“I would like to pass my driving test and get a Range Rover. I would always want to remain BFF with Leila forever. And all of the Team 10 squad. I would like to give/help my parents whatever they want. I want to get a career in health and social care or an active job. I would like to donate to the poor and in need.”

The themes of caring and connection are trailed throughout, with a wish to see her younger cousins grow up and a desire to visit Pakistan each month to decorate family graves with flowers “and make it look really pretty and also clean it and let no mud and dust in it.”



Fig 13 Left: the cover of Basima's 'letter to future self'

Fig 14 Above: Marie's 'letter to future self' which says simply “achieve my math goal” and “if you don't like life change it”

Some of this style – and also some of the love/hate feelings about self – are echoed in the ‘letter to future self’ that Basima wrote. She catalogues a list of ambitions for work, study and friendship, then added

“Moreover, I want to be a better person. I want my asthma to go away forever. I want people to love me more and know how I feel inside me. I want to travel around the world. Although I will miss my parents when I go to uni I will always come to see them and make them happy.”

Similar to Amira, Basima expresses an intense attachment to a female friend (not involved in the project) and, overall, both letters are remarkably unguarded, even unsophisticated. David presented something quite different

in his view of his life. The 'front page of a magazine' activity he engaged with was inherently more structured and he had taken some time selecting and presenting his chosen items (some of which are discussed in a previous section). What was startling was that, given the care that he had taken over the front page, he was almost unable to elaborate on what he had chosen. The difficulties he found with this are perhaps revealed in one poignant exchange:

David: There's a picture of me on the beach when I was younger and I put this on because I don't have many photos of when I was little, I don't have many of them left (pause) which makes me kind of upset because I can't remember what I have done in my life, where I have been (pause)

Anne: So, tell me about that particular one.

David: (quiet voice) I don't know.

Anne: You don't know?

David: No, I can't actually remember it off the top of my head, when it was or where it was for that matter. I look about..... would you say I look about five or six in that photo?

Anne: I would have said you were younger than that.

David: So about three or four? (silence)

Anne: Do you think there were lots of photographs that just haven't survived or....?

David: I don't know.

Anne: No. You said that it makes you feel sad that there aren't many?

David: Yeah, because it means I don't have a full story of my life to tell which is kind of upsetting to me. Because I would like to pass on what I did when I were younger to my kids as a story.

Anne: Yes.

David: Some choices I made I am going to admit, they weren't the right ones, but at least if I did pass it on, I could tell them not to do this, that or the other. (pause)

Anne: There's something there about your story of yourself and the way you feel about yourself, having the pieces to put together.

David: Yeah,

Anne: There are big gaps in that....?

David: Yes, a lot.

(David, Interview 1)

David was expressing a strong urge to create his story but sadly did not seem to have the tools to do so at that time. However, he indicated that he is reflecting on his life and his choices, and this perhaps suggests that he was motivated to work on his personal story going forward. Of course, some of this is about having opportunities to rehearse narratives and that may come with age but, as discussed in Chapter 3, is also dependent on the types of collective stories and memory-making that goes on in families (which I infer in David's case is relatively impoverished).

By way of comparison, the two peer mentors who came for interview showed greater facility in their crafting of their life stories and more consciousness of how to develop the themes they wanted to explore. Even bearing in mind McLeod and Yate's (2006) suggestion that reflection and talking about self comes more easily to young women than to young men, their approach was markedly different. For example, here is the start of Caitlin's first interview, in which she was asked to talk me through her life to date:

Caitlin: Oh god, a lot has happened in 17 years (laughter)

Anne: I expect it has, hasn't it?

Caitlin: Ooh, it's been a rollercoaster.

Anne: Has it?

Caitlin: Yeah, really, (laughter) yeah, hmm. Birth wasn't exactly easy, for anyone in our family. I were 2 ½ months early.

Anne: Oh my god.

Caitlin: No one was expecting that, especially my mum, because she was a teen mum, she were 18 when she had me. My mum and dad weren't together at the time either, so like no one was expecting me to come that early. Ermm, mum said I was like that small, they couldn't even fit me in new born, she had to literally buy dolls clothes, you know like from the toyshop, things like that, because new-born's wouldn't fit me, and I was in hospital for about a month and a half and mum weren't really allowed to come visit me either because I was that premature that they couldn't risk anything.

Anne: Couldn't pick you up or do anything?

F No.

Anne: Oh wow.

Caitlin: So like for a month and a half my mum could only come about an hour a day to like come and see me, then my dad could come like every other day because obviously he weren't my primary caregiver, things like that. And then it were pretty smooth sailing until I were about five, and then like my mum and dad were on and off at the time but then they totally split up when I were five. Separated. My dad moved out. And then I stopped speaking to my dad, because I thought it were his fault.

(Caitlin, Interview 1)

This gives the impression that Caitlin may have told this tale many times and that she is drawing on a narrative developed within the family about her birth. Both she and Nicola, the other peer mentor who came for interview, were able to set out a chronological account of their lives (Habermas and Bluck,

2000) and to highlight key events (Pasupathi et al., 2007). They brought with them items that had meaning for them as a further basis for discussion and altogether were able to expand on their lives in a more elaborate way than the younger people. However, what their narratives had in common with those of other participants was the great emphasis on the role of friendships. I have therefore chosen to explore this in the final section of this chapter, leaving other areas to pick up in the discussions in later chapters.

Friends and foes

This chapter so far has presented a relatively rosy picture of the place of a friendship group. Inevitably being part of a group involves compromises, fitting in with others and negotiating around group norms, including in this case norms around what it is to be a British Asian young woman of Muslim faith. Within the project a seemingly harmonious set of relations existed within the 'core group' and between the 'core group' and others in the project (there was surprisingly little feeling of exclusivity around the young women). Nevertheless, group life is complex and often fluid so there may have been tensions played out elsewhere. Certainly, in terms of wider friendship groups and relationships between young people, the experiences of Amira and others resonates with empirical findings that show the vulnerabilities and the pain associated with friendships as well as the pleasures (Lees, 1986, 1993; Hey, 1997). These are discussed in more depth by Nicola and Caitlin, both of whom had big ruptures within their friendship groups.

Caitlin explained that she had survived bullying at primary school and established a good friendship group at her secondary school where all went well until she suffered a sudden bereavement in year 9. This triggered a panic attack and left her with on-going problems with anxiety. She gave a lengthy description of what unfolded after coping with the initial impacts of her condition:

Caitlin: Luckily I got through that year and my friends couldn't have been better, they were like stood by me, and I had a therapist through

that year as well, and then year 10 it started off fine, I were fine, and then I had- And then it were like an anxiety depression switch had switched back on, and I missed most of my school year, because I literally couldn't bring myself to go, and then the people that I thought were like my closest friends, they started to stop inviting me to things and started being like, not like aggressive towards my anxiety, but they were like 'Why can you not just be happy, why can you not just like do this stuff' and I am like I can't explain it to you, but I can't do it.

With support from parents and her school she did manage to get back into school, but by this stage all but two of her friends were deliberately ostracising her:

Caitlin: If I didn't come to school one day I would come back the next day for one of them to come up to me and be like 'Yeah, they had done a group vote and they don't want to be your friend anymore, they don't want you to sit with us', and then the two that were still my friends, that *were* still, they came with me and we formed like a new set of friends for like the rest of year 11, which was hard, because I thought that these people were like my best friends that I had had for like five years and then they had completely given up on me because of something that like I couldn't help.

(Caitlin, Interview 1)

As Caitlin spoke of this, the pain was still evident in her voice. This 'cold-shouldering' may have been due to lack of understanding and immaturity in the first instance, but when it became more serious it motivated her to move to college after GCSE's. She described herself as a sociable person, so with strategies to manage her anxiety in place, she has been able to develop new relationships and to be open about her needs:

Caitlin: I have formed some great friends at college that understand what I'm going through and they don't, they don't mind if I can't do

something, they understand that I know that, like, it's not going to be like smooth sailing.

(Caitlin, Interview 1)

At her first interview Nicola described an even more complicated series of developments around her friendship group, starting by saying

Nicola: At school I was a bit of a pushover and I had two groups of friends, so I had my actual friends, and then the friends that for some reason I decided to be really close with even though they were horrible, to be honest.

(Nicola, Interview 1)

She had brought photographs of her school group to the interview and talked through her relationships with some of the people depicted:

Nicola: So, these two here are the ones out of that book and she is the one out of that book that I am still really close to. Whereas these girls here, from I would say around year 10 to about the last year we really – they were like bullies, they were horrible to me both of them but I just thought because they were popular and everyone liked them, I just sort of let it happen whereas these girls. See I am not even friends with a lot of these girls anymore, or lads to be fair, but these were the people at school that were like my genuine friends, do you know what I mean? Like, that were actually nice to me. But I sort of ditched them quite a lot for *them*, as you can see like there are a couple of them that are in both photos and stuff, but yeah (thoughtful)

Anne: So, you ditched some of these for some of the ones that were more obviously popular?

Nicola: Yeah. Whereas they were like less popular. Sort of these girls like were the least popular girls, they were quite quiet, like reserved, and I wanted to be like these people, right, because these

were all really loud, chatty, popular – sort of everyone knew who they were. So, I like wanted to be more like them, and really even though *they* [the ‘unpopular’ group] were quiet I didn’t realise that they were actually better friends than they were.

(Nicola, Interview 1)

She described being treated as the underdog and being belittled, but putting up with it “because I would rather have friends – well at that point - I wouldn’t now, but at that point I would rather have friends and be sad than not have any friends at all”. What is interesting is how she talked about making definite choices about friendship and about shunning this ‘popular’ group as soon as she moved to college. It may be a retrospective realisation but as she told it, this seemed to coincide with a point where she was becoming clearer about her values and identity:

Nicola: At school you sort of like experiment with a lot of things, so it’s a lot more difficult, whereas I feel like by 16-17, you are just deciding who you are and you’ve done with most of the experiments and you sort of solidly know what sort of friends you are wanting, your sexuality, and what sort of things you like doing and what you don’t like doing and if you like drinking and drugs or if you don’t. Do you know what I mean? You know by that point what you like and what you don’t like and it’s a lot easier to make friends based on that and make decisions based on that.

(Nicola, Interview 1)

I found three further elements in Nicola’s discussion of friendship that will be explored over the later chapters. The first is the diversity represented in the friendship groups that she describes, living and being educated in a multi-cultural city and having volunteering and work placements even before moving out to university. This suggests the liberal attitudes and freedoms associated with what Thomson and Taylor (2005) refer to as the ‘cosmopolitan’ and reflects the differences in friendship management found by Hey (1997) and Hamilton and Deegan (2019) between middle class and

working class girls. The second relates to the increasing selectivity evident in friendships with age and where this connects to identity. At a younger age, friendships involve some choice but more typically from among young people who live in the same area or attend the same school, rather than from a larger pool. They are also more likely to be characterised by sameness (as in the 'core group') rather than difference. The third is about the gender work that takes place in friendship groups (Hey, 1997) whether single sex or mixed. Although describing herself as feminist and exercised by issues of fairness and equality, Nicola expressed a strong preference for male friendships. In her view, they are more straightforward which may indicate that there are differences in the way that young men and young women tend to relate in groups, how they use friendships and the emotional investments that they make (partially explored in Lees (1993) but certainly worth closer examination).

In summary

This chapter presents a narrative of the life of the 'conservation project' which sets the scene, introduces a cast of characters and develops the action along its life cycle. It goes without saying that this is just one view of what happened, putting the focus on selected aspects of the project life. Other perspectives might have given more attention to Martin from the environmental charity who was certainly not insignificant in terms of his role and his personality (and in being the only male present throughout the whole project). Different narratives might have brought the emotional life of the project more into view or might have considered the learning about the environment or about mental health. I have necessarily been selective and in doing so have sought to shed light on the following aspects of the project.

1. The project offered the young people a social space which allowed them unfamiliar degrees of autonomy within defined boundaries (Davies, B., 2015) Youth work represents a new *field* (Bourdieu, 1990, 1998) for the young people, distinct from the fields of family, education and religion within which they were already active. The

foregoing account indicates how they sought to position themselves within the micro-field (Atkinson, 2016) of the project and the relative power that individuals claimed in this space through their engagement with the activity of the project and through their relationships within Young Lives.

2. The impact of the project depended on the bonds of trust that developed between the young people and workers (staff and volunteers). These 'relationships of trust' (Wierenga, 2009) enabled young people to take risks and to try out new roles and experiences, in terms of initial engagement with the project and then the outdoor activities and the dissemination aspects. The willingness of the young people to engage in staff recruitment for Young Lives and other projects run by the organisation testifies to the strength of the ties and the trust that had grown. The transference of the 'core groups' trust from specific individuals to the organisation as a whole (Wierenga, 2009) suggests their growing capacity to look outwards and to engage with multiple settings and potential new relationships (albeit more pronounced for some individuals more than others).
3. Young people orientated themselves differently to the opportunities offered by the project and, consequently, to the capital of different kinds that they were able to draw from it. Some wanted to challenge themselves through speaking to audiences and becoming the 'youth face' of the project, if you like. Others were happier with a supporting role or, like David, simply being around the project. He commented at interview that "it means I get out of the house and I get to see Lauren and that lot". He then added that it is "something that I do (pause) something that I like doing as well, which is very rare that I like doing things" (David, Interview 1).
4. The emotional attachments that young people formed to the project and to individuals within the project were important in shaping what the project meant for them and what they may take away from the experience. For the 'core group' there was a dynamic interaction

between their feelings for the project and the bonds within the group, in that shared experiences and their shared discourse around the project became part of their group identity and what set 'Team 10' apart (Jenkins, 2014).

5. For the younger people around the project, the intensity of the experience was almost palpable. They were able to identify what – and who – was important to them but were not yet able to elaborate on why, and how, they were important. In this respect, the older peer mentors provided a contrasting view, firstly because of their more deliberate – perhaps even instrumental – approach to the project, and secondly, in their degree of self-awareness and reflection.
6. The Pakistani Muslim young women in this project were beginning to develop identities where both being Asian and being British are important. Taking Jenkins' (2014) point about the significance of sameness and difference in the construction of identity, within the environment of Young Lives, the young women were able to engage with an organisation that was socially mixed and to define their own identities in relation to the variety of people they met there. As outlined in the chapter, they found points of identification and defined themselves against others who were different to themselves. Subjectively, the growing confidence the 'core group' showed to varying degrees in relating across age and culture may stand them in good stead as they move into education and work contexts where more independence is assumed. In that sense, 'relationships of trust' (Wierenga, 2009) in the youth work setting are self-enhancing and encourage the building of trust in new social encounters across culture.

The 'conservation project' was funded to improve young people's mental health and in that sense reflects the 'vulnerability zeitgeist' that has promoted the targeting of services at specific groups (Brown, 2014). As Brown (2015) argues, the official designation of vulnerable or otherwise is not so straightforward. Members of the 'core group' would not necessarily have

been put in the category of 'vulnerable' but nevertheless revealed vulnerabilities in terms of emotions and mental health, and possibly also around racism and cultural insensitivity. Similarly, Nicola's narrative revealed upsets within her friendship groups which does support the view of vulnerability as a universal condition related to life stage and events (Brown, 2011). Even where young people fall within what might be conventional expectations of vulnerability, it does not mean that they see themselves as such. In Brown's research (2015) she found young people rejecting the status of 'vulnerable' and the ascribed identity that attaches (Jenkins, 2014) because it does not capture the complexity of their situations and their resilience. Here, it is striking that Marie, rather than resisting being seen as vulnerable, treated it as irrelevant to a perception of self that was pleasingly positive and upbeat. Caitlin also incorporated awareness of her personal strengths and the strengths she has in her family and friendship networks into her sense of self and constructed themes of coping and making choices in the face of difficulties (McLean and Thorne, 2003; Pasupathi et al., 2007).

There are, however, differences in the personal accounts that Marie and Caitlin gave, and this chapter closed with some indications of the developing sophistication in the stories that young people create about themselves and their lives as they grow older. The examples chosen continued the themes of friendships and bonds but could equally have highlighted feelings about family or other experiences, including the place, position and culture in which young people are raised. It might be expected that, returning to members of the 'core group' in future years they would have more to say about the way that culture, community and religion shape their lives growing up as British Asian young women. Certainly, there are multiple influences on individual lives that affect their course and the opportunities within reach.

Chapter 7 Moving forward into the future

While this chapter focuses on the ‘church hall group’, the ‘conservation project’ from the previous chapter is referred to throughout to develop a cross-cutting analysis. Material from the interviews with peer mentors are also used alongside the data from the two young men from this group who came to a series of interviews together. This throws into relief some of the differences in the groups themselves and in the young people taking part, allowing exploration of aspects of age, gender and social location, as well as the young people’s interactions within youth work settings as a separate *field* of social activity (Bourdieu 1990, 1998). The young people in this setting were undergoing the sorts of transitions explored in Chapter 2, demonstrating the diversity of pathways and future prospects increasingly typical for young people post 2000 and their use of agency in making choices for both their immediate and long term futures.

Thoughts on group process – ‘the church hall group’

Due to the lack of structure, it took some time for me to appreciate the nature of relationships and young people’s engagement in the ‘church hall group’, which superficially seemed passive but over the months revealed rather more by way of individual (and collective) agency and choice (de St Croix, 2018). At the most fundamental level this included decisions whether to turn up on specific evenings. As de St Croix (2016) comments,

In open youth work spaces, young people choose *when* and *how* to engage, can come and go without sanction and ideally have a high level of ownership over what goes on. This has become an increasingly distinctive practice as other spaces (such as schools and the streets) have become more closely governed and controlled. (p. 2, emphasis in original)

Attendance was consequently sporadic compared to the 'conservation project' and fluctuated around school holidays, exams and external events (including home games for Bransgate United). It might be expected that young people would be keen to come during holiday periods, but this session runs in a relatively affluent part of the city and the young people typically have access to other activities and family vacations. The young people valued having the youth club in the background of their lives – somewhere they can call into when they wish – rather than viewing it as a vehicle for opportunity and change. Involvement in the session still contributes to personal growth, but in style and substance what the 'church hall group' offers is clearly distinct from the directed support, guidance and learning available through organised activities or initiatives such as the National Citizen Service (de St Croix, 2011).

The most immediate difference with the 'conservation project' was that the members of the group were mainly young males, slightly older than the young women in the 'conservation project' and largely (although not entirely) white. There was a much more obvious and active physicality, as the young men played indoor football and other games, occupying the space in the large hall to its full extent. In the early weeks the 'performance' of masculinity was particularly evident in interactions with one (white male) youth worker who was acting as locum. He sought to connect with the young men through a familiar tactic of competitive games and jokey banter (Harland, 2001), praising them when he judged they 'could take it' (meaning the teasing and mild abuse). In later weeks, one of the young men took to circling around the hall on his bicycle and generally it was noticeable how the young men moved freely about the room and in and out of the building.

In contrast the small number of young women in the early sessions were a more tightly knit group, relationally and also in that they tended to cluster in the kitchen or around the serving hatch. However, behaviours overall did not fall quite so neatly into gender stereotypes. The youth workers, Attaf and Ifzal, were both devoutly Muslim and from different minority ethnic backgrounds, but equally important to their versions of masculinity were the domesticity involved in preparing food and their willingness to listen and to

nurture. When needed, Attaf could use his authority but more often he was concerned with fostering relationships of equality and allowing the young people to see the youth club as their own space. The young people appreciated that Attaf would

Ed: Just treat us like an adult. Not like probably our mums and dads, just an adult that we could just – other than that you don't really experience that.

Jamie: Adult interactions that aren't -

Ed: That are on like a jokey, friend kind of level.

Jamie: Yeah.

Ed: Like you're just with people your age and obviously we come to youth club, Attaf is just an adult mate really, do you know what I mean?

(Jamie and Ed, interview 3)

In this setting 'long-term relationship-based engagement [] is at the core of the work.....there is a significant focus in open youth work in process, on what happens 'between the cracks' and over time' (de St Croix, 2018, p. 418). Batsleer (2008) and Nicholls (2012) emphasise the importance of 'conversation' with young people – that is communication in the context of a relationship that becomes the vehicle for learning. This session 'worked' because of the attachments that had formed between the youth workers and young people, and their knowledge of each other. However, I started to volunteer at a point where the group that had been attending for some time was showing signs of being ready to move on. No doubt their departure was hastened by the pressure of approaching their GCSEs but it was evident that it was also affected by having a series of workers standing in whilst Attaf was absent and then for a period after the previous post-holder left and before Ifzal was appointed as second youth worker.

The downside of not actively recruiting and trying to 'hook' young people into the youth club, of course, is that it becomes dependent on the young people who come through the door and the ebbs and flows of their interest and/or willingness to engage. In this instance, the session was very reliant on the personality of Attaf and his co-workers, which proved to be a strength but left a big gap when they were absent. Another factor affecting the dynamic after Easter was the arrival into the session of Craig, who was not well received by some of the 'regulars' and seemed to have history with one individual. Attendance over the summer was patchy, although Craig stayed in contact and returned in September with a group of other young men. A few of the more long-standing members also returned in September and seemed happy to have that point of contact whilst moving in their separate post-school directions.

The number of young people remained low during the autumn of 2017, although the young men around Craig were a more mixed group, in terms of age, ethnicity and indicators of possible social or behavioural problems. Two of the younger ones looked at Craig and his friend, Danny, with admiration, following their lead both figuratively and literally, roaming around the building and then gathering outside around Craig's motorbike. I reflected on the feeling around the session in my field notes:

"There is quite a bit of coming and going in the sessions and this is more so because there is beginning to be a tendency to huddle outside – perhaps to smoke or for other reasons they don't want the staff to see? While there is a lot of engagement and an amicable relationship with Attaf particularly, I get the sense that there is a life that the young people don't want observed by adults. This last week there was a more distinct split in the group with Jamie and the two young women in the kitchen mostly, and the other young men much more restless. They played pool, spent some time outside, were on the TT table and also in and out of the kitchen."

The body language and the behaviours of this male pack, if you like, did not have the warmth and amiability of the friendship group in the 'conservation

project: it felt edgy and defensive. It was therefore sad but unsurprising that within a few short weeks they had overstepped a line and had been asked to leave.

Deconstructing this as an event illustrates the strength of the remaining group and the efforts of the youth workers to keep them on board. The 'kitchen group' had been expressing some unease about the 'outside group' for several weeks and Attaf had subtly indicated to them that he was watching and waiting to see what would happen. When matters came to a head and he sent them off the premises, he was at pains to explain to the 'kitchen group' the reasons behind his actions and why he dealt with the situation in the way that he did. By doing this, he minimised their upset and at the same time sought to increase their ownership of the space and sense of responsibility. He and Ifzal were consciously working to ensure that the young people aligned themselves with staff and with the club, enhancing their feeling of belonging and confidence in the 'trustworthiness' of them as youth workers (Robinson, 2019).

This strategy was successful in that this group remained in place around the session for several months. Jamie and Ed formed the strongest bonds with the youth workers as they showed in their habit of speaking of – and to – Attaf as 'Atty'. The young women, Emma, Ruby (long-standing members) and Katie (who started attending over the summer at the same time as Jamie) tended to come together and were friendly but seemed to relate in a less personal way to the session. Towards the end there were evenings where only Jamie and Ed attended and these were possibly the chattiest and most comfortable, much appreciated by the young men. By the summer of 2018, when Jamie went for an extended visit to family abroad, even their involvement was drawing to a close. However, what it meant to them was illustrated in one exchange during their second joint interview six months earlier (at this point Ed had not attended for a few weeks):

Jamie: It's just not like you come and there's a set activity that you have to do and it's not like a chore, it's just you come and you chill out

a bit. It's good. *And it shouldn't be closed down* and they should do it more than once a week.

Ed: What, it's getting closed down?

Jamie: Attaf thinks it might be.

Ed: *I'm going to hit the roof.* Why does he think it might be?

(Jamie and Ed, interview 2)

Friendships and family

The eighteen month period of the study coincided with the end of the Year 11 for most members of the 'church hall group' and their moves into post-16 destinations. For Craig this meant a work-type situation, but most made the transition to one or another of the city's colleges at the start of the academic year. Only Katie took longer to find a niche in catering and stayed in the local area. The others in the 'kitchen group' went further afield to establishments where they had to build new social relationships. Emma described having friends 'for years' at school then finding herself in a situation where complete strangers on her course had to get to know each other almost overnight. The role of existing friendship groups take on a different significance at such points of change because they provide stability but also because they lose their connection with the place (in this case, school) where they originated and become more free-floating. The weekly coming together at the church hall enabled friendships to develop and this group took advantage of new freedoms and more varied patterns of study to socialise elsewhere. The session was empty at Halloween, for example, when they held a party and there was regular talk of other get togethers, wherever possible without adult interference.

The young women in the 'conservation project' at age 13 and 14 had relatively little opportunity to spend time with friends outside school so the project itself opened up a valuable space for them. The age and social profile of young people in the 'church hall group' meant that they were granted more

autonomy (Van der Eecken et al., 2017) irrespective of any cultural factors. However, time and space with peers still needed to be negotiated, given the protective instincts of adults, and fitted in wherever possible. One conversation between Jamie and Ed encapsulates this feeling:

Ed: Or even now when I say I'm going out, my mum's like, 'What are you doing?'

Jamie: Yeah, mum's like, 'what are you doing?'

Ed: I'm like, 'I'm just going out', she's like, 'What do you mean, going out? Where are you going?'

Jamie: Yeah, my mum was like that but -

Ed 'I'm just going to meet my friends.' 'Where?' Obviously, I'm going anyway, she wouldn't want to stop me but she's a bit like, 'what are you doing? Why are you going to stand on a street corner?' but there's nowhere to go is there really? We can't always go to a friend's house.

Jamie: Yeah. It's a rare occasion when somebody's got a free house and then that's why it's so good to be having this ['church hall group'] on a Thursday.

(Jamie and Ed, interview 2)

Not yet able to access pubs, clubs and other venues, they were definite that being in public space (Hopkins, 2010) was preferable to each other's houses:

Ed: And I wouldn't want my friends round when my parents are in anyway.

Jamie: Exactly!

(Jamie and Ed, interview 2)

Peer groups have been characterised as transitional spaces for young

people and sources of secondary socialisation, counteracting (for good or ill) socialisation within family and schooling. Jones (2009) suggests that the importance of this transitional space is reduced in late modernity when identity construction is a more active, on-going process. Moreover, Coleman, J. (2011) argues that parents and peers are both important influences and are interconnected, not least because parenting styles and attitudes may affect young people's friendship choices and, more fundamentally, their abilities to build and to manage relationships. This may be an open question for the young people in the 'outside group' but there was nothing to suggest that members of the 'kitchen group' experienced any difficulties out of the ordinary socially. They described being able to work and develop relationships with young people in college, in sports teams and so on, and were demonstrably learning to relate to adults – youth workers and tutors at college – on a more equal basis. Nevertheless, their expanding social world was still to a large degree dependent on parental life choices, as well as their preferences and the resources that they could make available. The young people could exercise their own choices but at 16 and 17 within parameters that were set for them, both in practical ways and in the limits of imagined futures.

In his second joint interview, Jamie mapped out the social groups that he relates to saying "they couldn't intersect less" (Jamie and Ed, interview 2). The lack of connectedness is striking particularly when seen in conjunction with the chart he also completed outlining his physical movements. Across the three projects all the young people who came for a series of interviews had parents who lived apart and, to different degrees, were negotiating complicated sets of relationships and domestic (and holiday) arrangements. Over several years Jamie has been able to spend large periods of time with his father and stepmother who are now settled in North America, during which he has had to engage with an entirely separate social group. Although this has its challenges, it has enabled him to develop plans to study in a university town close to their home base. At the same time, he has family networks on his mother's side which provide connections with other parts of the UK, as well as regular visits with extended family to the same resort that

means he has a discernible group of 'holiday friends'. These are entirely separate from the group he designates as his 'main friends' – those that he has positively chosen – and also from the people he knows from playing sport and new friends/ acquaintances from college.

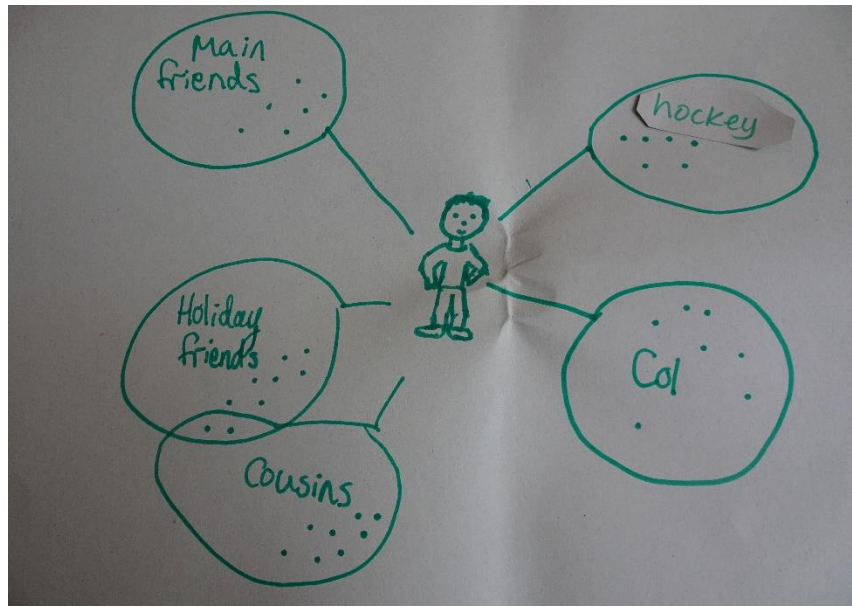


Fig 15: Jamie's relational map

He explained that each dot within the circles represents a specific individual.

This is a complex mix for a young person to manage, and to a marked degree is determined by family circumstances and relationships on both sides of the parental divide. This must take some skill to negotiate but the result is that Jamie's horizons are broad and, in many respects, he adopts a cosmopolitan identity (Thomson and Taylor, 2005) and expectations of being able to take opportunities across international boundaries, facilitated by his parents.

Ed described different and contrasting influences from his family, particularly relating to his love of football and allegiance to Bransgate United:

Ed: I've been so passionate about it from when I was young, because obviously growing up around family members that are in love with the team. It's everything isn't it really, for some people?

Anne: Did you get sent to lots of games?

Ed: Yeah, yeah, in fact all of them. I went to every single one.

(Jamie and Ed, interview 2)

He describes his fandom as a core part of his identity, saying “If I didn't go to watch Bransgate, I don't know. I think going to watch Bransgate at a weekend is what I live for.” (Jamie and Ed, interview 2). Ed's immediate post school choice was to enrol in a sports academy and to become involved in coaching, showing the extent to which this shared love of football touches disparate aspects of his life.

Family and parental influences, however, are not unidirectional (Coleman, J., 2011) as young people growing up can also shape their parents' thinking and behaviours. Caitlin, one of the peer mentors from the 'conservation project', talked about closeness and reciprocity in her relationship with her mother, a legacy of the long period before she remarried where there had just been the two of them together. Not that everything is entirely harmonious as Caitlin described heated debates when they found themselves taking opposing sides on the Brexit question. Nicola, the other peer mentor, outlined interactions that were even more directly challenging. Nicola herself was proud of growing up in a multi-cultural environment and having friends of different ethnicities, faiths and sexualities. She is aware that her mother has not had the same experiences and is accepting of certain views that she considers old fashioned, nevertheless

Nicola: I keep bringing my trans friends home or my like coloured friends home, and my Pakistani friends, my black friends, and I just try and – because then she sees them and she's like 'They're really nice' and I say this is the generation that's going to grow up mum. It might be the older generation that you don't like but the younger generation are very understanding like we are.

(Nicola, interview 2)

Here she is recognising that she has a wide knowledge and understanding from her unique perspective drawn from the diversity that she has encountered in school, college and elsewhere, and she is prepared to speak on the basis of that:

Nicola: I sort of say to her like I've grown up with them so I do know. I don't want to say I know better..... but sometimes, I do tell her, sometimes I am right, mum, and I do know.

(Nicola, interview 2)

At 17 and 18 years these young women are older than Jamie and Ed and their gender may colour how they relate to their mothers, but it is still worth noting the developing give and take in relationships as marking their transition into young adulthood. The insights from the young people also illustrate the sources of social and cultural capital, particularly gained through travel and sport, available from family and their efforts to claim their own social networks and sources of capital when opportunity arises.

Lives online

My interviews with young people suggest that give and take extends to their involvement in various forms of online communication. The 'core group' in the 'conservation project' enjoyed using their smart phones as a means of contacting each other, sending photographs and messages. Although Boyd (2014) intimates that young people are compelled towards friendships, not necessarily to the technology itself, the older young people demonstrably accessed a greater variety of devices and social networking sites, selecting them for specific purposes. In the 'church hall group' it was not unusual to see a row of young people in the kitchen with their phones – and the information, videos and music that could be called up on them – very much part of the conversation. Certain media platforms were preferred for peer communications, and others for family members (and here, although often

deprecating, they appreciated that other age groups related to social media in different ways and to different degrees).

Fieldwork for the longitudinal *Inventing Adulthoods* study (Henderson et al., 2007) ended just as e mail and mobile phones became commonplace. One of the messages from that research is that young people grow up in specific contexts and at specific points in time, for the young people in that study a moment where they could be dubbed the emerging 'digital generation'. The following decade has seen exponential growth in online activity, with young people becoming increasingly sophisticated in their engagement. Concerns are regularly expressed about the possibilities of addiction to social media, cyber-bullying and 'facebook depression' (O'Keeffe et al., 2011) which depletes mental health and self-esteem (Richards et al., 2015). However, the young people who experience victimisation or other problems in the virtual environment seem to be the same ones already known to be vulnerable in offline contexts and to have similar risk factors associated with histories of abuse, poor experiences of care or parental conflict (Boyd, 2014). For most young people, the overall experience of social media is more positive than negative in its potential to enhance sociality and connection with others.

When asked, each young person reeled off a list of the social media that they used which tended to include facebook, Instagram, Snapchat and (less popular) Twitter. Caitlin said that "without exception, every one of my friends has every single one of them" (Caitlin, interview 2). If, for some reason, a friend could not be contacted through one or another, she would use text but that would be a "desperate measure". Further generational differences are indicated in a conversation between Jamie, Ed and Emma (who joined their first joint interview):

Emma: I wouldn't use normal messaging on my phone....

Ed: Unless I'm talking to my mum....

Jamie: My mum uses her Whatsapp

Ed: My dad uses Whatsapp. I don't understand though.

Emma: What do you mean?

Ed: Why you need Whatsapp. I don't understand it – it's just like messages, isn't it?

Emma: It's just like the older generation's version of Snapchat.

(Jamie, Ed and Emma, interview 1)

Facebook was seen as suitable for family use – “what you post is more PG” [parental guidance] (Nicola, interview 2) – while Instagram and Snapchat were preferred for communicating with friends, the latter because it is immediate and short-lived. Here young people are faced with choices about what to post, how and where:

Emma: Instagram – on my normal Instagram – I don't really post anything because – I don't know – I feel like it's too much pressure to be.... Because on my normal Instagram I've got over 1000 followers so there's loads of pressure. People are, like, what are you putting on? So, I don't really post anything on my normal Instagram but my private one which is just friends, then I post stuff.

(Jamie, Ed and Emma, interview 1)

This does raise questions about what is private and is (or can be) made public, and the concerns for young people about credibility, loss of social capital and reputation that appear differently because of the visibility of their virtual presence. Henderson et al. (2007) note that as transitions are becoming extended and fragmented, the sense of moving from the protections of childhood into adult status and the public sphere through the institutions of work, marriage and citizenship has reduced. They suggest that new information and communication technologies have contributed to the blurring of the distinction between private and public. As Lincoln's (2012) study of young people's bedrooms has shown, access to the internet means they do not now function as entirely private spaces. Public and private are no longer – if they ever were – binary and young people must work to create

their own boundaries. Relatedly Boyd (2014) talks of privacy as a process, and the sharing of information and images as performative, implying exercise of agency and control:

Privacy is not a static construct. It is not an inherent property of any particular information or social setting. It is a process by which people seek to have control over a situation by managing impressions, information flows and context. (p. 76)

Two instances illustrate the thought and effort that young people put into decisions about their online presence. Nicola, who described experimenting with many different clothing styles and image, talked about deleting an old facebook account:

Nicola: If you're trying to make new friends at like college or university, you don't want people to see what you were like then and then judge you from what you were like then, do you know what I mean? I don't want people to look on my old Facebook and see I were quite gothy and think 'Oh, I don't really want to hang around with her because I don't like that type of person' because I wouldn't say I was that type of person anymore.

(Nicola, interview 2)

Here Nicola was expressing both her sense of having moved on from her younger self and her reflections on how she wanted to appear to new friends at the point of moving to university. (Incidentally she had facebook contact with other students before going to university, so the first impressions given online clearly did matter.) In contrast, for Ed, the concern was about being able to stipulate who could access postings on what he thought was a 'private' area:

Ed: Basically, my private, I made it on my [Instagram] and my mum added me and it didn't come up. And I posted stuff to my private and my mum spoke to me the next day. She just said something that was

on my private and I said, how do you know? She said, you posted it on Instagram. I went back to Instagram and put on the lock.

(Jamie, Ed and Emma, interview 1)

While the posts themselves were innocuous, Ed was indicating an issue of principle over the extent to which, in effect, they become public. His intended audience did not include parents and his mother seeing the posts was an unwelcome intrusion that prompted swift action.

Many young people such as these are digitally fluent and are proud of their competence and mastery of social media. Although this aspect of 'generational habitus' may be more pronounced for those with money and access to new technologies, young people's proficiency frequently trumps that of adults who lack their 'feel for the game'. In interviews these young people described having Bebo and facebook accounts "early doors" (Caitlin, interview 2) then moving on to other social media as they became available and, significantly, as they needed to communicate with different people and for different purposes. Many social networking sites are heavily youth-populated and consequently digital communication is a field where many of the usual hierarchies of age and power are turned on their heads. Twitter is perhaps an exception in the way that it has been taken up by the political chatterati: most social media has a tilt towards younger age groups and some are exclusively used by young people who find there a sphere of activity that carries promise for personal development and social capital.

The functions that ICT and social media fulfil, and their value for young people, are not static. At younger ages they are used primarily in the service of relationships with family and close friends, and then with growing peer networks. They enable young people to strengthen their bonds to the social groups they belong to, but as well as bonding capital (Putnam, 2000) young people's virtual presence may allow them to bolster their cultural capital and standing with peers. To that extent, social networking is self-referential and is integrated into young people's 'identity work'. However, social media can also be outward-looking: it may be a facet of age or the courses they were studying, but both Nicola and Caitlin discussed using social media to keep

informed about politics and current affairs, and to follow their favourite celebrities. At first glance, this might seem a more passive use of social media, but not necessarily given the potential to comment and, on facebook, to debate issues with friends and with strangers “to your heart’s content” (Nicola, interview 2). Nicola was certainly also keen to exploit the practical benefits of facebook to ease the transition to university, finding out about her accommodation, contacting her prospective flatmates, and negotiating what kitchen items each would be bringing. Social media, then, assists in making new connections and provides bridges to the unfamiliar, both physically – as in moving for work or study – and in terms of growing social awareness.

Establishing a sense of place in the world

One of the characteristics of the young people in the ‘church hall group’ that distinguished them from the younger people in the ‘conservation project’ was their growing sense of where they were placed socially. Both they and the peer mentors had a level of social experience that allowed them to measure themselves against others, and here moving to college and the more diverse social mix there seems to have been significant in establishing their sense of class identity. In one revealing set of exchanges between Jamie and Ed, they show how they were positioning themselves:

Ed: Do you know at college now? Everybody says I'm really posh.

Jamie: Yeah, same.

Ed Because you speak [like] you've been spoon fed your whole life! You do!

Jamie: Right, yeah! I do.

Ed You sound like – Probably out of everyone I know you're probably like -

Jamie: Really?

Ed - poshest.

(Jamie and Ed, interview 3)

This had been preceded by a discussion of accents, in which they had indicated the importance of having a sufficiently Northern voice to have credibility, but without being too broad. When I asked why other people thought they were 'posh', the response was interesting:

Ed: Because they're all from different ends of Bransgate and obviously this side, not more where I live but more probably where Jamie lives are like the more privileged children, so obviously they're going to -

Jamie: Yeah, if people stop calling me posh and call me privileged that would be a bit better.

Ed: Yeah. Whereas over the other side of Bransgate are probably where the less privileged people live so, yeah. I'd say I'm probably in the middle.

Matt I'd say you're not. I'd say you're privileged.

Ed: Why?

Jamie: Winton.

Ed: Winton? Yeah.

Jamie: Yeah, it's not a bad area.

Ed The bottom side of Winton is basically Charltons.

Jamie: God, isn't it just! I've seen the crime graph. Winton's in the green zone which means it's affluent and there's low crime.

(Jamie and Ed, interview 3)

Being privileged, according to Jamie, meant living in a good area and speaking 'proper English', both powerful indicators of class and education. This shows how they were developing their sense of the geographical (and

social) demarcations in the city and was further underlined by Ed when he talked about his family as coming from one of the less affluent areas. Their move across the city, he implied, was indicative of their social mobility and, as the exchange above illustrates, he may be more ambivalent about middle class status than Jamie. Nevertheless, he revealed clear consciousness of class distinctions when he quipped “Winton, Charltons, don’t chat to me.....Craggs Moor child!” (Jamie and Ed, interview 3). Although he was speaking tongue in cheek, the remark only ‘works’ if there is a shared understanding of these areas and their social status relative to each other.

For the ‘church hall group’ growing social awareness did not seem to translate into an appetite for political engagement, evident in the lack of response to the 2017 General Election which took place during the fieldwork. Political interest no doubt varies from person to person, but the overtly political stances taken by the peer mentors from the ‘conservation project’ may be connected to being closer to an age where they attain the right to vote. In this regard, there may be learning from Austria where young people have been able to vote at 16 in all elections since 2007 (Eichhorn, 2018) and from the Scottish Referendum in 2014 where 75% of 16 and 17 year olds registered to vote did so (ICM, 2014). Research with BAME young people found that they viewed the lowering of the age at which they could vote as an inclusive act and indicative of an open and pluralist society. Intriguingly, identifying with either of the Yes or NO campaigns seemed to strengthen their ontological security and sense of themselves as young Scots (Botterill et al., 2016). This is interesting in view of Sloam’s (2007) argument that identity and belonging are key factors in encouraging political participation.

More recently, of course, the European Union Referendum has had its own effects in politicising young people throughout the UK. Both Nicola and Caitlin described being encouraged on their college courses to debate Brexit and other hot political topics in the way that Eichhorn (2018) advocates:

Anne: So what sort of issues and campaigns have got you fired up?

Caitlin: Brexit - a lot.

Anne: Yeah.

Caitlin: Because it caused an argument with my mum and all.... because she voted for us to leave and I said, well great, but that means I could possibly be homeless and not being able to pay student loans because they're doing a bunch of random stuff that's going to affect us more than it's going to affect the older generation. So that annoys our class, that's a big issue that we always talk about because obviously it's going to affect us at some point, but we don't know what that is yet because they're not doing owt yet.

(Caitlin, interview 2)

Apart from comments about the President of the US – “Donald Trump just annoys me. He needs to stop, just stop.” (Caitlin, interview 2) – the interviews suggest that interest in current affairs depends on whether events or issues have meaning or potential effects on young people's lives. In conversations around the ‘church hall group’ there were few references to political happenings. In contrast, Caitlin and Nicola clearly expressed their sense of Brexit as a threat to their futures - economically, their ability to travel, work and study abroad, and their sense of security generally. This may be a result of selection effect, but Nicola indicated a real shift in the concerns of her friendship groups as they became aware of how political decisions impacted on their lives, particularly access to university and financial support whilst studying. Consequently, they were talking more about these issues and debating on social media.

Interest in specific issues may also stem from more personal motivations. Nicola, for example, described campaigning for gay marriage to be legalised because this was pertinent to members of her family, and supporting friends who were transgender. She also commented that

Nicola: I've been arguing for Muslim rights because I am friends with a lot of Muslims and I know that they don't agree with terrorism and I would think that..... imagine if it was us and they were saying you were a terrorist because another white man is blowing someone up.

(Nicola, interview 2)

This links with Nicola's sense of herself as open, liberal in her attitudes and a crusader for rights. She is developing a political awareness that is not clearly based on either class or identity but is derived from her knowledge and understanding of the diversity she has grown up with in Bransgate and, increasingly, in the wider world she is encountering, physically and online.

As indicated here and in other more extensive studies (MacDonald and Marsh, 2005; McLeod and Yates; Henderson et al., 2007; Wierenga, 2009), young people grow up in specific social and spatial locations which determine the range of opportunities and experiences available to them. However, they are agentic in how they make use of these and also how they make sense of their experiences. Nicola wanted to engage proactively with diversity and the political questions about rights, freedoms and inclusion. The white members of the 'church hall group' were more passive in their acceptance of diversity. Whilst living in an area that was less ethnically mixed than Nicola, they still enjoyed a variety of different foods and cultural experiences but seemed to take much of this for granted. My fieldwork covered two periods of Ramadan and the festival of Eid Al Fitr but there was very little curiosity in the group around the fast and prayers observed by Attaf and Ifzal in the first year (although slightly more in the second). It was as if these practices were seen as neither exotic and interesting, nor strange and alienating, but just part of the *habitus* of their urban lives.

Moving into the future

This chapter has already demonstrated young people's use of agency in their relationships and communications as they connect with larger social networks and become involved with a greater range of activity. This section focuses on the young people's views of their immediate future and practical evaluative forms of agency (Emirbayer and Mische, 1998) in weighing up their different options. The length of the fieldwork in the 'church hall group' allowed me to observe how this developed, from the stories they told about

initial choices post-school to changes in direction towards the end of the academic year (Wierenga, 2009). Of the 'kitchen group', only one stayed in sixth form and one (Katie) remained in limbo for a while before finding work locally. The other three went to college, Emma on a health and social care program and Ed and Jamie for sports related and media-related courses respectively. Jamie liked the technical rather than performance aspects of creative and media work, and Ed was following his love of football, moving to a college that allowed him to become involved in coaching. These initial choices were dictated by personal preferences and what was familiar and comfortable to the young people, given they were at the same time moving and having to adjust to a new institutional setting. Towards the end of the academic year these decisions were being revised by both young men.

What was striking about the young people's deliberations about actions and choices was how they were based on the extent of their knowledge, direct or through others. For example, talk about gap years before university was centred on people they knew and where they had travelled or worked abroad. At interview, when asked how he envisaged his future, Ed discussed buying and renovating property, drawing on his understanding of property values and also his father's work in construction. This produced an interesting exchange:

Ed: I'd like to just buy houses, lots of them and rent them out but I don't have the funds! So, yeah. Probably first thing I'm going to try and do, the first thing that I could do when I have a solid income is try and buy property because I think that's what you need to do. It's always going up isn't it?

(Jamie and Ed, interview 3)

Jamie expressed scepticism about this claim and when I asked Ed whether he would like the practical aspects of doing up properties, he replied:

Ed: I don't know. I don't think I would. I've not really done it but having a trade obviously would be decent. I was actually thinking about it

once but I don't know. I don't think so. That's practical but it's not my kind of practical.

Anne: So what is your kind of practical?

Ed: Playing football! That's it.

(Jamie and Ed, interview 3)

Ed continued to ponder about the advantages of gaining a trade and six months later, with the help of Attaf, he was pursuing options for apprenticeships, specifically targeting his father's trade. Although he was simultaneously seeking part time work with a view to immediate income, it was evident that both he and Jamie were starting to take a more grounded approach to planning for the longer term future. For Jamie, who was more amenable to office work, this involved transferring to a business-oriented course, the implication being that he judged this as more likely to provide him with the level of income that he aspired to and better chances of being accepted by his chosen university abroad.

Caitlin, the peer mentor from the 'conservation project' also changed her course at the end of her first year at college, saying "I picked up something that I know that I'm definitely going to do well in, but also it fits into the career path that I want to do" (Caitlin, interview 2). Again, this showed growing commitment to a future direction and ability to choose from the various routes to arrive at a particular destination (here a career in a branch of law). Caitlin was also displaying a growing self-awareness based on her previous experience. This informed her assessment that she was likely to achieve higher marks through coursework rather than exams. Having moved from school to college, she knew that she could cope with starting her new course at a different college and had strategies in place to support her mental health through the transition. The move entailed another year at college, but she had considered this a benefit in terms of ensuring her readiness to then progress to university.

Caitlin's example shows a developing ability in decision-making that was evidenced in an equally sophisticated way by Nicola, the other peer mentor,

in her decisions about university and, in different ways, about part time and voluntary work. She had been set to go to another Northern city to study a degree-level professional qualifying course. When she did not achieve the grades that she needed, she had to rapidly review her options to secure an alternative course through clearing and chose a straight academic degree in the same city rather than a comparable course elsewhere. Ultimately the location became more important than the course itself and several factors contributed to this, including having family members in that city and being able to use her knowledge of different neighbourhoods to help select university accommodation, both important elements of bridging capital (Putnam, 2000). These, and her confidence that she could travel home to see her partner, made it easier to envisage university life there than in an unknown – and more distant - place. Inevitably, not taking the vocational course she had planned had implications for future career options and, when I caught up with her again after her first term at university, she was actively rethinking her future and considering post-degree training and/or higher academic qualifications (thus demonstrating use of projective agency (Emirbayer and Mische, 1998)).

Research (UKCES, 2015) indicates that fewer 16 and 17 year olds in the UK are now combining work with study compared to the 1990s, possibly due to the pressures of academic expectation. Nicola, however, went against this trend because in the two years before going to university she had several part-time jobs. She was initially reluctant to apply for a job in a fast food restaurant but when she started work in a takeaway outlet she found that the flexible shifts and young demographic of the other workers more congenial than she expected, and more demanding of communication and other skills that she realised would stand her in good stead in other roles. She took the same view of volunteering, recognising that she could further some of the causes she was interested in and add to her CV at the same time, building her capacity for independence (here showing a further development of practical-evaluative agency (Emirbayer and Mische, 1998)). She was continuing her volunteering whilst at university and working flexibly during vacations.

These visions of future lives and the steps needed to achieve them are not static. Over the period of a year, Jamie and Ed each thought about their future directions and assessed what best met their longer term goals and sense of themselves, their values and preferences. These were still very much work in progress at the point where I ceased contact with them whereas both Caitlin and Nicola were more definite about the narrative of their future lives and were able to construct more complex future aspirations. These two young women approximate to Wierenga's (2009) explorers in how they talked about weighing up their options and future possibilities. Jamie and Ed were less clearly placed in Wierenga's typology, with Jamie perhaps showing increasing 'exploring' characteristics but with Ed moving between 'wandering' and 'settling'. At the time the urgency of decisions about his future was not too pressing but when it became so that may have propelled him further into 'settling' which is more agentic in making and enacting informed choices (Wierenga, 2009).

Independent (and inter-dependent) young women and men

In terms of working through transitions in piecemeal fashion (Henderson et al, 2007) Nicola described her mother encouraging her to take her first steps to financial independence through part time work when she became 16: "She said you're at that age now where you can earn your own money, why wouldn't you want to?" (Nicola, interview 1). Such family influences can determine how and when young people make significant steps to independence and how they imagine their future independence. However, in Nicola's case, she has looked to her older sisters rather than mother as guides and as examples of the sort of woman she wants to be. She spoke of one in particular, who had a child at a young age and had shortly after come out as lesbian:

Nicola: And I feel like her sort of charity and independence inspired me to be who I am, because she sort of like - I don't know how to explain it. She's one of them people that you look up to, definitely.

She is very supportive of all, like she is a massive feminist, she's up for gay rights, she argues against racism.

(Nicola, interview 1)

Nicola has adopted her sister's forthright attitude and political stances albeit applied to her own situation and the issues about sexual identity, racism and cultural assumptions that she was meeting in her social life at college. As a side-note, this sister has had another impact in making Nicola determined not to have children herself before she has had chance to travel and have other experiences that her sister has missed out on. (This had clearly been a subject of conversation between the two).

Thinking inter-generationally, Nicola acknowledged the part her grandmother has played, saying

Nicola: She's experienced loads of different things in her life..... So, yeah. I go to my nan for a lot so I feel like in the growing up process I feel like I'd go to my nan with things that I wouldn't want to tell my mum or my sister.

(Nicola, interview 3)

There is a wealth of personal history and wisdom available there as a resource-in-hand' (Wierenga, 2009) for Nicola, who is in a fortunate position in having a number of family members at different life stages to whom she can go for advice and assistance. It is not irrelevant that she presented herself as resourceful in being able to draw on all that was accessible to her. However, as she has grown older, this has become less one-sided: she also talked about devoting time to her niece, who was approaching teenage years, and responding to her requests for instruction in make-up and hair-styles.

Caitlin also spoke about caring for her two much younger sisters, particularly during a period when her mother was ill. As the elder child, she helped out and supported her mother whilst step-father was at work. The dynamic here is interesting as Caitlin characterised their relationship as being more best

friends than mother and daughter, which implies a greater degree of equality and, it might be inferred, reciprocity. Caitlin also described helping her father in caring for relatives on his side of the family which, as she presented it, seemed not so much an obligation as something that she did willingly when she could and felt good about.

As the *Inventing Adulthood* study found, undue burdens of caring responsibilities at a young age can be detrimental to emotional health and well-being (Henderson et al., 2007). However, in the absence of the structural markers that existed for previous generations, one understanding of adulthood and citizenship evidenced in interviews with young people

was associated with taking care and responsibility for others, locating oneself in a set of inter-locking relationships in the different areas of ones' activities.....while for many the final destination of this version of adulthood was located in the relatively distant future.....for some it was organically linked to the present through embeddedness in relationships and usually domestic responsibility. (Thomson et al., 2004, p. 224)

The relational aspects of adulthood referred to in that research mainly refer to intimate relationships and future expectations of parenthood, but the authors also recognise that many young people perform a range of household tasks and give personal support and other forms of assistance in the present. Ultimately, this represents an early form of the 'generative activity' (Erikson, 1950) portrayed by McAdams (1993) as giving to others, particularly shown in concern for and commitment to the next generation and typically in mid-life. However, as argued elsewhere in relation to young offenders and desistance (Halsey and Deegan, 2015), the concept can be adapted to the sorts of caring and self-care shown by young people and their developing sense of themselves as people willing and able to care for others both in their immediate and in their imagined future lives.

In this instance, Nicola and Caitlin were conscious of having received attention and care themselves, which may have increased their capacity to reciprocate in caring acts for others. Certainly, this contrasts with the abilities

of the young men in the 'boys group' presented in the next chapter who may have experienced less nurturing early environments. Gendered expectations could well be at play here too but, reflecting on relationships and awareness of others' needs among the young people in the 'church hall group, it is significant that at a slightly younger age they were notably more peer-orientated and keen to use the session as a space to spend time together without adult interference.

That is not to suggest that the young people in the 'church hall group' were uncaring, However, interest and concern for people of other ages was much less evident and they were not seeking feelings of 'being adult' through intimate relationships either. They were exploiting their greater freedoms to extend and consolidate friendships and to be able to socialise with others of the same age. They talked about going out to eat together and going into the city, activities that no longer had to be mediated through adults. As the period of fieldwork progressed there was more chatter about parties and being allowed domestic space to have friends round. Alcohol and drugs are social facilitators and moreover provide a shared activity through which to bond with friends. Research with young people participating in the night-time economy (MacLean, 2016; MacArthur et al., 2017) suggest that related friendship practices include creating safety within the group and looking after others whilst in public space. The young people in the 'church hall group' were not yet able to frequent pubs and clubs, but some of the same practices may well pertain in terms of collectively constructing a space for experimentation and 'letting go'. Tolerance and safety are important elements, and occasional comments within the group suggested that they were co-constructing boundaries around acceptable and unacceptable behaviours. The field of youth leisure holds great potential for gaining social and cultural capital, but the other side of the coin is the risk associated with excessive excess, if you like, or ill-judged risk-taking.

Finally, in terms of independence and 'feeling adult', a distinction might be made between moving forward on the basis of having had new experiences and anticipating new experiences. I was struck by the difference between Nicola expressing pride at having been on holiday with her partner where

she successfully negotiated the airport and flights, and Ed relishing the prospect of a 'lads' holiday' which he felt would be "absolute chaos!" (Jamie and Ed, interview 2). There was a difference too in Nicola's description of driving lessons and Ed's enthusiasm, at the age of 16, for learning to drive which he mentioned in each of his three interviews, joshing Jamie who would get his provisional licence earlier but was more cautious. Independence, then, is a progressive process that involves reflecting on small steps taken in order to move on to the next step, and broader imagining of ambitions further ahead.

In summary

Youth work considered as a field (Bourdieu, 1990, 1998) is diverse and certainly the micro-field represented by the 'church hall group' is quite distinct from the ethos of the 'conservation project' and the active opportunities that it offered young people. The possibilities of gaining position within the group and enhancing social and cultural capital through dissemination activities were evident in the latter, as was the role of adults in facilitating the project and making resources available. Young people valued the 'church hall group' precisely because it was so non-hierarchical in structure and youth worker roles were muted. As a field, then, youth work represented something separate from college, family and other social arena, with relatively few adult-imposed expectations:

Jamie: I think the main part of it is it doesn't feel like it's an extra school thing or like a chore because Attaf doesn't, or any of you to be fair, none of you act as if you're our superiors and aren't, like, we're in control of you, we're going to make you do this. It genuinely just seems like you are just mates to be fair.

(Jamie and Ed, interview 3)

Again, this is inevitably a partial and selective account of the 'church hall group'. In this account, I have illustrated my perception that the benefits of the 'church hall group' are more indirect than in the other two projects within this study. As in Nolas' (2014) research, coming to the session was 'an end in itself'. These young people had opportunities, guidance and direction elsewhere. They wanted space to develop their relationships and sense of autonomy and chose to 'hang out' in public space as well as availing themselves of the session. The 'kitchen group' as a subset of young people around the youth club were in a period of transition and I have shown the way that they moved and developed over the year in comparison to the two slightly older peer mentors from the 'conservation project'. In doing so, the following points stand out.

1. The 'relationships of trust' (Wierenga, 2009) in the 'conservation project' allowed the young people there to take risks and to approach new challenges. Trust in relationships was equally important for the 'church hall group' but the key ingredients there were respect and equality. The young people wanted to be confident that they would not be told what to do and that they would be taken seriously. At the same time, as demonstrated by the reaction of the 'kitchen group' after the 'outside group' were asked to leave, they appreciated that boundaries were in place appropriate for that youth-centred environment (Hart, 2016).
2. The 'kitchen group' valued the session as a place where they could spend time together and develop their friendships. However, those friendships were not exclusive to the session and they increasingly socialised elsewhere, using their peer network as a resource. In that sense, the session acted as a catalyst for social growth and connection. The social space was important in encouraging young people to choose to engage but, as seen by the young people drifting away from the session, they could be equally agentic in disengaging when it no longer serves a useful purpose for them.

3. The move to different destinations post-statutory schooling was a significant event for all the young people, including the two peer mentors from the 'conservation project' who also feature in this chapter. Those who transitioned to college had to interact with different groups of young people and institutions which expected greater degrees of independence and responsibility. This was appreciated on the whole, and young people were pleased at how they coped with transitions and the sense of themselves as capable of adapting to new contexts. In their various ways they were able to draw on their stock of social and cultural capital from prior achievements and investments in sporting and other activities in their new situations.
4. Friendships were important in transitioning from school, and this chapter presents examples of old friendships developing and providing a point of anchorage, contrasting with the accounts of the peer mentors in the last chapter who were both glad to make fresh starts with new friendships groups at college. The greater fluidity of friendships and acquaintances was apparent as young people talked at points about moving on from relationships and social groups, and also in their strategising around new social relationships.
5. The particular friendship glimpsed here between Jamie and Ed shows the to-and-fro of ideas and perceptions, as well as the use of humour, that contribute to developing views of the future (and possibly views of self although the pair showed less by way of introspection than the female peer mentors).
6. Compared to the younger people in the 'conservation project', the young people in this chapter were more skilled in the use of practical-evaluative and projective agency (Emirbayer and Mische, 1998), weighing up their options for the future and using their direct experience, and indirect experience of others, to inform their assessments and choices. They were also more conscious of identity-choices, self-presentation and the benefits (or downsides) of their

deliberate identifications. This is evident in relation to styles but more fundamentally in terms of class affiliation.

7. It is not inevitable, as will be seen in the next chapter, that young people are on a trajectory through adolescence that brings more by way of experiences, learning and understanding of the wider world. However, for most that is the case and, as illustrated here, especially so when young people have resources available to them and both social and geographical mobility. More choices become open to them, but also more ability to exercise agency in making choices, based on a greater body of knowledge about the world and about self.

Most of the young people appearing in this chapter were in a position of relative advantage and certainly those whose situations are considered in more detail started from a position of having multiple sources of social capital and 'resources-in-hand' (Wierenga, 2009) because of their parents' status and earnings. What they showed was increasing capacity to deploy their capital in their social relations, including online, and to build their own social capital with peers and, increasingly, cultural capital with a view to future careers and other life goals. Raffo and Reeves (2000) suggest that each young person has an individualised system of social capital – the specific volume and combinations of different sorts of capital - that may support or constrain their actions and potentials. These young people could be defined as having systems which are rich and robust compared to others, particularly the young men in the 'boys group' who form the basis of the next chapter. Their contrasting scenario sheds further light on the interplay between agency and structure, and the limits of possibility.

Chapter 8 Achieving adulthood?

This chapter considers the circumstances and possibilities for young men at the social and educational margins whose sources of helpful capital – whether seen in Bourdieu's (1986) or Putnam's (2000) terms - are consequently limited. By examining the dynamics of the 'boys group' and connections within the college where it was located, I show that the in-group relations and the relationships with supporting adults develop in ways that are different to relationships around groups of young people whose social and psychological development is more normative. Although the explicit contrasts will be analysed fully in the following chapters, the examples of the young people already introduced and how they 'use' adults, particularly youth workers, are implicitly present throughout.

One further theme in the study is the developing sense of identity, here specifically masculine identities, and the construction of identity through self-narratives (McAdams, 1993). Despite being well integrated with this group as co-worker and readily gaining their permission to observe the group as it developed, I was not surprised that only one had sufficient confidence to share his self-story, the others perhaps retreating in way suggested by Wierenga (2009). Nevertheless, Kieran's contribution is revealing and, analysed alongside further data from Caitlin, the peer mentor from the 'conservation project', it is possible to reflect upon the nature of more problematic transitions, as well as the strengths and strategies that enable young people to move forward into adulthood, despite their difficulties.

Thoughts on group process – the 'boys group'

Compared to the other two groups, members of the 'boys group' were much closer to the demographic of young people with whom I was used to working in youth justice, in terms of social location and gender. Young men are predominant in the justice system. Yet, as illustrated by Baumgartner's (2014) study of one youth offending team, there is paradoxically little explicit attention to masculinities in the processes and practices in youth justice.

Where male gender is recognised, it is a narrow and essentialised understanding of masculinity that is unlikely to have changed as the workforce has become increasingly feminised (MoJ, 2016). The notion of masculinity as problematic (Robb, 2010a) may be less entrenched in youth work, but proactive ‘boys work’ similarly remains a niche activity (Harland, 2001). It is notable that literature with examples of male co-leadership of generic groups for young men is sparse (although admittedly more exists in relation to specialist interventions around gangs and with BAME young men). Carlos is passionate about his work with young men, but he has generally had to pursue initiatives on his own and had found few opportunities to link with male co-workers.

The nature of the ‘boys group’, sitting within Mayhew Training and having a selected rather than a self-selecting membership, inevitably meant that it started with a degree of uncertainty and possible ambivalence. In contrast, the first session of the ‘conservation project’ was exciting because young people had opted to attend and were anticipating a benefit, even if only an enjoyable experience with their friends. Whatever is presented at the initiation of a group, the professional concern of youth workers is to employ strategies to engage the young people and to foster a sense of ownership of the group space sufficient to encourage them to return in the following weeks.

The dynamic in the ‘conservation project’ was affected by the young age of the original participants, which was brought into relief when the peer mentors joined and were demonstrably able to relate to staff and to activities in more confident and assertive ways. In the ‘boys group’ there were similar issues about power inequalities related, in this case, to the group taking place in an educational setting. For all the nurturing and friendly relationships in this specific college, staff are still in a position of authority and the backdrop, if you like, is one of previous experiences in education which have been difficult and, by extension, disempowering. These young men therefore hold a marginal position within the institutional *field* (Bourdieu, 1990, 1998) of education. Although arguably improved by what cultural capital they gain through certified courses at the college, it could equally be argued that

effects of marginality are compounded by being singled out as ‘vulnerable’ (which, for Brown (2015), can only too easily slide into ‘transgressive’).

Recognising these dynamics, Carlos, was seeking to create a contrasting ethos in group sessions. The smaller, informal *field* of youth work is premised on different power relations and underpinning assumptions about young people’s capacities (Jefferies and Smith, 2002; Davies, B., 2015). His negotiations in the initial scoping session were therefore consciously aimed at reducing power differentials. The programme he had set out with participants across 12 sessions included elements around relationships, emotions, young people’s rights and the law, as well as anticipated futures. The group had also agreed a rough set of ground-rules – expectations expressed in their own language about behaviours such as respecting others and listening.

At the first session I attended it was evident that Carlos and his participatory approach had already made an impression on participants. We met in the café before going to the room on the second floor of the building that became our group space. There were six young people who in their own ways were all keen to claim his attention, some more directly than others. Kieran, Chris and Neville were the most vocal and active. Brandon and Robbie both had autism-related disorders and were quiet but seemed comfortable until asked directly to respond. Daniel, the oldest at the session, was relatively passive except in relation to technology (a skill and interest that we used in later sessions). Realising that we needed to avoid going around the room asking young people their views, we took contributions as they came. After the break, Neville became noticeably withdrawn but the conversation continued, although in a more general way and straying on to future plans for group activities as well as individual concerns about money and courses at the college. The sessions settled into this pattern of being more focused in the first half and responding to participants’ concerns or interest in the second.

As co-workers Carlos and I brought complementary styles and ways of interacting to the group. Notably, we planned sessions together and communicated about the emerging relationships among the young people

more than in the other two groups. We remarked upon the discernible increase in interactions and in eye contact between the young men, whereas in early sessions they had communicated predominantly with Carlos, and to a lesser extent with me. They quickly developed attachments to Carlos as was evident in the issues that Chris and Kieran brought to him, and the way that Robbie, who found it hard to talk about his feelings, opened up to him when his father became ill. This again demonstrates how young people benefit from the sorts of 'relationships of trust' with adults described by Wierenga (2009), which in turn enabled trust and bonding between the young people in the group and then extending into other parts of their college week.

Five young people stayed with the group through to the end which, despite variable attendance, formed a relatively strong basis for work. However, two were unable to build the 'relationships of trust' that would enable them to make the same commitment. Neville left partway through the second session in some agitation and did not return. A troubled young man, he was not sufficiently resilient at this point to engage in the group setting. Simon attended three sessions partway through but presented a different issue in that he was pleasant but evasive. He was willing to talk one to one but declined to contribute to group discussion or express any view, which others confirmed was consistent with his engagement generally at college. His behaviours seemed to evidence an insecure pattern of attachment. In any event, he was not 'hooked in' to the group through the relationship with Carlos as the other young people were and lacked their capacity to seize upon relationships as a key resource en route to adulthood (Wierenga, 2009).

Following the half term break, a slow week at college resulted in only Kieran and Robbie coming to the session. Already by that time (session 5) Carlos had spotted Kieran's readiness to grasp opportunities through potential voluntary youth work so used this time to allow him to practice presentation skills with a view to him coming to help out with another youth group. The way that Kieran responded to Carlos' interest and expression of faith in his potential is explored later in the chapter. The relevance here is its impact on

the group as he vacillated between allying himself with Carlos and laughing and joking on a level with his peers. In that sense he found himself in an intermediary position recognised by the others and forming part of a complex system of relations within the group.

Security and insecurity in relationships is a fundamental concern in groups, and the young men's anxieties in this regard were highlighted in their reaction to the college asking their consent for a youth work student to join Session 8. Only two attended that morning, the others reportedly feeling threatened by the thought of a new presence in the group. Ironically, the student later accompanied the group on a pre-Christmas trip through the town to a burger bar when, realising that he was not much older than themselves, they quickly overcame their wariness. The interactions and the humour around the table that morning showed how the group had developed and afterwards Kieran, Chis and Brandon all walked back through the shopping centre together deep in conversation. Robbie, who had managed the social situation by concentrating on Sudoku whilst the others were talking, preferred to stay with Carlos, the student and me, but he was chatting with us about his hopes for Christmas until we reached the bus station. Compared to his interactions only a few weeks previously, this showed real growth in confidence and openness.

The remaining group session was held five weeks later in mid-January in a sombre atmosphere. Perhaps the group had reached its climax during the pre-Christmas outing and group members may also have been 'mourning' its end (Tuckman and Jensen, 1977). We watched a group video with a soundtrack that Daniel had taken away to work on. No one had been confident enough to speak to camera but in a previous session Daniel and Carlos had created slides with help from Robbie and Chris. One of the images featured a 'what have we learnt machine' resembling a quirky steam engine blowing out the words – empowerment, support, emotions and agency. Whilst these were Carlos' words, the young people felt that they resonated with their experience of the group and said that the video expressed what it had meant for them. This was a sweet moment and we left them watching a film, so happy enough in the short term, but in later sections

I go on to question what might be needed to make more substantial and lasting impacts in the lives of *lost boys* (Carlos's words) such as this.

Masculinities and relationships

Broadly speaking the intention of the 'boys group' was to work in line with Harland's (2001) aspirations that an approach

that does not tolerate, perpetuate or reinforce restrictive stereotypical images of men and masculinity will help unlock the creativity, energy and potential that young men undoubtedly possess. It will also help free young men from their perceived need to hide behind the 'masculine masks' that prevent them from recognising and accepting that they can be sensitive, caring and at times vulnerable, without somehow believing they are somehow compromising their identity and masculine status. (p. 293)

The group was intended to create a safe space in which the 'masculine mask' could be put aside at least temporarily. Sessions 1 and 2 of the group took the subjects of relationships and emotions respectively and were the two points where the questions of masculinity, identity and relationships were encountered most directly. However, gender featured throughout the life of the group so here I comment on relevant aspects of the group process as well as examining the sessions in detail before moving on to consider insights arising from Kieran's individual situation.

Carlos began session 1 by introducing the motif of a sword as a metaphor for the phallus and male agency, but also as a means of drawing out from the young men thoughts on pride, honour and defence. This stimulated a lively discussion, involving Kieran, Chris and Neville for the most part, that touched upon the importance to them of honour and respect. They revealed their sensitivity to threat and a general edginess in their relations in the wider world. Emotions around masculinity – and the performance of masculinity – are complex and multi-faceted. The group touched briefly on positives such as pride, courage and vigour, before turning attention to more troubling

feelings. They referred explicitly to castration, by which they meant emasculation both physically and figuratively in terms of being belittled and judged by others. They further recognised that they carry with them personal history and 'emotional baggage' from their families and from previous relationships. The position of these young men in this specialised college suggests that they are disproportionately likely to have experienced difficulties in some aspect of their lives and wider social relations. It is reasonable to assume that this has impacted, albeit in diverse ways, on the personal strengths and capacities – including emotional resources - that they can draw upon to cope with the challenge of constructing identities and their subjectivity as young men. This is compounded by finding themselves in a location where they have a restricted range of social, economic and cultural resources available (or accessible) to them, so few external enablers of autonomy and independence.

When asked about relationships, the young men immediately honed in on sexual relationships and associated concerns (and fears) about trust, respect and loyalty. It was striking that among the first words they used to characterise relationships were 'depressing' and '(un)healthy', indicative of how difficult they found intimacy and their feelings of being defenceless. Robbie and Brandon were on the edge of this discussion; others were more obviously struggling with contradictory impulses towards sexual intimacy and independence not easily resolved by those unpractised in social skills and articulating feelings. The challenge of interdependence for this group was encapsulated in the shared views that girlfriends are continually 'messing with your head' and 'trying to make you angry'. They were in the paradoxical position of wanting to be close whilst at the same time feeling threatened by the (psychological and, arguably, physical) proximity of potential partners.

These indications of struggles in relationships did reveal a measure of negativity towards women, although there were no expressions of direct misogyny. Neither did the young men show signs of overt homophobia and disdain for homosexuality as a form of masculinity subordinate to their own (Connell, 1995; Connell and Messerschmidt, 2005). What appeared was more nuanced; whilst Jamie and Ed from the 'church hall group' might

approximate more closely to the type of 'inclusive masculinity' that Anderson (2008) and McCormack and Anderson (2010) found among university and sixth form students, members of this group reflected society's increasing tolerance towards homosexuality in a similar way to the working class young men in McCormack's (2014) study in comparable post-16 education. Nevertheless, there was evidence of 'heterosexual recuperation' (McCormack and Anderson, 2010) – distancing from homosexual behaviours and affirmations of heterosexuality – in the references that some made to sexual desires and 'shagging' as well as in the sexual content of the imaginary case study couple that the group created. Here it is relevant to note the tensions that Richardson (2010) found working class young men experienced between what is on public view and personal aspects of sexual behaviours:

The gratifications the young men associated with heterosex were primarily social and emotional, and their accounts were marked by a lack of language of embodied desire and physical pleasure. They frequently spoke in terms of young men having to engage in sex not because they were driven by adolescent urges or bodily states, but because they were socially compelled to do so. (p. 753)

Arguably the group situation opened a space somewhere between the public and private, intimate enough to encourage the young men to be candid about their feelings whilst, at least at this early stage of the group, still needing to 'perform' in front of others and to underline their heterosexual interests.

The young men showed how they were wary of young women and, in the course of conversations, it became evident that they were able to recognise and empathise with a variety of feelings that men expressed but were limited in their sense of (and consequently ability to 'read') a range of emotions in young women. The boundaries of what they considered acceptable and respectable were also articulated much more clearly in relation to young women than other young men. Although not necessarily endorsed by all members of the group, desirable qualities in a prospective partner were identified by the vocal participants as cleanliness, self-respect and being

'nice looking'. They thus reflected gendered and classed expectations of the kind outlined by Skeggs (1997; 2004) and were conscious of how their own status might be enhanced or diminished by the type of young woman they are connected to. In discussion they also communicated their insecurity about a potential partner 'chatting to other lads', showing glimpses of vulnerability in emotional aspects of their masculinity as well as fear of being shamed or embarrassed.

Compared to the feelings about young women, the attitudes expressed in the group towards male friendships were relaxed and surprisingly non-competitive, with reference to bonds, being 'bruvv' and appreciation of 'give and take' as well as friends 'being there for you'. This is speculative but some in the group may have experienced more stability and closeness in friendships than in short-lived (and possibly painful) romantic relationships. Over the weeks they described becoming 'bruvv', with growing signs of contact and communications outside the group between Chris, Kieran and Daniel. The openness of the group environment encouraged these bonds, but most had started from a position of relative comfort and ease in responding to male peers. However, this was not the case for Kieran as outlined below.

Identity and peer relations

Of the young men, Kieran was the group member who most explicitly aligned himself with Carlos and over time assumed a semi-volunteer role. He was also the only one who was living on his own in a flat and was in a relationship with a young woman. He used early sessions of the group as opportunity for him to work through difficult decisions between commitment to this relationship and, as he initially framed it, to one long-term male friend. Whilst young people often have to confront such dilemmas, in this instance, the choice entailed a big break with long-established social patterns around drug use and friendships with older men as well as the loss of the social capital that these relations offered (Bourdieu, 1986). In interview he described the

few friendships that he had developed with boys of his own age as difficult and often characterised by aggression.

What this illustrates is a scenario common to a significant minority of young men in which peer relationships do not provide a safe space for healthy development. As so often happens, this began in early life and, for Kieran, was exacerbated by moving into Addenford and being an 'outsider' in the school he joined. Victimised first by his mother's then partner, he experienced problems at school and was further victimised when he was placed in a special educational unit by the other students:

Kieran: And then high school it was more like trying to fit in. I had to fit in. There was nothing about it, I just had to fit in. I had to be right. And I got in with two lads, two of the hardest kids in school. Nobody would mess with them, they were really hard kids. They smoked as well, and I got in with them. Now if I could go back I wouldn't have got in with them, but what they did to me, I tell you it was bullying, very, very violently bullying.

(Kieran, interview 1)

The search for acceptance within same sex friendship groups is a normal part of growing up and validation of self (Jenkins, 2014), but is complicated for young people where the choice of other young people available to befriend is limited or, as in Kieran's case, skewed by being removed from the mainstream school. It is made more difficult where a young person has been unable to develop the social skills needed to initiate and sustain friendships, and here conflict and poor communication in family relationships may have a detrimental impact, as well as conditions such as ADHD or autism as experienced by Brandon and Robbie. The consequences may be isolation or adherence to peer groups that are unbalanced or dysfunctional to greater or lesser degrees.

Ungar (2004) emphasises young people's need to feel in control of at least some aspects of the world around them and to construct identities of power. He argues that, where conventional and adaptive ways of doing so are

unavailable to them, young people will use alternative, and possibly less prosocial, means. These means are often relational and linked to belonging, common experience and recognition in the peer groups the young people are able to access, particularly where they are thrown together and designated marginal positions by institutional processes. Alternative perspectives might focus on young people's efforts to gain whatever bonding capital (Putnam, 2000) they can by group membership, or the social capital (Bourdieu, 1977; 1986) they accrue through association with the sorts of 'hard kids' that Kieran describes. These all give indications of the subjective basis of young people's decisions to adhere to relationships that might be judged to be problematic by any objective criteria.

Peer groups are an important site of 'identity work' for young people (France et al., 2012) but the complexity of friendships may mean that they can offer elements of intimacy and sharing and, at the same time, feature abuse and disrespect. Their role may therefore be ambiguous in the construction of positive masculine identities in that peer group relationships may be both helpful and damaging for the individuals involved, and relationships between a recognised group and the wider social context – perhaps school or residential area – may be marked by status in some quarters and stigma in others. Kieran's account of his peer relations illustrates the push and pull factors and the sense that many others of school age may share, of any friendship group being better in the short term than being isolated, whatever the longer term impacts on subjectivity and well-being.

This, of course, begs questions of what might resemble a 'positive masculine identity' which is explored in the next section, along with the models of adult masculinity available to young men marginalised by class and social environment.

Learning from adults?

Robb (2010a) remarks that 'transitions to adulthood are inescapably gendered: they are about becoming a man or a woman, rather than simply an adult' (p. 109). That said, we should be wary of the questionable social

policy discourse about the benefits of 'male role models' to help young men form a 'correct' gender identity (Robb, 2010b; Robb et al., 2015). Research suggests that

the supposedly common-sense assumption that there is a need for more positive male role models does not capture the complexity and diversity of subjectivities and experiences of boys, and of those men who are expected to be role models. (Tarrant et al., 2015, p. 74)

In reality learning about gender is a complicated business, based on social practices, and contextual in the sense that expressions of masculinity differ according to geographical and/or social location. Over time, societal norms also shift, influencing ways of 'doing' gender and its performative aspects. Ruxton (2009), for example, points to the support of boys and men for the White Ribbon campaign to end violence against women. Robb (2010a) cites the softening of attitudes to heterosexual males paying attention to their appearance and, as already noted, there is increasingly positive recognition of gay masculinities. Furthermore – and challenging the binary notions of gender in Robb's (2010a) statement - discourse is increasingly turning on questions of transgender, intersex and fluid sexual identities.

Nevertheless, most young people take learning about what it is to be a man or to be a woman from the adults around them and from their social relations. In many instances, this learning aids progress and assists transitions, as adults acting as guides and mentors provide practical and emotional help as well as examples of how to respond to problems and to negotiate the tasks of adulthood (Wierenga, 2009; Robb et al., 2015). The network of relationships described by young people from the 'conservation project' and 'church hall group' suggested that they had a variety of 'helping hands' available. These were offered by adults of different generations and with different relationships to the young people, enabling them to choose who best to approach with questions or concerns. However, not all young people are in circumstances where these sorts of relational resources are at hand. Some have fewer adult enablers in their lives or fewer who are well equipped to help them navigate their way through difficult territories.

Young people learn about gender from both parents (Robb, 2010b) but for young men the presence or absence of father figures can be hugely significant (Coleman, J., 2011) and, sadly, not always positive. Kieran's parental relationships were characterised by violence in his early years instead of appropriate safety and nurturing. When he was 10, his mother allowed her brother to move into the family home and Kieran described how he had looked up to his uncle who he naively considered 'hard' and 'cool'. Kieran also spoke with feeling about one 'friend' who subsequently started a relationship with his mother and then turned on him and caused him to leave the family home abruptly at the age of 16. He has maintained relations with his mother since but effectively the only help he receives is with managing his finances. While his is an extreme case, it does illustrate how some young people grow up in situations where trust, attachment and feelings of belonging cannot be taken for granted, and where on-going support and the bridging possibilities that might offer are negligible.

What we see in Kieran's account is a boy and then a young man looking for men with whom he can form allegiances and with whom he can identify. Gender identities are constructed at an individual level, seen here in Kieran's former identifications with older male figures that are worked into his sense of self-hood. Initially he was striving to align himself with the male figures in his life, but it was clear from interview that he has subsequently defined himself against them by rejecting their aggressive or dishonest versions of masculinity. In this way his unique experiences have affected his sense of himself and the power and agency that he has as a young man. The presence or absence of relationships and their dynamics clearly impact significantly across the young life course. However, gender identifications work at a collective level too, given gender's significance as a primary social category. Jenkins (2014) argues that it is distinctive in being individual and collective at the same time which means that, for young males, identifications with broad cultural ideas and embodiments of masculinity play alongside identifications with the men present in their immediate social world.

Cultural tropes around masculinity are not fixed and are not homogenous, with some being present across the whole of society in the various forms of

media from social media to national newspapers to film and television. Across these media representations of masculinities are becoming increasingly diverse. Other – possibly more restricted - versions of masculinity are attached to regional or to local areas and constructed, and reconstructed, in the prevailing discourses. Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) identify this as ‘localised hegemonic masculinity’, translations of cultural and symbolic understandings of masculinities into social practices and interactions. This understanding resonates with the plentiful evidence that suggests that, in localities in the North of England, the strong work ethic and association between white working class masculinity and physical or technical ‘graft’ has endured despite dramatic labour market transformations (Webster et al., 2004; MacDonald and Marsh, 2005; Shildrick et al., 2012). Sadly, this simply does not match the reality of the jobs available in the service sector and knowledge economy, where working class young people of both genders are disadvantaged but especially young men (McDowell, 2012).

Research has found examples of young men constructing work in retail as enhancing their masculinity through their abilities to interact with customers and to maintain paid employment (Roberts, 2012). Nayak’s (2003) study of a group of 16 year olds in the North East at the cusp of leaving school suggested that, in the absence of routes into the traditional male occupations that were still strong in their imaginations, they developed their masculine identities through leisure pursuits, consumer goods and, most importantly, following Newcastle United. However, in both these studies the young people had access to opportunities and resources for building cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1986), albeit restricted by their immediate circumstances and by wider social and economic conditions. The possibilities for creatively re-imagining masculinities may be different again for those young people whose position is even more constrained, as may be the case for members of the ‘boys group’.

Like Newcastle, Addenford sits in an area previously dominated by coal mining and heavy industry which disappeared during the 1980s. Memories of the miners’ strike still run deep and, 30 years on, many still harbour a

visceral - and often loudly voiced - hatred of Margaret Thatcher. The social mix is less diverse than in the nearby city of Bransgate and there is consequently less challenge to the continued valorisation of physical work and cultures of masculinity that may nowadays feature less obvious machismo but are nevertheless predicated on bodily prowess and display (Nayak and Kehily, 2013). However, buying into this in the way that Nayak's (2003) 'real Geordies' described, may not be easy for young men whose finances are restricted to training allowances and who may not have the social networks that allow them to go to clubs, to the pub to watch the football match with others or to engage in collective pursuits. The combinations of social, economic and cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1986) available to them means that they have less to work with in fashioning a viable masculine identity and to draw upon in their performance of masculinity.

I do not have intimate knowledge of the social lives of members of the 'boys group'. However, conversations, particularly those with Brandon and Robbie, suggested that they often favoured solitary gaming and watching films at home rather than going out. They did not mention involvement in team sports or other activities that would give them contact with older men as well as others of their own age. This may mean that their transition into being an adult male may be even more difficult if the mentoring and guidance from men outside the family that may naturally occur through work, sport and other leisure pursuits are not readily available.

Relatedly, in one of the later sessions of the group, Carlos was encouraging the four young men present to anticipate their futures. As part of this, he asked them to identify what he termed 'avatars' (referring to the original meaning in Sanskrit of a deity descending to the earth in human form and representing, therefore, a kind of divine teacher). In their immediate lives, none were able to identify the involvement of significant older males, relatives or otherwise, who they looked up to or whose lifestyle and way of being they wished to emulate. Nor could they talk about role models or idols, even when asked about people active in music, sport or film. Eventually Robbie did reveal a liking for Morgan Freeman, he said, because he found

the veteran actor's voice attractive. It is difficult to speculate precisely what the absence of men worthy of respect or admiration might mean for the lives of these young people. With this in mind, it may be instructive to turn to Wierenga's (2009) analysis of how resources of all kinds may be made available through relationships, and to consider the implications when such helpful relationships are not easily within grasp.

As participants in Wierenga's study talked about their access to resources and what they could reach out to, the figures of 'prophet' and 'mentor' appeared in their narratives. While the two overlap, the former is typically a more distant trusted figure, perhaps a spiritual or political leader or teacher (analogous to Carlos' 'avatar'). The mentor is closer to hand and is able to enter the young person's world:

These mentors translate or retranslate reality, bringing new stories, languages and meanings. Significant characteristics of the relationship include trust, mutual respect, and that they emerge organically through two-way flows of communication. The most effective mentors are those who know richly the respondents' own universe of meaning.....the relationships, therefore, involve mutual opportunities for translating the world, and pointing out why new things could be possible or 'relevant' (Wierenga, 2002).

(2009, p. 145)

Here Wierenga is interested in the role of the mentor in enabling young people to create self-stories, to share understandings and to imagine future possibilities. The resources of symbol and meaning for young people may be as important as the tangible resources and assistance from mentors, certainly in the sense of establishing purpose and commitment to moving towards meaningful goals. Purpose was not entirely lacking among members of the 'boys group', but the contrast between their 'life projects' and those of the core members of the 'church hall group' and the two peer mentors from the 'conservation project' is stark. The paucity of naturally occurring 'relationship of trust' for members of the 'boys group' may cause them to struggle more to develop stories of their past and to project into the future,

and may also result in less practical assistance in working towards what may be relatively modest goals.

This inevitably leads to thinking about how gaps in enabling relationships might be filled and the part that might be played by professional intervention within education and, of interest to this study, youth work. The following sections consider, first, the nature of help available and how young people might be able to use these to accumulate sources of capital of various types, and to develop more robust 'systems of capital' (Raffo and Reeves, 2000). The following section then turns attention back to life stories and the themes of resilience and self-reliance in the face of difficult life circumstances.

Purposeful intervention

The intention of intervention is two-fold. The first aim in policy, vastly expanded since the millennium (Wood and Hine, 2013), is to connect young people to the labour market or to educational opportunities that increase their employability. To that extent it is largely instrumental and, in England and Wales, delivered via institutions and the former Connexions service. Critical voices outlined in Chapter 1 charge this approach with too neatly equating NEET status with exclusion and ignoring the way that young people 'churn' between training schemes, 'poor work' (Shildrick et al., 2012) and joblessness at the lower end of the labour market (Thompson, 2011). Relatedly – and of relevance here - Simmons and Smyth (2016) argue that it is possible to be socially excluded whilst being in full time education, suggesting that there is more utility in talking of marginalisation than of binary categories of inclusion/exclusion.

The second policy aim attends to wider concerns about development and transitions to adulthood, with all the attendant rights and expectations of citizenship (Hall et al., 1998; Finlay et al., 2010). This second aim might encompass intervention from health, social care and voluntary agencies outside the scope of this study, but also includes the involvement of youth workers in diverse aspects of young people's lives. Given the orientation of

youth work towards a broad social education agenda (Jeffs and Smith, 2005), there is inevitably some conflation of the two aims, especially where youth work intervention is positioned alongside education in a mutually supportive role, as with the 'boys group'.

The tensions in recent education policy are apparent: despite continuing the New Labour emphasis on (a) work and education as a means of social inclusion (Levitas, 2005) and (b) reducing the proportion of young people who are NEET (Powell, 2018), the spread of post-16 destinations for young people is increasingly skewed. Evidence from the Education Policy Institute suggests that more young people are sustaining their educational placements, but the trend across all types of placements is uneven, with the increase in 'non-disadvantaged' students being concentrated in sixth forms. The segregation of 'disadvantaged' and 'non-disadvantaged' young people post-16 is thus growing and at different rates regionally (Hutchinson et al., 2018). This matters because of the effect of disadvantage on post-16 choices and the levels and combinations of qualifications, academic and otherwise, that young people are encouraged, or able, to choose. Some young people begin with less by way of social and cultural capital, and then take – or are channelled into - routes that do not allow them to accrue cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1986) through qualifications that have the same status and recognition as their more advantaged peers (Ainley, 2017). There is then a mixture of individual preference, the vagaries of what Hutchinson et al. (2018) refer to as 'the local provider network' and large scale social and economic factors all impacting on the choices that individual young people make (Simmons et al., 2014). These elements of 'opportunity structures' act together to perpetrate, if not worsen, existing social divisions (Thompson, 2017). This may be acutely the case for young people without adults invested in helping them to weigh up the risks and benefits of their options and to envisage possibilities beyond those available in the immediate environment.

In this context, the demands on a specialist provider such as Mayhew Training are considerable. Their constituency of young people are typically depleted in social and cultural capital in Bourdieusian terms, and arguably

the nature of the college itself does not confer much capital in that it is not part of mainstream provision and has a small range of certificated courses. Nevertheless, the nurturing environment does allow young people to build bonding capital (Putnam, 2000). The college fosters a sense of belonging and security that enables young people to accept challenges, although responses do depend on each person's capacities and their readiness or confidence to engage with new experiences. Recognising that members of the 'boys group' could be viewed as borderline on both counts, the college negotiated youth work intervention to take place within its environs, aiming to offset the risk of them stagnating or becoming disaffected.

Such targeted interventions may be successful to the extent that they strengthen participants' connection to the organisation and the whole network of relationships within in, enhancing what they gain from the environment by way of support and social learning. The time we spent in the café area before each session and at break allowed Brandon and Robbie to have conversations that enabled tutors to find out about the group and for Carlos and me to learn about what they were doing on their courses. They appreciated the interest shown on both sides, and Robbie started to talk more cogently about his next set of exams and what he was doing beyond that. Carlos also engaged with Olly as link tutor over the group's idea of trip to a recording studio – the group ended before this could be arranged but simply entering negotiations on their behalf was appreciated by the young men in itself.

The knottier problem, however, for colleges of this kind is how they enable young people to build forms of bridging capital (Putnam, 2000) that allow them to make meaningful moves into their future. This can be separated into two critical areas. The first relates to the range of contacts, variety of pathways into further education or employment opportunities and the reputation that the college has to draw upon. In each of these, the situation of a specialist college is likely to differ from mainstream further education, and specifically in that their reach is comparatively local, with all the limitations that implies. Relationships within a local landscape may be good but typically not as extensive and diverse as for larger mainstream providers,

inevitably affecting the follow on opportunities they can facilitate for students and their geographical dispersal. Where young people also lack contacts and facilitation through family and other networks this creates situations of further marginality for those already educationally (as well as economically and socially) on the margins.

The second issue that specialist providers face relates to the confidence that young people can have in building visions for their futures. As Finlay et al. (2010) note, NEET young people are often assumed to have low aspirations but what they express in reality is a low level of expectation. Their study in Scotland found that young people's hopes about they might achieve with support are not unrealistic but that they scale back their plans as they observe what happens to others around them. Furthermore, Thompson's (2017) discussion of 'opportunity structures' suggest that they are formed of

the interaction of family backgrounds, education and labour markets, providing a frame within which young people exercise agency, but an agency constrained by the logic of these structuring factors.....Roberts (2009) proposes that behaviour within opportunity structures, including class differences in aspirations and orientations to post-16 learning, can be understood from a rational action perspective in which the subjective evaluation of costs and benefits influences young people's decisions. (p. 751)

The implication of this for education providers on the margins is that they need to make extra efforts to enable young people to extend their horizons and to visualise options beyond what is familiar and in close view. Developing bridging capital is certainly about opportunities and pathways but is equally about exploring the limits of what is possible and what young people can begin to envisage as not only desirable, but reachable. Undoubtedly this could be culturally challenging for organisations that share young people's tendency to low expectations and are unwilling to stretch outwards, but less so where there is belief in the capacities of young people to succeed against the odds.

The creation of the 'boys group' was an attempt by Mayhew Training to

address both of these areas. On the one hand, the youth work intervention was intended to provide additional contacts and opportunities, and indeed did have potential to offer more on that front given more time. Carlos tried to sustain contact and to encourage individual young people to become involved with other projects that he had planned in Addenford but these were not in place at the point where the 'boys group' ended. Nevertheless, Kieran did come into Bransgate to attend the AGM of Young Lives and was signed up to volunteer on other projects that would have meant travelling to the city.

On the other hand, and possibly with greater effect, Carlos was able to influence the young men's beliefs and sense of agency. He worked hard to shift established attitudes and patterns of behaviours - effectively forms of *iterative agency* - that were limiting, instead encouraging a more active appraisal of options and future plans. It was evident that some group members needed more space to practice the other types of *practical-evaluative* and *projective* agency suggested by Emirbayer and Mische (1999) but, within the short life of the group, Kieran grasped the chance to develop different relationships and through them to envisage new roles and possibilities for helping others. It was clear from interview that his mission was to find paid work but through the group he had seen other opportunities that he felt were also within his capabilities:

Kieran: I think it's being a part of society as well, putting that in, because at the moment I don't feel a part of society, I feel like you come to college, you're still at school. You are basically at school and I feel pretty narrowed down, but hopefully if everything goes well and I do get a job, and maybe Young Lives can help out after my job and I could have two jobs, you know what I mean? I could go around supporting people at a night-time and then during the day valeting, you know what I mean? So, you can have two sides and I could help other people as well.

(Kieran: interview 3)

It is telling here that his self-belief grew because of the way that Carlos recognised his skills and readiness to become involved in other groups,

taking responsibility and being a giver rather than a recipient of support. Although at this stage plans were vague (and in fact were only ever partially realised), he had already placed his trust in Carlos and, having done that, was starting to envisage a different future in which he could make a positive contribution:

Kieran: Carlos is an opportunity giver and I reckon if I stick with Carlos, he will get me somewhere decent, you know what I mean? I will finish work and I will do something with Carlos, but I am not sure what it is yet.

(Kieran: interview 3)

Considering intervention generally, why was the impact of this one intervention more dramatic for Kieran than for other members of the group? In part, this was about being motivated to change, but it was notable that he displayed a greater self-awareness and range of relationship skills. This suggests that he had personal capacities enough to allow him to respond to opportunities presented and new ways of relating more decisively than others in the group. What might be drawn from this is that the length, intensity and type of intervention for young men with limited sources of social, cultural and economic capital (Bourdieu, 1977; 1986) could be adapted to suit the personal or human capital of the young people concerned. For those such as Kieran who are cognitively more agentic (as discussed in the next section) and are able to reflect upon emotions, shifts in identity and self-narratives may be more rapid so social circumstances need to change around them to affirm those shifts and help further movement forward. Others may benefit from slower and gentler intervention to assist their transitions that is focused on bonding in the first instance, with bridging possibilities following on.

The following section returns to Kieran's interview and the question of identity as constructed through self-narratives, noting the absence of co-construction of life stories evident in the interviews of young people from the other groups. A question remains, of course, about the role of professionals in consciously working with young men in particular on (re)shaping their self-

stories and whether this deserves more attention in the light of Wierenga's (2009) comments about the value of adult mentors and the space they might provide for creating narratives, whether biographical or simply focused on the story of engagement within a given context.

Self-narratives and 'getting through'

Not all of the young people in this study who were facing difficulties were located in the 'boys group' but collectively members of that group found themselves in a place that offered fewer opportunities for growth. In interview with Kieran, it was apparent that this included opportunities to talk about himself and develop self-stories, although at 19 he was at an age where he was reflecting upon his life and what has shaped him. Unlike David from the 'conservation project' who struggled to elaborate on his past (see Chapter 6), Kieran could identify 'critical moments' (Thomson et al., 2002) in his life but the way they were presented suggested that his narratives had not often found an audience. This sharply contrasts with interviews with the peer mentor, Caitlin, who started her life narrative with "ooh, it's been a roller coaster" and details of being a pre-mature baby that smacked of family storytelling.

Both Caitlin and Nicola, the other peer mentor who came to interview, arrived with personal items of significance to talk around. For Caitlin, this allowed her to explain about her reconciliation with her father at the age of 13 and remaking connections:

Caitlin: And then when I were learning more about my dad's side of the family, I learnt about my granddad that died a couple of days before I were born, so in 2014 I did Race for Life and I ran for my granddad because everyone on their side said that he would have really loved me and apparently we are way too much alike! So I brought the sign that I did for him that was on my back while I ran.

(Caitlin: interview 1)

Caitlin's account of her life touched at many points on feeling wanted and loved, including her closeness with her mother and being her father's 'little princess' (it was she who had rejected him when her parents split up). Later, when she suffered from extreme anxiety and was bullied at school, she had family support and, looking back, expressed her appreciation: other members of her maternal family had experienced mental ill health so she benefited from understanding from her mother and a willing engagement from her father, even though he was meeting these issues for the first time. These elements bolstered her resilience and she described then making choices to ensure that she removed herself from stress and could manage her condition:

Caitlin: This past year has helped me so much, like, to grow as a person, and I think being at that school that I was...because a lot of things happened while I was at secondary school...I don't think that my mind could move on from anything that had happened while I was in the place, but now that I have moved somewhere different, that I have only got good memories with in that place- Like everything just seemed to be going fine.

(Caitlin: interview 1)

Caitlin's interviews were full of evaluative comment as she recounted events in the past and discussed her various relationships and transitions, as well as her feelings about her initial moves to college and then progression to another course. She was clearly not daunted by moving to a strange environment, making social connections and all the telling of self-narratives involved in establishing new friendships.

In comparison there was much less by way of conscious self-presentation in Kieran's interviews. Even taking into account individual differences and research evidence that suggests that young women tend to be more reflexive than young men (McLeod and Yates, 2006), his stories were less complex and developed. There were also two strong themes running through them. The first was deeply negative, and touched upon his feelings of betrayal and

sense of frustration, both because he has not had the support that others enjoy and because so many things have worked out badly for him:

Kieran: I feel like I have just been in a tornado spin all my life and it has never stopped. And then when I have tried bettering it, tried getting a job, tried getting new friends, I have tried – all has failed. It all just keeps hitting a dead wall.

(Kieran: interview 1)

A combination of circumstances, relationships and actions of other people have left him feeling powerless and alone:

Kieran: It feels like I didn't just screw it up myself, I feel like I've had help. Help along the way. Like mum has helped me a bit, dad has helped me a bit, my brothers have helped me, step-dads have helped me, and then-

Anne: Not helped you positively, helped you screw it up?

Kieran: Yes, negatively, they have all helped me negatively, all my mates have helped me negatively. You know what I mean? None of them have helped me in a proper way, a proper pal way.

(Kieran: interview 1)

He talked about people having 'built' him the way that he is, and not wanting to be so "strapped in to my ways" but not knowing how to change.

Alongside this, however, was a more positive theme of self-reliance and capability that might be shared by many young people who have had to depend on their own resources (see, for example, accounts in Brown (2015)). This was double-edged in the sense that Kieran described generally finding it difficult to relate to others of his own age as a result of his early independence and the time he had spent around older men. Nevertheless, he was proud of having lived on his own and having coped, even though he felt it set him apart from many of his peers. Some experiences had not been easy: he described only learning about having to pay council tax and TV

licences when he was threatened with court. One exchange was especially revealing of how he has had to develop skills and understanding of benefits (which I saw in action when he phoned Job Centre Plus partway through one of our interviews):

Anne: but everybody has got some contacts, everybody has got some people that help and facilitate things for them. Who is that in your life?

Kieran: Me. It's always been me. Always been me that sorted hostel moves, moves here there and everywhere.

Anne: So nobody at college, or nobody....?

Kieran: No, the people at college normally help with college things, just college things. Outside of here it's me, myself and I, you know what I mean. If I've got a bill and it comes through my door the first person I ring is whoever is on that letter, you know what I mean? I try and sort it out myself. Like council tax I don't understand. I went down to Olly, I'm like 'Look, can I pull you up a second, do I have to pay council tax?' and he was like 'No, you're in full time education', so I rang them back up and got it all repaid, you know what I mean? I will think about things, look it up, do a bit of deep research. If I am not sure then I go and ask somebody, and then I will do what I have to do.

(Kieran: interview 3)

There was, then, a sharp contrast between Kieran's feelings of fatalism and 'being done to', and other expressions of agency and empowerment (even if only empowered to defend his position and solve problems rather than moving forward).

In some senses, in the light of clear statements that he only trusted himself, it was paradoxical that Kieran gave trust so readily to Carlos and, generally, to the group context. In other senses, it seemed understandable, given that he was so aware of the limits of his own resources, that he would grasp what was offered. The critical factor may have been the early recognition in the

group of his skills and social competence, as well as readiness to progress. Relatedly, researchers in the *Inventing Adulthoods* study noted that

As we sought to understand how young people invent adulthood over time, we realised that they felt adult in different ways and different contexts, and thinking of themselves as adult was related to their feelings of *competence*, and the *recognition* that they received for that competence. (Henderson et al., 2007, p. 29 emphasis in original)

While feeling infantilised by the college regime, Kieran saw himself as adult in living on his own and having his own transport. It may be that Carlos' way of relating to him and the relative equality offered in that relationship chimed with Kieran's sense of self as almost adult and helped him envisage the sort of adult he might want to be (rather than the adult he had to become by force of circumstance).

Kieran's desire to work with young people was indicative of feeling sufficiently confident and capable - and sufficiently distanced from their youth - to have something to offer, interestingly by virtue of his own biography and life experiences. Having his own assessment of his capabilities reflected in his interactions with Carlos and offers of potential volunteering was clearly welcome. The shift in self-belief was not immediate however, as in his initial interview he talked about how much easier it was to relate to his familiar 'friends' and commented that, although he responded to him as a good person, "the connection with Carlos is a good connection but it's a hard connection, it's hard to grasp and get a grasp of". By the time of the third interview, two months later, the sense of having to bridge to someone very different had reduced and something had shifted for Kieran in his self-identity. He did maintain contact for a short time after the group ended but was unable to take up opportunities that had seemed tantalisingly close. I have no way of knowing his reaction to this and whether he had experienced enough of a boost to enable him to move on. The implications otherwise for his sense of future possibilities are potentially extremely damaging.

These are only two individual narratives that cannot be taken as representative. They nonetheless illustrate strategies for survival and growth,

in the one case based on relational resources, and on the other self-reliance. They are also distinct in their narrative style and coherence, with Caitlin appearing much more practised at telling her story of self and drawing upon greater reserves of 'narrative capital' (Baldwin, 2013) – that is, shared stories and linguistic ability. For young people afforded fewer opportunities for co-creating narratives with family or friends (including, it might be inferred, members of the 'boys group'), professionals may step into the gap in different ways to assist in their narrative construction of self (McAdams, 1993). Ungar (2004), for example, in a therapeutic context argues for an approach involving narratives of resilience that incorporates elements of reflecting, challenging and (re)defining experiences and identities. Admittedly, youth workers are unlikely to work with young people in a comparable degree of depth. Yet conversations in which they help young people reframe the past and explore future visions as young women and young men are potentially transformative just as much as the activities and social opportunities that they open up.

In summary

Young men with depleted social capital and few 'resources-in-hand' (Wierenga, 2009) may require support and relationships that form bridges into other worlds to be sustained for long periods of time to enable meaningful progress towards their goals in life. For these young men, the 'boys group' was a valuable resource whilst it lasted and the young men demonstrably drew benefit from relationships in the college environment. However, they faced difficulties over and above those experienced by most young people and had fewer of the naturally occurring opportunities available to others (and illustrated in the accounts of the 'conservation project' and 'church hall group').

The short life span of the group limited its impact and also my ability to observe the developing relations among its members. Nevertheless, strong indicators of what constitutes positive practice and points of intervention can be drawn from this account. As in the previous two chapters, I have

inevitably presented a partial narrative of the group and its dynamic, focusing on specific aspects – unsurprisingly, in this case, gender and the construction of masculine identities. In doing so, we again need to recognise the salience of the social world that these young people inhabit, in and out of college. In brief, the important learning from this chapter can be summarised as:

1. Young people learn from different kinds of relationships with adults, and especially as they grow older, relationships based on assumptions of increasing equality. Institutions are inevitably structured in some form of hierarchy and the *field* of education is imbued with authority invested in staff roles. There is, then, value in creating opportunities for other types of relations and space where young people are not directed into activities but can develop autonomy. Whereas previous chapters show examples of young people confidently exploring freedoms, the ‘boys group’ underlines the disparity among young people and the benefits of intervention within college consciously offering opportunity to develop autonomy and agency.
2. It cannot be assumed, of course, that making intervention available is enough in itself to ensure that young people are able to access and to engage with what is on offer (Wierenga, 2009). This group illustrates even more than the previous two how young people will only ‘hook in’ if they are at a stage of receptiveness and are also capable of forming attachments so that they can build ‘relationships of trust’. Here their choices are influenced by previous experience of relationships and history with adults. They may also find the practical arrangements in college or other formal settings off-putting or, as in this case, facilitative.
3. ‘Boys work’ as a niche activity in youth work is clearly undervalued. Yet for young men educationally and socially on the margins, it has enormous potential (Harland, 2001). This specific group was situated in a town given character by its white working class population, the

marginality of these young men being exacerbated by the local labour market and lack of the 'traditional' routes into non-skilled and semi-skilled jobs. Young men in different, yet still marginal, social contexts face other challenges, but share the difficulties of accessing appropriate resources to construct positive, pro-social masculine identities, particularly through their occupation. 'Boys work' as an explicit response to young men in crisis (or boys heading in that direction) (Simmons and Smyth, 2016) offers opportunity to explore visions and extend resources for 'identity work', at the same time giving young men permission to reflect upon, and express, feelings such as fear, vulnerability and threat. Whilst it is not a panacea for inequality and 'precarity', it does enable young men to be less dependent on employment as a means of defining their masculinity, and to value their full range of roles and social relations.

4. The impact of 'boys work' and the relative equality in the relationship that Carlos fostered with group members could only have effect if amplified by the network of relationships that the young men had around the college generally. Tutors of course have a role of authority but in this case the hierarchies within a small college were muted and the sorts of 'messages' about masculinity associated with competition, work ethic and the like described two decades ago by Harris (1995) were largely absent. The masculinity performance of the men around the college, such as the link tutor Olly, therefore reinforced the non-aggression and attitude of openness encouraged in the 'boys group'.
5. Significantly, for all the uncertainties about themselves and their social place as young men, members of this group evidenced the same lack of homophobia that McCormack (2014) saw in his study of working class young men, despite the indications that they were not greatly involved in social media nor consumers of conventional media. While they could not be described as aligning themselves with the 'inclusive masculinity' that Anderson, (2008; 2012) and Anderson and McCormack (2010) found in middle class students, it appears that they are still influenced by the greater acceptance of sexual diversity

apparent in media and general discourse and, interestingly, are not setting themselves against gay men in an attempt to shore up their own (hetero) masculinity. This reflects a shift in cultural attitudes across society, but more specifically suggests a 'generational habitus' among young people that is increasingly tolerant of sexual behaviours and identities. Class differences and personal experiences may affect how young people understand sexual diversity and how far they embrace it, but negative reactions and resistance are now less commonly seen.

6. Reflecting on the classic questions of structure and agency, this case study shows the limits on choices and opportunities created by, first, particular social circumstances and, second, cultures and expectations arising from the routes into work and further education (or lack of them) available and accessible to young people. These young men were not in a place, geographically, economically, nor in terms of social class, that offered mobility and varied opportunities for development. That said, the response of Kieran and, in a quieter way, Daniel to the possibility of further involvement in groups with Carlos, does show the exercise of individual agency in pushing for change, and in Kieran's case, engaging in the shifting cognitions and social relations that constitute 'identity work'. Although it is perhaps a truism to say that individual differences play a part alongside broad structural and specific social contexts, it was starkly evident in this group that responses are not uniform and reflect the abilities, motivations and empowerment of each young man.
7. Agency is seen not only in the behaviours and choices that individuals make but in their ways of appraising their situation and making sense of their experiences. Here we have only brief glimpses of the work that goes on in creating narratives of self (McAdams, 1993) and individual biographies that become more complex through the teen years (Habermas and Bluck, 2000; Bluck and Habermas, 2000). Even from this it is evident that young people have different levels of resources to draw upon in creating narratives (Fivush et al., 2011). Young people

short of 'narrative capital' (Baldwin, 2013) can turn to youth workers as professionals placed closest to them in a personal sense, to develop conversations through which they co-construct narratives of self. This may be especially valuable for young people such as Kieran and David (see Chapter 6) who want to find ways of enriching their self-stories.

In conclusion, through the three groups in this study I have shown young people responding to their circumstances and making choices about their futures. However, the variety of choice available to them has differed considerably, with the young men in the 'boys group' having markedly less by way of 'resources-in-hand' and, stretching the metaphor, 'resources-within-reach'. Unsurprisingly, young people in such marginalised positions find it harder to self-generate the growth and development that takes them further through the transition to adulthood and may seek formal intervention to help them on their way (intervention that needs to be substantial and sustained for a significant minority). The previous two chapters showed young people actively accumulating social, cultural and, sometimes economic capital (Bourdieu, 1986), as they engage with education, social life, activities such as sport and volunteering, and part time jobs. Young people who are socially and educationally on the margins typically inherit less capital from family and their social context in the first place, and then have greater difficulty in acquiring capital through their own efforts. Not that those efforts are pointless or entirely without reward, but they do require persistence and creativity to bear fruit - qualities that may have been nurtured in young people to greater or lesser degrees.

Chapter 9 Youthwork and its uses for young people

So far analysis has focused on the details of specific youth work settings and the ways that young people have engaged, paying especial attention to the relationships they have formed or developed through the various projects. This chapter steps away from the questions around young people and ‘youth’ at the heart of the study to which I return in the next and concluding chapter. In contrast this chapter considers youth work and the diversity of its endeavours. In doing so, I analyse the ways that young women and young men may use the space that youth work offers for their own ‘identity work’ and feelings of belonging. As such, it responds to the eighth and final question, albeit one that came to the fore during the research rather than being explicit from the beginning:

8. how does youth work present itself as a resource for young people that is accessible, relevant and meaningful to their lives and aspirations?

Although these observations and findings are bracketed off from the presentation of findings directly relating to young people, that does not mean that they are less significant nor that they are unrelated. The separation is in the interests of clarity and to underline that the main focus of the study remained on the young people despite the growing salience of the youth work context.

The previous chapters have shown how young people are agentic in relation to youth work: they make choices about whether to attend sessions or project work, and in how they invest in youth work. They do so to the extent that they feel the activities and the relationships they find there have meaning and relevance for them as individuals and – illustrated by the three examples of youth work here - as a group. These qualities, along with trust and confidence in the youth work environment, encourage young people to view the risk that they take in committing to a process of learning and discovery as worthwhile. That process inevitably differs according to the

setting, the young people themselves and what the adults bring to the situation. There is then, great variety in youth work as it is practised (Ingram and Harris, 2013; Davies, 2015), but also common features which I explore in this chapter.

Critically, youth work at its heart is concerned with enabling young people to grow and to gather whatever they need to assist them in reaching their desired destinations. While 'traditional' youth work is predicated on principles of voluntarism and universal provision (Jeffs and Smith, 2005: 2008; Nicholls, 2012; Wylie, 2013), it has always sought to make itself available to young people with limited access to resources and capital (Williamson, 2009; Spence and Devanney, 2013) or lacking particular forms of the social, cultural, economic or symbolic capitals that Bourdieu (1977; 1986) suggests are signifiers of social and cultural position. Moreover, youth work seeks recognition and belonging for young people in communities and in groups (bonding capital) and provides points of contact and support to allow them to take advantage of opportunities and experiences outside of their immediate environment (bridging capital) (Putnam, 2000). Both conceptualisations of capital provide useful lenses through which to view youth work and its benefits for young people. Yet they do not illuminate the identifications and emotional attachments that motivate young people to become, or to stay, involved with youth work relationships. Drawing from my fieldwork, I argue that the relationship itself is the focal point of youth work, nurturing growth and change in an enabling environment. In that sense the human processes are the 'hooks' that keep young people involved and give them access to shared experiences and the possibility of achieving competence and mastery of skills and new knowledge – effectively, the stuff that confers capital.

As a *field* of activity (Bourdieu, 1990; 1998) youth work is not structured and hierarchical in the same ways as education and medicine, for example, and, as outlined in Chapter 1, the status of youth workers is equivocal (Davies and Merton, 2009, 2010; Bradford and Cullen, 2014). The youth work profession is positioned awkwardly by virtue of being a non-statutory service and being annexed to youth justice, anti-social behaviour and other initiatives for the purposes of funding (de St Croix, 2016). Problematic as this may be

for youth work professionals, the informality and hand-to-mouth existence of youth work may be part of its attraction for young people, at least in the sense that they perceive youth workers as closer to themselves. Community-based youth workers do not have recourse to institutional power of the kind that teachers have within schools: their authority must be earned through the management of relationships with young people and their authenticity (Hart, 2016). This is a skilled enterprise as reputation and hard-won trust can easily be lost. The ethos of professional youth work and the value that it places on empowering young people, working in holistic and collaborative ways and building resilience (<http://www.nya.org.uk/about-us/ourpurpose>) have historically denoted the boundaries of the youth work *field*. While recognising that these values may be compromised in targeted prevention work (Bradford and Cullen, 2014; Mason, 2015; de St Croix, 2018), the three examples of youth work in this study are all responses to the contemporary context based on core youth work principles.

One notable feature of present-day youth work is its ability to work across disciplinary boundaries and to collaborate with other organisations and professionals in problem-solving. The ambiguity of youth workers and youth agencies often allows them to operate in border territory, linking or bridging different bodies and proving most valuable where there are disparities in power (Curran and Golding, 2013), as between communities and local authorities. Notions of borders and crossing borders are also pertinent to young people in the ways that youth work creates possibilities for exploring new landscapes and territories previously beyond reach (Coburn, 2011). The following account analyses how youth services – and workers within them – are able to facilitate movement and what might limit their capacities.

i. Young people and projects

The first border, of course, that young people meet is that of the youth work *field* itself. They may be pulled across by a defined purpose or project that speaks to their collective or individual interests. Equally, having a clear aim and project identity might be enough to draw young people in, irrespective of

its focus. In any event, while they may not speak consciously in terms of concrete benefits and accrual of capital (Coburn, 2011), young people need to feel that they could gain from involvement and that they are being offered opportunities that appeal (Davies, B., 2015). In the first instance, they might be motivated by anticipation of such things as emotional satisfactions and expectations of fun, shared experience with friends and non-parental/non-teacherly relationships with adults rather than rational calculations of benefits. It was evident for the 'core group' in the 'conservation project', for example, that the draw was as much the personality of the youth workers who visited their school as the explicit aims of the project around mental well-being and the environment. This suggests that personal dynamics are critical elements in starting projects, particularly powerful where combined with purposeful activities and opportunities for young people to shape the direction of the project from the outset (Davies, B., 2015).

Young people may experience entry to the youth work *field* as a big step, because the environment they encounter is so distinct from family, school and faith communities and the established pattern of relations there. In that sense, the 'liminal space' offered by youth projects (Nolas, 2014) and the greater equality in adult-young person relationships may feel daunting. It is therefore not surprising when they arrive in groups or encouraged by friends who have been before.

The Pakistani Muslim young women in the 'conservation project' also crossed a border from their cultural world into a project run by a predominantly white organisation. By offering accessible but unfamiliar social milieu, projects provide opportunities through which young people can build confidence in cross-cultural relationships and negotiate identities that integrate disparate elements, touching upon points of similarity and difference (de St Croix, 2016). This had not been a specific intention in this case as it was only by chance that most participants shared an ethnic identity. Yet at the same time youth work approaches intentionally offer young people freedom safely to explore new knowledge (including self-knowledge) and cultural meanings, and the norms around a project might form what Coburn (2011) refers to as a 'localised habitus' conducive to this.

Furthermore, in many instances young people come together in groups because of shared characteristics or circumstances (asylum seekers and young carers being two contemporary examples). This creates opportunities for them to reframe their experiences and identities, engaging in a process of collaborative learning and action in the sorts of 'interrupted spaces' described by Bolzan and Gale (2011b). Whatever the reason for coming together, group process hinges on common interest and collective efforts to progress towards an identified end and, in most cases, within a defined life span.

The benefits that young people gain in the early stages of a project may not be tangible except to those immediately involved, being contingent on relationships and the atmosphere of the group. However, they are critical in motivating young people to make commitments through which they can secure greater substantial gains. While being wary of discussing capital in a mechanistic way, a Bourdieusian analysis would suggest that young people might accrue

- Social capital through the relationships that develop through participation in the project and its tasks or activities. These may be new peer relationships or strengthening of pre-existing friendships providing more by way of resources for young people to draw on;
- Cultural capital through recognition of skills developed through the project and involvement in activities – dissemination, campaigning, advocacy – arising from the project, as well as certification of experiences or learning (for example, in the 'conservation project', ASDAN awards):
- Social capital through a widening of social networks and potential involvement with follow on projects or other activities, which become reachable as a result of engaging with the initial project;
- Social and cultural capital that comes from being identified with a successful project and its achievements. (Perhaps symbolic capital in certain cases too).

(Bourdieu, 1977; 1986)

Naturally, individual young people engage with groups and with project work in different ways and are agentic in taking (or opting out of) leadership and other roles that enable them to develop skills and interests. That means that each young person gains from a project in unique ways, depending on their choices and investments in the relationships and the opportunities around the project, as well as their capacities and readiness to stretch themselves.

Feelings of belonging, of course, are a necessary part of successful groups but not sufficient in themselves for young people to move forward (Davies, B., 2015; de St Croix, 2016). As exemplified by the 'conservation project', bonding elements were clearly observable in the inter-relationships between the young people as a whole and specifically between members of the 'core group', as well as between the young people and Young Lives. The latter meant that the 'core group' were open to the suggestion of moving on to other initiatives and, through them, further youth work relationships. They thus reinforced their connections with Young Lives, whilst also strengthening the organisation which after all can only exist – and continue to thrive – on the basis of young people's active engagement: a reciprocal benefit of bonding capital (de St Croix, 2018).

At the end of any project, moreover, youth work organisations and their funders are conscious of potential bridging capital (Putnam, 2000), which might be evidenced in the activities and projects that young people access subsequently, acquisition of transferable skills, and their experiences, such as volunteering, that might contribute to CVs (de St Croix, 2016; 2018). By the end of a project, young people may take away these sorts of recognisable assets, as well as personal gains that are harder to measure yet still powerful at a subjective level.

ii. Youth work as catalyst

Young people may be able to explore their interests and lead the direction of projects that are discrete and time-limited, with the facilitation of youth workers (Davies, B., 2015). Something different happens where, rather than

being an activity that is separate from other aspects of young people's lives, the location of youth work is in formal settings such as the youth justice system and schools (Westergaard, 2013). Inevitably, such work challenges the ethical and value position that youth work has long taken on young people's voluntary participation and the primacy of the 'youth work relationship' (Nicholls, 2012; Jeffs and Smith, 2008). On this question, Ord (2009) points out that the emphasis on young people attending of their own volition is unique among children's services and matters 'because of the inherent power that it affords young people, as well as the necessity of negotiation. Without it, it may be much harder to form such a relationship, particularly with young people at the 'margins' (p. 44). Nevertheless, he contends that it is not a necessary condition of a youth work relationship and that the critical factor is the degree of choice that each young person is offered. Despite resistance, practice in any case has had to concede the inevitability of working on the basis of referrals and required attendance (de St Croix, 2016). At the same time, it has also pragmatically sought to determine good practice in these contexts and to exploit new opportunities for reaching out to young people (Davies and Merton, 2010).

In situations where vulnerable young people are at risk of being marginalised and problematized, youth work's value is its emphasis on informal learning and positive views of young people (Davies and Merton, 2010). In these sorts of roles, youth workers cross disciplinary boundaries, using their specific skills to support the endeavours of education, youth justice, health or other professionals. Consequently, rather than existing solely in youth work space, the relationships between young people and youth workers are shaped – although not determined - by the organisational context and the networks of relations that exist there.

Youth workers, then, may be used in functional ways to enable young people to exist within an environment, even to flourish. What is more intriguing, however, is where youth work has greater ambitions to help them transcend their circumstances (Nicholls, 2012; de St Croix, 2016). Throughout my analysis, I have consistently referred to the ideas of capital and *field* but have generally found that the fluidity around young people's growth and transition

renders Bourdieu's (1977) concept of *habitus* less meaningful. However, in thinking about young people's engagement in the *field* of education and its institutions, it can be argued that the ways that *field* and *habitus* interact might constitute a huge constraining force for young people experiencing difficulties or exclusion.

To use the 'boys group' as an example, each of the young men has a history in education that has affected their ability to transition into mainstream options for further education. Despite claiming a degree of status and achievement as a specialist facility, in a large and structured *field* of activity, Mayhew Training is inevitably not a powerful player and has a localised sphere of influence. Where the notion of *habitus* extends our insight into the barriers faced by colleges similarly at the edges of educational provision is in revealing the way that beliefs and norms are generated and reproduced in local contexts through the conjunction of

- Young people entering the environment from a background of poor prior engagement and, arguably, little or no 'feel for the educational game';
- Tutors habituated to patchy levels of participation who may therefore develop a tendency to focus on internal relationships rather than external contacts;
- Wider structural conditions and expectations that determine the range of courses, placement opportunities and activities that the establishment is able to offer (and, indeed, what is deemed suitable to offer).

This all interacts to curtail aspirations and confidence in both young people and tutors about what it is possible to access and to use to advantage, forestalling the room for young people to move socially and culturally and perpetrating inequality. Young people with the most entrenched difficulties – effectively marginalised even within a marginalised population of young people – are especially susceptible to gravitating towards the lowest point and remaining there.

The entry of youth work into such educational environments may have two effects. It could work to maintain the status quo by simply helping targeted groups of young people to feel happier with their situation. Youth workers such as Carlos, however, are committed to enabling young people to progress and move beyond the restrictions they have experienced, both practically and in terms of imagined futures (de St Croix, 2016). What is interesting in this is that in doing so, they are not posing an outright challenge or opposition to the *habitus* (which Nicholls (2012) suggests might be counter-productive or simply ineffectual). Instead their efforts are built on relationships within the organisation and appreciation of what, in this case, Mayhew Training, are able to offer and the limits of its reach. In that sense, it is more about working constructively to shift the localised *habitus* and beliefs about what is possible, than dismissing its powerful effects. What the youth work intervention can contribute – and what can act as catalyst for change – is a combination of space for young people to reflect on self and identity, additional social capital (contacts, opportunities, relationships outside the organisation), and encouragement and support to see the potential of new opportunities and to seize them. In small ways, as in the sessions of the boys group, it may offer an environment to practise new skills so building human capital and confidence that enable young people to feel empowered, initially in their relationships in the wider college but, more importantly, in the world beyond (Miller et al., 2015). Young people who may have felt disregarded and disrespected may thus begin to develop belief and a stronger subjective sense of self that is then reinforced in positive interactions with others (linking back to Jenkins, 2014).

However, the transformative potential of any youth work is inevitably dependent on its context and the durability of relationships. The short life span of the 'boys group' did not allow the work to come to fruition. Although in this instance the group was perhaps not a vehicle for lasting change, it was nevertheless evident that a longer term presence could have strengthened the resource-flows (Wierenga, 2009) into these young men's lives, enabling their development as agentic and forward-thinking selves. Certainly, they appreciated the relevance of the group to their situation, not

just because of the relationships they encountered there, but because it encouraged them to (at least start to) create new visions for their futures beyond the college. This motivated them to commit to the group and to participate.

At a point of transition, whether to adulthood or out of a training placement, young people may find this sort of intervention pivotal in helping them negotiate away from the edges of society by communicating a belief in their value and worth. Its potency comes from working alongside other interventions in young people's lives, rather than counter to them. This is nevertheless specific to populations of young people who may possess limited agency but enough to allow them to make active choices to access help from professionals and, through them, to discover new sources of capital. As discussed below, young people in different social circumstances might see the separation, rather than the integration, of youth work as its principal benefit.

iii. Young people and social space

My intention is not to create a comprehensive account of youth work and the many places where it exists, but to outline a variety of ways in which it makes itself available for young people to use. Attention here turns to unstructured forms of youth work that consequently demand much less by way of conscious 'opt-in' from young people. Of course, young people still exercise agency in their engagement with detached work or open access provision. However, the nature of their commitment may differ, perhaps hinging on who else comes to drop-in sessions or a building itself. Young people in Nolas' (2014) ethnographic study, for example, valued their youth club as a refuge from pressures and conflicts on the streets, suggesting that it was the physical space not just the people within it that mattered. Interestingly, Nolas talks in terms of youth workers reacting or improvising in the way they create a learning environment, being attuned to young people's wants and needs rather than imposing their own agendas. In this approach young people experience youth workers taking responsibility for setting boundaries but

otherwise allowing them to have control of the space and what happens there. This may not involve the sort of overt negotiation that typically takes place in other settings, in part reflecting looser connections with and between young people, and, in part, group situations that may not have clearly defined start and finish points. Trust and norms are instead established through on-going processes of interaction and shared understandings (Hart, 2016).

In this study, the 'church hall group' is firmly at the informal end of the spectrum of formal-informal learning environments (de St Croix, 2016). Within it, the young people in the 'kitchen group' might be judged to have robust systems of capital (Raffo and Reeves, 2000) in that they had a variety of different types and combinations of capital (Bourdieu, 1986) through their families, colleges and organised activities. They simply did not need the resource-flows (Wierenga, 2009) that for others might come through professional youth workers. What motivated their allegiance to the youth club is better understood by thinking of attachments, belonging and relationships than capital and access to opportunities. As Hall et al. (1999) note in relation to young people seeking unstructured time with peers and the utility of friendships, 'it is in the course of such informal interaction, away from parents and teachers, that significant aspects of young people's personal and social identities are affirmed, contested, rehearsed and reworked' (p. 506). The youth work environment may become increasingly attractive to young people as other spaces – physical and virtual – come under ever more intrusive surveillance.

The circumstances and consequently needs of young people in the 'kitchen group', however, noticeably differed from those of the young men who left the session (the 'outside group'). Had this second group stayed, the indications were that they would have asked for quite different things from the youth workers, whether explicitly or through their behaviours. The character of sessions would thus likely have changed, taking on more challenge and more active intervention and support. Young people can make many and diverse demands on youth work, the best of which is capable of adapting to whatever young people present and to behaviours, needs and

the presence or absence of social goods in their lives that are far from predictable (Spence and Devanney, 2013).

With that in mind, the bridging possibilities of informal work may be less obvious than for a project with clear outcomes and achievements, or for a group on the margins of a system. For some young people, having confidence that workers and volunteers are there as a resource may be enough. Others may wish for youth workers to act as personal advocate or to mediate for them collectively, perhaps with community or with police. What matters here is mutuality in the relationships and young people's perception of youth workers 'being there' in the sense of attending to their interests as well as being bodily present (Spence and Devanney, 2013). It is the quality of these relationships that keeps young people engaged, although it is apparent that they seek varying levels of intimacy, intervention and brokerage from professionals.

Young people's motivation to cross the border into youth work territory and to voluntarily continue engaging is contingent on whether they perceive that what is on offer is relevant to them. Two different sets of young people wanted to engage with the 'church hall group' and for contrasting reasons. However, both believed in its relevance and both felt trust and sense of ownership of the space. This cannot be taken for granted. Hart's (2016) study included a homework club linked to a school which asked to be provided with the names of those who attended. The young people expressed disquiet as they wanted the homework club to remain distinct. In one of their research sites, Hall et al. (1999) found that young people were deterred from using the existing youth club by the police presence and were campaigning for new provision. Similarly, in this research, Ed and Jamie viewed the local church-led youth group unfavourably; they could not trust that there would be no agenda and no adult expectations (in that case around worship) placed on them as they could with the 'church hall group'. Young people's keen sense of the nature of different youth provisions and the power relations therein weighs significantly in their calculations of the benefits of participation and what acts as disincentive.

Gender and sexuality

For young people, the attraction of youth groups is the chance to spend social time with peers. The examples in this study have illustrated the tightening of pre-existing friendship groups, the development of friendships between former school-mates, and the formation of supportive bonds between young people, all taking place in youth work space. Single sex and mixed groups both, in various ways, allow young people scope for constructing their gender identities and expressions of sexuality through their interactions and 'gender practices' in what Nayak and Kehily (2013) refer to as the 'coming-into-being' of gender. Gender is inescapably social but is also embodied and, for young people, rehearsed in their social groups, whether peers or cross-generational:

Bodies are both the objects and subjects of gender process: they are socially constituted but remain wilful agents that participate in their own making and that of others. Gender practices are embodied activities that carry with them a scattering of feelings, affect and emotion. (2013, p. 7)

In this section I consider the 'identity work' relating to gender and sexuality I observed (or on occasions inferred) in the three groups in my study. In doing so, I recognise that gender intersects in various ways with ethnicity, class, regional identity and other aspects of social selves that together influence individual subjectivities.

As identities develop throughout teenage years, young people may relate first to groups characterised by similarity before moving on, as opportunities allow, to more diverse friendships and relations with peers. Jenkins (2014) argues that identity is a practical accomplishment and, moreover, once established, must be constantly re-established because 'one's identity – one's identities indeed, for who we are is always multi-dimensional, singular *and* plural – is never a final or settled matter' (p. 18).

For Jenkins, the process of 'being' or 'becoming' is founded on growing awareness of sameness and difference. In early adolescence, South Asian

young women may come together in single sex groups as a form of bonding and collective strength, sharing experiences and cultural moments. In that sense, their sameness creates a bond that allows them to explore their own individual differences within a set of peer relations and norms. As they do this, they are marking themselves as distinct from older age groups, as well as the majority white population, where they cluster together within school and in their social lives outside. At the same time, by outwardly complying within education and religion they have a means of distinguishing themselves from South Asian young men and assumed (or actual – see Qasim, 2018) associations with extremism and criminality (Shain, 2003).

It is difficult to suggest where the 'core group' from the 'conservation project' might fit with the categories of 'gang girls', educationally competent 'survivors' or 'faith girls' found in Shain's (2003) study of 13-16 year olds: my contact with them was in the context of youth work and therefore gave only glimpses of their attitudes to education and school as an institution. However, Shain's analysis of her fourth group of 'rebels' is particularly interesting in that it shows South Asian young women choosing to adopt Western styles of femininity, wearing 'English' clothes, limiting the use of home languages at school and pursuing friendships with girls of other religions (as well as being more open to relationships with boys than their culturally conservative peers). All these groups were negotiating their identities but the boundaries of acceptable practices within Islam (and, in that study, Sikhism and Hindism) were being pushed most actively by the 'rebels'. At 13/14 the 'core group' were not moving too far from their culture and religion but they were entering a period where questions of identity and place in society come to the fore. In comparison, the infrequent attendees from their wider friendship group approximated more closely to versions of Shain's 'rebels'. Despite variation in dress and the wearing of the hijab, the willingness of all these young women to engage with professionals, peer mentors and other young people, most of whom were of different ethnicities and religion to their own, spoke of their growing security in their own identities from which they could develop their abilities to explore new worlds.

There are two further points to note from the 'conservation project'. The first relates to the reactions of the 'core group' to the young adult women around the project, and particularly the attachments they formed to the staff member and peer mentor who were both of South Asian ethnicity. Proximity is salient here, as members of the 'core group' saw the older young women as close enough to themselves to be reachable but 'sufficiently different' to represent ways of being that they could aspire to (Davies, B., 2015). Framing their response as admiration for role models oversimplifies what was happening, but certainly members of the 'core group' were conscious of both as students and as independent British Asian young women, arguably discovering future possibilities for themselves in the ways that they lived and conducted themselves. Although the impact was no doubt felt unevenly across the group, what I observed of discussions among the 'core group' suggested that shared memories and anticipations amplified both the affective dimensions and the social and cultural capital individuals claimed through their affiliations.

The final point is that the project itself offered space for the young women to adopt feminine practices. As illustration, before a presentation to adult 'friends of' the project, the 'core group' spent time practising with make-up and grooming each other. The other two young people, David and Marie, were left standing on the side-lines in a way that underlined the dynamics of friendship groups in experimentation and rehearsal (Henderson et al., 2007: Coleman, J., 2011): together the 'core group' were preparing for a new experience. Doing so by focusing on appearance is not unusual, given the premium placed on attractiveness and appeal (by young women themselves and by others). Indeed, physical appearance and style is an important source of cultural (and sexual) capital that affects young women's subjective sense of self (Coffey, 2013), in this instance as 'acceptable' versions of Pakistani Muslim girlhood.

The other two groups offered other possibilities for developing gender identities. The 'church hall group' itself presented two different scenarios in terms of gender practices, illustrating how these vary according to the needs and situations of individual young people. The main interests for the 'kitchen

group' were the emergence of mixed sex friendships and opportunities to socialise. The sessions were a safe space, where risky endeavours around sexual relations and intimacy were put aside, and young people appreciated the relative absence of gendered expectations. The playing out of masculinity was more obvious among the young men in the 'outside group' in terms of physicality and edginess, as well as their interactions and use of rough humour. Here the audience or 'reference group' (Baumgartner, 2014) for masculine performance was salient. Positioning among the young men was evident in, for example, a 'mine is bigger than your's' type exchange between Craig and another in that group, referring to the cost and flashiness of their e-smoking kit.

The 'outside group' left before the youth workers could get beyond their defences and relate to them as young men. In contrast, the 'boys group' purposely created opportunity to make connections with individuals and to explore the fears, vulnerabilities and sources of pride that underpin youthful masculinities. As such, this group was unique in my study in explicitly focusing on gender and social context. As Brown (2015) argues, young men in difficult circumstances are often unable to enact the sorts of 'performance of vulnerability' that attracts services, and their resistance, aggression and other behaviours are interpreted negatively rather than as sign of distress or struggle (Baumgartner, 2014). It is therefore to the credit of both Mayhew Training and Young Lives that this intervention was put in place.

While gender conscious work is not confined to single sex groups (YouthAction Northern Ireland, 2006), 'boys work' does tend to separate out young men, in part to move away from sports and other means conventionally used to engage them, and in part with the aim of facilitating 'expression of their opinions, thoughts feelings and expectations, as well as attempting to free them from the need to constantly prove themselves to others' (Harland, 2001, p. 296).

The intention in all 'boys work' is to enable young men better to appreciate the variety of masculinities and masculine roles, expanding visions beyond the masculine norms and expectations that they meet in their day to day

lives. This needs a supportive atmosphere in which to challenge beliefs that expressing any emotion other than anger is 'unmanly' and to encourage self-awareness. The further intention is to provide bridges to opportunities and experiences that allow them to take steps towards the sort of male adulthood that they aspire to, and in that regard identifications with adult males are key. However, Robb et al. (2015) found that what young men seemed to appreciate is not so much having a role model as 'someone who is more of a coach, guide or confidant, and who had a more active and negotiated relationship with the young person' (p. 25). Young men may therefore develop agency in terms of projecting visions for the future and formulating plans, as well as becoming agentic in the active choices and involvements they pursue as they work towards their future (Emirbayer and Mische, 1998). In their relationships with male youth workers, young men find resources and support for both endeavours.

In this instance, the key elements that allowed Carlos to reach out to participants were his self-disclosure, his attentiveness to feelings and his genuine interest in each of them as individuals (Murphy and Ord, 2013). Through these, he lessened the distance between himself and young men in the group so that they could view him as 'sufficiently different', that is, they were able to identify with him enough to encourage them to open up to the unfamiliar ways of 'doing masculinity' (Nayak and Kehily, 2013) that he exposed them to. As noted by Harland (2001), this is skilled work and practitioners need to feel secure in their own masculinity, which is not always a given (especially in the Northern Ireland context where Harland was writing).

Considering masculinities and femininities inevitably touches upon questions of sexuality. I have already noted the absence of overt homophobia in the three youth work settings in this study which reflect growing tolerance across present day society towards sexual expression and identity (McCormack and Anderson, 2010; McCormack, 2014). Youth work itself seeks to provide environments that are safe, not just in the sense of being non-oppressive, but in allowing space for exploration of ideas and attitudes, as well as self-identities. Three dimensions of this could be seen in the 'conservation

project'. First, youth workers are more likely than other professionals to make conscious use of their own identities and life histories (Murphy and Ord, 2013), as one of the workers in the 'conservation project' did. The young women in the project were intrigued by the idea of two women parenting a child together and listened and asked her questions about sexual identity and 'coming out'. Hearing a narrative from someone that they knew and related to, they were receptive and curious about a lifestyle and way of being that was unfamiliar to them (perhaps by virtue of culture but equally because of their age).

Second, later in the project life cycle, the peer mentors also talked openly about sexuality and positive LGBT identities. Their ease in discussing these issues and the political, campaigning edge to their remarks offered another element of social learning. Third, in the localised *habitus* (Coburn, 2011) that thus developed, David was happy to declare his bi-sexuality within the group, although was not yet able to talk about what it meant for his developing identity. Nevertheless, the fact that he could be open and even celebratory in his 'treebow' T shirt design, suggests that he felt security in the group and anticipated a positive validation of his sexuality. For him, and for similar young people, space to reflect and safely to explore sexual identity holds critical value, particularly where disclosure elsewhere could result in loss of status and social capital, if not outright vilification.

As illustrated throughout this section, trust in the youth work environment and in the relationships existing there allows young people opportunity to take risks in exploring gender and sexual identities at social, political and individual levels, to move beyond binary understandings of male and female and to appreciate the intersections of gender with other social characteristics.

Trust and belonging

Youth work is most powerful where it offers young people space for growth, development and social learning that is built on relationships of trust. Such

relationships are complex, existing within groups, between adult youth workers and young people, and between young people and organisations. It is through these relationships that young people can take hold and make use of the various resources available to them. As Wierenga (2009) found in her longitudinal study,

In practice we can give young people all the information and opportunities in the world, but without trust relationships based upon individual and group history, they may be unable to make use of these resources at all. (p. 192)

This final analysis draws principally on Bourdieu's (1977; 1986; 1990; 1998) concepts of *field*, *capital* and *habitus* to consider 'relationships of trust' as enablers of growth and transition for young people, and how young people may be able to find such relationships within youth work, particularly where they are lacking in other areas of their lives.

The chapter opened with discussion of youth work as a *field* itself, whose character is informal and non-hierarchical in comparison to other professional spheres (Davies, B., 2015). As well as maintaining a separate presence in youth clubs and projects, it has permeated other organisations and more highly structured *fields*, such as education and sport. As an entity itself, it provides multiple environments where young people are empowered through the democracy of projects or groups, formalised to greater or lesser degrees. Within this *field* they are able to take control and make choices about whether, how and to what extent they participate, as well as determining activities or the direction of a project, depending on the context (de St Croix, 2016). The circumstances of an individual setting or other factors affecting individual young people may act as constraints, but there are openings for young people to assume positions of power and influence in the *field*. Of course, young people may gain prestige through achievement in education or the arts but that is not independent of the power relations involved in authorising and recognising achievement. Their position in many of the *fields* of activity in which they engage is subordinate. Youth work, then,

stands out as a context that challenges the limits of young people's power and, through its practices, seeks to promote their autonomy at a point of transition (Nicholls, 2012; Davies, 2015; de St Croix, 2016).

Given young people's relative powerlessness, youth work may have a pivotal role as it interacts on their behalf with other *fields*. As discussed earlier, youth work may work at the border of different systems or embed itself within institutions. Here its overlap with more highly structured, formal *fields* enables the negotiation, advocacy and support that young people may need to access the resources on offer. For those young people with few 'resources-in-hand' from family and their immediate environment, assistance and opportunities available from the formal education system, training placements, health providers and the like assume greater importance. However, availability does not ensure accessibility, especially for young people who are lacking in confidence, skills and circles of support (Ungar, 2004; Wierenga, 2009). Youth workers may enable young people to access resources through practical help, through support and encouragement, and through positive examples of 'travelling the same road' – effectively, smoothing the flow of resources to individual young people (Wierenga, 2009).

Being much closer than other authority figures means that young people can turn to youth workers when they are struggling for understanding and to work out solutions (Murphy and Ord, 2013). Through youth work relationships, young people may find the motivation to try again in the face of difficulties and to place their trust in organisations, activities and people through which they can access sources of capital. Conversely, through trusting relationships with youth workers who act on their behalf, young people may avoid situations that risk long-term and crippling loss of capital and stigmatised identities. (School exclusion, persistent absenteeism, non-compliance with criminal sanctions and homelessness spring readily to mind).

Considering capital in more detail, it is evident that young people may develop social and cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1977; 1986) in youth groups

and relationships, as well as through activities and achievements. However, social capital may be two edged in that strong relationships and belonging provide a secure base from which to explore new experiences but may also be limiting where the feared loss of friends and local knowledge prevents young people moving into new territories (MacDonald and Marsh, 2005). Cultural capital may also carry uncertainty because what is recognised in one social context may have little 'exchange value' in another. Skeggs (1997; 2004) argues that working class cultural capital based on physical prowess and appearance is less transferable than the capital claimed by the middle classes who are also more skilled in cultural appropriation for the purposes of building identities. If this reflects the reality of classed lives, youth workers are challenged to enable the working class young people they engage with to access more enduring forms of capital and those which have recognition outside their immediate environment.

It should be recognised, moreover, that providing this sort of 'bridging capital' (Putnam, 2000) may be easier for young people who have some capacities and resources already than for young people extremely depleted in capital or traumatised by their experiences. Whilst being positive about the potential impacts of youth work, there are clearly constituencies of young people who can make more immediate use of the opportunities and facilitative relationships that it offers. By definition, 'hard to reach' young people are trickier to engage (although this may be as much to do with the attitudes of professionals as young people themselves (Brown, 2015)). When they do form trust and attachments, they may need longer before being ready to detach and move on, whereas others may sadly remain beyond reach.

Whereas concepts of *field* and *capital* are relatively straightforward when considering young people and youth work, reflections on *habitus* are necessarily tentative given the liminality of young people and their movements. Youth workers, of course, may be helpful to individual young people struggling with disjuncture between their primary *habitus* and the *habitus* of their school or other setting. Thinking broadly, it could also be argued that youth work contributes to a generalised *habitus* among a generation of young people – Woodman and Wyn's (2015) 'generational

habitus' - whose sociality is technologically enhanced (Jaynes, 2019; NYA, 2019) and marked by its growing ease with diversity. How this *habitus* has been affected by informal social learning through youth work is hard to disentangle from the influence of formal education and media. However, youth work as illustrated in the examples in this study, offers environments where young people can question settled views of social order and social practices (Nicholls, 2012; de St Croix, 2016), so its impact is likely to be greater than its marginal position in the landscape of youth provision might suggest. More significantly, perhaps, progressive youth work offers a counter-balance to the individualising trends of late modernity (Giddens, 1991) where it champions young people's voices and their collective views, including participation in consultations and political processes (youth councils and the like). In this sense it seeks to be part of the structures and forces that determine young people's place and their power in society for the better.

In summary

I have ended the above with an admittedly idealised view of youth work and its societal impact. Most of its effects, naturally, are experienced at a local level as young people access sadly diminishing services of various kinds. In individual settings, the interactions between young people, staff, volunteers and organisations create a 'localised habitus' (Coburn, 2011) with its own structures, expectations and norms. This is not inevitably positive for all participants, but this study has explored examples where the ethos and network of relationships has empowered young people and, in different ways, enabled them to develop as autonomous and agentic individuals. Paradoxically, traditional youth work engages with young people in groups to do this and, here, we have seen the power of group relations and trust.

While the three projects are distinctively different, the group dynamic in each case was underpinned by the prior knowledge that some group members had of each other from other contexts, and their on-going contact between sessions. It is evident in these examples that youth work enabled the strengthening of old friendships and the creation of new from looser

acquaintances by giving the young people space and periods of time together. For the 'church hall group' that was sufficient in itself. In contrast, purposeful activity in both the 'conservation project' and the 'boys group' became a vector for growth and development, and young people chose to engage because it was accessible, unthreatening and relevant to their needs. The differences between just these three projects gives a sense of the multiple skills and adaptability of youth workers as they open 'youth-friendly' environments and put themselves forward as interested adults.

In diverse settings, through youth work, young people are given opportunity to move on when they are 'stuck', to identify options and make choices in the present, and to explore longer term visions for their future (Emirbayer and Mische, 1998). Not all young people want or need to engage with youth workers, and when they do so voluntarily the nature and extent of their engagement occupies a spectrum from the minimal to fully committed. That is indicative of their agency and how they choose to use (or not to use) the resource that youth work represents in and of itself and the resources youth workers can make accessible to them on the back of established 'relationships of trust' (Wierenga, 2009).

Chapter 10 Conclusion

This study sought to uncover the ways that young people are able to use strategies and resources to reshape or reinvent identities that they experience as being problematic and/or limiting in their progress towards adulthood. I earlier outlined the key questions which I articulated as follows:

My concern is to explore how young people exercise agency and the ways in which they do so, given that choices are so contingent on life circumstances and what Skeggs (2004) terms 'plausibility structures', (or, put another way, what young people see as being within their reach). In broad terms, the study, *Working it out for yourself*, set out with the following questions in mind: how do young people

1. start to create biographical narratives and ascribe meaning to 'critical moments' and relationships in their lives?
2. identify resources in their social relationships and environments that they can use in self-enhancing ways?
3. develop strategies to maintain a positive sense of self in the face of difficulties or challenges?
4. respond to the expectations and assumptions of the social institutions that they interact with?
5. choose their identity investments and commitments (and why)?
6. develop visions of possible future selves that they can act upon?

I had opportunity to develop two additional questions by virtue of the research settings within youth work projects:

7. how do young people perceive youth work and use the experiences and the relationships nurtured in youth work environments in their 'identity-work'?
8. how does youth work present itself as a resource for young people that is accessible, relevant and meaningful to their lives and aspirations?

In relation to specific questions, Q8 is largely addressed in the previous chapter which also gives some insights into Q7 and young people's perceptions of youth work. My observations there are undoubtedly influenced by my own past involvement in children's services and current role in professional education. This meant I was sensitised to critical questions about the values, philosophical underpinnings and distinct power relations active in the *field* of youth work and how they differ from the contexts in which I have worked myself. However, although these reflections enrich the study and add depth to the findings, my primary interest remained with the young people throughout.

Considering the initial set of questions, the data gathered from young people produced fewer of the biographical narratives that I sought through Q1 at the outset but more by way of other on-going and interactional forms of narrative and self-stories. Nevertheless, it should be recognised that in many instances I was observing strategies of identification and investment 'in action' rather than interpreting young people's accounts of them. Furthermore, the nature of the research meant that the focus was on interactions with youth work as a social institution. Although this was not to the exclusion of other institutions in young people's lives, the immediacy and freshness of the data about youthwork forms the basis of my response to Q4. The findings relating to young people are summarised in five sections, followed by broad recommendations for action arising from both Chapter 9 and this Chapter 10.

My intention as I set up the study had been to involve participants who may not have plentiful resources and robust 'systems of social capital' (Raffo and Reeves, 2000) but who are not obviously 'marked' by previous system contact. In choosing to recruit through youth work projects rather than the care system or youth justice services, I had a greater social diversity amongst the young people who came for interview or engaged in activities than I had originally anticipated. This gives opportunities for the comparisons and contrasts explored in this chapter. The ethnographic data also allows for distinctions to be drawn between the three projects and the demographics of the young people involved, and for like elements to be traced.

In the previous chapters I have drawn on a variety of concepts to complement Bourdieu's ideas of *field*, *capital* and *habitus*, most specifically around narrative and social constructions of identity and agency. This final chapter explores the ways that these concepts might be used creatively to go some way to illuminating the transitions of young people born after the millennium, focusing on their subjective views of present and future selves, and their responses to the objective conditions that they meet. Inevitably this is a partial account with data from a small number of young people and their encounters with youth work in specific local environments. Nevertheless, linking the particularities of their experiences with broader societal change and the suggestion of 'generational habitus' (Woodman and Wyn, 2015), there are many insights that can be taken from these materials. First, broad indications of how young people participate and find their places in a society that is at the same time increasingly diverse and increasingly divided. Second, specific pointers as to how they are able to use the many relationships around youth work to help negotiate and navigate the challenges or opportunities they find in their immediate environment and looking further ahead. Finally, evidence to further arguments for youth work with its 'shape-shifting capacity' (Bradford and Finn, 2014) to be valued and supported as a flexible and accessible resource for young people in many different circumstances.

i. Identity claims and identifications

Identities are constructed through social interactions which affect an individual's internalised sense of self and her relations in the social world. The constant process that Jenkins (2014) suggests builds, reinforces and alters identities over time is especially pertinent in the youth life stage. I have shown in my analysis that young people become more conscious of their identities and most develop their ability to manage or manipulate their identifications. From 'the conservation project' Nicola talked about playing with clothing and musical styles while the other peer mentor, Caitlin, recounted how she had tried the gamut of different hair colours as a means

of expressing her individuality at school. However, these are relatively surface presentations used tactically for effect whereas other identifications are fundamental to self-identity. In the safety of group sessions, for example, David was able to reveal that he is bisexual and here he was helped by the positive symbol of the rainbow which he referenced in his T shirt design and on his magazine front page. He was unable or unready to elaborate on what this meant for him, perhaps because he was still working through the implications of being open about his sexuality. (They are experienced in the context of his immediate social relations, after all, which may or may not reflect generally – but certainly not universally – greater societal acceptance of sexual diversity).

Here the narratives that young people tell about their identifications come into view, but their silences should be noted too. First, young people are increasingly able to identify the social groups and categories they belong to as they accumulate experiences and knowledge about the wider world, recognising similarities and points of difference (Jenkins, 2014). Thus, it is evident that Ed and Jamie from the ‘church hall group’ in debating their class position had more material to bring to bear and more capacity to discriminate than the younger women from the ‘conservation project’. They were also making value judgements about how far they wanted to claim a middle class status despite knowing that they were in a position of relative advantage. The selection of detail adds nuances and potential ambiguities, such as Ed’s reference to his family’s working class origins which implies recent social mobility rather than a secure class position. These sorts of exchanges with friends and peers (Bamberg, 2004b) challenge perceptions and allow young people to refine their views of self in relation to others. Yet, as evident in the contrast between these two friends and David above, they are contingent on the diversity and the nature of the peer groups that young people can access because trust and safety in relations are critical to active exploration and appraisal.

Second, young people become more sophisticated in determining who has influenced their lives and the associations that they claim. In interview, Nicola, for example, admired her older sister because of her feistiness and

outspoken politics, and her grandmother for her wisdom. She wanted to align herself with similar qualities and views, feeling these resonated with her own experiences of diversity within education and sense of self as being open and inclusive. In a different way, Caitlin described consciously identifying herself with her father's family after they reconciled when she was thirteen. Conversely, Kieran explained his decisions to 'dis-identify' with older men who, he realised, were not good models to follow. Personal identifications, then, can be helpful in providing templates for possible ways of being but some young people's stories are about the steps of avoidance or disassociation that they take.

Third, young people create narratives about new and developing identifications. The young women in the 'conservation project' talked amongst themselves from the outset about the project and what involvement meant for them. Contemporaneous narratives strengthen attachments and collective memories, although sometimes, as in the 'boys group' they have to be prompted. It takes time and distance to identify 'critical moments' (Thomson et al., 2002) and their long-term impacts but by the end of the 'conservation project', the 'core group' were already proud of being identified, and identifying themselves, as part of a cohort of young people associated with Young Lives. To differing degrees, their history with the project was becoming woven into their identities not only through achievements recognised by school and community, but also through the narratives shared among the group about their sense of belonging and the roles such as leadership (Amira) and co-ordination (Basima) they had taken.

The reactions of the young women exemplify the interplay of emotions with their developing social and cognitive skills. Emotions are critical in motivating young people's attachments and identifications with adults, in this case the workers and volunteers that the 'core group' met through Young Lives. These range from excitement and pleasurable anticipation to feelings of satisfaction, self-worth and empowerment from contributing to collaborative work and receiving recognition. The questions of relevance are pertinent too, in the sense that young people are able to relate to workers who are different in terms of age, ethnicity and sexuality where they find other aspects of the

worker that they can identify with. If emotionally invested they can engage with workers who are 'sufficiently different', bridging social difference so long as there is some point of connection (as was demonstrably the case with Kirsty and the 'core group' in 'the conservation project'). Although observed in the context of youth work, it is reasonable to assume that emotions underpin a whole range of relationships from intimate family and friends to Wierenga's (2002; 2009) 'prophets' and 'mentors', positive feelings reinforcing that the effort on both sides is worthwhile. I would argue that attachments to organisations, places and spaces are also imbued with emotions, and that positivity and hope encourage commitment.

Emotions, however, are many and varied: shame, resentment, alienation and fear can work in the opposite direction, causing young people to disengage (or preventing them from engaging in the first place). The young men in the 'boys group' were anxious before the first session and wary, perhaps on the basis of previous experiences in groups (and by extension larger bodies such as schools). They were reticent in talking about membership of the social groups – friendships, sports teams, college networks and the like – that young people in the other sites discussed freely. They also claimed little by way of the positive collective identifications that Ed showed, for example, through his allegiance to football and Bransgate United, suggesting that, while they had preferences in terms of films, music, gaming, the social and cultural capital attached did not have much utility for their 'identity-work'. With the notable exception of Kieran, members of the 'boys group' approximated to Wierenga's (2009) 'retreating' category, having thinner 'repertoires of identification' (Jenkins, 2014, p. 28) from which to create narratives and less confident story-telling practices.

In Chapter 8 I outline the emotions and conflicts the group revealed when prompted to think about themselves as young men, but in that early session these were only related in passing to past events or relationships and were not connected to future aspirations. This implies that most were relatively unsophisticated in terms of the skills needed to make meaning from experiences and evaluate their significance (McLean, 2008; Fivush et al., 2011), but also that they did not have the facility to draw on anecdotes and

'small stories' (Bamberg, 2004b) evidenced by young people elsewhere in the study. While David from the 'conservation project' also presented as unable to articulate about his experiences, he had stronger markers of identity around being a 'you-tuber' who is heavily invested in computer gaming and by virtue of his sexual orientation. To me, these examples underline the role that professionals might play in helping young people create their self-stories and consolidate the skills needed to enrich and develop complexity, not only about life events but also about their identifications (Pasupathi et al., 2007). For David and others, youth work relationships may provide spaces otherwise absent from their lives for practising narratives and reflecting on self in ways that enhance identity (Wierenga, 2002). As indicated here, such spaces may appear – or be purposefully sought by young people – over successive interactions. Equally, given the variability of youth work practice, some relationships offer young people meaningful periods of time to explore their lives and individual biographies.

Encountering difficulties in life and being identified by negative traits can diminish young people and their belief in themselves. Conversely, strength and learning can be derived from difficult experiences and narratively reconstructed as stories of survival and capacity to withstand setbacks (Ungar, 2004; Pasupathi et al., 2007). That said, middle class young people are more likely to have opportunities and dispositions conducive to reflexivity (McLeod and Yates, 2006; Henderson et al., 2007). Some young people have fewer enablers of reflection or people to hand who can reflect back hopeful messages about moving on. There were stark differences, for example, between Caitlin's account of support with her mental health from family and newfound friends and Kieran's solitary journey. Referring back to the research questions, he did not find meaning in critical relationships in his life so much as in the absence of relationships and resulting self-reliance. Nevertheless, he was striving to 'make good' and to identify himself as a 'helper', as someone who could assist others precisely because of his previous experiences, not despite them. In that way, he was defining what had shaped him, creating a 'counter-story' (Baldwin, 2013) and seeking a

healthier way of being that recasts his past as being useful. It is moot point as to how far he was in that narrative work when the 'boys group' started but aligning with Carlos was certainly a factor in Kieran's subjective world view and identification with – and therefore aspirations for – future volunteer status.

I have sought to illustrate in the above that identifications take place across a spectrum, from identifying as part of a family or defined group at micro-level through to recognising membership of macro-level social categories. In-between, being a student of an individual school, resident of a town or member of faith community, for example, can be used creatively in identity-work by degrees of positive identification or resistance. Cultural identifications through fan-dom or expression of personal tastes also mark distinctions. Yet these assume a high level of individual agency which, it is evident, is not unlimited but is practically and inevitably contingent on both the individual actor and her social circumstances.

ii. Recognising intersectionality

One of my key concerns for this study was the effect of social conditions and structural disadvantage on young people's ability to exercise agency and how young people could make use of their experiences and whatever resources they can access to build strong and resilient identities. Ungar's (2004; 2008; 2011) explorations of resilience foreground the notions of *navigation* and *negotiation*: 'Navigation refers both to a child's capacity to seek help (personal agency), as well as the availability of the help sought'. Furthermore, 'children and youth negotiate for health-sustaining resources to be provided in ways that that they, and those in their culture, define as health-enhancing' (2008, p. 225). Talking in an international context, he stresses not only the need for resources to be available to young people in their environments and through social provision, but also that they must be accessible to young people, culturally as well as in practical ways (echoing Wierenga, 2009). This raises questions for this study about the intersections of culture and social categories and what they might mean for young

people's access to resources and their identity negotiations. Fortuitously, the young people who participated in my research provide a greater contrast than had been anticipated in terms of intersectionality.

The OED defines the sociological meaning of intersectionality as 'the inter-connected nature of social categorisations such as race, class and gender, regarded as creating overlapping and interdependent systems of discrimination or disadvantage' (<https://www.oed.com/view/Entry/429843>). However, since Crenshaw (1991) first spotlighted powerlessness and lack of voice, intersectional studies have shown that the effects of discrimination and disadvantage experienced on multiple fronts do not work in a straightforward additive or accumulative manner. Rather, the inter-relations are complex and play out in many and various ways that 'simultaneously structure the macro material conditions which produce micro everyday 'lived' social and economic inequalities' (Mirza and Meeto, 2013, p. 207). Meanwhile, other developments have seen authors exploring implications for the plurality of identity. Although criticised for giving less attention to the detrimental effects of power (Cho et al., 2013), this latter strand of work offers different insights into the intersections of gender, class and ethnicity and what they mean for young people's 'identity work'. Members of the 'church hall group', for example, have helpful intersections of privilege which meant they had multiple and rich resources to use to craft their identities as 'cosmopolitan' young people, able to move freely around a diverse urban environment (Thomson and Taylor, 2005).

The situation for the 'core group' and their friends around 'the conservation project' is more equivocal as they each create identities from the gender, religious and ethnic categories that they inhabit, as well as their location in a city in the North of England. These are inflected by personal experiences and positions, such as birth order within family, that influence individual *habitus* and feelings about self. The empirical evidence presented earlier suggests that this is not a process of simple absorption: young people actively interpret and make sense of their experiences, as well as making choices about investments in the relationships and opportunities they can access, in this case, as females within their ethnic and faith communities. It should be noted

that Farida, Basima and the other young women were supported by their parents to participate in the 'conservation project' because it had been introduced in the first instance through their school, because it presented as an unthreatening environment and, no doubt, because they could attend together. There is safety in the friendship group, of course, which is a key motivator but it is also critical that a decision to attend en masse increased the chances of parental endorsement and thus allowed the project to be accessible when it might not have been to any single member of the group on her own.

The relationship these young women have with their collective identity is double-edged. At times they showed how they resented the cultural insensitivity they encountered in settings such as school, although they rarely talked about outright racism. However, they also evinced feelings of belonging and positivity about their ethnicity and faith. Jenkins (2014) suggests that social classifications inherently involve values and processes of evaluation taking place internally as well as by external parties. It is unsurprising then that at 13/14 years these young women were starting to consider what it means to be of Pakistani heritage and Muslim faith in a majority white secular society and were working out how to be female in that context. Relatedly, Jenkins (2014) comments that

The human body is simultaneously a referent of individual continuity, an index of collective similarity and differentiation and a canvas upon which identification can play. Identification in isolation from embodiment is unimaginable. (p. 43)

The wearing of the hijab by all members of the 'core group' can thus be seen as an embodied expression of cultural solidarity and a statement of identity. Others in the wider friendship group preferred to adapt Western styles of clothing that met cultural expectations but marked them out less clearly as Muslim.

Shain's (2003) study of South Asian young women illustrates the negotiations that take place around gender, faith and ethnicity. She shows how her participants who were a similar age to the 'core group' positioned

themselves, from the defensive retreat into faith and culture of the 'gang girls' to the closer alignment with mainstream school values of the 'rebels'. This indicates that there are various ways of 'doing' South Asian femininity which attract different sorts and amounts of cultural capital within the school environment as well as 'religious cultural capital' (Ramji, 2007; Sanghera and Thapar-Björkert, 2017) through adherence to the tenets of Islam. These are not without tensions and the literature talks both about the pressures on schools to produce the 'model Muslim female student' (Mirza and Meeto, 2013) and about attempts to 'rescue' young women from their religion (Rashid, 2016), primarily through education. The focus on religion, however, obscures other significant dynamics:

Religion is increasingly seen as *the* problem, especially if you are Muslim. The sustained focus on Islam as *the* definer of self-identity has the effect of ossifying religious identity and obscuring the gendered, structural and racial positioning of Muslim communities. (Ramji, 2007, p. 1173, emphasis in original)

Shain's (2003) 'rebels' were outspoken in their criticisms of patriarchal relations within their communities and Ramji's (2007) research with young adults further points to the impacts of class and gender. She identifies claims to 'Islamic cultural capital' as most salient for the working class young women in her study who had less recourse to other forms of cultural or economic capital, but all her participants were seeking to rearticulate their religion and their own definitions of acceptable behaviours, especially in relation to modesty. Albeit a small-scale qualitative study, Ramji (2007) powerfully refutes assumptions of unthinking passivity and oppression, instead uncovering the collaborations and acquiescence that Muslim young women might use strategically to gain greater freedoms and access to education and work (and in this study, to youth work).

Religious and cultural identity is far from homogenous but the five pillars of Islam and the concepts of *ashan* (mutual care and respect) and *izzat* (honour or respect) (Crabtree et al., 2017) do provide a shared moral framework. In that and in other regards being brought up in any religion profoundly affects

an individual's sense of subjectivity (Hopkins, 2010). Even where the self is defined against religion in the rejection of beliefs or cultural practices, religion leaves an imprint. That is not to say that being associated with an ethnic or religious community is unambiguously positive because that is self-evidently not the case in the face of Islamophobia, antisemitism and sectarianism in the West as well as the social, economic and spatial constraints that might follow. Nevertheless, for young women such as those in 'the conservation project', their religion, their cultural and ethnic group and their ties to Pakistan each provide materials from which to construct identity and a sense of place in society. Here the subject-position of being a British Pakistani Muslim young woman would seem to offer resources for identity as well as defining the parameters of behaviours and ways of being.

The contrast with the resources, practical and discursive, available to the young men in the 'boys group' is striking and only serves to emphasise the relative poverty of their situation. The disparities in terms of 'ontological security' (Giddens, 1991) are also stark, with much higher levels of anxiety, shame and feelings of threat evident in their group interactions. Baumgartner (2014) discusses the routine construction of masculinity in youth offending teams as problematic and overwhelmingly associated with aggression. Mayhew Training as an educational facility were more ready to recognise the vulnerability that Baumgartner describes as neglected in youth justice services. Yet that also over-simplifies the reality of their experience as young men. The debate about young men's underachievement in education and work has been objectified as a 'crisis of masculinity' despite research evidence to the contrary (Nayak and Kehily, 2013). The picture is in fact highly variable according to class, ethnicity and location:

What appears to be a question about gender is really one about class, or rather the connections between the two. The higher up the socio-economic scale you go, the less the gender gap is; it is widest at the bottom end. As Teese et al. (1995, p.109) noted: 'the real question is not whether girls as a group or boys as a group are more disadvantaged but *which* girls and *which* boys'. (McDowell, 2000, p. 203, emphasis added by McDowell)

For members of the 'boys group' the combination of white ethnicity, working class origins and being located in a small socially homogenous Northern town carries little by way of social and cultural capital, and even more so where they are failing to live up to ideals of 'localised hegemonic masculinity' (Connell and Messerschmidt, 2005). In practice, they have few resources to use in the construction of positive identities as young men and in important respects their situation is worsened by the political and social climate.

iii. Marginality and vulnerability

The 'social generation' (Woodman and Wyn, 2015) born since the millennium face levels of precarity in work and adverse social conditions that together have caused widespread youth poverty and 'hard times' (Shildrick et al., 2015). Extended austerity measures and lack of secure employment have impacted unevenly: it is evident even from the data in this study that some young people are relatively well cushioned against risks and uncertainty whereas others have entered the category of 'advanced youth marginality'. Unlike their advantaged peers, growing numbers now find that as

young adults [they] are unable to do normal and everyday things, such as having the opportunity to contribute, participate, produce and consume.....We identify youth marginality as a multi-layered and multi-dimensional form of personal and social oppression. Marginality operates as a series of structural, cultural and emotional experiences, where social exclusion both preserves and identifies discrimination, stereotypes and prejudice. (Blackman and Rogers, 2017b, p. 6)

For Blackman and Rogers, marginality is not synonymous with unemployment, given the prevalence of 'poor work' (Shildrick et al., 2012), underemployment and being 'parked' in education (Ainley, 2017) which they encompass in their definition. Over and above the practical effects, marginality erodes human dignity and self-respect. It is therefore doubly disempowering in the way that it removes optimism and capacity to exercise agency, as well as the availability of opportunities. In effect the social

arrangements and relations that produce marginality perpetrate symbolic violence against young people.

Linking the notion of marginality with political ecologies (France and Threadgold, 2016) reveals how it impacts on young people at multiple levels. As I outlined in Chapter 1, macro socio economic shifts have restructured labour markets, placing a premium on individual endeavour and responsibility whilst deprecating welfare dependency and state provision. The global dominance of neoliberalism is manifested in the UK in the increasingly disciplinary benefit regime and in 'welfare to work' schemes as well as consumerist orientations to education. Such exo-systems provide 'blueprints' for the organisations that form part of young people's lives, establishing patterns and consistencies across social provision and practices, most significantly the structure of education.

Local schools, youth centres, social and political groups form 'critical environments that can have a major impact on the everyday sense of selfhood of young people' (France et al., 2012, p. 19). The inter-relations between these micro-systems or 'micro-fields' (Atkinson, 2016) are conceived within an ecological approach as meso-systems, the nature and quality of which are consequential for young people. For example, the trust established between family, school and Young Lives facilitated the 'core group's' participation in 'the conservation project' and progression to other projects. Communications across boundaries may not only enable access to resources but can also be enhancing because

micro-social identity building takes place across and through different sites and settings with individuals drawing upon the interactions within and between those sites and settings to construct their sense of self. (France et al., 2012, p. 21)

In short, confidence and capital gained in one environment can be transferred to another where the connections are sufficiently strong, reinforcing developing identities.

However, returning to ideas of social identity and Jenkins' (2014) propositions about the *internal-external dialectic*,

What people think about us is no less significant than what we think about ourselves. It is not enough to assert an identity; that assertion must also be validated, or not, by those with whom we have dealings. *Identity is never unilateral.* (p. 44, emphasis in original)

It follows from this that the consequential effects of meso-systems can equally be detrimental. It may be hard for young people to maintain self-belief when reputation or negative classifications follow them from one setting to another. Information *and* subjective views of individuals are frequently shared across education, social care and youth justice agencies, and these are not independent of widespread societal prejudices and assumptions. Whilst France et al.'s (2012) concern focused on the overcriminalisation of young people, their arguments parallel those around 'advanced youth marginality' in pointing to the corrosive impacts of public discourse through nested ecological systems down to personal interactions in such things as claiming benefits (Blackman and Rogers, 2017a). As noted by Bottrell et al. (2010) 'chains of events or influences at a macro-level may thus be traced into (and from) micro-ecologies as influences, structures and direct transactions with young people' (p. 59). It is not inevitable that young people internalise the negative views of self that others hold nor that they accept how they are categorised, but these are powerful political processes of evaluation and inclusion/exclusion (Jenkins, 2014).

Turning attention to organisational behaviours and administration of services, Jenkins (2014) further identifies the dual role of discretion and stereotyping in categorising people for purposes such as resource allocation. This might sound contradictory, but discretion is exercised in deviating from the rule, effectively responding to exceptions from the standard represented in the stereotype. I wish to draw two related points from earlier discussions around the popularity of 'vulnerability' as a way of targeting services (Brown, 2014). The first is that, notwithstanding real and pressing concerns about specific risks to young people, targeting in this way is frequently premised on

understandings that fall wide of the mark. The designation of Muslim young women as vulnerable by virtue of their religion and culture (Ramji, 2007; Rashid, 2016) underplays what they might experience by way of racism, socio-economic disadvantage and location in urban environments. Moreover, as the data in this study shows, bullying and distress caused by conflict with peers cuts across ethnic, cultural and (in the case of the peer mentors) class position. As Brown (2011) points out, children and young people are inherently vulnerable and social policy should be sufficiently broad and inclusive to respond to a variety of needs without forming networks of social control and risk of exclusion from support for inappropriate 'performances of vulnerability'. Brown (2015) further illustrates how these often unfairly penalise young men and those young people who 'act out', commenting that 'for certain 'vulnerable' young people, transgressions functioned as resistances that were important to create a positive identity or necessary manoeuvres in the context of their circumstances' (p. 116). Discretion can be used ethically to continue to 'hold' these most challenging young people safely and to avoid further discriminating against them, including, I would argue, in the interactions that take place within meso-systems.

The second point relates to the levels of engagement across the groups in this study and specifically the relative passivity of the young men in the 'boys group' brought sharply into relief by the response of the one person, Kieran, who actively participated. Challenging behaviours might be evidence of the 'hidden resilience' that Ungar (2004) sees in troubled young people in that they are trying to exercise some control over their situation albeit in maladaptive ways. He suggests that skills and qualities developed in the context of gangs, anti-social behaviours and rebellion might form the basis of therapeutic work with young people and future resilience. Furthermore, he argues that it is 'better to be a good delinquent or mental patient than just another problem child, invisible and vulnerable to the labels others force upon you' (2004, p. 184). However, the behaviour among members of the 'boys group' is characterised by timidity and alienation rather than challenge to authority, and that means there is less obvious to grasp as a focus for work in their 'struggle for subjectivity' (McDonald, 1999).

Without understanding the individual biographies of the young men in the 'boys group', any comments I might make about their histories and what they have internalised is inevitably limited and speculative. They are affected, nonetheless, by the ways that they have been categorised, for all by virtue of their placement in specialist training and, in individual cases, by virtue of diagnosed learning disabilities. They had gained additional support but were placed in an explicitly marginal position and one that – again, with the exception of Kieran – did not encourage them to look outwards. In fact, their response could be likened to Merton's (1957) classic characterisation of 'retreatist' in their non-engagement with the wider educational ethos of achievement and enterprise. However, Merton suggests an individualised or 'privatised' adaptation (Taylor et al., 1973; Downes and Rock, 2003) whereas thinking in terms of marginality leads to an interpretation of retreating as symptomatic of multiple social processes and structural barriers acting upon the individual. I suggest, moreover, that the shared experience of such processes influence dispositions and compound feelings of disempowerment and lack of agency, in a way more reminiscent of Wierenga's (2009) illustration of 'retreating'.

iv. Opportunity and mobility

At this point I feel it is helpful to return to Bourdieu to consider the nature of dispositions and 'feel for the game' so central to his understanding of *habitus*. His use of 'disposition' in part refers to a 'way of being' or habitual (especially embodied) state and in part to deeply ingrained tendencies and inclinations (Bourdieu, 1977). Social practice as he conceives it is neither entirely rational nor entirely arising from the subconscious but rests somewhere between the two as a product of strategies or 'generative principles of regulated improvisations' (1977, p. 78). Jenkins (2002) suggests that there is more direct instruction and inculcation of such principles or rules than Bourdieu allows, but it is also true that much of this learning and acquired taste is experiential. It follows that the middle class and the well-connected are typically, but not inevitably, better equipped to cope in diverse

social settings through a greater breadth of social experience and through greater access to guidance and coaching, informal or otherwise. As seen across the three sites in this study, in education alone there are huge disparities in young people's 'feel for the game', that is the confidence, access to information and ability to understand the expectations of academic versus vocational routes and therefore to choose, then pursue, options that suit.

Although Bourdieu is not often talked about in relation to emotions, lack of opportunity, low expectations and anticipation of failure contribute to negative views of self-worth (Reed-Danahey, 2005) and colour the affective tone of the *habitus* among students. This happens on the one hand where there is disjuncture between the culture and ethos of an educational establishment and students who are mismatched by virtue of class position (Stahl, 2012) or ethnicity (Shain, 2003). On the other hand, a closer match may itself bring problems if the *habitus* of an organisation is downbeat and confirms young people's sense of what little may be 'plausible' (Skeggs, 2004) for their futures, forestalling alternative possibilities. In this study, Mayhew Training was thoughtful and constructive in its efforts for young people, in that sense being a good example of specialist provision. Even so, colleges and training centres outside of the mainstream are tasked to work with young people whose previous experience and feelings about education are likely to be negative, which is challenging for even the most optimistic and committed providers. What opportunities such providers can make available to young people may not be accessible to them without a great deal of encouragement and support, practically and in terms of instilling hope and self-belief.

Bourdieu's framing of 'transposable dispositions' suggests mutability and sufficient flexibility to adapt to different contexts whilst 'durable' alludes to the capacity to simultaneously maintain coherence over time. Transferability is also key and, again, this exposes inequalities according to social position especially, although not exclusively, class location. One implication is that a young person with a highly developed 'feel for the game' in one setting is better prepared at the point of entry into other related micro-fields, for example, the transition from the environs and social relationships of a school

to university. Another is that her ability to 'play the game' in one context equips her for moves between unrelated fields, drawing on confidence, skills and behaviours that can be adapted to new activities. Naturally, virtuosity in the *illusio* of any given field depends on personal qualities as well as social characteristics, meaning that two young people with comparable backgrounds will not respond in the exact same way. It is the case, nonetheless, that young people who have had more exposure to diverse experiences and encouragement to explore future possibilities are more likely to develop dispositions that enable them to confidently navigate different environments and to negotiate the demands of the multiple micro-fields that Atkinson (2016) identifies as part and parcel of contemporary life.

Capital, for Bourdieu (1986), can also be transferred from one context to another and converted from one type of capital to another. The ease of conversion and transmission is implicated in the reproduction of power relations and economic advantage, specifically from one generation to the next. Yet young people are not simply passive recipients of parental capital, but actively produce and consume capital in their own right (Holland et al., 2007). Friendship groups are an example of this, most powerful where they provide opportunities and inter-generational contacts as well as peer relationships (Wierenga, 2009). As evident among the young women in 'the conservation project' there are strong inter-relations and inter-dependencies between bonding and bridging capital (Putnam, 2000), so the latter is not necessarily more valuable (Holland et al., 2007). On occasions bridging capital and associated resources only become accessible through the collective activity of a group or community (in this case, the young women making a commitment together to 'the conservation project', supporting each other's participation and then progressing to other work with Young Lives).

Relatedly, Holland et al. (2007) point to the salience of bonding and ethnic-specific resources to Caribbean young people's abilities to bridge out, helping with confidence in transitions to further/higher education and into work. They talked about the bonds created through rituals, events and networks of family and community, but also the potential expansion of world view through civic participation and solidarity with kin living in other parts of

the world. The parallels with the Pakistani Muslim young women here are obvious and might be extended to other diasporic populations. Bonding capital, of course, has elsewhere been shown to constrain young people by binding them to specific localities (MacDonald and Marsh, 2005; Henderson et al., 2007). Notwithstanding experiences of racism and economic disadvantage that might lock them into an area, many of the participants in the research discussed in Holland et al. (2007)

perceived black neighbourhoods as a resource for politics, collective mobilisation and reaffirming ethnic identity.....what was important for the young people was that these neighbourhoods represent identifiable and physical spaces that they can frequent to access a range of ethnic specific social resources. Participants recognised these neighbourhoods as important sources of racial-ethnic group identity, helping them to form a distinctly urban and Caribbean consciousness. (p. 122)

This sort of consciousness does not itself equate to what Bourdieu (1977) refers to as 'disposition'. However, seen alongside a set of social practices, available capital and sense of place in the social order, it represents a distinct collective *habitus* that underpins ethnic identity and feelings of belonging.

The implication of the above is that community can be, on the one hand, limiting and, on the other, a resource for identity and a secure base that enhances mobility. This also shows that physical mobility at least is not the sole property of the middle classes who might have easier access to holidays, travel and study abroad. Connections with other places are many and various, providing experiences and resources for identity and for telling stories about self and, as indicated above, community. In the digital world that many young people inhabit, relationships with people and place may be maintained over distance, but that makes them no less meaningful.

Wierenga (2009) identifies symbol and meaning as a resource for identity, finding that 'stories about 'me' are enmeshed with stories about my people, be they families, peers, mentors, or community' (p. 136) She suggests that

inter-generational relationships and groups (or 'clans') are more important for identity than peer groups. I would argue that they have deeper and more lasting influence on the development of dispositions and 'ways of being', in part through the presence or lack of collective identifications and practices, and in part through the social and practical resources they provide. That might seem to contradict the notion of 'generational habitus' (Woodman and Wyn, 2015) but such *habitus* is surely created in the social practices between different generations and responses to the conditions that young people experience as much as within the age-cohort.

v. Resource flows and relationships of trust

While Wierenga (2009) herself refers to *habitus* and *capital* only in passing, her analysis can be related to both, specifically in her typology of story-telling practices and young people's 'resources-in-hand'. Telling self-stories involves developing visions for the future and here she found that 'exploring' young people described diversity in both their goals in life and the sources of capital that might help them reach their goals. Their resources included family, school, peers, community whether local or community of interest, and a range of media and literature. 'Settling' young people had less ambitious visions rooted in their locality but also tended to have resources and assistance to access what further resources they needed to achieve them. The other two categories – young people who were 'wandering' or 'retreating' experienced a disjuncture between their desired goals or destinations and the practical means, through trusted people or institutions, to get there (Wierenga, 2002; 2009).

This study reflects Wierenga's findings (and also those of Henderson et al. (2007)) that capital and resources are dependent on the nature and extent of young people's networks, and on the further networks of those who are present in their networks (networks at one remove, if you like). Neither, however, consider the availability of transnational networks and the small indications here suggest this warrants further attention. Furthermore, where networks are thin, and perhaps attenuated by the sort of social and economic

downturns experienced in Bransgate and described by MacDonald and Marsh (2005) in Teesside, they typically have fewer resources attached and these resources will flow less easily through them to young people (Wierenga, 2009).

Wierenga (2009) describes the dynamics of accessing and being empowered to use resources – what she terms ‘resource flows’ – as social processes involving relationships of trust. For this study, the ‘relationships of trust’ of interest are those available through youth work which arguably form the most significant findings. Before outlining these, however, I would like to put forward some general observations about the nature of trust and its effects upon feelings of security, and therefore willingness to take risks (or, following Wierenga, to explore). There are naturally big questions outside the scope of this discussion about ontological security and trust in the contemporary social world. Even so it is worth remarking that, although many aspects of social life are ‘de-traditionalising’ and becoming less predictable, much of the preceding discussions have suggested that most people experience more continuity and stability in social relations than Giddens (1991), for example, argues. Although positive in implying on-going commitment to collective identities, the continuation – if not deepening – of inequalities along the lines of gender, class and ethnicity are definitively not. The questions more pertinent for this discussion, however, relate to trust in social institutions and trust at a personal level.

The social world functions on the basis of trust that must be underpinned by confidence and broadly favourable expectations of the actions and intentions of social actors

for very few relationships are based entirely on what is known with certainty about another person, and very few relationships would endure if trust were not as strong as, or stronger than, rational proof or personal observation. (Simmel, 1978, p. 178-9 cited in Barbelet, 2001, p.4)

What can be taken from Simmel's work is that trust cannot be entirely constructed from what is known or directly experienced but necessitates an element akin to faith. Möllering (2001) further suggests that

Trust can be imagined as the mental process of leaping – enabled by suspension – across the gorge of the unknowable from the land of interpretation into the land of expectation. (p. 412)

By suspension, he is referring to a process of bracketing off uncertainty and ignorance so that actions and commitments can take place but in a way that 'sets the phenomenon of trust apart from, for example, rational choice and blind hope' (p. 412). In other words, trust, because it also involves interpretive knowledge, has some basis in reality and enables confidence in extending or extrapolating from that to formulate expectations. The significance for this discussion is recognising 'attitudes of trust' (Giddens, 1991) which might also be understood as dispositions that are trustful or otherwise. Giddens, of course, is concerned with large sociological questions about modernity, but this applies equally at personal or local level. Ability and willingness to take a 'leap of faith' may depend on many of the factors I have outlined in this thesis. These critically include the nature of the knowledge resource available to use in making decisions and what might be jeopardised if a risk of whatever kind does not pay off. Young people, families and communities in precarious positions will likely find it harder to trust. Moreover, previous experiences of being damaged, let down or neglected create dispositions that tend towards distrust and unfavourable expectations of others and of the future.

The situations of young people in this study exemplify different issues in relation to trust and resource flows through relationships of trust. Some young people talked about having many relationships with adults that provided them with practical and emotional support, as well as cultural knowledge, connection and shared stories. The peer mentors from 'the conservation project' discussed close and extended family, even in Caitlin's case, the memory of her late grandfather whom she had never known. For them and the young people in the 'church hall group', family structures after

parental separation and re-partnering often meant complicated but more diverse relationships and, consequently, resources. Friendships and peer networks were also expanding and becoming looser in the process of transitioning from school to college, good early experiences providing confidence in being able to survive, or even thrive, in new settings. For example, after encountering difficulties in school Caitlin's successful move to one college gave her belief that she could move again to a second college when she wanted to change her course. As Wierenga (2009) notes the '*been there, can go there again*' attitude (p. 147, emphasis in original) is indicative of strength and resilience, which is dependent on trusted others who have been there too or who have supported the 'journey'.

Trust in institutions and systems is critical in being able to access the resources that flow through them. For young people these are principally, although not exclusively, schools and education and I have argued earlier that young people and families in relatively privileged situations typically have a more confident 'feel for the game'. Class position, culture, religion and ethnicity all affect the exchange of knowledge and experience between, as well as within, generations, and this in turn affects practical know how and confidence in dealing with organisations and processes. The implication is that, in many instances, trust is not given easily and is based on immediate experiences of behaviours and interactions rather than inherited collective knowledge. Once won, however, the corollary is that trust is more likely to be extended to the contacts, activities and opportunities available through the trusted organisation. In this way, the parents of the young women around 'the conservation project' were happy for them to attend because the approach had been made via the familiar institution of the school. The resource flow happened because they were given information that they might not have sought independently and had confidence, because of the endorsement of the school, that they could allow their daughters a 'leap of faith' into the unknown world of youth work (and youth work moreover that was not specific to their ethnic group). As I outline in Chapter 6, once the young women engaged with the project, further resources flowed through

Young Lives and the range of relationships and other challenges they took on there.

Interestingly, the five peer mentors engaged with 'the conservation project' in a different way, accessing it as a resource and potential source of capital through their college. The trust in this instance related to belief that the project would offer a worthwhile experience and at the same time help them develop skills and cultural capital that they could take into future volunteering or work. The reputation of Young Lives and its previous relations with the college thus featured in their initial calculations but the impression made by their first interactions with the project staff and young people were important too. All the peer mentors subsequently made some investment in the project, with Caitlin and Nicola following it through to its end.

The above provides an example of youth work offering young people relationships of trust through which they can access resources that they can use in their social development and identity work. Young people, of course, start from very different places and some do not have the same ability to 'generalise' trust evident in different ways in the 'core group' and the peer mentors. Within 'the conservation project' there were other young people with questions about trust and attachment more akin to members of the 'boys group'. Relationships are then necessarily more concerned with attending to individual need than group dynamics, and the resources that flow through them may relate to personal skills and local connections, including access to college or community facilities. Youth work can facilitate participation rather than mere presence, and so help young people experience a greater sense of agency and belonging in the world. Sometimes, though, the initial steps are tentative and the 'world' in the first instance is the young person's immediate environment.

Implications and questions for further consideration

i. The application of theories and concepts

Whilst setting out to use Bourdieu's *field*, *capital* and *habitus* combined with notions of narrative and social identity, I have found myself reaching further into the theoretical toolkit to find ways of analysing and understanding the complexity of modern life and the experiences of young people growing up in the 2010s. In part this was due to the diversity of participants in this study, not least in terms of age and position in relation to key institutional transitions and experiences in education. Yet the broader point is evident: to do justice to young people's experiences and to reflect what they say about the reality of their modern lives requires nimble use of theoretical frameworks. The ways in which pathways are becoming less predictable whilst still conforming to patterns is most apparent when a variety of ideas and concepts are brought to bear upon their data. Youth researchers need to be rigorous for sure but not too hasty in applying models. Appreciating young people's subjective responses and their actions requires careful observation and thought and only then selecting from existing - or developing new - theories to aid understanding. To do this and still maintain coherence is not an easy task but a necessary one for future and more ambitious research with young people and about 'youth'.

ii. Aims of social policy

Deeper understanding of the nature and complicating factors in young people's transitions informs broader developments in social policy including, but certainly not restricted to, approaches to education and youth support. As shown in this study and in the research discussed throughout, it is clear that experiences and outcomes differ according to class, gender and ethnicity in complex and intersecting ways that are further impacted by regional and city/town/rural location. That suggests that there is merit in devolving policy to local areas and strengthening the contribution of young people to local developments, on commissioning groups and the like. Turning to education

and entry into work, stronger protections are urgently needed against insecurity and marginality, and meaningful choices for *all* young people. That some young people have a plethora of options whilst others have so few is a shocking indictment of a wealthy society characterised by growing inequalities and manifest division. It simply need not be so.

iii. Provision for young people

As shown throughout this thesis, there are huge disparities in young people's social circumstances and the resources – for which read, forms and systems of capital (Raffo and Reeves, 2000) – they have available to use. However, availability is not the end of the story as they also need to be accessible (Ungar, 2004). Here Wierenga's (2009) distinction between resources-in-hand and resources-on-offer is pertinent in highlighting how services or opportunities may exist but in effect are unusable for young people. Often family and others in their informal networks will give practical or personal assistance to bring resources within reach – lifts, loans, pep talks and the like. Yet that is not always possible. There is therefore an onus on children and young people's services to step in. Youth work and youth work practitioners are highlighted within this study and shown to be capable of responding to diverse needs and settings. However, youth work should be part of a broad spectrum running from targeted and specialist services to universal provision through which young people can find relationships of trust and youth-friendly environments that provide both a resource in themselves and a bridge to further resources. At this point in time, two commitments are needed – one is to increasing the money and training necessary to expand the range of options for young people providing activities and/or support, the other is to do so in a way that allows young people choice and collaboration, not further forms of control, however well-intentioned.

iv. Youth work and relationships of trust

Finally, there is real value in youth work for those young people who have few relationships with adults or few relationships that offer critical forms of bridging capital (Putnam, 2000). Whether the benefits are immediately

tangible, youth work relationships are an important source of support, assistance and access to opportunity for young people who are resource poor although they need to be sustained to make a meaningful difference. That being the case, this study has also shown that relationships of trust with youth workers are not irrelevant to young people who are comparatively well resourced. They may not need youth workers to enable resource flows because they have family, friends and social networks that are sufficient in that regard. Yet young people who are resource rich still value youth work relationships characterised by openness and equality because they are different from many of the other relationships they have with adults. Open access provision allows space for discussion and exploration, effectively different ways of being and relating both to adults and peers in a youth-friendly environment. Sadly, youth work in this sense is not sufficiently recognised as a resource in and of itself but the evidence of this study suggests that it offers space for growth and informal learning that marks it out as unique among children's services.

The value of youth work is underlined again and again throughout this study. I was fortunate in finding examples of such good practice, practice which respects and empowers young people. In schools, communities and many other places young people may develop relationships of trust with adults, but youth work relationships are characterised by equality and willingness to reach out to young people in ways that makes them distinct. Of course, there have been pressures on youth work organisations to demonstrate outcomes and deliver to wider strategic agendas, often simply in order to survive (de St Croix, 2016). It is true that youth work skills enable practitioners to engage with young people who other services find hard to reach. There is a compelling case for them to play a part in multi-agency initiatives and to work with individual young people in difficulty. However, this should not be at the expense of 'traditional' open access youth work based in localities and attracting groups of young people, nor more recent developments in project work, arts and within education. Young people can choose to connect with each of these according to their interests and needs.

This study supports arguments for an expanded and vigorous youth work sector, and imaginative projects that respond to contemporary challenges in ways that involve young people and speak to their diverse needs and aspirations. At the very least these should encompass

- a) Enhanced open access and area-based provision;
- b) Initiatives aimed at groups of young people identified as in priority need – but, critically, these should be determined locally rather than by national dictat;
- c) Youth work-supported structures that enable young people's voice and civic participation;
- d) Projects engaging young people in practical action around contemporary social, political and environmental issues;
- e) Youth work presence in key institutions offering advocacy, support and development for young people at the interface of the different *fields*; and
- f) Engagement with acute contemporary concerns such as county lines, knife crime and radicalism, and activity co-ordinated strategically and operationally with other agencies as an equal and respected partner.

Appendices

Appendix 1 Ethical approval

Ethics Application

JACKSON, SARAH F. <s.f.jackson@durham.ac.uk>

Thu 09/03/2017 14:44

To:

- ROBINSON, MARGARET A. <m.a.robinson@durham.ac.uk>

Cc:

- SMITH, ROGER S. <roger.smith@durham.ac.uk>

Dear Anne

I am pleased to advise that your recent Ethics Application has been approved by the Schools Ethics Committee. This means you are now permitted to begin your data collection and field work.

Well done on reaching this landmark in your research and good luck with your data collection. I will endeavour to ensure a signed copy of your Ethics form is available should you need it however in the meantime please store a copy of this email as proof of the Ethics Committee decision.

Best Wishes

S.Fiona Jackson

S.Fiona Jackson | Postgraduate Research Administrator

Durham University | **School of Applied Social Sciences** |32 Old Elvet | Durham DH1 3HN

Tel: +44 (0) 191 334 1485| www.dur.ac.uk/sass

REVISED RESEARCH ETHICS AND RISK ASSESSMENT FORM, MAY 2015

SECTION A: INTRODUCTORY INFORMATION

A.1. Name of researcher(s):	Anne Robinson
A.2. Email Address(es) of researcher(s):	ann.robinson@shu.ac.uk
A.3. Project Title:	Working it out for yourself: how young people resolve aspects of identity they experience as problematic or limiting in moving towards the adult they wish to be.
A.4. When do you intend to start data collection?	March 2017
A.5. When will the project finish?	The end date will be dependent upon progress and young people's participation, but probably late 2017.
A.6. For students only: Student ID: Degree, year and module: Supervisor:	Anne Robinson PhD PT route Roger Smith and Hanna King (SASS)
A.7. Brief summary of the research questions: Working it out for yourself: how young people resolve aspects of identity they experience as problematic or limiting in moving towards the adult they wish to be. This project will explore how young people: ☐ start to create biographical narratives and ascribe meaning to 'critical moments' and relationships in their lives ☐ identify resources in their social relationships and environments that they can use in self-enhancing ways ☐ develop strategies to maintain a positive sense of self in the face of difficulties or challenges ☐ respond to the expectations and assumptions of the social institutions that they interact with ☐ choose their identity investments and commitments (and why) ☐ develop visions of possible future selves that they can act upon	

A.8. What data collection method/s are you intending you use, and why?

I will adopt a narrative methodology, using mobile and visual methods to engage a small number of young people over a period of time (possibly 6-9 months)

SECTION B: ETHICS CHECKLIST

While all subsequent sections of this form should be completed for all studies, this checklist is designed to identify those areas where more detailed information should be given. Please note: It is better to identify an area where ethical or safety issues may arise and then explain how these will be dealt with, than to ignore potential risks to participants and/or the researchers.

	Yes	No
a). Does the study involve participants who are <i>potentially vulnerable</i> ?	☒	☐
b). Will it be necessary for participants to take part in the study without their knowledge/consent (e.g. covert observation of people in non-public places)?	☐	☒
c). Could the study cause harm, discomfort, stress, anxiety or any other negative consequence beyond the risks encountered in normal life?	☐	☒
d) Does the research address a <i>potentially sensitive topic</i> ?	☐	☒
e). Will financial inducements (other than reasonable expenses and compensation for time) be offered to participants?	☐	☒
f). Are steps being taken to protect anonymity and confidentiality?	☒	☐
g). Are there potential risks to the researchers' health, safety and wellbeing in conducting this research beyond those experienced in the researchers' everyday life?	☐	☒

SECTION C: METHODS AND DATA COLLECTION

C.1. Who will be your research participants?

Young people aged 14-16 at the start of the research period. In exploring identity at a key stage in late adolescence, I would be seeking to engage young people who may not have straightforward and easy access to diverse forms of social and cultural capital to assist their transitions. Participants may be officially categorised as 'at risk' in some way but this will not be an expectation.

C.2. How will you recruit your participants and how will they be selected or sampled?

My approach is to recruit through voluntary and community groups and youth projects, and I am already volunteering for one organisation and am about to start with a youth project linked to the local authority in January 2017. Through my involvement in these projects I hope to build relationships with young people and encourage their voluntary participation in the research. It should be noted, however, that my data collection will be separate from any activities that I am involved with as volunteer and will not be on project premises. I envisage the research data will be mainly in the form of individual narratives, images and other artefacts, but if linking in to group sessions within a project, there may be also be opportunity to generate materials from group activities or discussions.

C.3. How will you explain the research to the participants and gain their consent? (If consent will not be obtained, please explain why.)

The most transparent approach to this would be to explain the focus of the research as being about the participants'

- Experiences of growing up
- Views on what makes them feel more 'grown up'
- Feelings about what (or who?) has the opposite effect
- Visions of who they want to be in the future
- Plans and strategies for achieving that future self

This can be done through conversation and written documentation that captures the essence of my interests but put in simple and accessible language. All participants will be made aware of how their data will be stored, who will have access to it and how it will be used. I will also advise them of their rights in terms of withdrawing from the research at any time and/ or withdrawing consent to use data that they have provided.

The activities involved in the research will be designed with the intention of providing interest and stimulation for the young people participating. These may involve walks around places significant to the young person, video interviews or cameos, photography and use of social media, and will be largely chosen and directed by each young person.

C.4. What procedures are in place to ensure the anonymity and confidentiality of your participants and their responses?

As I am recruiting from projects and group settings, others within that setting may be aware of an individual young person's involvement in the research. That may include professionals or volunteers as well as other young people. I will work within each project's approach to confidentiality which should restrict disclosure of information outside of the project or group itself, and to provide guidance that reinforces or supplements the project's existing requirements as appropriate.

For the practical purposes of meeting up with young people, parents, carers and others may be informed of a young person's involvement in my research. The extent of communication and liaison with others, and the circumstances that would warrant this, will be negotiated with each young person.

The content of individual interviews, images and artefacts will be seen by my research supervisors and, under their direction, colleagues advising on the research (and possibly transcriber).

All data used for the doctoral thesis and any subsequent publications will be appropriately anonymised. Young people will be consulted and agreement will be sought over the use of extensive case study data that enters the public domain, both in terms of the information included and the author's interpretation of the data.

C.5. Are there any circumstances in which there would be a limit or exclusion to the anonymity/confidentiality offered to participants? If so, please explain further.

Confidentiality must be balanced with the duty of care and protection. If a young person discloses information that suggests that he/ she or another person is being harmed or at risk of being harmed, this would invoke safeguarding procedures. Similarly, if a serious criminal act or potential criminal act comes to light. Depending on the seriousness and urgency of the situation, contact may be made directly with children's social care or with the police, with a view to formal referral or informal advice. However, where deemed appropriate, I will encourage and support the young person to self-refer and to retain some control over the process of disclosure, whether to official agencies or to parents or carers who may then take action to protect.

In addition, as I am in contact with young people by virtue of volunteering for particular organisations, I need to be mindful of their expectations and procedures around confidentiality and disclosure to other parties (even where the activity with a young person for data collection is outside of the organisation's remit).

C.6. You must attach a **participant information sheet or summary explanation** that will be given to potential participants in your research.

Within this, have you explained (in a way that is accessible to the participants):	Yes	No
a). What the research is about?	☒	☐
b). Why the participants have been chosen to take part and what they will be asked to do?	☐	☒

<i>Not directly as they will be participating voluntarily.</i>		
c). Any potential benefits and/or risks involved in their participation?	X	☐
d) What levels of anonymity and confidentiality will apply to the information that they share, and if there are any exceptions to these?	X	☐
e). What the data will be used for?	X	☐
f). How the data will be stored securely?	X	☐
g). How they can withdraw from the project?	X	☐
h). Who the researchers are, and how they can be contacted?	X	☐

SECTION D: POTENTIAL RISKS TO PARTICIPANTS

You should think carefully about the risks that participating in your research poses to participants. Be aware that some subjects can be sensitive for participants even if they are not dealing explicitly with a 'sensitive' topic. Please complete this section as fully as possible and continue on additional pages if necessary.

What risks to participants may arise from participating in your research?	How likely is it that these risks will actually happen?	How much harm would be caused if this risk did occur?	What measures are you putting in place to ensure this does not happen (or that if it does, the impact on participants is reduced)?
1. Physical risks – for example, an accident or injury	Minimal	Variable, but probably temporary physical upset or injury	General advance planning and risk assessment of activities and locations that might be visited as part of the data collection.
2. Psychological risks through exploring events or experiences – past or present – that are distressing to the young person	Moderate	Variable, depending on the nature of the event or experience and also the support available to the young person	The research approach allows young people, rather than the researcher, to raise and to explore topics, so I will not be deliberately probing sensitive areas. However, young people may wish to use the opportunity to talk about difficult areas of their lives and, possibly, to start to work through them. I need to be able to signpost the young person to support if needed and to liaise with parents and carers as appropriate.
3. Social risks, such as teasing, inappropriate	Minimal	Potential feelings of stigma or exclusion	To avoid negative associations, the project will be presented as exploring strengths rather than

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questions from peers or professionals arising from involvement in the research			focusing on problems. Publicity for the research project and communications around it will be upbeat, so it is presented as a personally enhancing opportunity. This should ensure that the knowledge of a young person's involvement in the research is not detrimental to him or her.
4 Risks associated with young people being identified through images or other products from research activities	Minimal	Potential reaction from others and feelings of distress	This requires attention at the stage of designing activities. For example, making sure that activities do not focus on young people taking photographs of themselves or of friends. It also requires attention in the use of data, particularly in research outputs that enter the public domain so that individuals and locations cannot be traced.

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SECTION E: POTENTIAL RISKS TO RESEARCHERS

You should think carefully about any hazards or risks to you as a researcher that will be present because of you conducting this research. Please complete this section as fully as possible and continue on additional pages if necessary. Please include an assessment of any health conditions, injuries, allergies or intolerances that may present a risk to you taking part in the proposed research activities (including any related medication used to control these), or any reasonable adjustments that may be required where a disability might otherwise prevent you from participating fully within the research.

1. Where will the research be conducted/what will be the research site?

What hazards or risks to you as a researcher may arise from conducting this research?	How likely is it that these risks will actually happen?	How much harm would be caused if this risk did happen?	What measures are being put in place to ensure this does not happen (or that if it does, the impact on researchers is reduced)?
1. Physical risks – for example, an accident or injury, or being stranded away from home (nb the research sites will be located in a city more than 20 miles from where I live)	Minimal	Variable depending on the circumstances	Such risks could be minimised with prior planning of activities and by making sure that named others are aware of my whereabouts.
2. Physical risks to a young person in my care	Minimal	Again, variable, but may be significant in terms of loss of trust and relationships with	This is another area of risk that can be avoided with good planning and communication, generally following the health and safety

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		the young person and/or the organisations I am working with	guidelines of the organisations I am working with
3. Complaint or allegation	Minimal	Could potentially derail the whole project	It is important to work sensitively with young people and to treat them with respect. Working through youth-centred organisations which have their own expectations and codes of conduct will help set a benchmark for my engagement with young people as well as ensuring that they already have a relationship with me before they opt into the activities that contribute to my research.

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SECTION F: OTHER APPROVALS

	Yes, document attached	Yes, documents to follow	No
a). Does the research require ethical approval from the NHS or a Social Services Authority? If so, please attach a copy of the draft form that you intend to submit, together with any accompanying documentation.	☐		X
b). Might the proposed research meet the definition of a <i>clinical trial</i> ⁱⁱⁱ ? (If yes, a copy of this form must be sent to the University's Insurance Officer, Tel. 0191 334 9266, for approval, and evidence of approval must be attached before the project can start).	☐		X
c). Does the research involve working data, staff or offenders connected with the National Offender Management Service? If so, please see the guidance at https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/national-offender-management-service/about/research and submit a copy of your proposed application to the NOMS Integrated Application System with your form.	☐		X
d). Does the project involve activities that may take place within Colleges of Durham University, including recruitment of participants via associated networks (e.g. social media)? (If so, approval from the Head of the College/s concerned will be required after SASS approval has been granted – see guidance notes for further details)		☐	X
e). Will you be required to undertake a Disclosure and Barring Service (criminal records) check to undertake the research?	☐	X	☐
f) I confirm that travel approval has or will be sought via the online approval system at http://apps.dur.ac.uk/travel.forms for all trips during this research which meet the following criteria: For Students travelling away from the University, this applies where travel is not to their home and involves an overnight stay. For Staff travelling away from the University, this applies only when travelling to an overseas destination.	☐		X

SECTION G: SUBMISSION CHECKLIST AND SIGNATURES

When submitting your ethics application, you should also submit supporting documentation as follows:

Supporting Documents	Included (tick)
Fully Completed Research Ethics and Risk Assessment Form	✓
Interview Guide (if using interviews)	
Focus Group Topic Guide (if using focus groups)	
Questionnaire (if using questionnaires)	
Participant Information Sheet or Equivalent (nb it is intended that the more detailed information is printed and presented as an A5 leaflet)	✓
Consent Form (if appropriate) - in draft form	✓
<i>For students only:</i> Written/email confirmation from all agencies involved that they agree to participate, also stating whether they require a DBS check. If confirmation is not yet available, please attach a copy of the letter that you propose to send to request this; proof of organisational consent must be forwarded to your Programme Secretary before any data is collected.	tbc

Please indicate the reason if any documents cannot be included at this stage:

Summary

In terms of access to research participants, I have arranged two volunteer placements with youth organisations. However, the data collection for my research will be over and above my volunteer activities (albeit the latter will contribute some supporting ethnographic data and will certainly provide a basis for understanding the social and other circumstances of potential participants).

To assist an understanding of the types of activities that I envisage for the project, I have also drafted a 'menu' of things that young people might choose to do if they opt into my research. This should give a sense of how the research might go forward in terms of physical location and time. I want to work with individuals, rather than groups, for the purposes of data collection as I feel this will be more helpful for generating reflection and personal narratives. However, given that the young people in both placements have pre-formed friendship groups, getting involved in pairs (or even trios depending on the activity) might seem more appealing

(Please note that any ethics applications submitted without sufficient supporting documentation will not be able to be assessed.)

Signatures

Researcher's Signature:

Date:

Supervisor's Signature (PGR students only):

Date:

Please keep a copy of your approved ethics application for your records.

If you decide to change your research significantly after receiving ethics approval, you must submit a revised ethics form along with updated supporting documentation before you can implement these changes.

PART F: OUTCOME OF THE APPLICATION

<u>Reject</u> The application is incomplete and/or cannot be assessed in its current format. Please complete the application fully.	
<u>Revise and Resubmit</u> The application cannot be approved in its current format. Please revise the application as per the comments below. Please complete the application fully.	
<u>Approved, with Set Date for Review</u> The application is approved and you may begin data collection. A date for further review of the project as it develops has been set to take place on: _____ The anticipated nominated reviewer will be: _____	
<u>Approved</u> The application is approved and you may begin data collection.	

Comments:

I approve this Ethics and Risk Assessment application and I have no conflict of interest to declare.

First Reviewer's Signature:

First Reviewer's Name:

First Reviewer's Role:

Date:

If applicable:

I approve this Ethics and Risk Assessment application and I have no conflict of interest to declare.

Second Reviewer's Signature:

Second Reviewer's Name:

Second Reviewer's Role:

Date:

ⁱ **Potentially vulnerable groups** can include, for example: children and young people; those with a learning disability or cognitive impairment; those unable to give informed consent or individuals in a dependent or unequal relationship.

ⁱⁱ **Sensitive topics** can include participants' sexual behaviour, their illegal or political behaviour, their experience of violence, their abuse or exploitation, their mental health, or their gender or ethnic status. Elite Interviews may also fall into this category.

ⁱⁱⁱ **Clinical Trials:** Research may meet the definition of a clinical trial if it involves studying the effects on participants of drugs, devices, diets, behavioural strategies such as exercise or counselling, or other 'clinical' procedures.

Appendix 2 Information for agencies

Working it out for yourself

A project for young people about growing up and dealing with things that get in the way

Information sheet for agencies and groups

My name is Anne Robinson. I now work as a lecturer at Sheffield Hallam University, but have a previous life as a practitioner in youth justice. I am also a student at Durham University and I am approaching you in that capacity for help with my PhD research project. I am interested in how young people negotiate their identities at times of transition, particularly where they have fewer or variable sources of support and social capital to draw upon. I would like to identify young people to take part in my study and hope that we can work together to encourage and support them through this research so that they get the most benefits that they can from their involvement. And I hope I can contribute to your organisation as well by volunteering so that there are gains all round.

What will the research involve?

There are a variety of methods that could be used to explore my research questions, and my intention is to be as flexible as possible in asking a small number of young people to opt in to up to 3 'special sessions' each over a period of months that will provide the data. Some of the activities will be intended to prompt reflection on past life and experiences, and some will be about hopes, plans and expectations of the future. These could be framed as



We might use technologies such as photography, film or social media, and this could be in sustained structured way to create a specific product, or quick images from a mobile phone. Other approaches might involve mobile methods (walking and talking about places of significance to the young person) or keeping a diary or blog. This means that each young person can be involved to the extent that he or she wants and is in control of how and much he/she participates. These 'special sessions' will be over and above any contact that I have with young people by virtue of volunteering or being involved in your organisation.

Next steps

I would really like to talk with you about whether we could work together. You can contact me by telephone or e mail.

Anne Robinson e mail phone

**Would you like to take part
in research about young
people and growing up?**



**Working it out
for yourself**

**creative activities time to think
its all about you**

Interested? Talk to Anne or contact me

on xxxxxxxxxx

annerob@xxxxxxxxx



Working it out for yourself

Would you like a chance to talk about yourself and the choices you make as you are growing up?

If so, talk to Anne about taking part on a brand new project that offers you up to three 'special sessions' of activity spaced out over a few weeks or months.



The 'activity' could be a simple interview but, if it suits you better, could involve photos, recordings, diaries, drawing or just walking around places that mean something to you - you choose what interests you or what you want to try out.

What you create in these sessions and what you say will form part of my doctoral studies at Durham University.



**Like to find out
more?**

**Get in touch with
Anne Robinson**

annerob@xxxxxxxxx

Tel xxxxxxxxx

Working it out for yourself

**A project about growing up and dealing
with things that get in the way**

Would you like to take part?

My name is Anne Robinson and I work at Sheffield Hallam University. But I am also a student at Durham University and this research project is part of my study there. I have always been curious about growing up and the different possibilities that might be open to us. We all make choices – big and little ones - based on what we think suits us best and fits the sort of person we want to be. So my project is exploring how we do that, and I am asking whether you can help me by contributing your experiences.



So what is it about?

What I am interested in is your experiences of growing up and how you get along on what is sometimes a difficult journey. Together we can explore questions such as

- ? How you would describe yourself now and how that has changed
- ? How you think other people see you
- ? How you would like them to see you – is it the same?
- ? What makes you feel more ‘grown up’
- ? What (or who) has the opposite effect
- ? How you see yourself moving forward in the immediate future
- ? Where you might see yourself going, looking further ahead
- ? Who or what might help you get there?
- ? What sort of adult you think you might want to be
- ? What might change your plans or hopes for the future

What will I be doing?

There are lots of different ways that you can explore these and other questions, and how we do it will be largely up to you during three ‘special sessions’. Together we can work out activities that give you opportunity to think and to express what you are thinking and feeling. One ‘special session’ will be looking backwards, at the experiences that have helped make you what you are, and the other two will be about hopes, plans and expectations of the future. So we might be quite techie, using cameras, videos or social media. Or it might be much more about walking around the places where you spend time,

drawing and creating pictures or keeping a diary. It depends on what suits you, how you want to contribute and how much time you are willing to give.



And what would I get out of it?

You will be involved from the start in choosing what we do and helping set it up, so it should be enjoyable but will also give you opportunity to try things you haven't done before or to do familiar things – things we take for granted - in a different way. You will be able to learn new skills or develop skills you already have (and I expect you may be able to teach me some as well). And you will have space to reflect and talk about yourself – it's surprising how little time we have to do that as a rule!

What if I say 'yes' and then change my mind?

I would like to run these 'special sessions' over several months, and I hope that what we do interests and stimulates you so you

want to stay involved during the whole time. But it is no problem if you decide it's not for you or if things crop up that make it difficult to keep in touch. You have volunteered to take part and you can pull out at any point.

My promises to you

- ✓ What you tell me will remain confidential (although I must tell somebody else if you or somebody else is being harmed or at risk of being harmed)
- ✓ You will be asked to sign a consent form and I will stick to what you have signed up to on that form
- ✓ I will be open and honest about why I am doing this research and how I will use what you tell me
- ✓ The research is for my PhD and nobody other than my supervisors at Durham University will see interviews or anything else you contribute to the project without your permission
- ✓ Interview data and any other materials generated will be stored in a secure place
- ✓ If I use any materials from the research in articles or presentations, I will ensure that you cannot be identified in any way
- ✓ *Info re liaison with project from which young people are recruited*

How to get in contact with me

E mail:

Tel:

Appendix 5 Consent form

working it out for yourself

A project about growing up and dealing with things that get in the way Consent form

By signing this form I am agreeing to take part in this research project.

The nature of the research project and how the information I give will be used has been explained to me. I have been given a leaflet with this explanation in writing as well.

I am aware that I can withdraw my consent at any time without having to explain my reason.

I understand that what I say and what I do within the sessions remains confidential unless there is a concern that I may be harmed or someone else is at risk.

Photographs or other things created within the sessions will not be used or shown to others without my permission, and all care will be taken to protect my identity.

Name _____ Date _____

Signature _____

Researcher _____ Date _____

Appendix 6 Parental information & consent form

Working it out for yourself

Anne Robinson
School of Applied Social Sciences
Durham University
32 Old Elvet
Durham D1 3HN

Dear parent/carer

My name is Anne Robinson and I have been working as a volunteer with XXXX at the YYYY youthwork session on Tuesday nights since January 2017. Your son/daughter has been attending that project and has expressed an interest in being involved in a study which will form part of my doctoral research. This is supervised at Durham University (although I am based locally). While this research is separate from YYYY, I am working within the guidelines used by XXXX to ensure the confidentiality and welfare of all young people who participate in activities.

My research would involve three sessions of activity spread over a period of months and I have enclosed with this letter a leaflet explaining what it is about. In order for your son/daughter to take part, I would need your consent as parent or carer and some basic information. This will not be passed on to any other party and will be held securely.

The activities involved in the research could be quite varied as the young people involved will choose what they would like to do. The consent form attached covers

- Meetings outside of the group sessions for YYYY
- Travel in my car (with appropriate insurance)
- Eating out
- Visiting local outdoor locations by negotiation
- Taking photographs or video – images will be stored securely and will not be made public except with express written permission
- Other activities as agreed

I will ensure that you are aware of where we are meeting or where we are going at all times and will be contactable by mobile phone. The intention is to use familiar indoor places, or to perhaps walk and take photographs around the area where you live or where your son/daughter goes to school.

I am planning to do the first set of activities over the summer school holidays and the remainder during autumn 2017. I will only seek consent from you as parent or carer once but I will ask for written consent from your son/daughter for each individual activity that he or she is involved in over a period of months (probably until autumn 2017). He or she will be able to opt out at any time if she or she no longer wishes to take part. I will keep you informed of the activities we are planning and when/where they will take place so that you can be reassured that involvement in my research is safe and appropriate.

I have enclosed information about my research and would be happy to answer any questions that you might have before giving your consent. I can be contacted on annerob@xxxx or by telephone on XXXXXXXX

Kind regards,

Anne Robinson

Working it out for yourself

I agree to (young person's name)

taking part in the working it Out for Yourself research project and any of the following activities if they are involved in the course of the research:

- Meetings outside of the group sessions for xxxxxxxx with the researcher (Anne Robinson)
- Travel in my car (with appropriate insurance)
- Eating out
- Visiting local outdoor locations by negotiation
- Taking photographs or video - images will be stored securely and will not be made public except with express written permission
- Other activities as agreed

Signed..... (parent/guardian/carer)

Name (please print)

Essential details

Name of young person.....

Address.....

.....

..... Postcode.....

Date of birth..... Phone number.....

Emergency Contact

Please note here any medical or other information that I may need to know if I am responsible for the young person named above for any period of time:

Please note that the above information will be held securely and will not be passed to a third party without your prior consent except in the case of a child protection or safeguarding concern.

Appendix 7 Signing off information

Working it out for yourself

A project about growing up and dealing with things that get in the way

What happens now?

Thank you for taking part in my research project. I am really pleased you got involved. I will be using what you have said and made in activities as I write up the research but I won't use your name or anything that will identify you.

If you have any questions or want to get in touch with me about the research and how your information might be used, you can contact me on E mail:

annerob@XXXXX or Tel: XXXXXXXX

If you would like to return for an interview around December, please write your name and phone number on the sheet I will circulate.

Anne

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