The Impact of Educational and Industrial Policy Developments on Working Class School Leavers across Two Generations

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by

Andy O’Callaghan
Abstract

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The research project attempts to advance evaluations that look toward the major impacts educational and industrial developments within Britain over recent decades have had on working class school leavers’. The thesis aims to contribute uniquely to these fields of study by concentrating the qualitative research that underpins the project within a distinctive geographical area within south west Birmingham, an area where the employment sphere was dominated for many decades by a large car manufacturer until its closure. The research focuses on the very unique experiences of school leavers in the area across two generations that it is suggested were subject to the influences of differing educational and industrial policies. Underpinning the exploration of people from this part of Birmingham’s experiences of school and post school transition is the thesis’ contribution to the new wave of class analysis that has emerged within academia within recent years. In particular the study adheres in part to contemporary evaluations of class as being individualised and subject to variations according to cultural and social as well as economic influences through a person’s life course. However, the thesis also suggests the use of a theoretical model of class that incorporates fluid, often changing, but sometime shared class experiences. Included within this exploration is a critique of the ideological construction of working class educational and occupational underachievement as being due to individualised social and cultural deficiency. Instead the thesis suggests the interrelationship of the growth of the educational market within the UK alongside rapid deindustrialisation has influenced distinctive and at times shared working class experiences.
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Chapter One: Overview of the Research Project

Aims and Objectives of the thesis

This research project analyses and evaluates some of the major impacts that key educational and industrial developments within Britain over recent decades has had on working class school leavers’ educational and subsequent transitional experiences.

The study aims to contribute uniquely to these fields of study by concentrating the qualitative research that underpins the project within a distinctive geographical area within south west Birmingham. An area where the employment sphere was dominated for many decades by a large car manufacturer until it closed down. Additionally the research focuses on the very unique experiences of school leavers in the area across two generations that it is suggested were subject to the influences of differing educational and industrial policies.

Underpinning the exploration of people from this part of Birmingham’s experiences of school and post school transition is the thesis’ contribution to the new wave of class analysis that has emerged within academia within recent years. In particular the study adheres in part to contemporary evaluations of class as being individualised and subject to variations according to cultural and social as well as economic influences through a person’s life course. However, the thesis also suggests the use of a theoretical model of class that incorporates fluid, often changing, but sometime shared class experiences.
Additionally whilst acknowledging the analysis of working class experiences within the formal education system (Ashton and Field 1976; Brown 1987; Goldthorpe 1996; Willis 1977) and also working class experiences of transition post school (Goodwin and O’Connor 2002 and 2003; Vickerstaff 2003) have been discussed at length within academia, this thesis aims to contribute further to the fields of study in a number of ways.

Primarily it is suggested there is predominance within policy spanning all political parties over recent decades to focus on working class educational underachievement and problems related to working class employment in isolation from one another. The tendency to segregate different aspects of working class experience, it is suggested allows policy makers to problematise working class educational and occupational underachievement as individual incapability rather than focus on structural and policy impacts on groups of people.

This project instead explores the interrelationship of the growth of the educational market within the UK alongside rapid deindustrialisation and suggests the combination of educational and industrial policy and ideology has influenced distinctive working class experiences in recent years.

The remainder of this introductory chapter provides an overview of the initial influences in wanting to research the areas under discussion throughout the thesis. The chapter also provides a brief overview of the structure of the thesis, the methodology employed
within the practical research and a short evaluation of some of the key themes emanating from the data.

**Background to the research**

The main research questions initially developed through the juxtaposition of thought processes encouraged by the researcher’s own upbringing, family background and main occupation and an adherence to some key literature with various overlapping fields of study.

The academic influences stem from interests in access to workplace learning amongst lower income employees and potential long term cycles of educational and subsequent income deprivation existing amongst elements of the working class within Britain. Subsequent research interests developed in regards to whether poor early educational experiences amongst the working class lead in turn to more polarised, less economically beneficial post-school transitions which in turn can lead to social and cultural deprivation in other aspects of life.

These early academic interests were themselves fuelled through experiences of growing up in an inner city council estate to low income parents, attendance at a comprehensive state school and laterally long term employment within the trade union movement.
Structure of the thesis

The thesis is structured around ten chapters beginning with this introductory chapter. There are then four chapters reviewing the literature in the relevant fields of study.

Chapter Two reviews key debates within the fields of class analysis including the influence of Marxism, theories advocating the embourgeoisement of the working class (Goldthorpe 1969), social stratification theories (Bourdieu 1984) and an evaluation of the new wave of class analysis (Savage et al 2001; Savage et al 2013; Skeggs 2011; Skeggs and Loveday 2012). This chapter sets the foundations for the theoretical distinctions of ‘working classness’ elaborated later in this chapter and utilised throughout the thesis.

Chapter Three evaluates research spanning more than three decades that broaden out discussions around potential cultural and social incompatibilities between elements of the working class and the education system (Ashton and Field 1976; Willis 1977). These discussions include analyses’ of the potential for cultural incompatibilities to heighten during periods of economic instability, resulting in the possibility for increased educational disengagement amongst elements of the working class (Brown 1987).

Chapter Four focuses on research evaluating the impact of years of deindustrialisation, on working class communities and the working class post school transitional experience (Pahl 1984; Charelsworth 2000; Goodwin and O’Connor 2002 and 2003; Vickerstaff

Chapter Five looks towards the potential politically motivated education policy decisions across all political parties that have juxtaposed significant industrial developments and had a significant impact on the educational frameworks that working class school leavers across generations have to operate within.

Chapter Six delineates the methodological approach undertaken within the practical research, the key ethical considerations and some of the potential gaps within the chosen research methods. The methodology employed is also briefly explored later in this chapter.

Chapters Seven to Nine evaluate the central themes emerging from within the research data. This includes influences on how class is perceived by research participants and what influences developing perceptions of class. Additionally data is generated on the general cross generational trend towards experiences of educational individualism and on post school opportunities developing from transition mainly into reasonably paid and secure work, to polarised transitions into further and higher education or into periodical unemployment and low end training. The factors emanating from educational and industrial transformation in regards to changing class perceptions are analysed, alongside the influence of these factors on individual’s ability to experience successful educational careers and early post school transitions.
The final chapter offers conclusions, assessment of the methodological approach utilised, suggestions for potential improvements in how the research methods were employed, evaluation of unexpected research outcomes and an assessment of potential future areas of research.

**Methodological Approach**

The thesis has adopted the qualitative research methods of utilising semi structured interviews. The methodological approach is delineated and justified in detail throughout Chapter Six. However, it is useful to briefly outline that the methods were chosen for epistemological reasons, in that there is a fundamental belief underpinning the study that ideals of gaining value free data through quantitative research methods are largely flawed. The foundation for these beliefs stem from the idea that choices and values are made from the outset of any research project, including what areas to research and even what research methods to employ (Silverman 2005). Use of qualitative methods is therefore perceived as free of the methodological shackles of trying to establish value free data.

Just as importantly this project is researching highly complex issues that are related to peoples own thought processes on for example how they perceive their class, what has influenced these perceptions, how have these perceptions influenced and been in turn impacted upon by changing educational and post school transitional experiences for individuals living out their lives in the same location but within different phases of their life span.
With goals of extracting data on these intertwined subject areas, even robust statistical evidence is not deemed appropriate enough in terms of being able to allow significant deliberation and analysis of the complexities of these peoples life experiences.

Semi structured interviews were therefore utilised, with twenty nine people interviewed from two distinct research cohorts. The first group was made up of people who self identified themselves as working class or were identified as working class because of their family backgrounds and economic circumstances and left school in the 1970’s. The second group was made up of people who again either self identified themselves as working class or were identified as working class under the criteria set and left school within five years of the interviews taking place from 2009 to 2011. All participants live or at least for a significant part of their lives lived in or near the Parliamentary Constituency of Birmingham Northfield and subsequent wards that make up the research site.

These two distinctive generational groups were chosen as the two era’s in question, the 1970’s and the years within the first decade of the new millennium are viewed within the literature (Charlesworth 2000; Vickerstaff 2003; Macdonald and Marsh 2004; McDonald et al 2005; Pahl 1984) as key points of departure within working class experiences of education and transition. From the 1970’s where comprehensive education and relative full employment for working class school leavers was the norm, to a transference over a period of thirty years to the current position of polarised transitions from a fragmented education system into either higher education, unemployment or low end training courses.
The use of semi structured interviews allowed for an abundance of data to be drawn down on the very different educational and subsequent work experiences between and at times within the two different generational groups. For example data was generated on how different forms of educational individualism impacted on research participants lives across both generations. Other significant findings included the maintenance of key drivers influencing working class educational decisions across the generations and potentially most influentially of all the complexities in how perceptions of their ‘working classness’ are created and develop over the life course and how these perceptions may be influenced by the transforming educational and industrial frameworks they were subject to at school leaving age.

As theories related to both how class is constructed and how the class perceptions of the individuals interviewed within this project are formed is so integral to the analysis of all other data generated within the practical research it is important to provide a brief outline of the model of ‘working classness’ favoured within the thesis.

**A model of ‘working classness’**.

Research themes emanating most prominently from the practical research revolve around the idea that within this location the way individuals perceive their developing class throughout their lives is based more on the transformative relationship with parental employment and income patterns than their own relationship with the employment sphere.
These findings could question much research evaluating the intrinsic relationship between an individuals’ class and the job they do. In addition there is important data indicating that processes by which individuals perceive their class are influenced by decades of educational and industrial transformation. In conjunction with these findings further data suggests that the processes that influence an individuals class perceptions also impact on the ways they are able to navigate through the educational and industrial frameworks they find themselves operating within.

The data on class perceptions and how they are individually built up through a complex network of interactions through the life course as opposed to a more straight forwards relationship with the employment sphere largely supports the model of working classness generated within this thesis.

The definition of class utilised through the thesis is outlined in more detail in Chapter Two. However, it is important to note that like much of the new class analysis emerging within academia, the definition of class utilised in this study is heavily influenced by the theories of Bourdieu (1984) and in particular his socially stratified evaluation of how class is constructed. Newer class analyses’ build on Bourdieus work in a critical sense by focusing on how class is more individualised and influenced by the cultural and social aspects of life, in opposition to the economic models of class such as Marxism that propose a shared class consciousness being built out of the similar inequalities faced within the labour market.
The model of ‘working classness’ proposed within this study therefore adheres to many of the arguments supporting the individualised nature of class and also aligns itself to theories that suggest fairly static models of groups of people within a class sharing or developing a shared consciousness to be misplaced. However, the model proposed in this study whilst recognising the individualised and continually developing nature of class, also suggests that people with similar social backgrounds can at times have shared experiences that at particular moments will infer temporary shared class experiences.

Although not suggesting the possibility of mass consciousness much of the data emanating from the practical research suggests that some of the research participants within their own generational cohorts will at times purvey very similar thoughts on for example, the schools careers advice they received, the role of education in their lives, their early transitional experiences and the development of their communities. The thesis argues that how these individuals perceive their class is influenced by the developing social structures they are integrated within, but equally how they elaborate thought patterns on the social phenomena they are questioned about is influenced by how they perceive their developing class.

There are also research participants that elaborate vast differences in thought processes on these social phenomena and in one sense the adherence to an individualised model of class allows for the acceptance of individualised development of thought patterns around personalised class and how these thoughts patterns intertwine with thoughts on other aspects of life.
Therefore the model of class distinction utilised within this thesis allows for the possibility that the creation of a persons’ class is subject to a vast array of variables and interactions throughout the life course. However, within these processes there will at times be moments where living within a certain epoch in a certain geographical location will allow for the creation of experiences and memories that will be subject to the influence of individual variables such as family unit, race, gender, but will nevertheless create the opportunity for some similarity in retrospection that is ultimately class based.

The influence of such shared experiences will be fluid, in terms of individuals reading of situations being at times different depending on their wider social networks and interactions, there is therefore capacity for these retrospections to change and develop frequently. Ultimately the fluidity within the model of class distinction proposed, whilst allowing for shared ‘classed’ experiences make the natural static nature of shared class consciousness at best fleeting and probably untenable.

The research continues with Chapter Two providing a broader outlook on the theoretical development of class analysis within academia and the subsequent influence of such theories on this research.
Chapter Two: From abstract to multi-layered: An analysis of the complexities within the social make up of the British working class.

Introduction

This chapter analyses and evaluates theoretical debates and discussions within the sociological field of class analysis, this analysis is undertaken in order to establish the complexities within any analysis of working class experience. The analysis will therefore attempt to utilise theory to establish a useable theoretical definition of what it is to be working class in Britain today, which will in turn underpin the aims of the thesis, which are to explore and compare current and past working class experiences of education and subsequent transitions into the workplace within a specific locale.

Attempts to formulate adequate definitions of ‘working classness’ is also important as there have been marked shifts in forms of working class life and how working class lives are analysed within academia within recent decades. For example wide spread deindustrialisation and the impacts of these processes on the availability of secure reasonably well paid jobs within industry for many working people, have sat alongside radical shifts within the development of theoretical evaluations of class within the social sciences, that have spanned Marxist analysis’ through to post modernist assertions regarding the ‘end of class’, to more contemporary evaluations focusing on the socially stratified and individualistic nature of class.
This chapter therefore proceeds by offering a brief historical insight into the economic climate of the 18th century industrial revolution that some theorists (Reid 1998; Harding 1998) believe gave rise to what could be considered the archetypal image of the ‘working class’ and brought about the conditions for the construction of Marxist ideology.

Some of Engels and Marx’s concerns regarding the economic and social conditions that encouraged the development of a ‘working class’ in Britain, including labour’s relationship and ultimate subjugation to capital and the creation within capitalism of the conditions for (working) class-consciousness are explored, not least because of their longevity and influence within the realms of the sociological study of the working class.

Whilst offering some extremely valuable insights into large elements of the working classes’ relationship to capital and this relationships subsequent impact on the conditions of existence for many people, Marxist ideology is not viewed as solely sufficient within the goals of this research project. Examples of some of the criticisms of Marxism or at least criticisms of ideas surrounding ‘class consciousness’ will be explored in greater detail within the chapter through analysis of the work of Goldthorpe et al (1969) and some of the ‘new wave’ of class analysis (Bottero 2004; Savage et al 2001 and 2013; Skeggs 2011 and Skeggs and Loveday 2012).

The fundamental reason in analysing critiques of some of Marx’s theories in particular, is the platform it provides for a more comprehensive analysis about why a
predominately economic based evaluation (or indeed any single contextualised evaluation) of the working class experience and conditions of existence, although useful does not ultimately offer a substantial enough account of what it is to be working class in contemporary Britain (Benyon 1999; Roberts 1999).

From this basis a more multi layered and contemporary approach to analysing the construction and perpetuation of a working class is established. Of particular use is the socially stratified approach to class analysis purported by Bourdieu (1984) that takes on board ideas of class fractions and independent variables such as gender, age, religious belief, educational level as well as occupation that both help to construct common class identities, but also highlight the often overlooked complexities within the construction of a class.

Bourdieu’s work is primarily useful for the influence it expels on theoretical debates initiated by Sayer (2005) and Kirk (2008). Kirk for example develops arguments about how class differences become more recognisable to individuals once they start moving between social classes and experiencing a degree of fragmentation between their class of origin and the class they currently occupy.

More importantly in terms of this study Sayer’s use of Bourdieu’s theories are particularly helpful in the way that they are used to argue that class analyses should not just focus on the differences in economic capital between classes, but also on the wider but inter-related areas of social and cultural capital.
The chapter continues to look towards the influence of Bourdieu on the ‘new class analysis’ emerging within the social sciences from the late 1990’s onwards. In particular an exploration is undertaken regarding the tendency of the newer class analysis’ to simultaneously reject ideas of class consciousness whilst highlighting the deficiencies in the post modernist approach of dismissing notions of class altogether. The more contemporary approach to class analysis that favours evaluation of the cultural and social as well as economic impacts on the individual (Reay 2004; Reay et al 2007; Savage et al 2001; Savage et al 2013; Skeggs 2011; Skeggs and Loveday 2012) will be reviewed in order to establish the influence on the definition of ‘working classness’ favoured within this thesis.

The early development of the British working class

One of the fundamental theories underpinning this thesis is that within the UK, working class experiences within society including experiences of the education system and subsequent transition into the workplace differs significantly to those of other classes. As Reid (1998: 238) has argued;

“However uncomfortable it may be, however incongruent with values concerning individuality and individual responsibility, the evidence clearly shows that in reality most of life’s opportunities and its experiences are vitally affected and mediated by the dimensions

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of social class”.

The idea of the collective experiences of a coherent group of people in society being different to ‘others’ is influential and persuasive and has its roots set centuries earlier. Therefore a brief historical analysis of how the archetypal image of a ‘working class’ developed through earlier transformations in industry and the changing ways of life for working people, juxtaposed with developments within theoretical analyses of the lives of working people will be undertaken. The lasting influence of the industrial revolution and theoretical developments of the period on contemporary thinking about class will also be discussed throughout the chapter.

Therefore one of the dominant and potentially most persuasive explanations for the existence and continued subjugation of the working class is an economic based evaluation of class differences. Salaman (1980: 13-14) argues that class refers to the relationship between groups and the means of production, the example he uses is between owners and non owners. He continues his analysis by evaluating that capitalist societies are class societies and the differences in levels of rewards and life chances that exist within such societies are systematically related to an economic arrangement that’s primary purpose is the pursuit of profit.

Reid (1998: 6) also identifies that within society the differences within classes are essentially about different group’s relationship to social wealth. However, he does also recognise that there are other factors in addition to wealth that highlight and perpetuate
differences in class, such as lifestyle, education, values, beliefs and patterns of
difference in multi-layered approach to class analysis will be returned to in
greater depth at a later point in this chapter.

Reid (1998: 8) continues his evaluation through assessing that during the industrial
revolution within the 18th century the pre-dominant simple social structure based on an
agrarian society started to diminish rapidly. He argues that industrialisation broke up
the existing order of society and created greater divisions of labour, including increased
differentiation in occupational background with a greater variety of skill requirements
and subsequent rewards. The combination of these differences and unprecedented
migration to British cities also brought about fundamental changes in how working
people lived, including the type of residence they occupied, the style of their lives and
their interests.

Alongside the actual effects of industrialisation on working people, distinct theoretical
evaluations began to surface about the emergence of a ‘working class’ both created by
and reliant on capitalist means of production within the industrial UK. Arguably the
most significant and ideologically influential class theorists emerging from within the
industrial revolution are Friedrich Engels and Karl Marx. Whilst it is not in the remit of
this thesis to provide a full evaluation of Marxism as an ideology, it is still important to
provide a brief overview, primarily of Engels analysis of the development and
conditions of existence of the working class in 18th and 19th century Britain and his
subsequent influence on Marx’s evaluations of the working classes emerging intrinsic
relationship to capital.
Initially Engels (1987) offers a useful and comprehensive introduction to the emergence of a working class through the processes of the industrial revolution. He argues that before the advent and wide scale use of machinery the spinning and weaving of raw materials took place in the working man’s home, with the whole family having a role to play in this process, with this labour and lifestyle process repeating itself with the likes of small scale farmers. (1987: 50).

Engels then identifies the industrial revolution fuelled by the introduction of machinery as the key component that vastly changes the production process, with the industrial revolution also being the reason populations in the emerging cities began to rise rapidly between 1760 and 1844. Engels assesses that as capitalists introduced machinery and new quick and efficient production practices that meant goods could be produced on mass for large profits, the means for working people to continue their previous existence ceased and many of them were forced to migrate to the cities to look for waged employment.

He continues his evaluation by also debating that handicraft men and small retailers that largely made up the lower middle class, who in turn offered working men a route through apprenticeships through the class system, were largely crushed by the industrial revolution. Whereby those that couldn’t compete with new large scale capitalist organisations were pushed towards working class status, in turn for the first time there was in existence a working class group that didn’t benefit from any hope of ever rising above their status as workers; “Now, he who was born to toil had no other prospect than that of remaining a toiler all of his life” (1987: 62). Engels also observes that the vast
majority of the people underpinning the population growth in this period were working people, which in his opinion meant that the common condition of the working class within this period was in fact the common condition of the vast majority of English people (1987: 62-63).

In alignment with analysis of the population growth Engels offers a useful framework for the creation of the large industrial towns and cities during the period of the industrial revolution. Primarily new manufacturing firms required lots of workers to operate new machinery, with workers and machinery being largely located within large buildings acquired by the owners of the means of production. So that the new tranche of workers can easily get to and from the workplace they need accommodation nearby which influences the creation of workers villages, these villages in turn need services such as bankers, shoe makers, carpenters and retailers.

The workers gain new skills in the workplace so that when a firm no longer finds it economically viable to employ them they sell their skills to new firms, with the villages expanding, growing into towns and harbouring an increasing number of manufacturing outlets and subsidiary organisations (1987: 66).

Engels concludes that this industrial framework creates competition throughout society that encompasses both class on class competition but also inter class competition, whereby working people compete with each other for better paid jobs and the unemployed or poorly paid compete with those in better paid employment (1987: 111).
Ultimately within the society based on the capitalist model it is the owners of the means of production or the bourgeoisie that exact the ideological conditions that impact on the existence of working people.

“The bourgeoisie has gained a monopoly of all means of existence in the broadest sense of the word. What the proletarian needs, he can obtain only from the bourgeoisie, which is protected in its monopoly by the power of the state. The proletarian is, therefore, in law and in fact, the slave of the bourgeoisie, which can decree his life or death. It offers him the means of living, but only for an ‘equivalent’ for his work. It even lets him have the appearance of acting from a free choice, of making a contract with free, unconstrained consent, as a responsible agent who has attained his majority”


Engels provides a useful overview of the creation of the conditions of working class existence in Britain through economic and social processes emerging from the industrial revolution and whilst this thesis would adhere with some of the ideological foundations of his analysis, there is a requirement to examine some of Engels assessments in light of the structural changes to British society over the course of the last 150 years. For example it is useful to compare Engels evaluation of the development of the great manufacturing towns in the 18th and 19th centuries and how working class people were situated in them in relatively close proximity to their work, to debates initiated by Pahl
(1984) and Charelsworth (2000) that are covered more comprehensively later in the thesis. Pahl (1984) and Charlesworth (2000) focus in part on the systematic destruction of such manufacturing bases from the late 20th century onwards and the negative impacts this has had both economically and socially for working people still living in these towns and psychologically, socially and historically attached to them.

An important question for this research project is whether the contemporary British working class, who may work in different types of industry, may not have close proximity and relationships with fellow workers, or may not work at all due partly to processes of deindustrialisation, are a different subject to study than those discussed at length by Engels. This study argues that the industrial revolution and the subsequent growth in the British manufacturing base did create conditions whereby many collective traits amongst a new formation of ‘working class’ people, based predominantly on the workers’ mass experience within the labour process, grew and developed and the more fragmented working world of contemporary Britain may make these common class traits less visible.

However, this research project would also debate that the fragmentation of the mass working class workplace experience is fraught with complexities. For example later points in the thesis evaluates research undertaken by Kintrea et al (2011) that suggests there is a maintenance in the psychological link contemporary school leavers have with obtaining jobs in traditional industries in certain locations even when those industries have effectively disappeared.
Additionally, the development of class analysis methodologies and in particular socially stratified methods of analysis, allows this research to question retrospectively whether influential studies about the working class emerging from within the industrial revolution actually only abstracted elements of the class out for study. For example there seems to be little in the works of Engels or Marx that concentrates specifically on the role of women within the 18th and 19th century working class. Likewise the complexities within the analysis of class the variable of race introduces is only dealt with by Engels in terms of what could be considered an evaluation of Irish immigrants into the UK during the 18th and 19th century that has a tendency towards the racist.

Therefore it is suggested throughout this thesis that a thorough evaluation of what constitutes the working class should not just focus on an economic model, partly because important variables that complicate class experience of society such as gender and race are then largely ignored, which in turn may lead to a false representation of working class experiences.

However, a line of argument is also pursued that questions whether the results of subjugation within a contemporary capitalist society may still give rise to the same social impacts as expressed in theoretical debates about earlier generations and although some working class people today may have different reference points in terms of their relationship (or lack of it) to industry, the class traits of living in poverty or with limited opportunities to transgress from their originating social position, may still create similar responses from some people. These themes will be explored in more depth later in the chapter.
Another interesting aspect of Engels work is the way his study of the conditions of the working class in England during the 19th century is used to further distinct ideological goals. A prime example is the way he evaluates the weavers (as representative of all working people) prior to the industrial revolution, as leading a simpler life than the emerging working class, but one in which they were largely illiterate and offered unquestioning humility to their ‘superior class’. He continues by assessing that these people were ‘intellectually dead’ and it has only been the advent of the industrial revolution that encouraged workers forced into wage labour to emerge from this existence and become the proletariat (1987: 52).

Engels offers little empirical evidence for his evaluation of the social and intellectual properties of working people prior to the industrial revolution. To a degree it could be argued that his assessment may have been utilised in order to further his political goals of mobilising and utilising the emerging working class in order to heighten sociological debates about the realignment of society away from the capitalist model.

In this respect Engels influence on the work of his colleague Karl Marx is distinct and it is through a brief evaluation of some of Marx’s key theories in relation to the division of labour, that a more in-depth analysis of an economically driven model of the working class can be further assessed for its usefulness to the goals of this thesis.

In his evaluation of some of the central theories in the works of Marx, Durkheim and Weber, Giddens (1971) suggests that Marx believed that the formation of a class society
is underpinned by two key drivers, the purchase of private property and the division of labour. Giddens identifies how Marx makes the historical link between the rise of wage labour and the increasing importance of private property ownership by reviewing Marx’s evaluation of the development of social systems leading up to the industrial revolution.

Marx initially identifies the ‘pre-class’ tribe as a system whereby the communal group lead a migratory existence that involves hunting and gathering, exhausting resources before moving on. This form of life eventually gives way to the formation of agricultural communities which themselves develop with leadership roles forming as well as inter-tribe conflict and systems of slavery. As different communities have different natural surroundings and utilise different natural resources, both cross community trade and wars develop and natural resources transform into commodities and subsequently the origins of markets with products for sale are born (1971: 24-25).

Giddens also identifies how Marx further associates the development of cities primarily with Ancient Greece and Rome, whereby the Roman Empire for example was based on landed property with population expansion encouraging an enlarged military with the emphasis on expanding territorial ownership of land for the privileged and the enslavement of the peasant population. However, Marx identifies the treatment of the peasant population and the extreme poverty it caused eventually becoming one of the key factors in the self destruction of the Empire leading in Western Europe to systems of feudalism.
Feudalism in turn was largely based on the dominance of military leaders and associated scholars, with the peasantry predominantly undertaking agricultural work. Marx does argue that although peasants operating within feudal society had to give up some of their produce to the ‘lord’ they were not altogether ‘alienated’ from their produce, as by and large they were their own proprietor with the majority of goods produced being subsistence for them and their family (1971: 28-30).

The point about individual workers alienation from the production process is, Giddens insinuates, important to Marx’s overall theoretical assumptions regarding the development of the working class. Whereby, as the impact of the industrial revolution develops, workers who would of previously operated within the feudal system and had a reasonably intrinsic relationship with the production process were now forced to work for a wage undertaking tasks that were not on the whole related directly to their basic needs. In turn the work undertaken by the ‘workers’ helped the wealth accumulation of the owners of the means of production who also separated themselves further through ownership of private property (1971: 30).

Marx conceived the alienation of workers taking two distinct forms, primarily there is alienation within the labour process whereby the worker neither enjoys what he is doing nor understands fully the purpose of why he is doing it. The second form of alienation is the alienation of the worker from the product he is producing whereby the dominant class exploit the working class into specialising within the division of labour to earn a wage for assisting in the production of products that are relatively meaningless to them (1971: 228-229).
There are critiques of some of Marx’s assertions, in particular Giddens (1971: 229-230) suggests that Durkheim deals with class conflict differently to Marx who asserts that it will be the basis for the ‘revolutionary restructuring of society’. Whilst Durkheim acknowledges the alienating experience of productive activity within capitalist societies and organisations, he believes workers become ‘dehumanised’ because they have no real conception of how their work combines with the work of others to forge a ‘unity of purpose’. “This situation can therefore be remedied by providing the individual with a moral awareness of the social importance of his particular role in the division of labour” (1971: 230).

Durkheim believes human freedom can only be achieved if workers take on board a moral acceptance of their role within the division of labour. Whilst Durkheim’s theories about the alienation of the working class becoming eroded by moral acceptance of the position within the division of labour obtained are open to question, particularly when such moral acceptance presumably leads to a continuation of social and economic inequality, some of his assertions about future elements of capitalist society seem highly accurate.

“Therefore foresees the existence of a society with multiple occupational positions, in which access to the leading strata will depend, not upon transmitted privilege, but upon competitive selection of the talented through the medium of the educational system. Such a society, which
places a premium upon individual attainment through the public manifestation of ability, clearly exerts a pressure towards expansion of incompatible egoisms” (1971: 232).

Some of the themes expressed by Durkheim are re-visited within later chapters within this thesis when, in particular, the role the British education system may have in reinforcing rather than challenging the dominant social order will be explored in greater detail. However, to conclude the brief evaluation of some of Marx’s key theories relating to the working class, it useful to explore how Marx utilised some of his main theoretical concerns to progress key political goals.

Harding (1998) in his evaluation of the contribution of Marx to the creation of the Communist Manifesto acknowledges that Marx’s had key ideological concerns, including the working class becoming forged into the ‘proletariat’ and the inherent antagonism between the working class and the bourgeoisie fuelling a class war (Harding 1998: 21). Harding suggests it becomes clear when analysing the ‘Communist Manifesto’ that Marx believed for the working class to become the ‘proletariat’ it would need to be in possession of a single consciousness. Additionally Marx argued that a single consciousness would develop through the continual exploitation of workers within the capitalist system, whereby once the conditions of the working class are more and more equalized and skill and pay reward differentials are driven down through the introduction of new technologies workers conceptions of themselves will coalesce (Harding: 1998: 29-30).
Many of Marx’s fundamental arguments are still influential in contemporary studies of the working class. In particular the idea that within the capitalist system the majority of workers sell their labour power to employers who manipulate it for the purposes of profit (Salaman 1980: 6) and at the same time how the development of capitalist societies are largely characterised around the growing disparity between the wages earned by the working class compared to the income of the capitalists (Giddens 1971: 57).

However, it is acknowledged that this is an extremely limited evaluation of some Marxist theories and that the analysis doesn’t come close to providing any sort of substantial overview of Marxism. Despite this the brief evaluation does provide an introduction to some of the most traditional underpinnings within the theoretical development of studies around the ‘working class’ experience. More importantly the analysis starts to highlight some of the gaps that exist even in some of the most comprehensive studies on the construction and development of a working class. The remainder of this chapter will incorporate an analysis of some of these gaps largely through an exploration of some of the other influential models of class analysis.

The impacts of post war consumerism on working class life

Initially Goldthorpe et al (1969) draws attention to academic debates from the mid point in the twentieth century. These debates question Marx’s assertion that the working class would form into a class for itself, arguing that instead of class consciousness forming around continued working class subjugation at the hands of the owners of the means of
production, a “process of progressive integration of the working class into the institutional structure of capitalism” took place (1969: 5). Such critiques of Marxist philosophy are largely formed around ideas of the emergence of the post World War Two ‘consumer society’ in Western societies, which it is argued influenced the rise of the ‘affluent worker’.

Goldthorpe et al (1969) identifies that proponents of theories surrounding the ‘embourgeoisement of the working class highlight that although at the start of the second half of the twentieth century migration from rural to urban areas continued at a fairly rapid pace, this movement was now juxtaposed by large elements of working people in turn spilling out from the central areas surrounding older industries into newer suburbs and commuter belts. One of the apparent effects of such movements was the disruption of many long established working class communities. (1969: 6).

Advocates of embourgeoisement theories point to a number of key factors that influence what they view as a gradual dissolution of the very essence of the working class through the classes’ integration into middle class ways of life. Primarily there is the identification that many manual workers start to earn middle sized incomes post World War Two, which apparently allowed such workers access to middle class social stratas including the ability to share in the values associated with a middle class lifestyle. Continual advancements in technology are also deemed to enhance the production experience for the same set of workers, making work less stressful and more satisfying. With new collegiate management techniques also growing alongside technological advancement to encourage greater assimilation of worker’s into the ethos of the
employing organisation (1969: 8-12).

“As communities of this kind have been disrupted or deserted, so it has been argued, has the matrix of the traditional working class way of life been destroyed. It was through the network of kinship, the pattern of neighbouring, the collective activities and rituals of communal solidarity which characterized such districts that working class culture was transmitted and preserved. Once this basis is gone, therefore, the local and particularistic nature of working class life is immediately threatened” (1969: 12-13).

This paper would critically analyse aspects of embourgeoisement theory for not allowing manual workers who possibly do end up receiving better pay and moving to suburban areas any sort of consciousness regarding the culture and the socialisation processes that has helped to form their very being.

Also whilst embourgeoisement theory allows for the visualisation of diminishing working class communities as the working class transcend into middle class social and physical spaces, what the theory does not seem to account for is those working class people that do not physically move to the ‘suburbs’, or do not start to earn higher wages or enjoy greater job satisfaction.
Strikingly Charlesworth (2000) reflects on the parts of working class society left largely unacknowledged by embourgeoisement theorists. Charlesworth’s (2000) study analyses what remains of the working class communities and the people within them after years of deindustrialisation. Whilst embourgeoisement theory proposes the end of such communities due in part to new found affluence amongst working class people, Charlesworth finds the communities very much still in existence some three decades later, although devastatingly impacted upon by the direction of capitalism and governmental industrial policies over a number of generations.

Goldthorpe etc al (1969) also reflects upon the Marxist response to theories surrounding the affluent worker. The Marxist counter critique highlights the idea that even though technological advancement may change the daily nature of work for many working class people, the individual worker will still be in a subordinate position within the employing organisation. Marxists also tend to critique embourgeoisement theories for not evaluating that although greater affluence amongst some elements of the working class creates new possibilities as a consumer, it doesn’t remove the alienating process of work within a capitalist society and in fact creates a process where increased income is utilised on the ‘false needs’ promoted through the capitalist system. (Goldthorpe et al 1969: 16).

This line of enquiry continues through the evaluation of the way the working class continue to be subjugated within a modern capitalist society through hegemony, which is predominately realised through the maintenance of cultural supremacy by the dominant class’ over the cultural institutions within society, such as the arts, media,
education systems and literature. Marxists in their response to embourgeoissement theory believe that such hegemonic control means that the dominant class in society have control over the very means of creating any sort of social consciousness. However, this control it is argued raises workers expectations and demands as consumers, it is through this process that some Marxists believe that any increased affluence amongst working people may, ultimately increase the likely re-awakening of working class protest, as continually raised expectations as consumers outstrip the reality of paid labour (Goldthorpe et al 1969: 17-20).

The Marxists’ response to embourgeoissement theory can in some respects be re-evaluated in line with some of the key debates initiated within this study, for again, like much of Marx’s general theories on the condition of the working class the counter critique seems to fall into the trap of only abstracting out elements of the class for study. In the case of the counter critique there seems just as much acceptance of the working class’ transference into the status of ‘affluent worker’, than any acknowledgement of the variation in economic, cultural and social experiences of people from working class communities.

What is more useful in terms of a critique of embourgeoissement theory, is Goldthorpe’s et al (1969) own summary of the problems they foresee with the theory. They initially identity four main issues primarily, that the theory suggests that a rise in income automatically leads to an adoption of a new social outlook. Secondly, although recognising that the income and conditions of employment may have risen for many manual workers within the post war period under scrutiny, it is argued that the long
term employment prospects or the opportunities to develop into managerial positions within employing organisations were still inferior to most white collar colleagues. Thirdly, embourgeoisement theory insinuates that middle class values are automatically desired and emulated by the working class without much empirical evidence to support such arguments.

Finally, whilst the theory is based around the idea that working class families standards of living have risen during the period in question, there is no discussion regarding the social interaction that may take place between manual and professional workers, for example there is no research evidence provided regarding whether middle class workers socially accept the newly affluent working class, apparently living out their lives within the same social spheres (Goldthorpe et al 1969: 24-25).

Whilst Goldthorpe et al (1969) are critical of embourgeoisement theorists over simplified analysis of the development of the working class, they are equally critical of the prospects of the formation of class consciousness amongst the working class that Marxist counter critics believe can be formed because of unrealised consumer aspirations. Instead they indicate that their research offers findings that suggest any sort of solidarity amongst working people is already in decline in the 1960’s and the activity of work is creating less communal ties than it previously did in earlier era’s of industrialisation.

“To the extent that among the present day working class both workplace
and communal solidarism appear to be in decline, and work is seen merely as a means of sustaining a mode of social life dominated by home and family” (Goldthorpe et al 1969: 165).

The author’s progress their arguments by suggesting that working people’s perceptions of the social order were not structured in relation to class hierarchies as they may have been to an extent in earlier generations. Instead working people’s social consciousness was structured around the model of the individual consumer, which in turn largely prevents a raised awareness of the shared inequalities that exists within capitalist societies and the forms of exploitation that the existing order relies upon for the continuation of hegemonic control (Goldthorpe et al 1969: 180).

Goldthorpe et al (1969) assertions that working people are to a degree increasingly dislocated from any common consciousness formed around the inequalities faced within society are partly supported through the recent resurgence in class analysis. In particular, the very idea of class consciousness existing at all is purported within some key evaluations that nevertheless still dismiss the idea that class doesn’t matter and instead suggest that class in the contemporary period is an important indicator of the inequalities faced within society.

The multi-layered working class

An emerging number of academics within the social sciences have been revisiting the
analysis of class with vigour since the late 1990’s. To a degree this has been in response to the post modernist approach that suggests due largely to processes of deindustrialisation and the transformation of capitalist societies, social class and the ‘working class’ in particular are no longer a coherent class in themselves (as an example see Beck 1992).

Due to space and capacity this paper doesn’t provide an overview of the post modernist approach to class analysis. However, it is important to denote that the new wave of class analysis doesn’t just critique ideas of the ‘end of class’, they also reject notions that class consciousness can (or to an extent ever could) be formed around working experiences. In fact the developing new class analysis increasingly advocates the evaluation of wider aspects of life other than the economic, such as the cultural and social aspects of life that importantly impact on individuals as opposed to coherent groupings of people.

The work of Pierre Bourdieu is heavily influential within the theoretical development of new class analyses’. Primarily, Bourdieu (1984) generates ideas around how a class is defined not just by its relationship to the means of production, for example the occupations people undertake, but also other prevalent identifiers such as gender, ethnicity and distribution of people from a particular class across distinct geographical spaces. These and more subsidiary characteristics from within a class may function as the principles of social selection or exclusion without ever being verbalised (Bourdieu 1984: 102).
Bourdieu’s initial indications of the complexities behind the makeup of a class start to reveal that focusing on individual or groups of individuals place within the modes of production as the basis for an analysis of their class, offers a limited evaluation. This is largely because sitting behind an individual’s place within the mode of production (for example the job that is undertaken, the economic prospects that are attached to a particular job, the educational qualifications needed to undertake a particular job) lie numerous traits, both physical and psychological that have an influence on where within a class stream an individual sits.

For example, an individual’s race or sex will have a substantial influence on their educational and occupational opportunities, but will also attach specific thought mechanisms and ways of being in the social world that only being from that race or gender will project. In line with much of the earlier critical analysis of utilising a singular contextualisation such as Marxism within an analysis of what constitutes a working class, Bourdieu argues that consideration of only one of the main properties within a class will ultimately lead to ‘crude errors’ such as, for example, a lack of analysis of working class women’s differing experiences of transition into the workplace (Bourdieu 1984: 103).

Bourdieu progresses his analysis by suggesting that when evaluating what constitutes a class, there are ‘independent variables’ such as sex, age, religious belief and educational level. In this framework independent variables hide a network of relations between a particular independent variable and a particular opinion (for example age and certain ideas surrounding the worth of education) (Bourdieu 1984: 103). Basically Bourdieu’s
arguments suggest that independent variables are actually part of wider networks and that the connections between many of the independent variables make up ‘class fractions’, which in turn combine to create a person’s class.

“Similarly, relationships such as those between educational capital, or age, and income mask the relationship linking the two apparently independent variables. Age determines income to an extent which varies according to educational capital and occupation, which itself is partly determined by educational capital and also by other, more hidden factors such as sex and inherited cultural or social capital” (Bourdieu 1984: 104).

By taking on board this analysis it becomes possible to envisage individuals inheriting what would be regarded in a hierarchal society as ‘low’ cultural and social capital, that in turn will probably help to determine educational attainment, which will influence occupational opportunity as well as opportunity within the occupational structure entered into.

Subsequently such independent variables will affect income in the short term, but more importantly the ability to accumulate increases in income with age. If other more hidden independent variables are added to the equation, such as the influence of gender and race on the ability to obtain certain types of employment, then the complexities of a multi-layered analysis of the constituent elements making up the working class become
clear. However, this framework also allows for an assessment to take place whereby the interdependence of the independent variables potentially situates individuals along socially designated cycles of economic, cultural and social deprivation, with the effects of being situated within ‘a certain way of being in the world’ disseminated from generation to generation.

Ultimately Bourdieu suggests that a class cannot be defined by a single property, or a collection of properties, or even by a chain of properties connected to a more fundamental property, but instead by the structure of the relations between all the pertinent properties and how they combine to effect practice (Bourdieu 1984: 106).

Although Bourdieu’s analysis is extremely useful in offering a framework whereby a working class are made up of a multitude of shifting layers that are interconnected, he also acknowledges that some of the variables within the construction of a class are more heavily weighted than others. The example that Bourdieu uses is the amount and composition of capital, which he suggests gives value to how other factors such as age and sex impose on the practices of individuals (Bourdieu 1984: 107).

This analysis is interesting primarily for two reasons within the scope of this research. Initially, it allows for a potential acceptance that Marxism as an analysis of the construction and continuation of the working class is limited. However, it still enables Marxism to attain a high degree of relevance in terms of analysing how the amount of capital individuals obtain and their role within the production process has a fundamental
impact of the other key variables that ultimately impact of the conditions of existence for working class people.

Secondly and more importantly in terms of the ambitions of this research project, establishing some independent variables as more heavily weighted than others within the structure of the complex system that determines an individuals class, allows for the recognition that despite the complexities within the make-up of the working class there is still the potential for common traits or variables to be established across all elements of the class. This is highly important in establishing the analytical framework that is utilised to evaluate many of the important theoretical debates on the working class experience of education and transition within this project.

Therefore in order to undertake a substantial analysis of the relationship between the working class and the education and industrial systems they are integrated within there needs to be recognition of the complex interdependent independent variables that interact to create individual ‘classed’ experiences. Within this analysis it is suggested that some of these variables (for example race and gender) mean that ‘working class’ experiences of education may differ substantially in some respects within different elements of the ‘class’. However, it is also argued that because some variables are so heavily weighted within the overall make-up of a ‘working class’, then there are still likely to be a set of traits that belong to many working class people and a set of experiences that differ in relation to the experiences of individuals from other social classes.
Utilising many of the themes explored by Bourdieu the ‘new wave’ of class analysis has tended to focus on the idea that whilst class is undoubtedly important in the facilitation of life chances within society, the evaluation of class requires focus on wider aspects of life other than work, such as for example the cultural and social influences on peoples’ lives.

Also in a marked shift from both Marxist based evaluations regarding class consciousness and indeed those theorists such as Goldthorpe (1969) that suggest the decline of working class consciousness, the newer class analysis’ question the idea of class consciousness at all, preferring to explore class as adding context to individual lives.

Primarily Kirk suggests the transition between classes is a way of identifying the difference in experiences that are not solely related to individual’s economic wealth (or lack of it). To do this he initially uses the analogy of ‘climbing the social ladder’, which he argues is problematic as it is not a straightforward process either sociologically or psychologically (Kirk 2008: 2). Kirk accredits the ‘structure of feeling’ amongst working class individuals with as much value in terms of the partial construction of individuals within the class as the economic locations people occupy. Within these theoretical boundaries the lived experiences of people that are grounded in social and historical contexts produce long lasting social and cultural formations (Kirk 2008: 2).

Kirk advances these discussion points by arguing that cultural and social capital are
equally as important in the formation of class as economic capital and that in general the working class are unable to obtain the necessary cultural and social capital that is valued within a hierarchal society because of the constraints that the same society places upon them.

Subsequently, Kirk (2008: 4) questions whether for those working class people that do acquire cultural and economic capital more advanced than the cultural and economic capital of their origin, changing their ‘way of being in the world’ and the social and cultural signifiers they identify with, react to and interact with is easily achievable. The example Kirk uses is of teachers from working class backgrounds undertaking the transition from one class to that of the professional, but not necessarily being able (or willing) to alter the values and identity associated with their inherent social, cultural and economic background.

“Perhaps another way of putting this would be that the deep seated habitus derived from culture and upbringing harbours profound structures of feeling which interact dialogically and in complex ways with subsequent experience, shaping and defining the working class subjects alignments and affiliations to a particular formation and way of being”. (Kirk 2008: 4).

Delving further into this particular theoretical spectrum is Sayer (2005) who initially acknowledges the limitations of Marxism in terms of its focus on relations within the
means of production to the detriment of acknowledging the possibility that variation and differentiation exist within the working class experience, making it in Sayer’s opinion an abstract study of the working class.

However, he does argue that although Marx can be critiqued for not taking into account wider aspects of social life such as gender differences within the working class experience of work, this wasn’t the overall goal of the study which would of been (in part) to explore the economic conditions that encourages capitalism (Sayer 2005: 72-73). Putting Marx’s study in context allows Sayer to start to broach the analytical approach that he prefers to utilise, notably that class although heavily influenced by, is far more than just an individuals relation to their economic status, but is instead intrinsically inter-related to a “deeply embodied sense of self” that influences individuals appearance, behaviour, what they value and how everyday ‘feelings’ such as pride and envy are related to how individuals value themselves (Sayer 2005: 22).

Sayer continues by discussing the idea that all subjects have internal conversations that are utilised as a form of reflexivity to make sense of the social world and the individual place within it. However, Sayer argues that the working class have often had their ‘life of the mind’, internal conversations, or reflections denied to them, particularly within the field of academia (Sayer 2005: 29). Ensuring acknowledgment that working class people are subject to and influenced by internal conversations as much as any other individuals is an important theme within this research project.
Additionally combining an evaluation of the act of internal reflexivity by working class individuals with an analysis later in the research of the working class experience of education, assists in re-evaluating many of the studies on education and the working class that in some cases situate the working class as not only having limited opportunities from within the system, but limited ambitions of what they want out of the education system.

“As with any casual power, the effects of this exercise of reflexivity may be overridden by other obstacles or forces. That many of the intentions and plans developed through our internal conversations are frustrated by external constraints does not mean that they can be ignored by social scientists, for they also influence what we do within the constraints, and the failures certainly matter to the subjects, and affect what they do subsequently whether they increase their resolve or moderate their ambitions. Sometimes we manage to change or escape the constraints” (Sayer 2005: 29-30).

Sayers’ use of ideas surrounding ‘internal conversations’ are utilised within his study in part to support, but also to critique in certain areas some of the work of Bourdieu. In particular Sayer references Bourdieu’s ideas surrounding ‘habitus’ and how habitus refers to the set of dispositions that individuals acquire through the experience of socialisation, which in turn sub-consciously orientates them towards the social and the physical world they exist within. According to Sayer, Bourdieu’s use of ‘habitus’ suggests the dispositions that individuals are subject to are down to a form of osmosis,
whereby individuals absorb aspects of their social world and then subconsciously ‘dispose’ themselves to the ‘game they are situated within’ (Sayer 2005: 28).

Whilst Sayer largely agrees with Bourdieu’s analysis he does argue that the continual act of internal reflexivity ultimately means that individuals evaluate and learn from the social world around them as well as subconsciously absorbing aspects of the world they are part of. For example Sayer debates that as individuals are continually interpreting and forming understandings of the various discourses they are subject to, they will inevitably also come across discourses which vary to their dispositions at which point through the process of internal conversation they will make a sub-conscious judgement on whether to alter a disposition within a particular area, or to knowingly continue on a particular path (Sayer 2005: 28).

Sayer’s interpretations of some of Bourdieu’s work is useful as they allow suggestion that external processes for example deindustrialisation, increased privatisation of public services, increased individualisation within a consumer rather than a producer society, will potentially situate working class people into certain social positions and their sub-conscious habitus will mean reactions in certain ways that will in part re-enforce the social world around them.

For example the lack of availability of traditional forms of ‘working class work’ may predispose some working class people to not actively engage in processes that will determine outcomes of work. However, it can be argued that none of this means that
working class people do not have internal conversations whereby they process possibilities of embracing different kinds of social actions associated with a different habitus.

Whilst advocating the more socially stratified approach to class analysis and acknowledging the influence of Bourdieu on her own theoretical developments, there are nevertheless further critiques of his work within the more recent analyses of class undertaken by Skeggs (2011) and Skeggs and Loveday (2012).

Skeggs uses the idea of ‘personhood’ to argue that Bourdieu’s theories have the inability to offer explanations of how working class people form personhoods, when they cannot legitimize themselves as ‘subjects of value’ (Skeggs 201: 474; Skeggs and Loveday 2012: 501).

Skeggs acknowledges the use of Bourdieu’s theories in relation to evaluating individuals as complex human beings that develop over time as their habitus changes and develops through the life course. However, she also identifies that Bourdieu’s analysis of the inequality faced by many working class people within society is placed within the context of access to the higher forms of culture and socialization needed to advance progressively within life being blocked through social structures and institutions, like for example the common language utilised within education systems not being the common language of working class people.
Skeggs suggests that instead of just evaluating the working class experience of inequality in this way, there should also be an acknowledgment of a more general ‘person value’ which includes capitals described by Bourdieu, but also has the ability to include the excluded and their social values, actions and effects as legitimate (2012 476). In other words working class culture should be allowed within theory to be subject to equality of value to that of the value laden ‘high culture’.

As an example of the way social processes work to de-recognise valid working class cultures Skeggs identifies a number of trends amongst the women she interviewed within her research on ‘Imagining Personhood Differently’ (2011).

Primarily, the women didn’t necessarily want to be identified as working class and this is a theme that emanates from other recent research and will be returned to shortly. Secondly, they didn’t want to be identified as middle class, a class of which they associated with being ‘uncaring’. Instead they elaborated values such as ‘looking out for one another’, maintaining humour despite bleak social and economic situations and ultimately; “Their was a revalorisation of relationships made from local, familial sociality where other people were supportive connectivities, not sources for self accumulation” (Skeggs 2011 504).

Whilst within a different context and focusing on working class geographical spaces for example inner city comprehensive schools, Reay et al (2007) also acknowledges the de-valuing of working class culture, people and spaces. “If we are to move to a position
where positive meaning and value are accorded to working classness, we first need to
counter the invidious representations of the urban poor and the places they inhabit as
unruly people in unruly places” (2007 1199).

Taking on board the analyses of Skeggs (2011), Skeggs and Loveday (2012) and Reay et al (2007), a central aspect of new class analysis becomes apparent. Whilst theories developed by Bourdieu (1984) that assist in moving beyond ideas of class being formed around a distinct group of people with a distinct consciousness that either is or isn’t on the wane in recent decades are indeed useful. Adopting key aspects of social stratification theories assist in evaluating working class experiences as experiences that are individualised and impacted upon by numerous individual variables, such as gender, race, capital accumulation, family background and geographical space inhabited. Adopting social stratification as a method of class analysis also offers the potential to acknowledge that some experiences or variables could be shared across individuals creating the potential for some common class experiences.

However, acknowledging the benefits of adopting a socially stratified method of class analysis alone isn’t solely sufficient and like Skeggs (2011) and Reay et al (2007) this thesis would advocate that there needs to be an acknowledgement not just of the class based biased within social structures and institutions that prevent access to higher cultural and social strata, but also a recognition that working class cultures and ways of being in the world have value and to an extent are often denigrated to the disadvantage of working class people and advantage of other people and groups.
Despite the advocacy of much of the evaluations with the more recent class analyses’, it is also important to highlight some of the critiques of the methods and language employed within more recent class evaluations.

In particular Bottero (2004) applauds the transformation of class analysis away from the ‘minimalistic’ position of Marxist influenced theories based around collective class actions and also the post modern ‘death of class’ theorists, to the recognition of the influence of social and cultural formation on the individual class experience. However, she does still take issue with what she views as the tendency of new class theorists to retain elements from traditional class analysis.

For example, Bottero (2004) believes that whilst analysing individualised class experiences, these experiences are more often than not placed upon a ‘class of people’.

“Within new accounts of ‘class’ as cultural, individualised, and implicit, there is still a tendency to look back to older versions of class theory – as collective, explicit and oppositional. The uneasy relationship of these different aspects of ‘class’ threatens to undo the considerable advances that have been made in the organizing process of hierarchy and inequality” (2004: 987).
Bottero (2004: 987) continues by highlighting the potential contradiction between maintaining class categories within new class analyses’, when many of the same theorists seem to be finding a divide between class conditions that people live within and individuals’ reactions of those conditions not being perceived as based around class.

Savage et al (2001) in some of their earlier research in the field focused on class and class perceptions in particular and formulates similar findings as to those alluded to by Bottero (2004). In particular they found their research participants recognised structural class inequalities but were reluctant to label themselves as working class. Class is summarised as a set of external reference points which individuals navigate not necessarily a category to which people refer to themselves (2001: 882).

A fundamental difference between the two sets of research lies within Bottero’s insistence that individuals often naturally migrate to similar people and that such migration cannot be accused of reproducing hierarchal inequality (2004: 995). This is fundamentally important in Bottero’s critique of new class analyses’ and their tendency to still use traditional class groupings, that are by their nature oppositional. This thesis would however, suggest that whether implicit or explicit individual or group action which ends up structurally maintaining the advantage for large swathes of individuals who also possess many similar class variables and traits, is ultimately inverted class action.

It is also interesting that whilst Savage et al (2001) seem to be in broad agreement with
Bottero (2004) in one sense regarding the contextual nature of class, they then seem to further fall into what presumably Bottero would believe is a theoretical trap in later research, by forming new class categories on the back of a wide ranging survey run in conjunction with the BBC. In the more recent Savage et al (2013) research, methods advocated within this chapter of recognising the mediation of class by social and cultural aspects of life as well as the economic are employed. Savage et al (2013) then utilise their findings to establish seven new class categories which incorporate the Elite, Established Middle Class, Technical Middle Class, New Affluent Workers, Traditional Working Class, Emergent Service Sector and the Precariat (Savage et al 2013: 231-232).

Without going into detail on all elements of the Savage et al (2013) class model, it is useful to focus briefly on two of their categorisations, the Traditional Working Class and the Precariat. Within the Savage et al (2013: 240-243) model the traditional working class are a “residue of earlier historical periods”. Whilst the precariat are the most economically deprived, are located in old industrial areas, are unlikely to have attended university and are over represented amongst the unemployed.

Whilst acknowledging throughout the research the complexities and difficulties in terms of forming a clear distinction or model of a working class, particularly in the contemporary period post over three decades of deindustrialisation, this project still finds some difficulty in accepting a straightforward separation of categories of ‘traditional working class’ and ‘precariat’.
The thesis argues that the precariat may well exist but that they could equally be labelled the ‘displaced working class’, for example those within society that may have remained as part of a traditional working class if processes at times largely political, didn’t dispossess them of their potential cultural, social and economic inheritance. This is an over simplified assessment and indeed this thesis would suggest that the categories developed by Savage et al (2013) are useful, but there needs to be acknowledgement not only of the potential theoretical problems with the categorisations, but also of the need for recognition of the fluidity between categorisations that would in turn align with the adoption of a socially stratified model of class analysis.

This thesis therefore acknowledges the utility of new class distinctions within the contemporary period. However, the thesis still advocates a definition of what it is to be ‘working class’ that is socially stratified. Such a definition recognises the individual nature of class, accepts the fluidity of class in that it becomes difficult for individuals to recognise or acknowledge their class because individual variables in their lives such as work, education and family life are constantly shifting. It also recognises that in any given period despite potentially huge differences in aspects of individual’s lives there will be distinct class variables that span shifting and changing groups of people to create distinct and possibly temporary class experiences around certain social phenomena.

Conclusions

When attempting to construct a framework that encompasses the constituent elements of a working class in the UK, this paper initially acknowledges the potential difficulties
that utilising the term ‘working class’ throughout this paper raises.

In particular the chapter highlights that although earlier forms of industrialisation may have encouraged a more readily available group of workers that could be termed ‘working class’ within various theoretical debates, such studies may still have to a certain degree abstracted out specific groups of people for analysis at the expense of others. For example whilst this paper acknowledges the influence on contemporary sociological thinking of Marx and Engels, they still to a degree focus on the ‘working man’ with, in particular the writings of Engels having little to say about the influence of race or gender in the conditions of the working class within the UK at a specific point in history.

However, it is also recognised that within the particular point in the development of capitalist systems through which Engels and Marx started to develop their ideological direction, the group of people considered under the term ‘working class’ were a potentially less complex group to study than the group of people that could be considered under the term in contemporary Britain.

Some theorists argue that the emergence in the post World War Two years of the consumer society reduced class differentials as higher incomes earned by working class people, combined with technological advances in the workplace, raised many workers to a middle class status’, including migration away from traditional industrial communities to newer suburbs. Marxist critics of ‘embourgeoisement theories’ debate
that even if workers wages had risen they were still in subordinate positions within specific modes of production. At the same time the counter critics’ debate that the consumer society actually encourages demand and desire for goods that still outstrips income, causing the potential for the maintenance of class conflict.

However, both embourgeoisement theory advocates and the Marxist counter critics potentially miss a number of important factors within their analyses. Primarily the counter critique doesn’t necessarily debate the idea that the ‘working class’ are now subject to a higher standard of life. This is problematic for a number of reasons, in particular because it doesn’t recognise that a large number of working people do not earn higher wages in the post war period and do not necessarily move to the suburbs. This is important in particular when taking into account severe changes within society that have taken place since the 1970’s that have witnessed large scale deindustrialisation within the UK, alongside the emergence of more insecure employment patterns.

Within this context a new wave of class analyses has emerged within academia. The new wave both reject the post modernist assertion that due largely to fundamental changes within industrial societies working class culture is now largely obsolete. However, the new class analyses also questions the very idea that class consciousness does or ever could exist and therefore challenges those theorists such as Goldthorpe et al (1969) that suggest class consciousness from the post war period onwards existed even if it was on the wane.
Instead influenced by the theoretical developments of Pierre Bourdieu, those undertaking class evaluations in the contemporary period (Bottero 2004; Kirk 2008; Reay et al 2007; Skeggs 2011; Skeggs and Loveday 2012; Sayer 2005; Savage et al 2001; Savage et al 2013), focus their attentions on the wider social and cultural influences on class and the individualised, socially stratified nature of (working) class experience.

There have been critiques of the new wave of class analyses, in particular Bottero (2004) whilst adhering to the idea of exploring the individualised nature of class in contemporary society, rejects the tendency for new class theorists to undertake such evaluations and still place these evaluations within classed groupings more akin to traditional class analysis.

This thesis would disagree with some of Bottero’s (2004) assertions by adhering to the idea that even within a socially stratified analysis of class there is room for fluid, shifting and temporary common class experiences amongst different individuals. There has nevertheless recently been advocacy for the creation of newer class categories that may be problematic.

For example Savage et al (2013) have undertaken wide ranging research whereby they have concluded there are now seven class categories (within the UK), of which the diminishing traditional working class are one as are the new precariat, which is a category occupied by the most economically disadvantaged in the country. This chapter
has argued that such stringent class categories do not take on board ideas that social and political processes outside of the control of the average person may have actually, disposed the ‘precariat’ from their place amongst the traditional working class.

Despite some reservations the chapter welcomes the arrival in theory of new class categories for analysis and discussion, but prefers to advocate a definition of working classness within this study, whereby individuals occupy a place within a class stream and this is influenced by economic and family background, by race, gender, geographical location and many other factors. Within this definition an individuals’ place within the class stream is fluid and continually shifting in accordance with changes within social, cultural and economic circumstances, an example could be of a ‘working class’ person attending university and experiencing a gradual development of their habitus through interaction with others from different class streams.

Within this definition economic, social and cultural disadvantage and a hegemonic disregard of working class culture, means that working class people are less likely to experience greater fluidity within their place within class structures. However, the constantly shifting nature of an individuals’ independent class variables, results in individual class perceptions being increasingly difficult to ascertain and ideas of consistent and lasting class consciousness being difficult to realise. Nevertheless at specific times and temporary in nature there remains the potential for individuals to share common class traits and variables and so common class experiences that are subject to change and development.
Chapter Three:  Structural and cultural incompatibility: The working class and the education system

Introduction

This chapter utilises the class analysis framework identified earlier to contextualise evaluation of theoretical debates on the working class experience of education within the UK. Evaluating key literature in the field spanning the best part of the last four decades, a summary of how working class experiences of education differ to that of other groups is explored. The analysis of the literature within this chapter also encourages an evaluation of how (working) class action or indeed inaction in regards to the education received has been delineated within the developing field of research.

Initially an analysis of Goldthorpe’s (1996) work that highlights the ‘primary’ and ‘secondary’ effects that influence the educational choices of working class people, allows for an acknowledgement at the outset of the chapter that there are structural impositions placed on working class people that impact on their explicit and implicit educational choices.

Like Goldthorpe (1996), Ashton and Field’s (1976) earlier study also focuses on the direction school leavers can take towards the end of their formal education. However, whereas Goldthorpe (1996) concludes that working class children make rational educational decisions based (to an extent) on their family background, Ashton and Field’s (1976) analysis indicates that more hereditary decisions are made by school
leavers based on the class of their parents.

From the same era Willis (1977) ultimately affords some working class school children more agency by undertaking a Marxist evaluation of what he terms the ‘counter culture’ white working class boys in a Midlands comprehensive school form.

The chapter continues through an analysis of Brown’s (1987) study regarding the schooling of ‘ordinary kids’. Fundamentally Brown offers a critique of Willis’ earlier assertions that working class children that do not engage in the ‘counter culture’ are in fact allowing themselves to be indoctrinated into bourgeoisie methods of exploitation. However, Brown’s research is also useful for the significant differences it starts to highlight in terms of school leavers transitional experiences in the height of the Thatcher political era in the 1980’s compared to earlier studies from the 1970’s.

To conclude the chapter reference is made to earlier debates highlighting the complexities in analysing the construction of a working class in contemporary Britain. Attempting to address this problem to a small degree an evaluation of research is undertaken regarding the experience of ethnic minorities within the British education system (Sikes and Rizvi (eds) 1997; Sewell 1997) as well as the educational and transitional experiences of working class girls (Goodwin and O’Connor 2002; Gaine and George 1999).
The impact of primary and secondary affects on working class educational decisions

Primarily, it is useful to highlight a broad theoretical model delineated by Goldthorpe (1996) that attempts to offer an explanation as to how social and cultural aspects of class start to impact on individual educational decisions and actions from a very young age, but with increasing velocity at the later stages of schooling.

Goldthorpe has utilised a version of Rational Action Theory (RAT) largely in opposition to what he sees as the Marxist and also Liberal schools of theory in relation to the dynamics of class. It is not in the remit of this thesis to offer an analysis of RAT, however it is worthwhile noting that Goldthorpe (1996: 484) argues that Marxist and Liberal forms of class analysis are concerned with either class formation in the former or the decomposition of class in the latter, whereas RAT is concerned with the stability of class and the powerful resistance that class relations and related life chances display.

Whilst through the use of RAT Goldthorpe sustains the idea of coherent class groupings, ideas challenged to a degree within the theoretical definitions of class adhered to in this study. He does however accept ‘individualism’ as a methodological concept in relation to how social phenomena results from the action and interaction of individuals (1996: 485). Goldthorpe uses ‘individualism’ in his evaluation of class differentials to highlight how individual actions and goals although in many cases helping to sustain subservient positions within the social order are actually intelligible as they are conditioned by the resources, opportunities and constraints available to
particular people through the class structure (Goldthorpe 1996: 486).

In relation to Goldthorpe’s evaluation of what he terms throughout his study as ‘differentials in educational attainment’, he initially acknowledges that since the mid-twentieth century there has been an expansion of educational provision within economically advanced societies, which has heralded a substantial rise in the average level of educational attainment. However, he progresses by tempering any overly optimistic assertions that class differentials are being gradually broken down through educational attainment, by referring to research that has consistently found that despite educational expansion class differentials have actually changed little generationally.

“More specifically, if one envisages educational careers as compromising a series of transitions, or ‘branching points’, then, as these successively arise, children of less advantaged class origins have remained, to much the same extent, more likely than children of more advantaged origins to leave the educational system rather than continue in it; or, if they do continue, to follow courses that, through the kinds of qualification to which they lead, reduce their chances of continuing further” (Goldthorpe 1996: 487).

In part Goldthorpe addresses these issues by suggesting that the inherent culture of the advantaged classes leads them to place more value on their children’s education than parents of other classes. The analysis of societal denigration of working class cultures
and values is discussed throughout the thesis and would question how Goldthorpe assesses value systems in his study. However, what is more useful is his theoretical analysis of how over a period in time within families, socialisation takes place that predispose individuals to make certain decisions regarding their education.

Primary and secondary effects are viewed as the signifiers that impact on the differences in educational attainment between the classes. Initially primary effects are seen as those that impact on individuals initial ‘demonstrated ability’ within the early school system and it is argued are compromised by overarching influences that include the family, culture, psychology or genes. Primary effects are therefore viewed as one of the key components that outline the possible range of future educational outcomes for individual children (Golthorpe 1996: 490-491).

However, it is the secondary effects that arise at the later stages of formal schooling that are deemed to systematically impact on the conditions that influence the extended educational choices and subsequently life choices and chances (1996: 491). It is at the secondary stage that Goldthorpe highlights the influence of people’s social, cultural and socio-economic capital as extremely influential in placing them in positions where the choices open to them are unequal.

For example he argues that parental earnings will have a real influence on both a child’s choice to continue within further education after formal education, but also the value placed on the potential educational choices open to a child. Therefore educational
choices regarding further and higher education will have substantially different implications for families on lower incomes as costs are more inhibitive than to those of a higher class status.

In this regards parents who have children who are at the age where they are coming to the end of their formal education, will normally be at an average age themselves whereby they will see their earnings continue to rise if they are undertaking professional or managerial positions. Whereas those parents of the same age grouping undertaking manual work will potentially have already seen their income start to flatten out, which in turn will have an impact on the conditions for the future educational choice of their children (Goldthorpe 1996: 493-494).

Goldthorpe’s study is useful for elaborating how individual agency helps working class people make rational educational decisions albeit within social structures that only allow limited options. It is useful to further explore how agency has either been denied or elaborated in differing ways within influential studies regarding working class experiences of education across recent decades.

**Deferred gratification to alienated instrumentalism: Key concerns within the working class experience of education**

Ashton and Field’s (1976) study of young workers experiences transferring from school into the workplace is a useful starting point within the analysis of research undertaken
on working class experiences of education. However, it is important to highlight that large parts of the study are very much related to the era in it was undertaken. This can be delineated most obviously through their analysis of working class communities in a period that still heralded relatively large scale employment within traditional working class industries.

Within this analysis they argue that close community bonds are formed particularly in limited geographical areas with an obvious industrialised influence and that these bonds are formed around both work and non work activities (1976: 37-38). At a later point in this thesis an in-depth evaluation is undertaken of theories (Charlesworth 2000; Pahl 1984) that in part point to rapid deindustrialisation and the relative decimation of such communities in the decades since the Ashton and Field study.

Nevertheless despite being bound within the historical period it was conducted within the Ashton and Field (1976) study makes some important assertions. Primarily the authors identify the increased professionalisation of occupations within British society from the 1960’s onwards as being intrinsically linked to the simultaneous increase in emphasis on educational certification and the demand from employers for paper qualifications over the same period (1976: 29).

To a degree in line with Goldthorpes (1996) study of two decades later, Ashton and Field (1976) also identify parental income as a key factor in a child’s ability to succeed within the dominant educational structure. However, whereas Goldthorpe (1996)
concentrates on the very ‘rational’ educational decisions individual working class children make, Ashton and Field propose a model based more on inherent cultural behaviour across large elements of the working class.

They argue that because of economic poverty parents from many working class families are considered to be living in the ‘immediate present’, for example a primary focus of living in the present would be continually having to find money to pay household bills. Working class parents continually living in the present would not be able to undertake any long term planning or goal setting and the suggestion is because working class children learn from their parents to view the world in terms of the ‘immediacy of the present’ they and their parents view education predominately in terms of its value in assisting the child of school leaving age to get paid employment (1976: 39-41).

On the other hand the middle class are deemed to have the economic capital that ultimately allows the degree of freedom needed to make long term plans including how to utilise the education system to maintain the individual and families social position. As middle class families have more income than working class counterparts they can part take in longer term planning strategies, that to a certain extent are based around sacrificing the ‘pleasures of the here and now’, processes Ashton and Field identify ‘deferred gratification’.

Such longer term planning includes being able to afford and putting money aside for activities for children, such as registering for pre-school play groups and also
additionally children to parent contact being deemed to be different to working class counterparts. For example, Ashton and Field suggest middle class children are responded to by their individual characteristics rather than a standard response based out of living in the immediate present (1976: 75-77). The process of ‘deferred gratification’ would also mean that middle class children will gain an expectation from their parents that the period they spend in school sacrificing ‘fun’ for hard work will reap further educational and ultimately occupational and financial rewards in the long term.

Ashton and Field propose that these different ways of being in the world and the impact this has on interaction and achievement within the education system eventually lead to three main employment paths. Firstly there are ‘extended careers’ undertaken largely by the middle class, with the characteristics of this type of employment being better paid work, with more autonomy in the workplace, leading to better and bigger living accommodation and a degree of financial stability.

Interestingly they argue that the career undertaken and subsequent rewards on offer may dictate where individuals live, further damaging any sense of community bond that may exist (1976: 75). For these people work rather than community and leisure become the central interest, success at work becomes a way of measuring individual self worth with such ethics being instilled into their children (1976: 89-91).

Importantly Ashton and Field identify the education system as a key factor in allowing
the middle class to continue to dominant entries into professions and they view part of this process as being the social and cultural similarities between middle class parents and the majority of those dictating and delivering education within the system. Within this framework teachers’ social backgrounds are deemed to be similar to those of middle class parents with shared values (1976: 79).

The second employment route identified is the ‘short term career’. This work is considered to be undertaken largely by working class people. It is work that has a regular income which may increase over time and allows for a distinct move away from the culture of ‘making ends meet’ and also allows for a small degree of future planning. As there is a small degree of autonomy in the workplace, the children of these workers are viewed as being treated with the same limited autonomy by their parents (1976: 35). As a consequence the children of ‘short term career’ adults are evaluated as dominating the middle streams of state schools, whereby they may not always enjoy lessons, but they do view the subjects being taught within the context of underlying principles rather than just in the ‘immediate’ context of how a subject can help in the process of finding a job (1976: 58-59).

The final employment stream is dominated by what is termed the ‘careerless’ and “it is young people from this channel who are most susceptible to prolonged unemployment during economic recession” (1976: 104).

It’s useful to highlight that the authors considered ‘careerless’ employment to be
undertaken by a large percentage of the working class population and the work itself could be described as undesirable, low paid, with little prospects and poor working conditions. They also argue that more often than not the children of those adults undertaking ‘careerless’ work are placed in the lower streams at school (1976: 144-145).

Ultimately Ashton and Field argue that the institution of school serves to reinforce existing social, cultural and economic hierarchies, rather than necessarily helping to break the continuation of such social cycles.

“For the majority of their pupils, schools function to reinforce the self image and orientation to work derived from their family experience which is later confirmed by their experience of work” (1976: 119).

Whilst recognising the merits of comparing ‘immediate’ working class responses to education based on economic deprivation to the ‘deferred gratification’ employed by the middle classes, there are some significant gaps within Ashton and Field’s analysis. Primarily by comparing their evaluation with the model of class analysis favoured within this study, it becomes apparent that whilst it’s undeniable that many working class families live in poverty with a fundamental focus on how to ‘make ends meet’, Ashton and Field have denied such people any agency. In this respect there are no evaluations provided of the potential for outside influences on working class people
such as the media or interacting on a daily basis with people with different social and cultural terms of reference and what impacts such outside influences could have on the developing ‘habitus’ of individual working class school children.

There is no suggestion within this study that the reality of having low financial means and the impact that this ultimately has on the ability to achieve in the education system, can be overcome through contact with different media or people from different class streams. However, the finality and all encompassing nature of Ashton and Field’s study does not allow working class individuals the internal desire to move from living in the ‘immediacy’, even if such desires would potentially be unachievable within the social constraints they function within.

By revisiting Ashton and Field’s (1976) study with a theoretical lens advocating individualised and fluid continual class development, different conclusions can be drawn. For example the education system could be viewed as potentially being a fundamental element sustaining the dominant hegemony partly through an inability to create space to attempt to draw out and expand on the variety of goals, desires and values of multi-faceted working class children.

However, there are studies from the same period in time that do allow working class children agency within the school environment and even a systematic response to the inequalities existing within the structure of the UK education system. Willis (1977) undertook empirical work within a Midlands secondary comprehensive school in the
mid 1970’s. Like Ashton and Field’s research, this work is focused within a period of relatively high employment and where jobs for working class people within large scale manufacturing outlets were still fairly ubiquitous.

Willis focuses his research on what he terms the ‘counter culture’, which is predominately made up of white male working class school children. It is important to initially have a degree of understanding regarding Willis’ ideological convictions, which encourage him to go further than Ashton and Field’s earlier study in terms of critiquing the education systems unequal treatment of working class children.

Willis therefore critically evaluates what he terms the ‘common educational fallacy’, wherein in his opinion it is purveyed within many academic and also policy driven fields that education in its own right can create opportunities and upward social mobility can be achieved by individuals pushing themselves to gain qualifications. He argues that the social democrats of the time believed that education alone can transform the possibilities for the working class (1977: 127). This last point is extremely interesting in that it seems to be an educational ideology that returned with fervour with the election of the New Labour Government in 1997 and this particular area of study will be returned to in greater detail later in the research.

In direct opposition to the idea that education alone can transform the social and economic outlook of working class children, Willis instead argues that the knowledge and qualifications deemed important within the education system are about social
exclusion rather social advancement. In other words the system and its relevant components, for example qualifications, are maintained to sustain a status quo amongst the middle classes. To succeed within this framework working class children must overcome the inbuilt disadvantage of possessing the wrong class culture and instead change their basic outlook on life, in other words reject common working class values in favour of adopting middle class ones (1977: 128).

Willis’ analysis of his research participants’ actions are themselves framed through a distinct political and ideological lens. However, this doesn’t mean that his evaluation of what he terms the ‘counter culture’ is not useful, especially as it offers the opportunity to review possible working class action within the educational environment rather than the apparent passive acceptance of the dominant situation which can be read from Ashton and Field’s analysis.

“The counter culture is involved in its own way with a relatively subtle, dynamic, and, so to speak, ‘opportunity costed’ assessment of the rewards of the conformism and obedience which the school seeks to exact from working class kids. In particular this involves a deep seated scepticism about the value of qualifications in relation to what might be sacrificed to get them” (1977: 126).

Willis continues his analysis of the counter culture by arguing that white working class
boys within the culture make choices about the value of certain social criteria within the school. The example he uses is academic achievement, success and subsequent social mobility, which he debates seem as remote to these children as to be practically meaningless. Instead, success to this group is evaluated to be judged on different criteria such as ‘group mentality’ and obtaining a certain type of job (usually in manufacturing) after school, than those set out within the conventions of the formal school system (1977: 126).

Willis is additionally critical of individualism and particularly working class individuals who do engage in school culture’s other than the counter culture. In particular he argues that whilst individuals may become convinced about what is supposed to happen within society if they actively engage in the education system, the counter culture actually ‘knows best’ in relation to how the masses suffer at the hands of elitist exclusion within a system that is not set up for them to succeed. Within this framework individuals who do commit to work and ‘conform’ are placed in a position whereby they are not just giving up a part of their time, for example their time at school in relation to their lifespan, but are instead giving up on a whole set of potential social activities which cannot be measured or controlled firstly by the education system and laterally within the social sphere (1977: 128-130).

“The way in which we are all expected to pursue the same aims suggests that those at the bottom of a class society are there apparently, and they believe it for themselves, because of their own smaller capacity to
achieve these aims” (1977: 147).

However, his analysis is to a degree abstract in a number of fundamental ways. Primarily, in parts of his analysis he offers the boys involved in the counter culture too much credibility, particularly in respect of the counter cultures apparent understanding that the school system operates a system of ‘elitist exclusion’. There is little analysis of whether individuals want to be part of the counter culture, even understand that it is a counter culture or would in fact prefer to be part of the mainstream if they had the opportunity.

In differing ways to Ashton and Field’s study of the same period, Willis’ research may have benefited from an analysis that took into account the internal thought processes of the individuals deemed to be part of the counter culture. This may have helped to draw out the individualistic motivations within the group, both in terms of being part of the counter culture, but also being an individual with internal hopes and motivations with regards to education and work. Also like a general Marxist evaluation of class itself the counter culture is viewed almost as a static group with the same thoughts and motivations, not a group of individuals that happen to experience some commonalities of deficient educational experiences from within the same locality.

His evaluations like many similar research pieces of the same era, are also very much focused on the particular grouping of the white working class male. This framework in itself doesn’t allow for a more multi-layered approach to working class experiences of
education that an analysis of the educational differences and similarities experienced by women and working class school children from different ethnic backgrounds allows.

Combined with Willis’ limited scope of what compromises the working class is his ideological positioning of those working class children that do not engage in the counter culture. He is relatively scathing towards those who he views as undertaking the individualistic path within the system. In Willis’ terms this means giving up on distinct cultural values as well as a set of criteria that can be utilised to challenge the dominant authority. Within the ideological terms of reference set out within this study, the make-up of the working class is extremely complex with numerous independent and dependent variables many of which are shared amongst some individuals forming distinct class traits and experiences. Within this framework there is little room for an analysis that rejects the decisions made by a number of working class people when those individual decisions themselves may be evaluated as distinct working class reactions to dominant cultural values in operation within the education system.

Brown’s (1987) research on ‘Schooling Ordinary Kids’ also questions many of the assertions made by Willis (1977) and at the same time sets out a broader outline of how working class experiences and reactions to the education system may in fact be multi-faceted and complex. Brown’s analysis is also useful as it is set within a differing political and social climate to the earlier studies, with a Thatcher inspired marketisation strategy starting to infiltrate the education service, encouraging the decline of large scale manufacturing and influencing mass unemployment amongst working class adults.
Brown initially argues that Marxist evaluations of the working class experience within the education system, such as those purported by Willis (1977) operate within an ideological context of what the school system ‘does’ to children. This according to Brown, is a starting position that does not allow a place for human agency (1987: 12).

Furthering his evaluation Brown critically analyses Willis’ assertion that working class children who do not reject the dominant values of the school have merely been indoctrinated into the bourgeois modes of thinking required to be successful within the school system. Instead Brown highlights the idea that such evaluations assume that the ‘counter culture’ is the ‘natural’ working class response to the school. There is no recognition that mass compliance within the school system, resulting in both minor success and majority academic failure, is also a standard working class response to ideological foundations within school systems (1987: 25).

Brown argues that theories regarding the ‘counter culture’ do not take into account the experiences of working class children who do not reject school and make an effort in the classroom, even though there are severe limits surrounding such commitment. Brown terms the juxtaposition of working class mass compliance with the realisation that there are real social, cultural and economic inequalities dictating what can actually be achieved as ‘alienated instrumentalism’ (1987: 66).

Brown does offer a contextual analysis to his study that questions whether the degree to which such alienated instrumentalism would continue in the wake of the mass
unemployment facing many working class communities in the 1980’s. He suggests that responses to the education system will become subject to even more class fragmentation whereby middle class pupils and parents intensify the competition for qualifications that will provide them with an edge in a shrinking employment sphere. Whilst in an evaluation very similar to the ‘secondary effects’ analysis offered by Goldthorpe (1996), Brown suggests that many working class pupils and parents may start to question the value and purpose of the school system more than they had done previously (1987: 67).

It is useful at this point to provide a closer analysis of the social and political context in which Brown places his analysis of the working class interaction with the education system, not least as there are distinct parallels with the contemporary political, economic and social climate.

Brown assesses that by the mid 1970’s economic recession and rising unemployment eroded the consensus about the function of the education system amongst the political parties, with the right wing attacking the comprehensive school system for not delivering on expected outcomes. From the early 1980’s the new Conservative Government decided to change the UK education strategy, partly through limiting budgets in order to avoid having a population of highly educated but unemployable people (1987: 108-109).

Brown importantly identifies the significant relationship between working class
experiences of the education system and the particular political and economic context, which serves to highlight previous studies by Ashton and Field (1976) and to an extent Willis (1977) as evaluations of the working classes education and transitional experiences that are very much of their particular period in time.

Brown achieves this by pinpointing long standing deficiencies within the education system that have never been significantly resolved but only become really apparent within certain economic frameworks. He suggests that since the post war period, despite investment within the education system, there has always been unequal educational and occupational opportunities for working class children. He continues by suggesting that these issues were accommodated largely because working class youth formed social identities, which were influenced in part by the communities they grew up in and the occupational identities that developed within those communities, which in turn limited the demand for education amongst this group. However, during a period of large scale recession and deindustrialisation such as in the 1980’s, already existing educational inequalities amongst the classes become more visible;

“It is precisely because of the limited impact of the school on the cultural practices and understanding of the ordinary kids that the transition from school into manual and lower grade white collar jobs has remained unproblematic until there were no longer enough of these jobs to allow ordinary kids the chance of getting one” (Brown 1987: 111).
Brown establishes a useful framework whereby he, to an extent in a similar fashion to Willis (1977), explores the idea that the British education system operates within a different cultural context from the lives of working class children that attend school, putting these children at an immediate disadvantage. One way in which Brown differs significantly to Willis’ Marxist evaluation is his assertion that there are many different valid working class responses to the inequalities produced through the education system and that these can compromise acceptance and conformity as well as resistance to the norms of the school. The other important assertion within Brown’s analysis that differs significantly from earlier texts due to the context in which his research takes place, is that the school systems failings in terms of substantially educating working class children were to a degree hidden in earlier decades due to the abundance of ‘working class’ employment.

This analytical framework highlights that when this type of employment starts to disappear largely because of Governmental policies and advocacy of market principles, the issues with education structures and cultural incompatibility become more apparent. Within this context it is working class children that are disadvantaged, primarily by the education systems natural cultural alignment away from working class values and also through policy orientated disintegration of the fall back position of readily available employment in industry.

However, whilst Brown (1987) provides a more robust framework for the analysis of working class experiences within the British education system than earlier studies, there are still to a degree assumptions made within Brown’s research that replicate those
made within studies conducted by Ashton and Field (1976) and Willis (1977), for example the complexities of what constitutes the working class are not significantly dealt with in any of the research projects reviewed within this part of the thesis.

With this in mind it is important to acknowledge that evaluations of the differences in educational experiences of working class girls and working class individuals from the wide variety of ethnic groups reflected in British society, can justify a research study in its own right. It is nevertheless important to at least recognise and reflect to an extent within this study how differences in the social make up of working class people can influence their relationship with the education system.

The influence of independent variables on working class experiences of education

As has been mentioned at various points within this chapter, many of the significant studies undertaken within recent decades on the working class experience of education have similar traits, in terms of the way they largely abstract class from other independent variables such as race and gender. The proposal of this study is that it is extremely important to evaluate, even briefly, some of the important research that has taken place on the experiences of girls and some ethnic minority groups within the education system.

The importance of such an evaluation is two-fold, in that it is primarily relevant to acknowledge that there are some differences in the working class relationship to the
education system dependent on race and gender. Secondly, despite major differences within interactions with the education system, there are still significant similarities in terms of experience. Such similarities of experience suggest that there are certain independent variables that at times cross the variety of backgrounds of working class people forming distinct class traits and distinct class experiences of education and laterally transition.

Many of the important studies on the working class experience within education seem to predominately focus on the social grouping of white working class boys. In many respects this can be read as being related to the period in history when much of this research took place. In the 1970’s and early 1980’s despite significant immigration into the UK, much of the traditional forms of working class employment being undertaken straight after school took place in industries still occupied largely by white working class men.

However, despite the abstract nature of class analysis in these studies being to a degree influenced by the historical and political period in which they were developed, there is still evidence that more contemporary studies and educational policy debate still favour the analysis of the ‘white’ working class experience of education. Studies such as that undertaken by Gordon (2003) resonate quite strongly with Willis’ (1977) earlier study, in that her evaluations are predominately fixed on the white working class experience of education and how conformity within the school could result in alienation from the (white) working class community (2003: 192).
Within this analysis the class system within Britain operates on a ‘caste’ like basis with the white working class being the lowest caste, wherein although immigrants are acknowledged in terms of complicating the existing class system, they are deemed to have replaced the white working class within the hierarchy of the overall social structure (2003: 192-193).

More interesting are Gillborn and Kirton’s (2000) response to comments made by the then head of Ofsted (Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills), Chris Woodhead in the mid-1990’s regarding the supposedly systematic failure of white working class boys within the UK education system. The study disputes some of Woodhead’s assertions through research undertaken within a local education authority area where working class boys are low achievers.

Gillborn and Kirton suggest their research indicates that many of the white students interviewed drew connections between the educational disadvantage they experience and what they believe to be the racist disadvantage that is elaborated to them in the home and community. They argue these findings reinforce much of the discourse from the 1980’s onwards of the white working class as victims of the liberal establishment (2000: 280).

Gillborn and Kirton instead debate the poor performance of the white working class boys interviewed within their research was not down to inherent racism but instead class bias, resulting from socio-economic structures that oppress the working class in general.
They assert that problematically class bias is not conceived by either the white working class boys within the research or indeed the communities they live within, with ‘anti-white’ racism instead blamed for the disadvantaged position they find themselves within, both in terms of the education system and society as a whole (2000: 285).

Other research undertaken from the mid 1990’s onwards particularly focusing on the experiences of black students start to enable a more overarching analysis of the complexities of the working class experiences of education. Primarily, a text produced in tribute to the life of the researcher of Afro-Caribbean boy’s lives in Britain - Barry Tronya (1951-1996) (1997) provides the opportunity to analyse some of the structural issues positioning ethnic groups within the education system in the UK.

Tomlinson (1997) identifies that much of Tronya’s work was aimed at implementing antiracist education in schools and colleges whose population was predominately white. Additionally Tronya’s research also had goals of helping students to recognise they shared a variety of inequalities based on gender, class and race, with his predominant focus being on the nature of race inequality.

Tronya’s research, much like Browns (1987) study of ‘Ordinary Kids’ also identified a rapidly changing political and economic climate as being significant. However, whereas Brown’s focus is predominately on white working class children, Tronya argues those cities that were subject to industrial decline in the period of the late 1970’s and early 1980’s witnessed race becoming an increasingly important issue because of
racially segmented labour forces. This, Tronya debates, is where the education system and schools themselves became sites where racial inequalities were played out (Lingard 1997: 101).

Tronya also moves on to summarise the advance in the political ideology of the New Labour Government from the late 1990’s, which viewed education as the catalyst for social mobility for all in society. New Labour’s early educational policies are critically analysed by Tronya for the way in which they dismiss the idea of class, gender or indeed race having any significant impact on pupil’s abilities (Hatcher 1997: 127), themes that will returned to later in the research.

Whilst the review of Tronya’s influential work spanning three decades is important, for the overview it provides of the political and economic climate of the 1970’s and 1980’s and its impact on thoughts regarding race as well as class within the education system, it is useful to offer further analysis of the ethnic experience within the British education system.

Sewell (1997) highlights that within the school system black boys tend to purvey cultures of resistance. Interestingly within the ‘culture of resistance’ Sewell draws distinct lines between black boys and girls. Whereby black girls feelings of anger and frustration against the inequalities they experience at school are not, like in the case of the boys, turned against themselves, or a general dislike of either ‘whites’ or the opposite sex. Instead, within his research black girls generally accept the fact that they
are both black and female and alternatively form goals of ‘making the best’ out of their situation by aiming to achieve educational qualifications (1997: 9-17). The actions of the black girls detailed in Sewell’s research, is important in terms of providing evidence that starts to offer some explanations as to why in recent years girls from all classes have tended to reach higher attainment levels compared to boys within the same social class. The impact of gender on working class educational attainment is an issue that will be returned to shortly.

Sewell’s analysis is also interesting primarily for the way he identifies sets of black boys within his research as forming groups that were in one way or another anti school. In some ways this evaluation inadvertently links closely to Willis’ identification of the ‘counter culture’ (1977) two decades earlier. It is extremely useful to draw parallels between the two separate pieces of research, not least because of the apparent generational and ethnicity differences in the research participants. Drawing from the earlier class definitions a line of enquiry can be followed that suggests that certain independent variables within an individual’s class distinction may cross generational and cultural boundaries. For example, the unfair treatment the boys taking part in both studies believed they were subject to and the subsequent methods they employed to resist it.

However, returning to the differences Sewell draws out between black boys and their reactions to the school system, it is important to highlight that Sewell recognizes the complexities of the ‘anti school’ culture, possibly more than Willis does a generation before. In particular he highlights how some of his research participants may be both
viewed as a rebel by teachers, but at the same time purposely distance themselves from other black boys who form distinct gangs in school and subsequently are perceived as conformist by many of the boys in such groups (1997: 17).

Ultimately, Sewell makes clear connections between the incompatibility of black boys culture to the culture of the school system, but while the compatibility issues he delineates are focused on black boys, there are extreme commonalities within the cultural mismatch experienced by working class children in general and the education system in the UK.

“You can be valued and rewarded in school and society, the schools say to these students, but first you must master the culture and ways of mainstream Britain and, since mainstream (as it is represented) is essentially white, this means you must give up many characteristics of being black-styles of speech and appearance, value priorities, preferences—at least in mainstream settings like school” (1997: 193).

Sewell’s (1997) research is extremely useful in outlining the specifics of the black male experience in school within the UK and it does in parts purvey the relationship between lack of educational and cultural compatibility with not only race but class and gender as well. A relationship that is explored in greater depth by Gaine and George, when they utilise the analogy of how there are key differences in how, for example middle class Asian boys encounter the education system in comparison to working class Asian girls
(1999: 88). This example is helpful in firming up the links between the independent variables of class, race and gender, far more than a study such as Sewell’s (1997) that is focused predominately on racism and black boys cultures within the school, is able to do.

Within this more over-arching framework Gaine and George identify the term ‘culturally deprived’ as the way in which both the working classes and minority ethnic groups are socially positioned as being part of cultures that are inferior to the mainstream culture of society. Within this social positioning the children of people from these backgrounds become impossible to educate (1999: 99-100). However, to a degree the notion that the use of the term ‘culturally deprived’ is referenced at all individuals within ethnic minority groups is open to debate.

Gillborn and Mirza (2000: 19) argue that research has shown that generally pupils from non manual backgrounds achieve substantially better educational attainment levels as a whole group, than those children of the same ethnic background but from manual homes. This indicates that although cultural incompatibility between ethnic groups and the education system is a reality to a degree and is worthy of more in-depth analysis than can be provided here, the potentially more important variable is class background.

The idea of the class of people being the variable that directs an individual’s reactions and interactions with the school system as well as their overall life chances, more than any other variable including gender and race, can be drawn out more sufficiently
through an evaluation of theoretical debates about the apparent growing differentials between girls and boys school attainment levels in recent decades.

Initially growing higher attainment levels amongst girls is explained within research as being due to a number of factors including, the equalling out of educational opportunities for both sexes through the introduction of the comprehensive system, the positive impact of equal opportunities policies and legislation and new approaches to teaching and learning (Gillborn and Mirza 2000: 22). In addition it has also been argued that male disaffection with school has resulted in powerful male sub cultures being formed that are resistant to the dominant educational norms of school.

Theoretical debates about the structure and purpose of such sub cultures have been analysed earlier (Sewell 1997; Willis 1977). What is important in relation to the differences in attainment levels between boys and girls is the way that sub cultures are deemed to affect the performance of boys within the school, but that schools themselves are potentially partly to blame for the role they play in constructing and confirming dominant forms of masculinity (Gaine and George 1999: 83-84).

However, it is important to note that some researchers have argued that although there is no denying the gap in educational attainment between boys and girls, there are numerous complexities which again can be related to the independent variables that help to form the class status of individuals. For example, the variables of race and gender can combine to form significant differences within the attainment levels of girls.
from a variety of backgrounds. Whereby, although girls from all ethnic groups attained around the same percentage points higher than boys of the same ethnic groups, there were still significant differences between the ethnic groups, such as girls from white or Indian ethnic backgrounds generally attaining higher than those from Afro-Caribbean backgrounds (Gillborn and Mirza 2000: 24).

More importantly within the context of this study, it has also been argued that although the ‘gender gap’ is important and has been worthy of numerous research projects, the gap in educational attainment between black and white students, but more significantly between children of different classes is far more significant (Gillborn and Mirza 2000: 23).

**Conclusions**

It is important to acknowledge that within the class analysis framework adopted within this research project Goldthorpe’s (1996) evaluation of the understandable individualised educational decisions people make, being framed by their class background, is a useful overarching position from which to review research that analyses a range of working class interactions within the school system.

It is argued that working class people come from a variety of backgrounds, which encourage a complex range of responses to the education system, from resistance and the formation of sub cultures, to acceptance and conformity within school, to a
combination of some pupils being both perceived to resist by teachers while simultaneously being viewed as conformist by peer groups. This range of responses are dictated by the independent variables that each individual has as part of their social make up, of which race and gender are heavily weighted.

However, despite differences in the social make-up of individuals, economic deprivation has most influence on cultural and social background and interaction with the education system. As such the research referenced within this chapter has highlighted that class, influenced by economic status, as the most significant factor as to whether a child will succeed or be provided with the opportunity to make the necessary decisions to succeed within the education system and furthermore the employment sphere.

Within this theoretical framework it is important to bear in mind that the education system in the UK, both historically and in contemporary terms, remains firmly positioned as an institution valorising middle class values and ways of being in the world. (Reay 2001: 334; Whitty 2001: 289). It is also important to remember that educational policy initiatives have to be evaluated in relation to wider policy initiatives which have an interest in social class differentials and economic differentials, rather than in isolation (Whitty 2001: 293). As such the next chapter will start to relate more clearly the significance of the educational experiences of working class children to transitional processes, in terms of both the continuation of certain social cycles, but also how these processes are affected by Government economic and social policies that favour the ideology of the market.
Chapter Four: Full employment to a new millennium recession: The changing working class experiences of transition

Introduction

This chapter places the overall debates regarding the complex working class relationship with the education system within a context whereby the education system is viewed as a part of an overall social structure that both influences but is also impacted upon by the world within which it operates.

Within this contextual analysis an evaluation is undertaken of theories that delineate changes to the school to work transitional process and how these processes may be fundamentally altering for working class people and impacting on the communities they live within (Charlesworth 2000).

Initially debates evaluating the so called ‘golden age’ of school to work transitions within the 1960’s and 1970’s (Goodwin and O’Connor 2003; Vickerstaff 2003) are explored, predominately to elucidate whether the past experiences of working class school leavers were in reality straight forwards or in fact more complex than is sometimes perceived. From this starting point an analysis is undertaken of discussions that point to increasingly risky, fragmented and complex school to work transitions within the post-industrial society (Rudd and Evans 1998; Cieslik and Pollock 2002; Furlong and Cartmel 1997; MacDonald and Marsh 2004; MacDonald et al 2005;
Finally the chapter concludes by contextualising transitional debates within an overall analysis of the potential impact on working class communities of continued deindustrialisation from the 1980’s into the new millennium (Charlesworth 2000; Kirk 2003) and into a period of large scale recession (Crow et al 2009; Shildrick et al 2012).

The position this analysis initiates operates on a number of levels. Primarily there is the suggestion that fundamental social, economic and political changes that have continued for over three decades, serve to highlight to a greater degree than in earlier periods the education systems historical inadequacy in effectively supporting the large scale transition of many working class school leavers into meaningful employment.

However, the analysis also evaluates the seemingly impossible task the system has in attempting to fulfil this role in isolation. The chapter concludes by evaluating how long term processes of deindustrialisation are combining with a severe economic recession in the contemporary period in impinging on many working class peoples educational motivations, transitional opportunities and long term economic and social prospects.

**Transforming transitions**

Within many theoretical discussions around school to work transitions the traditional
viewpoint that within the UK there was a ‘golden’ period when the transitional process was straight forwards and uncomplicated has been challenged in some quarters (Goodwin and O’Connor 2003 and 2002; Vickerstaff 2003). Goodwin and O’Connor initially acknowledge that some debates have implied that in past decades the transitional process, although influenced by class, gender and race, was predominately a linear experience for a mass of pupils moving into a variety of ‘traditional industries’. Whereas in more recent years this process has become more individualised and fragmented with young people having to navigate through a variety of complex processes (Goodwin and O’Connor 2003: 3).

Goodwin and O’Connor challenge some of the assertions made largely by utilising data from studies conducted in the 1960’s that suggest young working class people of the period experienced frequent job moves, with many young workers feeling disillusioned with the work they were doing and having anxieties about the future and the lack of training they received.

Issue relating to the potential misinterpretation of transitional experiences are addressed through the suggestion that methodological approaches have changed to a degree within intervening years. Wherein there has been a shift from exploring the impact of social structures on people, to individualised approaches that dissect and analyse the complex subjective experiences of people and this in part may explain why readings of transitional experiences have shifted in emphasis (Goodwin and O’Connor 2003: 21-22).
Along similar lines, Vickerstaff (2003) also identifies the potential for more complex transitions for working class individuals within previous decades. She does initially recognise that during the period from the 1960’s up to the mid 1970’s full time employment and apprenticeships were fairly ubiquitous for young men in particular, predominately within employment arenas such as the factory and building site (2003: 271). However, Vickerstaff’s also identifies the difficulties some working class school leavers did face in the so called ‘golden’ era of transition. In particular the lack of career’s guidance, the lack of clarity amongst many people regarding career plans and the distinct mismatch between numbers of apprenticeships available and the amount of working class school leavers wanting to uptake such a role (2003: 271).

In relation to the potential for complexities in transitions to exist in earlier decades, it is useful to also reference a study by Goodwin and O’Connor (2002) that reviews the qualitative experiences of working class girls transferring to the workplace in 1960’s Leicester. In particular the study highlights that during the period many working class girls were expected to leave school at the earliest opportunity in order to take up low skilled work in factories or shops, the overarching attitude of the period was that girls would give up this low skill work once they got married and settled down to have a family (Goodwin and O’Connor 2002: 7).

In correlation, many of the research participants attitudes towards education and work seem to a degree structured by the expectations (or lack of expectations) placed upon them, for example many of those interviewed declared that when they were at school they felt it was a ‘waste of time’. However, this attitude seems to shift with some of the
What is also useful about the Goodwin and O’Connor (2002) study is the way that it highlights the differences in the expected work outcomes of working class boys and girls school leavers of the period, particularly in terms of the gender expectation in relation to sacrificing work ambitions to pursue marriage and family. The study therefore raises questions to be followed up in future research about the developing gender roles over recent decades within the working class, particularly in relation to marriage and family. What is even more useful within the Goodwin and O’Connor (2002) study is their analysis of the unfulfilled ambitions of some of the girls interviewed and this particularly resonates within an underlying theme within this project of the importance of recognising the existence of agency within the working class individual.

Goodwin and O’Connor (2002) identify the family as the most significant factor in the female school leavers occupational choices, in terms of some of the girls following in their mother’s footsteps to work, or gaining employment through an immediate family contact (2002: 14-15). In some respects this analysis relates to Ashton and Field’s (1976) study that places the occupation and economic situation of a family as having direct impact on a individuals ability to succeed within school. Ashton and Field (1976) suggest that many of the employment outcomes detailed for children of low income families end up being similar to that of their parents in terms of the lack of educational
attainment amongst this group in general leading them to short term ‘careerless’ job opportunities.

However, the difference with the Goodwin and O’Connor study is that it recognises many of the girls interviewed didn’t simply want to follow their parents into factory work, which they largely saw as undesirable and instead they wanted to undertake careers that differed significantly to their parents such as hairdressing and nursery nursing (2002: 14-15).

Ultimately though, despite the girls within the study elaborating employment ambitions outside of their immediate terms of reference the majority of them were unable to realise their ambitions, mainly because of the social and economic conditions they were placed within, within which their earlier interaction with the education system played a significant role. “In addition the girls’ own circumstances, particularly their generally low levels of educational achievement, had already conspired to militate against their ambitions” (Goodwin and O’Connor 2002: 15).

Despite the studies by Goodwin and O’Connor (2002; 2003) and by Vickerstaff (2003) raising serious doubt about the proposed linear and uncomplicated transition of working class school leavers on mass into manual employment within the period of the 1960’s through to the mid 1970’s, all of authors do acknowledge that there was more regular employment (if not career) opportunities, particularly within industry than in the contemporary period.
It is within this period of drastically reduced industrial employment combined with a severe economic recession in the later part of the first decade of the new millennium, that some theorists have declared that the transition from school to employment, especially for those from low income families has become more complex. This includes more limited employment prospects from young people, in particular those living in economically deprived areas (Cieslik and Pollock 2002; Furlong and Cartmel 1997; MacDonald and Marsh 2004; McDonald 2008; Shildrick et al 2012).

“Over the last two decades, the transition from school to work in Britain has changed quite radically, as is the case in much of Western Europe. Transitions have become more protracted, routes have increased in complexity and sequences of events have changed. Whilst young people were once able to develop fairly clear ideas about their likely destinations in the labour market, today they are much more uncertain about the implications of following particular transitional routes” (Furlong and Cartmel 1997: 1).

Whilst some of the assertions made by Furlong and Cartmel (1997) about young people having clear ideas of their employment destinations in earlier decades have been challenged earlier, there are still some debates initiated in their analysis that are useful to review. Predominately, they argue that despite educational expansion over recent decades within the UK the gap between those from middle class backgrounds attending higher education and those from lower socio-economic groups actually widened. They also note that many ethnic minority groups are also still under represented within higher
education.

However, like many of the studies already cited throughout this thesis, they ultimately assert that socio-economic advantage is the key variable in the equation (Furlong and Cartmel 1997: 4-5). Interestingly they argue that rather than class barriers being broken down in recent decades in relation to higher education attendance, it is actually the increasing access to institutions that women have enjoyed that has actually bolstered the figures in attendance across universities (1997: 5).

The relevance of Furlong and Cartmel’s (1997) debates on access to higher education to this thesis, relates to their wider social analysis that takes into account the rapid changes that have taken place within deindustrialised Britain in recent years. In particular, how the reduction in manufacturing based employment has witnessed a decrease in young people sharing similar workplace experiences, with individuals work experience increasingly becoming fragmented within small service based firms (1997: 6-7).

Adherence to the model proposed by Furlong and Cartmel (1997) means acceptance that young school leavers from low socio-economic groups are still faced, as in previous decades with a lack of opportunity to access higher education, but combined with this they now face the reality of having to enter into low paid, insecure employment within the service sector. Within this transitional framework it is also likely that occupational commonalities that may have been built up amongst young people transferring from school into large scale industry in previous decades, potentially facilitated through the
likes of the trade union movement, are now unlikely to occur due to the fragmented nature of the workplace experience (1997: 11-12).

Cieslik and Pollock (2002) expand on this line of argument by proposing that long term processes of change have fundamentally altered the norms of life for many people, with traditional ‘cultural guides’ such as family, employment and community apparently on the wane, the authors dub this phenomenon as elements of the ‘risk’ society (2002: 3). Cieslik and Pollock (2002) relate many of these perceived changes within British society to Thatcherism and in particular the pursuance of neo-liberal policies of economic individualism, in comparison to earlier egalitarian policies largely focused around achieving and maintaining full employment (2002: 4).

The authors do however, recognise that there are critiques of risk society theory, in particular they highlight criticisms that the theory neglects the traditional roles of economic and class based division within contemporary societies. Instead a model is proposed that accumulates a similar level of ‘risk’ for young school leavers of all social backgrounds, as opposed to recognising that more ‘risk’ exists within the changing industrial landscape for those from lower socio-economic groups (2002: 13).

On this point research undertaken by MacDonald and Marsh (2004) looking at the complex relationship between educational and transitional experiences and their links with social exclusion is useful. Their studies focus on the experience of young people in areas of Teesside in the North East of England, considered some of the most deprived
areas in the country. In contrast to discussions associating transitional risk as being a phenomenon crossing the social divide, MacDonald and Marsh highlight how the transitional experience is facilitated by class and geographical place.

In relation to theories pinpointing the potential for the breakdown in processes of alienated instrumentalism (Brown 1987) amongst working class children because of the combined factors of deindustrialisation and recession, MacDonald and Marsh also consider how the collapse of the industrial backbone to particular areas and its impact on the availability of ‘decent’ jobs for working people, has an impact on engagement with the education system prior to transition.

“The contemporary paucity as opposed to historical abundance of decent, working-class jobs in East Kelby has undermined the traditional educational contract that served to incorporate the majority of working-class pupils into begrudging acceptance of the instrumental value of schooling”. MacDonald and Marsh (2004: 159).

An analysis of theory touching upon some of the impacts of three decades of deindustrialisation of working class transitions from school is extremely useful. There is also a requirement to offer a more in-depth evaluation of research that discusses the actual impacts of processes of deindustrialisation on a wider sense within working class communities and how any impacts have escalated since the severe economic recession.
from 2008 onwards.

Deindustrialisation, recession and changes to working class ways of life

The section will initially continue by analysing how the contemporary economic recession may escalate fragmented transitions further by potentially polarising the transitional options available to working class school leavers even further.

Initially it is useful to evaluate Pahl’s (1984) evaluation of the development of the working class which focuses on an earlier period of large scale economic recession in the 1980’s and questions the very existence of the ‘traditional’ working class community. In particular the analysis targets the industrial towns of the north of England and the Midlands, split between factories on one side and residential areas of workers on the other as a “fossil marking a particular stage in the development of capitalism” (1984: 56).

Pahl (1984) suggests that the formation, continuation and ultimate decline of a type of influential working class community based largely around industrial work is simply part of a process of continual development. Interestingly Pahl’s (1984) research is in contrast to a more in-depth analysis by Charelsworth (2000) relating to how and why this development may have come about and the real impacts it may have on working people and their lived experiences.
Charlesworth’s (2000) research paints an emotive account of a culture in rapid decline, enforced predominately through the ideologically driven policies of successive Conservative and New Labour Governments that witnessed the advocacy of the market and individualism predominately at the expense of the collective work ethic upholding many aspects of working class community and life.

Using the work of Bourdieu and in particular the notion of ‘habitus’ and its accompanying philosophical theories to uphold his methodology, Charelsworth initially identifies significant changes occurring in recent years in relation to how working class people view themselves in relation to how they are disposed to the world they live in. He specifically uses the analogy of how school leavers heading for long term work in the mining pit disposed themselves to the world around them in earlier decades that was based largely around the collective experience of mass manual labour, compared to working class school leavers in contemporary times that have to relate their sense of self to a world whereby they will take part in lifelong retraining that sells itself as progressive education (2000: 50).

Within this line of enquiry young working class people today have different things that matter to them and the things that matter are based on a different relation to the self that is largely individualised.

Charelesworth debates that the changing sense of self amongst working class people is in fact a natural reaction to living a life within a social world that is changing rapidly
compared to earlier generations. However, unlike Pahl (1984), Charelsworth doesn’t
demean such changes to be a natural part of a process within a capitalist society, but
instead a set of long term processes that has dispossessed the very culture of working
class people. Such cultural dispossession becomes important within Charelsworth’s
assessment as in his opinion the culture was predominately one based around communal
work. Now that such ties have been removed for many working class people, it is
argued that social problems rise to the fore including demoralisation due to
unemployment or job insecurity, substance abuse, hidden rates of ill health and rising
crime that creates a “desperate urban environment” (2000: 68-69).

This bleak view of the social world of many contemporary working class people
replaces in Charelseworth’s analysis a social world that was based on various
relationships where there were realms of shared understandings and communal
perceptions of various things within the social world, due mainly to the shared
experiences fostered through working life, which in turn created a world that was
experienced not just by me but by ‘us’ (2000: 66).

Within this framework of individualisation and deprivation due to the disintegration of
large scale working class forms of work, governmental policies pursued form the late
1970’s onwards are seen as having a systematic role in diminishing a working class way
of life. In particular, the deregulation of the labour market it is debated has encouraged
more casual, flexible, often part time working practices, often with a lack of work place
protection through recognised trade unions, which has fundamentally altered working
people’s experiences of work and subsequently their very life experiences.
Within the same processes working class individuals who are no longer assured of some form of secure employment, are instead informed by politicians and employers that they need to undertake continual self development through education and training, which, the dominant rhetoric informs them will in turn transform them into employable assets.

Charlesworth evaluates that the change from secure employment to ideas around individual self development actually make little sense to working class people. This is because the process of self development is not framed within a wider context of the economic changes that are required to provide large scale employment for working class people, in this context he asserts that educational action cannot solve wider economic problems (Charlesworth 2000: 152-163).

Policies pursued by successive governments to improve social mobility through continuing education will be explored in the following chapter. However, it is useful at this point to evaluate some of Charelsworth’s assertions about the role the formal education system plays in helping to place working class individuals in contemporary society within disadvantaged social positions.

Initially Charelsworth identifies the education system as the “chief institutional site through which they (the working class) come to learn the dominant criteria of evaluation and realise their own competence as ‘negatively valued’ (2000: 280). From this starting point he also provides an interesting analysis that many of the earlier studies specifically focused on the working class interaction with the education system.
Charlesworth believes that working class people are deprived from a certain language that is dominant within the educational environment that would, if it were available to them, open out cultures and new ways of being in the world. Instead their own language and reference points are not valued within the dominant social system and this in turn means that their educational experiences are going to be restricted (Charlesworth 2000: 283).

Interestingly although operating from a more complex philosophical methodology that this study largely adheres to, Charlesworth’s analysis of the limits of the education system for working class children, does have close theoretical links to the earlier analysis of working class children’s experiences of education undertaken by Ashton and Field (1976).

For example, the debate Charlesworth initiates about the linguistic hierarchy within the education system is very much based upon the premise that working class people operate within social structures that prevent them accessing certain types of language and in turn various perceptions and resulting competences. Therefore, according to Charlesworth’s evaluation working class people end up functioning partly in the area of practice alone, which in turn rarely, if ever allows for a deeper understanding of the range of phenomenon outside of their range of practice.
So, to an extent it is argued working class people end up in a cycle of immediate practice and subsequent restrictions in terms of advancement within the education system and wider economic, social and cultural life that access to a wider set of linguistics would bring. In other words working class people become “contained in a realm of existence governed by their function” (Charlesworth 2000: 283).

As evaluated earlier, Ashton and Field (1976) conducted an analysis regarding working class children within the education system acting within the ‘present’, which prevents an understanding of the long term objectives of education. Ashton and Field’s analysis has been critiqued within this study for not allowing for working class agency, which in turn would allow them to hold ambitions outside the immediacy of the present. Whilst Charelsworth’s (2000) study would stand up more resolutely to such criticism, in terms of the ‘life of the mind’ presumably having the same limitations in terms of the language available to it, it does place itself within the same theoretical realm with its deterministic outlook for working class people.

In this respect, whilst Charelsworth’s study elaborates the systematic destruction of a working class way of life throughout his text, when it comes to the analysis of the working class and education, it is interesting that rather than suggest that the education system and society as a whole should be more responsive to working class culture and language, he instead evaluates that working class children will end up stuck in the same downward cycle of deprivation basically because middle class culture facilitated by a certain language is largely unattainable to them.
Although it could be argued that Charleworth is ultimately being realistic regarding the all encompassing nature of the dominant culture within British institutions, which accessing may be the only current escape route for children from low income families, the deterministic nature of his analysis of the role of the formal education system is a trait that can be read within other areas of his study.

Charlesworth’s text can be critiqued in the same way that the other major texts reviewed within this thesis have been evaluated, for the way it assumes that most working class people share the same subjective experiences. In this sense there is little if any recognition in the differences in experience or outlook that for example, working class women and those from ethnic minority groups may have with regards to the demise of a culture that in some respects may have been dominated by the white male majority and difficult for them to access anyway.

Fundamentally, whilst Charleworth quite rightly highlights the vastly changing working class reference points due to systematic deindustrialisation and the devastating economic and cultural effects this has had for many working class people, it is also the way that he indicates that this process is in many ways the ‘end of a working class way of life’ that is problematic.

Kirk (2003: 180-181) debates that if Charleworth’s analysis stands up to theoretical analysis then it becomes difficult to determine class identity at all, which, he argues defeats the objective of Charleworth’s (2000) research.
“At once insisting on the importance of class, the book performs the function of confirming that class in some crucial, positive sense – in fact, political sense, which is really the crux of it – can no long matter. Here, working – class people are prisoners of history, victims of change” (Kirk 2003: 184).

There are therefore contested areas of theory that imply on the one hand changes within society have signalled the end of a specific way of life, with a counter critique on the other hand suggesting that such theories effectively undermine their own studies on changing working class life by signifying the ‘end of a class’.

There is however, additional research based in specific locales undertaken by MacDonald et al (2005) that in many respects support the earlier assertions of Charlesworth (2000) regarding the disengagement of the working class from a productive working life. However, at the same time McDonald et al (2005) highlight a diversifying working class that has been severely affected by the distinct changes in society already detailed, but are nevertheless a very real and surviving class of people with distinct individual differences in persona but substantial similarities of experience in relation to education, work, unemployment and poverty.

The analysis undertaken by MacDonald et al (2005) discuss the idea that particular areas that were once thriving communities based around industry are now sites for extreme poverty, criminality, poor housing and lack of secure employment
opportunities. However, their research also evaluates how intrinsic social networks amongst people within the communities under investigation are necessary as part of individuals coping strategies within such harsh living conditions. The research does also assess that in the contemporary period and in stark difference to once collegiate communities based around industry, these networks of social relationships actually end up closing down opportunities for progression into more affluent lifestyles for most people living within such communities.

“Opportunities for comparison with more successful’ or affluent biographies were never great, but virtually disappeared as interviewees reached their mid-20’s. By this point, those around them were just like them. Informants reported circles of friends comprised of others in very similar circumstances”. (MacDonald et al 2005: 880).

It is noted by MacDonald et al (2005) and with other similar research conducted by Webster et al (2008) that many policy and academic debates argue that the maintenance of such potentially detrimental social networks are symbolic of a culturally deficient underclass existing within society that are subject to generational unemployment and have no real desire to work and are at fault for their own social and economic predicaments (Webster et al 2008: 3).

Instead Webster et al (2008) offer an alternative reading of the conditions that many working class people find themselves living within and suggest possible solutions for a
more progressive society for these people to live their lives within. Primarily they counter the idea that many people living in such environments have no desire to work, with the majority of their interview candidates expressing a desire and aspiration to work that was fairly conventional (2008: 34). The research also rejects the notion that whilst the social networks formed may ultimately ‘hold individuals back’, they are not to blame for social exclusion and all the related issues that result in living on the margins of society. Webster et al (2008: 36-37) instead view “the rapid and widespread deindustrialisation of a place that was, until relatively recently, ‘one that worked’ as being instrumental in the way many working class communities have developed over recent decades.

They also acknowledge that whilst an ‘information economy’ has grown, it is not sufficient enough to replace the low skill, low paid jobs that have arisen in place of previously secure and reasonably paid ‘working class’ jobs. Webster et al (2008: 43) do acknowledge the various policy initiatives employed by various governments to tackle social exclusion and poverty. However, they ultimately conclude that the key factor in changing the outcomes for whole groups of people is to engage in labour market reform that initiates ‘secure, better quality, decent jobs in distinct localities’, policies that as will be detailed in the following chapter do not seem to be on the agenda of the current Coalition Government.

Importantly in this area of discussion more contemporary research that places the impacts of deindustrialisation within the context of the current economic recession (Shildrick et al 2012; Kintrea et al 2011) is also explored in the following chapter. In
particular analysis’ will be undertaken that questions recent Coalition Government policy and rhetoric promoting the idea of increasing rates of working class transition from school into unemployment being due to a working class culture that encourages generational worklessness combined with a class based lack of aspiration.

In relation to this point it is important to conclude this chapter by acknowledging that this research project is being initiated within a period of significant social and economic change within British society, due largely to wide – scale recession. Proper theoretical analyses of the impact of the recession on all aspects of British society will take some time to construct within academia and it is not in the remit of this paper to undertake a wide reaching review. However, the following chapter will analyse policies and theories that suggest education can in part elevate social problems through impacting positively on social mobility amongst individuals to a degree by raising working class aspiration.

However, it is initially important to recognise that despite the real and potentially devastating consequences that the current recession has for in particular those from low income socio-economic groups, periods of recession no matter what the underlying causes are not necessarily unusual. Pahl (1984: 313) has in fact argued that the only unprecedented period within Britain over the last 250 years is the 1950’s and 1960’s, when there was high and virtually full employment particularly for the male population. Pahl continues his argument by suggesting that because many contemporary studies within this field use the immediate post-war decades as their comparators, it actually promotes the potential for distortion of what is ‘normal’ within the study of patterns of
work and employment.

However, even if adhering to Pahl’s (1984) evaluation, the recession within the new millennium has some significant unique traits. Fundamentally, as has been discussed throughout this chapter the recession comes on the back of more than thirty years of deindustrialisation within Britain which has diminished many of the job opportunities previously available to working class school leavers (Crow et al 2009: 2).

Importantly and holding a degree of resonance with Charelsworth’s (2000) and MacDonald et al (2005) earlier analyses’, Crow et al (2009: 3) also suggest economic recession effects working class people differently to many middle class people. Their analysis suggests that because working class individuals still tend to be grouped in geographical areas that were originally centred around earlier manufacturing bases, they are impacted both by the fact that many of these manufacturing organisations are no longer functioning as well as the job restrictions the wider recession initiates. Whereas middle class occupations tend not to be group in such ‘homogeneous settlements’, resulting in recession potentially not having such a wide scale and obvious social impact on middle class communities in comparison to working class ones.

Conclusions

This chapter has evaluated theoretical debates that suggest long term incompatibility between the education system and the working class has been to a degree hidden in
previous decades since the Second World War largely due to the availability of employment within manual labour for working class school leavers. However, successive Governmental policies have witnessed systematic deindustrialisation combined with an advocacy for individualism within a system whereby advocacy for market principles is the dominant ideology.

It is important to recap that within this framework it is suggested that the multi-faceted working class do have a voice, although working class responses are once again difficult to analyse because of their complexity. It is also debated that many of the theoretical studies of the working class experience of education and indeed their subsequent experiences of transferring into the work place are too deterministic, not in terms of their accuracy relating to continuing cycles of deprivation, but because of the underlying intimation of the working class as a coherent group accepting the situations they find themselves in.

In this respect this chapter again builds upon earlier debates in this thesis that acknowledge that all individuals have but that this is very often denied to working class people in academic debates. Encouraging discussion about the working class experience of education and subsequent transition into work that also reflects on the potentiality for internal reflection amongst working class school leavers is essential. This analysis should take into account the idea that working class children might want a range of educational and employment outcomes that the current education system within the wider framework of inter-related social structures and Governmental policy decisions cannot or will not facilitate.
It is within the context of the post industrial landscape juxtaposed by a severe contemporary economic recession that a closer analysis of the transformation of the direction of in particular recent educational policies spanning successive governments is analysed in the following chapter.
Chapter Five: The journey to an educational market: The influence of policy and ideology

Introduction

This chapter contextualizes theoretical conceptions of the varied and often complex working class interaction with the education system by reviewing some of the significant academic discussions about the transformation of UK Governmental education policy in recent decades.

The chapter initially offers a brief historical overview of successive education policies within the UK from post-war political educational consensus (Barber 1994; Doherty 2007; McCulloch 1997), through to distinct political shifts to the right in the late 1970’s, through the 1980’s and early 1990’s.

This analysis continues through evaluation of the New Labour Government’s development of education policy as a central element of its overall political strategy for economic growth and social cohesion through the late 1990’s and the early years of the new millennium (Dolowitz 2004).

The first section of the chapter will close by reviewing contemporary education policy concerns initiated with the inception of a Conservative – Liberal Democrat Coalition
Government in the UK in 2010. Primarily, the influences on some of the Coalition Governments key educational policy concerns will be evaluated. In particular, influential ideas around educational quality and how educational quality can be achieved (The World Bank 2007) will be explored.

The second part of this chapter will abstract out for analysis what seems to be the central objective within all educational policies emanating since the inception of Thatcher’s Conservative Government in 1979, ideologies surrounding educational ‘choice’.

The evolving nature of policies of educational choice will be evaluated by analysing early Conservative agenda’s of promoting educational choice as part of a wider social programme of restructuring society along the values and goals of the market place (Doherty 2007; Ranson 1993). The section progresses by reviewing debate around New Labour’s continued advocacy of educational choice for the purposes of improving socially mobility (Dolowitz 2004; Gerwitz 2001; Reay and Lucey 2004), before concluding with an analysis of what seems like a radical escalation of the educational market by the current Coalition Government (Department for Education 2010).

The final section in this chapter discusses literature that explores what seems like attempts over the last thirty years from governments of all political persuasions to employ policies and rhetoric that effectively declassifies the influence of social class on individuals ability to achieve educationally (Alexiadou 2002; and 2002; Gerwitz 2001).
The chapter concludes by reviewing debates that suggest the escalation and evolution of policies that disregard the importance of class show clear ignorance and rejection of research that suggests family background and class are continuing to be more influential in relation to eventual educational outcomes than innate cognitive ability (Galindo-Rueda and Vignoles 2005; Feinstein 2001; Goodman and Gregg 2010).

**Educational egalitarianism to marketisation and privatisation**

It is debated that the years of the Second World War (1939 – 1945) encouraged an interest in more egalitarian education systems amongst many diverse groups within the UK. Groups such as the Trade Unions Congress (TUC), the Workers Educational Association (WEA), elements of the established church, some areas of the press and the teaching profession to name but a few. The drive for a more egalitarian education system were influenced by the defeat of fascism and ideals of social solidarity that in themselves were facilitated by the common hardships and goals for a better future that the war encouraged (Barber 1994: 352).

Barber (1994: 352-353) points to the Butler settlement and the subsequent Education Act of 1944 as a turning point in the distribution of power within the UK education system, with Central Government being provided with a strengthened hand to direct locally administered education reform. Progressive reform such as the introduction for the first time of free universal education for all children up to the age of fifteen was given to Local Education Authorities to implement on behalf of Central Government with teachers and headteachers given the responsibility for developing the curriculum
and the pedagogy to deliver it.

Doherty (2007) usefully relates the changes in education to those in wider British society and politics. With what he terms “post-war consensus” both Labour and the Conservative parties adhered when in power, to Keynesian economics which advocated a mixed economy, the growth of the welfare state and the nationalisation of certain key industries (Doherty 2007: 269).

Within this period education was one of many areas of social life that the political consensus largely driven by involvement in world war, deemed it was important that the state should ensure the well-being and involvement of all of its citizens.

“During this period the idea that the state should take an active role in providing for the well-being of the masses gained salience. Politicians across the political spectrum were haunted by the spectre of unemployment, mass social unrest and the rise of revolutionary politics that had followed the First World War. The experience of total war following 1939 was another foundational dimension of the British welfare state. The social change that took place within a national war effort, the ‘principles of pooling and sharing’, the state direction of the wartime economy, the coordination of welfare and the triumph of central planning combined to hallmark the British welfare state (Doherty 2007:
Educational reform in the post war period was to a degree relayed through the introduction of the comprehensive schooling system whereby secondary education participation was not based on selection by academic ability (Doherty 2007: 271).

Post-war educational reform based on shared cross party political objectives continued to be facilitated through the comprehensive school system and teacher ownership of the curriculum up to the period of the mid to late 1980’s. Within this period the 1960’s was a key period where policy became formulated around the unequal distribution of educational achievement according to traits such as class, with extra resources for schools in deprived areas becoming the focus of policy papers (e.g. The Plowden Report 1967) (Doherty 2007: 272).

The post-war changes to education and the welfare state in general can be read as progressive and it is not in the remit of this paper to propose otherwise. However, by referring to arguments surrounding the working class experience of education detailed in earlier chapters in this thesis, it becomes possible to propose debates that suggest that even a seemingly progressive model of education such as that initiated post World War Two may not have been compatible to the lives and references points of many working class people. Education reform therefore may not have been sufficient as a stand-alone area of policy and action in terms of enhancing the opportunities for academic and subsequent social and economic success for many working class people.
For example, it is interesting that Ashton and Field (1976) and Willis (1977) both offer theories as to why ‘working class’ children cannot on the whole be as successful within the school system. In a similar fashion Goodwin and O’Connor (2002) detail the dissatisfaction many working class school leavers from the 1960’s felt with the school system when transferring into the workplace.

Highlighting research and theories that detail working class incompatibility or dissatisfaction with the school system within a period of apparent progressive education policy formation and practice is useful as it encourages an evaluation of education policy in the wider context of social and political change. For example, whilst opportunities to take part in formal education may have widened for working class children within the post-war period, the value system of the educational establishment may well have remained intertwined with middle class cultural and social reference points. In turn, as has been discussed in earlier parts of the thesis, the dominant language utilised within the education system becomes almost impossible to penetrate or engage with for many working class children.

However, it can still be argued that despite research that suggests incompatibility and dissatisfaction with the education system amongst elements of the working class, post-war changes to educational access were still a positive attempt to further educational achievement for working class people. The progressive ideals of the post war educational programme are highlighted further when comparing how successive education policies from the 1980’s onwards potentially situate ‘working class’ children in more unfavourable social positions.
Towards the end of the 1970’s a new Conservative Government under the leadership of Margaret Thatcher came to power and with it the educational consensus of the previous decades effectively ended as well. Restructuring of society and the state started to take place and with it new aims for education along the principles of the market started to take shape. In particular plans were put into place for the education system to be realigned to contribute towards governmental aims for economic growth. The introduction of market competition was to be the ideological foundations to how the shift in education delivery and participation was to be achieved (Doherty 2007: 275-276).

To understand how market ideologies took hold within the British education system, it is useful to initially undertake a brief evaluation of some of the reasons why the post-war educational consensus started to fail.

Butler (1994) has argued that towards the end of the Second World War there was a ‘tremendous social solidarity’ in Britain whereby previous social assumptions about class divisions were overridden. However, after decades of prosperity a wider variety of lifestyles were legitimised throughout the 1960’s, combined with increased migration into Britain from the 1950’s onwards, leading to people’s perceptions, aspirations and demands becoming more varied. Simultaneously despite apparently progressive reforms such as the introduction of the comprehensive school system, the education system was seen in some quarters to have failed too many young people. These factors combined with an economic crisis, caused analysis’ of the previous educational consensus as a failed system and one in need of reform (1994: 354-355).
It is useful to analyse an at times distorted historical evaluation of past educational policies and how such evaluations may have been used to legitimize radical education reform. This analysis is particularly important in terms of how the Conservative Government managed to pursue an educational agenda that was part of their attempts at wider transformations of many aspects of British society, by in part discrediting how education and other aspects of the state had been organised previously.

McCulloch (1997) has offered a useful analysis of how hostility towards the post-war political consensus around education developed through the 1980’s. He initially highlights how by the 1960’s and 1970’s the shared values that apparently existed across the political and social spectrum had become blurred and the advance of social progress through progressive educational reform was being questioned. In particular, in the 1980’s the Conservative Government held what they saw as the education establishment responsible for both educational and subsequent economic problems that needed resolving politically.

“The prevalent emphasis upon academic and liberal values in English education was held to explain the relative decline of British industry and economic productivity during the twentieth century”

(McCulloch 1997: 74).
McCulloch therefore debates that in previous era’s historical analyses’, in particular regarding the causes and impacts of social change pre World War Two were used to inform progressive educational change. However, under the Conservative administration of the 1980’s “history was no longer the ally of reform, nor was it safe or domesticated. Rather, it was now the enemy, something dangerous and alien, to be controlled or expunged” (1997: 74).

The history of educational reform in the UK was revaluated as a fundamental cause of an apparent decline in British society and industry without a wider analysis taking place that held to account the combination of various governmental policies and their influence on Britain’s economic successes or failures within the period. It is therefore argued that the educational policies of the 1980’s can be directly related to the right wing re-imaging of the past as an era that disappointed and failed to fulfil its ambitions (1997: 74).

The Conservative Governments agenda for education had clear parallels with their overall political objectives for the restructuring of the state and industry, where neoliberal objectives that demanded market prominence within most aspects of social life gained increased credibility.

“It would be the market, not the state, which would bring about improvement in the educational system. The market rewards the efficient and productive, with competition overcoming mediocrity and promoting
excellence. In order to introduce such pressures, parents were given the right to place their children in any state school that had the capacity to accommodate them”. (Doherty 2007: 276).

As well as the introduction of parental choice, which will be analysed in more detail later in this chapter, there are a number of other key building blocks that combine to structure the early marketized education system. Many of these key elements have remained both resistant to changing governments and in fact fairly central to subsequent ‘radical’ education reform under successive New Labour and Coalition Governments from the late 1990’s to the present day.

One of the major elements of a newly marketized education system was the devaluation of the social problems and educational disadvantage faced by many British school children, especially those from lower income or ‘working class’ backgrounds. “In the new policy climate it became more important for schools to concentrate their efforts on helping pupils to achieve highly and not to immerse themselves in the surrounding social problems” (Doherty 2007: 277). The inadequacies of such policies in relation to the social and economic impacts of wider governmental policies of the time will be evaluated at a later point in this chapter.

It is also is useful to evaluate some theories that discuss some of the intended objectives and the potential actual effects of the early Conservative model of the educational market place. Ranson (1993) argues that any market, including an educational one
encourages individual citizens to pursue their own interests. However, advocates of the use of the market in the public sphere claim that the pursuit of self-interest through market choices will ultimately benefit society as much as the individual through improvement in product brought about by attempts to attract consumers (Ranson 1993: 334).

However, Ranson (1993: 338) progresses his analysis by making some key observations that advocates of education markets choose to largely ignore. Notably that the market is inherently not neutral, but is in its creation intended to alter power relationships within society. In particular, the Conservative Government of the late 1970’s onwards had a clear political agenda of utilising the market within society as a whole to redistribute power away from the social democracy of local authorities towards a new neo-liberal order.

“The market in education is not the classical market of perfect competition but an administered market carefully regulated with stringent controls. It is an institution constituted by government and underwritten by legislation to define the relative powers and contractual responsibilities of participants. Thus the administered market in education seeks to fetter local elected representatives and professionals, as the bearers of the old order, and emancipate the middle class as the bearers of the new” (Ranson 1993: 338).
The suggestion is that rather than national and local democratically elected public servants making decisions about the direction of a public service such as education, national Government facilitates the market in making decisions about how educational resources are distributed to the winners and losers (for example those schools that attract more consumers to choose them over schools that are not as popular) (Ranson 1993: 338).

However, the Conservative administration despite winning four general elections spanning eighteen years and so obviously tapping into the mind set of large swathes of the British population, also witnessed large scale civil unrest, inner city rioting, mass unemployment and rising disparity in income between the wealthy and those living in relative poverty within their tenure.

It was within this context that the Labour Party under the guise of ‘New Labour’ eventually regained power with a landslide victory in the 1997 general election. (Doherty 2007: 278).

What Tony Blair’s New Labour Party attempted to undertake was a political programme whereby it maintained links with the traditional values of the centre-left of the party, whilst accepting the economic, social and economic circumstances of the particular point in history and ultimately using this acceptance, to acknowledge that the market had to be embraced. This acceptance of market values was promoted as being progressed in a more socially responsible way than previous Conservative
administrations that had facilitated the rise of low wage, low skill, low protection employment (Doherty 2007: 279; Dolowitz 2004: 215).

Dolowitz (2004) summarises the New Labour project by evaluating that New Labour ideology was underpinned by ‘endogenous growth theory’. It is not in the remit of this paper to offer a full evaluation of endogenous growth theory; however it is useful to discuss how the theory elaborates on New Labour’s utilisation and reform of the education system. It is argued that under successive New Labour Governments, education was not to become the privilege of one sector of society. Instead rather than leaving the success of educational careers purely down to market forces, Government would intervene when necessary to ensure that the benefits of education are spread equally across society.

Educational intervention in turn was not necessarily implemented for the same egalitarian reasons as the post war educational consensus. Instead educational intervention aimed to ensure the advantages of educational success were experienced by more in society. In turn New Labour’s education policies were intended to ensure educational success ‘spills over’ to increase technological advance and social and economic growth within a society that sustains the move away from manufacturing towards one based on ‘knowledge’ (Dolowitz 2004: 221-222).

Dolowitz (2004) continues his assessment of New Labour’s use of education as part of its overall strategy for growth, by arguing that there are key differences in the advocacy
and use of market strategies by the previous Conservative administrations and that of successive New Labour Governments. In particular, whilst the Conservatives operated a kind of ‘pure’ market with a lack of state intervention particularly in public services, for New Labour’s strategies to be successful there was a requirement that the state was involved predominately to ensure that “educational opportunities exist at all stages of life and that opportunities are available to all sections of the community” (2004: 222).

The New Labour educational programme was also largely based on linking state education with workplace training and adult education, creating a philosophy of lifelong learning. This strategy centred on investing heavily in education both in the form of schools, but also in terms of training the unemployed and continually skilling up the work force. The idea being that initially improving educational achievement amongst all children juxtaposed with creating a culture of lifelong learning amongst the workforce, would improve individuals long term continued employability.

This educational strategy took place within a society where there continued to be a lack of commitment from Government in terms of ensuring long term employment prospects. Nevertheless the strategic direction of the New Labour Government was deemed to have long term economic benefits for society in terms of more people from all sections of society being employed regularly (even if relatively temporarily) in high skill, well paid employment. Subsequently people would invest their salaries within the same society and economy. Thus according to some theorists in the field, the New Labour educational project had an overall objective of creating a ‘virtuous circle’ of educational investment, leading to educational success which in turn leads to individual
economic success and increased economic activity at societal level (Dolowitz 2004: 223).

There are however tensions within New Labour’s educational policy which are elaborated by Alexiadou (2002₁ and 2002₂). Alexiadou is initially critical of New Labour’s use of the term ‘socially excluded’ and in particular he questions the reluctance of New Labour to even include in their discussions in this area, never mind address through policy, the underlying causes of ‘social exclusion’. This refusal to address the social and political processes that combine to cause some individuals to be economically, culturally and socially excluded results, it is argued, in New Labour’s educational policies having the inability to offer an overarching account of the nature of social exclusion in the UK (Alexiadou 2002₁: 72).

Like Dolowitz (2004), Alexiadou (2002₁) identifies New Labour’s central ideology of raising educational access and attainment to encourage business to invest in high skill job creation, in a shift from the previous Conservative Governments strategies that relied on the market to drive down job security, wages and subsequently costs to employers. However, the fundamental difference in Alexiadou’s central concerns are that New Labour’s educational strategies, whilst distancing themselves from any comprehensive analysis of the causes of social exclusion, actually place the onus for educational and subsequent employment success predominately on the individual.

“In addition to the economic argument, there is a strong belief in the
capacity of all children, irrespective of background, to achieve, and this contributes to the view, promoted by government ministers and officials that ‘poverty’ is no excuse for failure. Education is seen as the main vehicle for economic and social mobility in isolation from social and cultural contexts. This perspective seeks to separate academic ability from social deprivation and thus challenges or even dismisses the evidence that links social deprivation and achievement” (Alexiadou 2002: 75).

Therefore, although New Labour’s educational agenda seems on the face of it more progressive than the earlier Conservative policies, particularly in terms of the investment in both state and adult education and training, there are fundamental problems with the dismissal of class background and income deprivation. This in particular is in relation to educational attainment and also the concept that individuals can overcome the cycle of generational economic, cultural and social deprivation to succeed in a system operating on the basis of the choice (Alexiadou 2002: 3).

Elaborating further on the individualistic nature of the New Labour educational ideology, Alexiadou (2002: 76) identifies the shift in ‘blame’ for educational and employment under achievement and the social exclusion that it is evaluated emanates from such under achievement. Within New Labour’s terms of reference as investment has been made in the education system, failure and the subsequent social, cultural and economic consequences are as a result of a combination of factors including bad individual choices, poor teaching and a lack of social responsibility. In line with some
of the arguments proposed throughout this thesis, what Alexiadou suggests is that there is a requirement for a move away from ideas that educational success or failure is based largely around individual choice and alternatively a recognition amongst policy makers that;

“the factors linked to social exclusion (poverty, unemployment, ethnicity, race, gender, etc) are seen as part of a complicated circle of deprivation, whereby conditions of poverty reinforce processes of social exclusion. That leads to more poverty because of lack of access and resources, lack of cultural capital or institutional discrimination. Breaking the circle of social exclusion is thus neither an individualistic responsibility, nor a question of raising academic standards. Rather it is a problem of governance of the system, and has to be addressed as such” (Alexiadou 2002: 80).

It is New Labour’s consistent failure to undertake an evaluation of the societal reasons for educational failure amongst swathes of people coming under the New Labour banner of ‘disadvantaged’ and their persistent reliance on market tools of choice, individualism and the promotion of certain types of ‘values’, that ultimately undermines their goals of addressing concerns of imbedding equality of opportunity and social mobility.

Further in depth evaluations will be undertaken at a later point in the chapter regarding
the continued advocacy of educational choice and the dismissal of the importance of peoples own traits, such as class background. However, initially it is important to conclude this part of the chapter by introducing how the UK’s educational market has advanced in recent years with the election of a Conservative – Liberal Democrat Coalition Government.

In 2010 during the course of writing this paper a new and fairly unique political situation arose within the UK. With no political party gaining the overall majority needed to govern at the 2010 General Election, a Conservative – Liberal Democrat Coalition Government was formed. The new Government came to power in the midst of a worldwide financial crisis, influenced by the near collapse of the banking system.

The new Government in the UK has set about on a programme of radical and rapid transformation of British society and in particular cuts and reforms to public services, based on Government rhetoric of the urgent need for British debt to be reduced on the back of austerity measures. Other groups such as the trade union movement argue that the new political reforms for public services are based on a distinct neo liberal ideology that has the agenda of using the economic recession as an excuse to carry out a wide scale marketization of public services, which includes removing many forms of local accountability.

As the Government and its policy reforms are in their relative infancy there is very little academic analysis and evaluation to refer to within this paper. However, it is useful to
review some aspects of the Governments White Paper ‘The Importance of Teaching’ (Department for Education: 2010), not least as it sets out what the Coalition Governments planned objectives are for the British education system.

The Government state that they are basing their educational reforms around seven key areas; teaching and leadership, behaviour, curriculum, assessment and qualifications, new schools systems, accountability, school improvement and school funding. It isn’t possible for this paper to offer a thorough overview and critique of all of these elements, therefore there will be a concentration on the three key interrelated areas related to the subject matters under discussion throughout this thesis, teaching and leadership, new schools systems and accountability.

This is not to say how the Coalition Government plan to tackle poor pupil behaviour for example cannot be analysed in terms of how it may pander to middle class perceptions of the poor behaviour of working class children or children of certain ethnic backgrounds. Or in a similar fashion, how the Government’s intentions to contract the curriculum could be evaluated for the way it may further alienate working class children. However, with limited space the areas of the Governments White Paper that have been abstracted for immediate attention have been done so with a belief that the issues related to them are ones of more immediacy to the goals of the paper.

The Department for Education (DfE) have initially pinpointed the developing role of teachers as intrinsic to an advance towards the model of education that the Government
wants to employ. The use of rhetoric around improving teacher quality and targeting only the most academically able (DfE 2010: 19: 2.1) has clear resonance with the interests of key multinational agencies within the worldwide capitalist market. For example the World Bank (2007: 1) has argued in a way that resembles the neo-liberal re-writing of the ‘failure’ of the post World War Two liberal educational consensus, that;

“policies aimed at increasing cognitive skills have themselves been disappointing. An emphasis on providing more resources while retaining the fundamental structure of schools has not had general success. On the other hand, one consistent finding emerging from research is that teacher quality strongly influences student outcomes. Just adding resources does not have much effect on teacher quality”.

(World Bank 2007: 1).

Interestingly the World Bank (2007) doesn’t offer an overarching overview of what exactly constitutes teacher or educational quality, only an elaboration of what methods policy makers within nations should employ to extract ‘quality’ from teachers. For example there is strong advocacy for the introduction of school performance systems that are not necessarily set up to help teachers to improve their professional practice in a collegiate work environment, but are instead focused on rewarding better student performance and penalizing teachers who do not produce high performance.
Such performance systems apparently need to take place in national school systems that are based on choice and competition, decentralization, school autonomy and accountability (World Bank 2007: 16). Whilst critiques of both the school choice agenda over recent decades and the Coalition Governments radical agenda for school autonomy will be analysed at a later point in this chapter, it is useful to primarily touch upon what components the Department for Education believe combine to constitute teacher quality within new systems of accountability.

For example in specific relation to teaching practice the Department for Education are aligning their proposed teaching structure closely to that advocated by the World Bank (2007). Most specifically the Government want to introduce systems whereby it is easier to reward good performance, tackle poor performance, link the performance management system introduced by New Labour more closely with capability procedures and introduce flexibilities of pay into what was previously a national pay structure negotiated in partnership with teacher trade unions (DfE 2010: 20: 2.7).

Whilst the Coalition Governments plans for increased scrutiny of teacher performance aligns itself closely with a business model of education, what clearly establishes the new educational agenda in the UK as an advance of previous educational market strategies, is the development of their plans for new schools systems, this programme in itself will be analysed in greater detail in the next part of this chapter.
Individualisation and privatisation: The escalation and impact of educational choice on the working class

This chapter has already discussed how the introduction of educational markets was initially heralded by Thatcher’s Conservative administrations. Furthermore the facilitation of the ‘new’ educational markets largely came through the initiation of a national curriculum and standardised testing of pupils as part of a league table of schools.

“A national curriculum was required to standardize education nationally and national testing was required to assess pupils according to national standards. This would open the way for schools to be measured by their performance, and the introduction of league tables would allow the market to operate by providing market information. The assumed effect would force poor schools to improve while allowing successful schools to expand.” (Doherty 2007: 276).

Within the introduction of performance measures that would enhance the ability of parents to choose the most appropriate school for their children, the role of school leadership was required to change to manage this process. Head teachers and other senior school staff were no longer required to develop curriculum with the teaching workforce, but to manage the process of making schools more accountable and better managed. This was part of a wider process whereby the local state became largely
bypassed in terms of educational control with education policy becoming centralised through national government control that was in turn managed at an individual school level.

This very brief evaluation of how the early model of educational choice was structured by the Conservative administrations from the 1980’s onwards doesn’t do justice to how ‘school choice’ was a central element of the early marketisation of the British educational system. However, the analysis does provide a useful backdrop to the more contemporary policy decisions of successive Labour and Coalition Governments’ to escalate the educational choice agenda from the late 1990’s onwards.

Primarily despite clear decisions to reinvest within the education service in a way that the previous Conservative administrations refused to do, New Labour continued to uphold many aspects of the educational market that had been pursued since the late 1970’s.

Ball (1999: 196-197) argues that despite divergences in New Labour’s desired outcomes from the education system, in particular in regards to achieving equality of opportunity and increased social mobility through educational investment, in actual fact on close analysis New Labour’s education programme left many aspects of the previous Conservative educational strategy untouched. In particular it is evaluated that New Labour maintained four of the central aims of the earlier forms of a marketised education service. Primarily the advocacy of choice and competition within the
education service, the promotion of autonomy of school leadership, increased performance management of teachers and finally centralising and prescribing what was to be learnt and how it was to be taught.

Additionally New Labour had goals of combining enhanced school level educational attainment with improvements in the availability and take up of adult education and workplace re-training. Within this framework “educational knowledge is reworked in terms of the skills, competencies and dispositions required by the economy, parents and students are positioned as consumers and entreated to compare schools in terms of published performance indicators” (Ball 1999: 198). However, the re-emphasis on both the structure and delivery of school education, adult retraining and workplace based learning to be based around the knowledge required in a high skills economy has a number of flaws.

Initially, referring back to earlier debates within this paper it can be argued that working class incompatibility with the school system is largely masked in earlier generations through the availability of wide scale employment for many working class school leavers (Brown 1987). There seems little in the New Labour educational rhetoric to suggest strategies to overcome the continued cultural and social incompatibility many working class individuals experience from within the education system within a different industrial climate.

Secondly as elaborated by Charlesworth (2000), the very way of being and acting in the
world for many working class people has changed largely through the already stated continued dismantling through a number of generations of many traditional working class employment spheres. Many working class people therefore live their lives in communities where joblessness and short term insecure work has replaced over a number of generations relatively secure livelihoods in manufacturing. For many individuals within such communities there seems little prospects of obtaining the necessary social and cultural capacity needed to succeed enough within the education system to go on to secure employment in ‘high skill’ industries.

Thirdly, New Labour’s approach to educational delivery and how performance is judged has been critiqued. In particular it is suggested that the pressure accumulated by the desire to meet parental demand in the choice agenda leads to a number of strategies to improve school performance, including teaching to the test and pressure on teachers to focus their time more on those students likely to succeed (Ball 1999: 202-203).

Reay and Lucey (2004) also identify further flaws in the New Labour educational ideology. Fundamentally that all ‘users’ within the educational marketplace are viewed as ‘equal players’, but also that all users of the education service have the necessary skills, cultural capacity and actual desire to make the objective decisions and choices about their children’s educational future’s (2004: 38). In correlation to the point being made by Reay and Lucey (2004) this paper will argue at a later point in the chapter that the class of parents largely dictates the way engagement with the school choice agenda takes place if, in the case of many working class people, there is any capacity for engagement in the agenda at all.
Reay and Lucey (2004: 39-40) continue their assessment by offering a helpful insight into how differences in the spatial location of individuals with different class variables attached to them, has a significant effect in the level that they interact with the school choice agenda. They initially identify that for the working class people they interviewed, the spatial location they occupy only allows them access to a certain type of state school, at the same time they lack the resources of their middle class counterparts in terms of relocating or travelling distances to access other types of state education.

Reay and Lucey also endeavour to make the point that the ‘choices’ of working class parents and children are not just driven by resources but also by complex psychological issues and value systems, where good local schools in the community are often viewed as the better option for their children. Such value systems seem difficult to accommodate in any of the marketised versions of education apparent in the UK since the 1980’s that have been and still are based on extending choice of school, despite research that suggests only parents from certain sections of British society actively engage in this agenda.

Ultimately Reay and Lucey (2004: 48-49) debate that it is the combination of governmental policies of choice as well as middle class engagement with the agenda, that continues to drive the disparities in educational provision and attainment between the classes in contemporary Britain. A fear of failure (of their children) amongst middle class parents is indentified as being one of the causes of ‘bog standard’ comprehensives being demonized by both middle class children and the working class children that have
little ‘choice’ other than to go to them. The continued adherence to the individualistic nature of the educational market creates according to Reay and Lucey, powerful middle class, class action that leads to the condemnation of lower income parents to “segregated, socially polarised state schooling”.

It is the continued valorisation of middle class educational demands that seems on closer analysis to have driven New Labour’s educational objectives forwards. This seems at the expense of any thorough evaluation of the disadvantageous starting position in terms of educational engagement that many working class families find themselves in. Just as importantly New Labour’s indulgence of middle class educational demands can actually be debated as leading to a disregard to forms of working class culture and values.

The critical analysis of New Labour’s continued advocacy of the market tool of ‘choice’ concludes through an evaluation of Gerwitz’s (2001) substantial critique of the early years of the New Labour educational project. Gerwitz (2001: 365) initially acknowledges that New Labour did make valid attempts to improve educational provision for all in society not just the privileged, by for example introducing reforms instigating reduction in class sizes, the introduction of citizenship education, specific strategies to tackle numeracy and literacy issues and funding of Sure Start early years support for parents in disadvantaged areas.

However, Gerwitz (2001) has particular issues with the way the New Labour
educational reform programme focused its efforts not on recognising that poverty and income disparity are significant influences on educational under achievement, but instead on realigning working class people’s values with those of the middle class (2001: 366).

Gerwitz (2001: 367) argues that New Labour identified four key attributes in relation to engagement with the education system that middle class parents in general held and working class parents in general should aspire to. Primarily middle class parents are seen to be active consumers within the education market place. Within this process they are viewed as monitoring the kinds of service that schools provide to their children whilst also having the cultural capacity to intervene through active engagement within the school hierarchy when what the school does provide doesn’t meet the required standards. Finally, middle class parents possess the social capital needed in order to build their own self confidence and form the social networks required in order to exploit the education system to the advantage of their children.

Gerwitz has serious concerns about the New Labour ‘resocialization’ programme, primarily because although acknowledging that there will always be some working class parents that help their children become upwardly mobile through engagement in the education system, the reality of the situation as she sees it, is that within the educational market only a certain amount of people can be successful and working class people are less well equipped to succeed (2001: 373).
Similar critiques relate to the idea that many of the educational policies pursued by successive governments within Britain since the late 1970’s have failed to recognise the variety of valid reasons why working class parents do not (or cannot) behave in the same way as middle class parents in relation to the education of their children.

“Poverty, and the stress, ill-health and poor living conditions associated with it, make it difficult for large sections of the population to prioritize education. Furthermore, a lack of employment opportunities in those areas categorized as disadvantaged means that, in cases where opportunities for geographical relocation are perceived to be limited, there is little incentive for families to take schooling seriously” (Gerwitz 2001: 374).

This paper would adhere to lines of enquiry that find it contradictory to say the least for governmental policies that have in part caused wide spread poverty in some communities through the dismantling of regular, reasonably paid and secure long term work, to then expect working people to overcome the generational disparities in social, cultural and economic capacities to engage with an educational market place.

However, Gerwitz (2001: 374-375) makes a further criticism of the New Labour educational programme. In particular, she critiques the idea that certain middle class values should be aspired to, for example she questions whether the competitive, individualist manner of the active consumer of education are really traits that a society
wants to promote in the majority of its citizens. This valorisation of one type of culture has a flip side in terms of the disregard for other valid types of culture by New Labour such as forms of social solidarity and forms of active citizenship that are often based around the shared hardship of living in certain types of conditions.

Finally in this section it is useful to debate the dichotomy within how the relatively new Coalition Government in the UK plans to increase parental choice and at the same time extend autonomy for schools through the academy schools reforms. At the same time the administration intend to maintain overall Governmental control of the school choice indicators, notably public information of schools performance through testing and league tables. “We will publish this school-level data in an easily accessible online format. Parents will be able to choose the aspects of a school in which they are most interested, and search for or rank local schools against these priorities” (DfE 2010: 67: 6.6).

New Labour initially extended the educational market within England through the introduction of academy schools, with the academy schools initially introduced being defined as “publicly funded independent schools”. Such academy schools had their capital and running costs met by the then Department for Education and Skills (DfES) with sponsors of the academy (often high achieving business entrepreneurs) supposedly contributing £2 million towards the costs of new and refurbished buildings (NASUWT 2006: 12).
Many of the academy schools that were set up under New Labour were jointly funded in order to improve provision in so called ‘disadvantaged’ areas. In this respect the New Labour academy programme seems to be consistent in regards to attempts by the party to create educational equality of opportunity and subsequent social mobility, through the engagement of private business in one form or another to support the education received by children from lower income families.

As has been discussed earlier in this chapter such strategies can be criticised in their own right for perpetuating ideas that directing more finance to schools will automatically improve educational achievement. Such strategies seem to have been employed without any obvious policy initiatives to deal with the economic and cultural disparities that to a large degree prevent working class children from achieving educationally in the first place.

However, although the same in name, the Coalition Governments academy schools programme seems to mark a shift in emphasis. Although still welcomed by the Government, there isn’t necessarily any need for wealthy private sponsors, as all schools will have the opportunity to transform themselves into self sustainable businesses in their own right.

“It is our ambition that Academy status should be the norm for all state schools, with schools enjoying direct funding and full independence from central and local bureaucracy. Some schools are not yet in a position to
enjoy full Academy freedoms and we will ensure that all, schools, whatever their status, are free from unnecessary bureaucracy and enjoy progressively greater autonomy, with their own funding, ethos and culture”. (DfE 2010: 52: 5.6).

Criticism of the Governments strategy for academy schools largely focuses not only on the role of private sponsors potentially influencing what children learn, but also on the role of the school leader becoming all encompassing in terms of the direction each individual school takes.

Ultimately the new academy schools programme can be critically evaluated within an academic project in its own right. Particularly in relation to what the potential long term effects of Governmental decisions to effectively place a public service such as education outside of the control of democratically elected politicians will be.

However, in terms of the specific areas of discussion this paper is initiating, there are specific observations that can be made about the Government’s privatisation programme, in particular that the transference of a number of state schools into academies is specifically related to creating even more educational choice for parents.

As this paper consistently argues, the creation of choice does not necessarily engage parents from lower income or working class backgrounds for a whole variety of social,
cultural and economic reasons.

Secondly, it is difficult to perceive how gradually taking the majority of schools outside of state control through the conversion of the schools to academy status, will in any way overcome the already identified cultural disparities between the array of working class children’s life experiences and the structure of the school system.

**De-classifying class: the disregard of class as an indicator of educational and occupational success**

This paper has critiqued the New Labour and the current Coalition Government’s education programmes for their continued promotion of parental choice as a questionable facilitator of educational progress and rising standards. This critique is advanced through the suggestion that successive governments have in one way or another dismissed research highlighting how educational and subsequent income disadvantage is maintained in part through class background and the economic, social and cultural disparities that are aligned with this. The paper suggests that such dismissals of evidence occur in order that distinct ideological goals can be pursued.

Primarily this section will concentrate on economic impacts and the relationship with the ability to achieve educationally. This analysis is utilised to add weight to earlier criticisms of New Labour’s apparent refusal to recognise class and some of its significant traits such as income disparity as one of the key underlying causes of
educational underachievement and subsequent future income disparities.

The evaluation will also consider critiques of the current Coalition Government’s continuation and escalation of rhetoric espousing the idea that it is a lack of aspiration amongst working class children that prevents educational and subsequent occupational success. This evaluation will be juxtaposed alongside an analysis of research that also critiques the idea actively promoted by the Coalition Government within the context of rising unemployment in the current recession that many working class school leavers are born into families that suffer from generational unemployment and a culture of worklessness.

Initially Gregg (2000) debates that within the UK once people are classed as being ‘low paid’ then they are more likely to leave employment on a regular basis. Simultaneously if the low paid do stay in the same low paid work for more than two years they are more likely to continue in low paid employment in the long term. Additionally he argues that wage inequality in the UK has been growing in recent decades, indicating amongst other findings that people working in low paid work will not normally be subject to transfers to better paid employment over time (Gregg 2000: 794-795).

In correlation, when combining the impact of growing inequalities in pay in the UK and the influence of long term low pay on the ability of working class people to achieve educationally, Blanden and Gregg (2004: 246) have posed an important set of questions;
“If the real drivers of educational outcomes are innate ability, parental
education, parenting styles, and other factors that are related to, but not
caused by, income, then increased income inequality will not matter to
children’s educational attainment. However, there are clearly
mechanisms by which income can directly influence attainment, such as
care quality, the home environment, social activities, neighbourhoods and schools. If these are important, then increasing
inequality in family income will translate into inequalities in children’s
educational outcomes and their life chances.” (Blanden and Gregg 2004: 246).

The potential or otherwise of innate cognitive ability of children to override parental
low income and class background will be returned to in more depth later in this chapter.
However, initially it is important to stress that this paper would argue that in answer to
some of the questions posed by Blanden and Gregg (2004), family income and its
subsequent influence on the ability of families to engage in many of the social functions
that in turn might improve educational outcomes, are issues of class and the fact that the
class of individuals was largely overlooked in New Labour’s drive to improve social
mobility through educational investments, ultimately leaves New Labour’s educational
programme open to criticisms of class bias.

One of the fundamental problems in New Labour’s reluctance to debate how class
variables such as income disparity can affect the ability of individuals to achieve educationally is highlighted by research that further indicates income inequality within the UK has increased rapidly since the 1970’s (Dearden et al 1997: 47; Machin and Vignoles 2004: 111). Machin and Vignoles (2004) elaborate on the influence of growing income disparity on the ability of individuals from different income brackets to achieve educationally. Their analysis is based around one of New Labour’s predominant indicators of how social mobility can be enhanced through investments in education, access to higher education.

They initially evaluate that during the 1990’s despite the rapid expansion of higher education participation, poorer children did not benefit as much as wealthier ones (2004: 117). Machin and Vignoles (2004: 126) conclude their analysis by arguing that the research indicates that although the expansion of higher education access increased the chances of students from all social backgrounds entering university, it actually increased the chances of the wealthier students more. The disparity between the classes in terms of percentages entering into higher education at least remained the same if not grew.

Interestingly moving into the contemporary era the Coalition Government not only seemingly maintain New Labour’s inherent policy orientated dismissal of class, gender and ethnic background variables within their education strategy, but escalate such disregard and so to a degree their own responsibility in sustaining such inequalities. They achieve this in part by proposing the dismantling of some of New Labour’s data collection initiatives.
For example the Department for Education (DfE) states that it will dispense with the use of the ‘contextual value added’ (CVA) measure of assessing the performance of pupils from, for example, different ethnic backgrounds.

“It is morally wrong to have an attainment measure which entrenches low aspirations for children because of their background. For example, we do not think it right to expect pupils eligible for free school meals to make less progress from the same starting point as pupils who are not eligible for free school meals. We should expect every child to succeed and measure schools on how much value they add for all pupils, not rank them on the make-up of their intake”


One fairly obvious misconception from within the Coalition Government is that children from lower income backgrounds that in their terms are signified by the allowance of free school meals will very likely be coming from the same starting position as children who do not require school meals. This analysis is over simplified and there will no doubt be differing degrees of poverty amongst children who receive free school meals and indeed some of those who do not. Nevertheless, the current Government seem to have made a firm ideological stance that family income, despite research to the contrary, does not affect school achievement.
It is also important to evaluate other aspects of predominant Coalition Government rhetoric in relation to the interaction between educational success or failure and a successful or otherwise entry into the employment sphere. In particular in a context of an on-going severe economic recession it is interesting that the Coalition Government are embarking on a radical programme that includes not only the effective privatisation of the education service, but reforms of the welfare system as well.

However, the Coalition Government choose to relate predominately working class educational failure to a culturally inherent lack of aspiration. This governmental rhetoric sits alongside a wider evaluation that one of the fundamental reasons that an increasing abundance of school leavers from low income backgrounds transfer into unemployment is because of both this inherent lack of aspiration and generational worklessness.

Such rhetoric has been disputed in a variety of recent research discussions that summarise the often overlooked complexities in both working class interactions with the education system and the subsequent transference into the jobs market, particularly in the current period marked by recession. Kintrea et al (2011: 68) argue that it is incorrect to reflect that poor and deprived areas are places where aspirations are always low. What their research does highlight is that those young people from in particular white working class areas may have aspirations that are more set within the culture of an industrial framework that has gradually diminished from around them.

“They tend to live in a milieu where traditional skilled ‘blue-collar’
occupations are valued, even if these kinds of jobs are now relatively scarce. The gap between their realistic job expectations and their ideal is wider than elsewhere. Many do aspire and expect to go to university and obtain professional jobs, and parents are broadly supportive, but people lack clear recommendations about occupational outcomes. (Kintrea et al 2001: 68).

In a wider sense the research indicates aspiration does actually exist amongst working class children, but that it is primarily varied depending on geographical location and the demographic of the local population and secondly amongst certain working class individuals much of it is placed almost out of time in relation to the vast changes in the industrial framework.

These suggestions relate to the general arguments made throughout the whole of this thesis, indicating that successive governmental policies have never effectively addressed many of the issues relating to the affects of deindustrialisation on working class communities. Instead responsibility relating to educational and occupational failure has been consistently cast on the shoulders of individuals, a strategy which seems ever more questionable in a period when the impacts of over three decades of deindustrialisation is contextualised by the severest economic recession for generations and where any kind of job for working class school leavers seems to be becoming ever more scarce.
Whilst the Coalition Governments strategy of questioning the aspirations of many lower income people is challenged through research, their juxtaposed delineation of many working class lives being situated in families where cultures of ‘worklessness’ are passed down through generations, has also been critiqued within recent research programmes.

Shildrick et al (2012) conducted research within some of the most deprived parts of the UK in Teesside in the North East of England and parts of Glasgow in Scotland. They attempted to initially locate families where there were three generations of people within them that have never worked. Interestingly considering the high levels of unemployment within these areas and in a direct challenge to Coalition Government rhetoric and ideology, no such families could be found. Eventually an extremely low number of families where there were two generations of people who had never worked were identified for research purposes.

The research elaborates that theories of worklessness are based around ideas that those people who are unemployed are in this position because of their own attitudes, behaviours and values as opposed to a shortage of adequate employment opportunities. The researchers found no evidence to support such theories. Instead they found that even amongst parents who were long term unemployed, there was a culture of wanting better for their children which included actively helping them to look for work. Whilst the children themselves wanted to escape from the poverty trap by finding employment, in other words traditional values towards working for a living were consistent across the research sites (2012: 5).
What the research does find is disengagement from school including leaving school with little or no qualifications was common amongst their research participants. It is suggested that the impacts of poor interaction with school and a weak local economy are some of the key facilitators of high unemployment in deprived areas. However, it is also suggested that most people within these areas still have some contact with the labour market, albeit in mainly short term, low paid, low skilled work (2012: 37-44).

With these findings in mind the research concludes that rather than continue with policies based on misguided notions of low aspirations and generational worklessness amongst the working class, the Government and related bodies should acknowledge that the majority of people in deprived areas do want to work and with a stronger local economy most of them would move into jobs post school (2012: 44).

Therefore there is influential research related to aspiration and the desire to work contradicting much of the Coalition Government’s educational and welfare strategies. Additionally there is influential research which highlights the declining importance of ability and the growing influence of family background on educational attainment.

In this regards research has been conducted (Galindo-Rueda and Vignoles 2005; Feinstein 2001) around the importance of family background in the ability of children to grow and compete intellectually. The research suggests that family background rather than the concept of innate cognitive ability has become over recent decades a key denominator of a child’s chances of succeeding educationally and subsequently
These studies therefore suggest that early cognitive ability has become a poorer predictor of later educational achievement, whereas family background has become more important (Galindo-Rueda and Vignoles 2005: 336). Galindo-Rueda and Vignoles continue by arguing that in Britain in recent years evidence suggests that income driven educational inequalities have risen rather than reduced despite increased investment within the education system (2005: 337).

However, in contradiction to some of the debates initiated within this study, Galindo-Reuda and Vignoles (2005: 346) argue that because the composition of social classes have developed over time with larger proportions of workers in higher class categories, social class itself becomes a less useful indicator than family background in relation to the impact on educational achievement.

This paper would to an extent question such evaluations. This paper would adhere to the argument that suggests that family background is a vitally important factor within a child’s ability to enjoy educational advancement, however families themselves are subject to the multitude of class variables that make up their being. Additionally, although there may be different degrees of poverty amongst ‘poor’ families, they will share many common class traits, largely income disparity and the variety of affects this has.
Ultimately, despite divergences in opinion on what factors are worth evaluating when analysing the impact of being born into a lower income family on the ability to achieve educationally, there are still other areas of discussion that this paper would adhere to from the Galindo-Reuda and Vignoles (2005) research. Most notably that within Britain educational policies should be focused on the more ‘disadvantaged’ children, although there is recognition that UK educational policy seems to have moved in the opposite direction (2005: 352). In particular this paper suggests the recent advance of schools being moved out of state control, policies of privatisation and extended school choice moves British educational strategies ever further away from the requirements of lower income families.

Other similar studies broaden out the impact of family background to include the community that individuals live within as having a real influence on people’s chances of developing their educational abilities. Klebanov (et al 1998) base their study on neighbourhoods predominately within the U.S.A. but many of their observations align with arguments relating to the influence of poverty on potential to achieve within the UK educational system. They argue that family income levels in the first four to five years of a child’s life are associated with verbal achievements in the early years of school life and that the overall effects of long term poverty have more impact than other factors often espoused by policy makers, including maternal education, maternal age at birth of child and maternal marital status (1998: 1420).

Klebanov et al (1998: 1421) also discuss how children of families with lower incomes predominately live in ‘poorer’ neighbourhoods (which they identify as being
neighbourhoods occupied by people that have low socioeconomic status, high residential mobility and large ethnic groups), which are in turn more subject to teenage crime and are more likely to experience worse educational outcomes that those children living in more affluent areas. “Thus, through the first 3 years of life, environmental effects may be said to become stronger. At the same time, the biological correlates of early IQ scores diminish over the first 3 years, as has been reported by previous, smaller-scale studies” (1998: 1421).

Therefore it is fairly clear that New Labour and the Coalition Government have some marked differences in intended outcomes from the education system. However, it seems that both make attempts to address educational under achievement without wanting to engage in discussions regarding the wider societal impact of their own policies on individuals ability to engage educationally and indeed gain adequate, decently paid, secure work post formal education.

Conclusions

How the affects of the breakdown in the interrelationship between working class people and the working environment has potentially affected working class children’s ability to succeed with the various models of education espoused over a number of generations since World War Two, has been well documented within this study. However, it is policy maker’s consistent failure to primarily deal with the social and cultural disparities between the developing lives of working class people and even progressive models of education such as the introduction of the comprehensive school system, that
potentially help to sustain the continual inequalities that exist between working class and middle class educational achievement.

What is potentially more effective in terms of an analysis of the continued disengagement of many parts of British society and the education system is the evaluation undertaken in this chapter of the continuation under various different guises of the educational market within the UK. Gerwitz (2001: 376-377) debates that the Government (the New Labour Government within her study) have drawn the wrong lessons from the research, in particular that working class educational experience will be enhanced through engaging working class parents in the values of the middle classes. She instead argues that middle class values of individualism should be problematized instead of promoted, by exposing the damaging effects on society that engaging with the education system on the basis of sustaining individual familial advantage in an arena of school choice has. She ultimately argues that British society should adhere to a dismantling of the educational market.

Whilst this paper would agree with large parts of Gerwitz’s (2001) analysis, within the decade since her paper was published it seems as if the marketisation of the British education system and the polarisation of many elements of the working class has accelerated not diminished, culminating in contemporary Coalition Government reforms.

New reforms and policies that juxtapose moving the majority of school education out of
the control of locally democratically elected officials, extending school choice to unprecedented levels, raising university tuition fees and at the same time cutting huge amounts of jobs particularly in public services, this paper argues, will only heighten the growing cycle of economic, cultural and social inequalities between sections of society.

In turn, such ideologically driven policies may lead to a further continuation and acceleration of the cyclical processes within the UK of educational under achievement amongst children from lower income families and the subsequent future occupational disparities that lead to growing generational disadvantages for working people within the UK.
Chapter Six: Research Design and Methodological Approach

Introduction

The earlier chapters within this thesis have provided a critical analysis of some of the key literature deemed to be of relevance to this study. This chapter will progress the study by providing an overview of the methodological approach chosen to uphold the practical research. This overview will sit alongside an evaluation of the epistemology that underpinned the methods of data collection and analysis.

The chapter opens with an analysis of the research sample used. This includes a justification of how the participants who volunteered to be interviewed move the research project towards meeting its aims and objectives. This part of the chapter also provides some background information on the interviewees which in turn leads into an analysis of some of the important demographic information on the geographical area(s) within a designated part of South Birmingham, where the majority of interview candidates are currently located or were located for a significant part of their lives.

This overview of the main research locations is important as one of the driving forces behind the overall research aims is to question how developing educational policy over the last few decades has impacted on working class children within an increasingly deindustrialised society. The part of south Birmingham that the majority of interviewees lived in during the research process is occupied to a large extent by people on relatively low incomes in comparison to some other parts of the city. It was also home to a large
car manufacturer that was an employer to many thousands of adults from the surrounding areas for the best part of the 20th century, until eventually over a number of years it reduced in size and eventually closed in 2005 with various impacts on the community.

The chapter will progress through a justification of why the qualitative research method of the semi-structured interview is utilised, this is followed by a description of data recording, transcription and analysis. Finally important ethical considerations are accounted for and recognition is given to the potential limitations of the methodological approach. Included within this evaluation are debates that suggest that memory, which is ultimately what much of the research data in this project is based on as interviewees recall their school and early work experiences in particular, is in itself a social construct. Arguments are evaluated that suggest recall of events by individual’s within the research process may be utilised to justify current social status as much as being about recalling key facts from an abstracted element of a lived life (Errante 2000; Libby and Eibach 2011).

The interview sample

Theoretical influences on the choice of interview candidates

Within the parameters of the research it became apparent through the process of analysing the relevant literature that the term ‘working class’ in itself is contested within academia. Therefore a theoretical model that offers an explanation of who the thesis is discussing when it references the ‘working class’ is constructed through the course of
the research. This model is utilised in the identification of appropriate research candidates who consider themselves or are considered by the researcher as having working class ‘traits’ and ‘variables’ as central aspects of their persona’s.

Another consideration within the research process that will be detailed in greater depth when reviewing the results of the interview process in later chapters, is the various understandings of the term working class, or of class structures amongst interview candidates and how these understandings are potentially generated through the life course. With this in mind it is important to stress that the researcher's own biography and theoretical understandings of class analysis have had an influence on whether an individual interviewee was deemed to fit the model for ‘working class’ identification that is utilised throughout the study.

The researcher grew up on a council estate within inner city Birmingham, in a stable home environment, where both parents undertook forms of manual labour, the father undertaking factory foreman roles and the mother part time domestic work within the local hospital. The researcher went to a catholic comprehensive school from the mid 1980’s and what would most probably be described in contemporary terms as an underperforming school in relation to academic achievements or the number of students entering into higher education. The researcher was one of the few children from his academic year at school to enter into further education after leaving school and laterally higher education within a period when full grants were provided for entrants from ‘lower income’ families and all academic fees were paid.
Subsequently after a relatively short period of undertaking various temporary jobs post degree completion, the researcher found employment within the trade union UNISON and continued in employment within the trade union movement for the next fourteen years inclusive of the period that this research project has been undertaken.

The initial research interests and laterally the extent to which certain opportunities to interview potential research participants were pursued is therefore heavily influenced by a number of biographical factors. Primarily there are the influences of the type of area the researcher grew up in, the growing awareness of the types of employment undertaken by his parents, differing experiences of education at secondary school and laterally further and higher education. Combined with these influences there are also others such as the growing awareness, fostered through employment within the trade union movement, of the educational inequalities that exist between people occupying different class positions that in turn lead to occupational and income inequalities.

A decision was also made to attempt to interview people that live or had lived a large part of their lives in a certain area of the researcher’s home city of Birmingham. Ideally the area would be considered to be traditionally occupied by people on lower income brackets and who to differing degrees considered themselves working class. The reasoning for this was although wide differences in individual variables or traits may exist between individuals, living within the same geographical spaces may contribute towards some shared or similar experiences of education and transition post formal school age education.
The researcher’s more recent employment within another trade union, the teachers’ union the NASUWT, not only enhanced the researchers opportunities to be involved and have access to discussions about education policy, serendipitously the Union’s offices are situated in South Birmingham only a couple of miles from the now defunct Longbridge car factory. This influenced the decision to choose the Longbridge area and immediate surrounding areas as the potential site to locate research candidates. The main theoretical drivers behind this decision were that the area may possibly symbolize the type of traditional working class area that was directly and indirectly reliant on one huge industrial employer and subsequently suffers various consequences when the employer starts to downsize its workforce over many years and eventually closes.

Once the theoretical basis for choosing research candidates and the main research location was decided, a third decision was taken to interview candidates from differing generations. Initially it was decided to interview people from three different generations, people who left school within the 1970’s, people who left school within the 1980’s and people who left school within five years of being interviewed (interviews of this cohort largely took place between 2009 and 2011). Within the data analysis this latter grouping are tagged as ‘new millennium school leavers’ for the sake of clarity.

The theoretical foundations for targeting distinct interview candidates from these three specific ‘generations’ relate to debates highlighted throughout the literature review chapters (Goodwin and O’Connor 2003 and 2002; Vickerstaff 2003) arguing that although working class school experiences within the 1970’s and later decades remain problematic in some differing ways, the early transitional experiences for working class
school leavers from the 1970’s and the new millennium is vastly different, with potentially more job opportunities within industry and other sectors being available for working class school leavers within the 1970’s.

Within these developing industrial and educational processes the 1980’s is viewed as an era where immense societal changes start becoming more visible than in previous decades. With the era in many respects acting as a theoretical bridge between earlier eras of relative full employment, the availability of employment within industry on a large scale and ubiquitous comprehensive education, to the contemporary period of a deindustrialised society with an increasingly marketised education service. The new millennium school leavers are therefore evaluated as living in a period of growing fragmentation of the school leaving experience over recent years.

The interviews therefore aim to generate data that has the objective of providing unique information from certain people within a community and surrounding areas within South Birmingham. The data aims to relay how experiences of school and early transition are perceived by these people and how the experiences are both similar and different. It is also the intention that the interviews conducted provide data on how these differences in experience across generations relate to developing policies that span the last three to four decades, with an analysis taking place to decipher what ultimately has been and continues to be the impact on the interview candidates concerned.

However, although the intention was to interview individuals from the three generations
discussed, once the process of attempting to locate and interview research candidates progressed it became clear that in reality it was potentially being over ambitious to find and interview that many people in the timeframes available. Therefore a decision was made that the data most vital to the research aims of the thesis was that which highlighted the differences in educational and transitional experiences in the seemingly vastly different educational and industrial spheres of 1970’s and new millennium South Birmingham. Whilst the 1980’s is still deemed to be an essential period that heralded many educational and industrial developments, it was decided the thesis wouldn’t suffer too greatly if the data analysis was structured around the two era’s discussed and that a wider analysis that included other generations of school leavers could be the basis for a future study.

**Locating research candidates**

Initially a number of tactics were employed to find willing interview candidates from both generations. Although many of the researchers’ work colleagues didn’t match the criteria in terms of age profile, some of them did live in the areas surrounding the former Longbridge car factory. Therefore word of mouth about the project was utilised with this group of people as well as with family members, such as the researcher’s older brother and sister who both fit into the category of 1970’s school leavers currently living within a two to three mile radius of the main research site.

Juxtaposing this strategy there was also attempts to use more formal routes in relation to finding in particular, ‘new millennium’ interview candidates. Obtaining a letter from the
sponsoring university, the University of Leicester (Appendix One) validating the authenticity of the researcher as a student undertaking a PhD at the University, a number of organisations that work with and for young school leavers in Birmingham were contacted to see if they could provide access to relevant ‘young people’.

Organisations included various contacts within Birmingham City Council’s Youth Service and also the youth employment advice service – Connexions. After listening to an explanation of the research project all of the various contacts within the Councils Youth Services declined access on the basis that it could compromise client confidentiality. In relation to Connexions two sites were contacted, initially their central office for the city was telephoned and e-mailed on request with an outline of the project, but once again although expressing an interest in the project it was felt that it could compromise client confidentiality.

The other Connexions site contacted was the Northfield Connexions office, which is the main site within the chosen research location. On this occasion a contact had been obtained through a current work colleague who used to be a former employee within Connexions. Primarily this seemed a more promising route to gaining access to relevant interview candidates as the contact elaborated he could find up to ten willing interview candidates. However, once the contact within Connexions attempted to formalise the work by running the idea past his own management for clarity, access was once again denied.
More success was found with the more informal word of mouth approach in relation to the 1970’s school leavers, with a combination of family in the guise of the researcher’s brother and sister initially volunteering to be interviewed. After this, spouses and friends of the researchers brother and sister volunteered to be interviewed and then a work colleague of the researcher’s sister who also managed a social club in the Rednal area approximately a mile and a half from the Longbridge car factory, provided four mobile phone numbers of people who socialised in her club and were willing to be interviewed, three of whom previously worked in the Longbridge car factory. The other five interviewees from the 1970’s school leaver cohort were made up from work colleagues of the researcher, who fitted the criteria in terms of their age, where they lived and their own self reflection of themselves as working class or having been from a working class background and finally in one case the spouse of a work colleague who also fitted the research criteria.

All interviewees from the 1970’s school leaver grouping were either contacted by telephone, in which instance the project was explained to them and any questions they had were answered or in the case of the work colleagues a short one to one meeting was convened to explain the project and answer any questions. Before each interview a short statement (Appendix Two) was read out and provided to each interviewee, explaining that the interviews were confidential and they would remain anonymous at all times and if they wished they could have a copy of their interview once transcribed. All interview candidates were given the opportunity for the interview to take place at a time and place of their convenience.
Eight of the interviews were held in the interviewees home either after work in the evening or at the weekend, one additional interview took place in the home of one of the other interviewees as two interviews were conducted on one weekend afternoon. Three interviews took place within the researcher’s workplace within the working day or within lunch breaks; the other two interviews took place in the social club mentioned earlier in this chapter, after working hours. All interviews with this grouping lasted for between twenty and thirty minutes. Thirteen out of the fourteen 1970’s school leavers’ interviews took place between October 2009 and May 2010, with the final interview amongst this cohort taking place in September 2011. This interview cohort consisted of ten male and four female interviewees, with all fourteen candidates considering their ethnic origin as white British.

The interview candidates from the ‘new millennium’ school leavers were identified in some differing ways although once again, personal contacts and word of mouth became the most effective method for establishing willing interviewees who met the research criteria. The first two interview candidates from this grouping were identified from amongst a group of young temporary employees working for the researcher’s employing organisation for a fixed period of time. The researcher approached two of the young employees who were deemed to fit the criteria in relation to their age, the areas they lived in being either in or reasonably close to the main research location and after an explanation of the project was given, elaborated that they considered themselves working class. Both were asked if they wanted to be involved in the project, both agreed and provided mobile telephone numbers to make contact with them to arrange an interview with them at their convenience.
One of these interviewees also asked his twin brother if he was interested in taking part in the project and he agreed and a mobile number was provided. The other initial interview candidate asked a university friend who agreed and again she provided a mobile phone number. These initial ‘new millennium’ school leavers interviews took place in a variety of locations including, the researcher’s workplace, a canteen within Birmingham University and two separate public houses within the Northfield area of the city which in itself is about a mile from the former Longbridge car factory. All of the initial interviews amongst this grouping took place within the lunchtime period of the day.

Another four ‘new millennium’ school leaver interviewees were identified through family contacts, whereby the niece of the researcher, her friend and her boyfriend were interviewed and also a friend of the researcher’s nephew was also interviewed. These interviews took place in the researcher’s sisters’ house on separate occasions either after working hours or on a weekend day. The niece of the researcher was given a verbal overview of the project before she agreed to take part; she then arranged the other three interviews on the basis that the other three candidates met the research criteria.

One interviewee was identified through the research candidates’ aunt who was a work colleague of the researcher, this interview took place at the researcher’s workplace during a lunchtime period and contact with this interviewee prior to the interview was conducted through his aunt.
Finally with this cohort six interviews took place within a centre providing basic educational and training opportunities aimed in part at teenagers who had struggled within the formal educational experience and had left secondary school with little if any qualifications. In part the centre catered for some teenagers that also had a degree of alcohol and drug issues, although were not classed as suffering with drug or alcohol addiction, attendance at the centre is also on a voluntary basis. Access to some of the participants within the centre was gained through a friend of the researcher who managed the centre during the period in question and he in turn provided contact details (an e-mail address) to a tutor within the centre, who tutored some of the attendees in literacy skills.

The project was explained to the tutor by the researcher’s friend and also by the researcher via e-mail conversations and she in turn explained the project to a group of her students and arranged a date for the researcher to come into the centre. On the day in question the tutor allowed the researcher to introduce the project again and then the tutor asked for volunteers to be interviewed. Out of approximately ten students on the day, six volunteered to be interviewed, all interviews took place in a room that was separate to where the main teaching was taking place within a mid week morning.

There were some ethical concerns in relation to interviewing so many research candidates from one setting with potentially similar backgrounds and with educational and social problems. However, it is important to stress that once the interviews took place and the data was analysed it became clear that although there were some similarities in the issues faced by each interviewee at school, within the home and
within early transition from school, they all also brought individual traits and the
individual ‘life of the mind’ (Sayer 2005) in regards to their own awareness of the
limitations of their educational experiences and their ambitions for the future.

However, whilst these particular interviewees provided rich data specifically in relation
to working class school leavers who may have been disenfranchised from formal
education there are retrospectively some further concerns in regards to how these
specific people are distinguished within the thesis.

For example questions were not asked about these particular participants employment
status, which is less clear than either the other younger research participants that are
clearly not in work as they are either unemployed, are in full time education at
university, or as in one case are in employment.

The Office for National Statistics provides a useful overview of who is ‘not in
education, employment or training (NEET) and they are basically people who do not
fall into the following categories; doing an apprenticeship, on a Government
employment or training programme, working or studying towards a qualification, are
undertaking job related training or education, are enrolled on an education course and
are waiting to start (www.ons.gov.uk/ons/guide...and.../young-people-who-are-neet.pdf).

These particular research participants are taking part in training and education in a
centre that the researcher understands anecdotally is subject to some Government funding, but because research questions were not formulated along these lines it is less clear whether the participants are themselves undertaking courses that are Government funded. Additionally because questions were not asked about whether these participants were claiming any kinds of benefits, it is also not entirely clear as to whether these young people would show within the Governments own unemployment and claimant statistics.

What is clearer from the data emanating from these specific interviews is that these interviewees were hoping to gain some basic qualifications to allow them to either potentially move onto further education in the future or get a job. They were not undertaking work related training or educational courses that were aimed at gaining further education based qualifications. One acknowledgment for future research in complex areas of study such as these is to gain further background information on the research participants that may prove useful when exploring the data they provide.

All the ‘new millennium’ school leaver interviews took place over a period of time between October 2010 and August 2011, all interviews were between twenty and thirty minutes long. Nine interviewees were male with six female, fourteen of this group considered their ethnic origin as white British, whilst one considered himself Asian British. Once again all interviewees were subject to a short statement read out by the researcher guaranteeing the confidentiality of the interview and research processes.
Further details of both interview cohorts are detailed below in Tables 1 and 2.

Table 1. 1970’s School Leavers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Age (at time of interview)</th>
<th>Year of leaving school</th>
<th>Current occupation (at time of interview)</th>
<th>Date of interview</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jimmy</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>1975</td>
<td>Self employed builder</td>
<td>October 2009</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kenny</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>1977</td>
<td>Accountant</td>
<td>October 2009</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Colin</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>1973</td>
<td>Driver</td>
<td>October 2009</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ken</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>1976</td>
<td>Freight Worker</td>
<td>November 2009</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Allan</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>1978</td>
<td>Trade Union Organiser</td>
<td>February 2010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sheila</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>1977</td>
<td>Part time Classroom</td>
<td>February 2010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Name</td>
<td>Age</td>
<td>Year</td>
<td>Occupation</td>
<td>Date</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------</td>
<td>-----</td>
<td>------</td>
<td>-------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>---------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sally</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>1977</td>
<td>Senior Administrative Assistant</td>
<td>February 2010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Des</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>1974</td>
<td>Self employed Builder</td>
<td>February 2010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gordon</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>1975</td>
<td>Self employed painter and decorator</td>
<td>April 2010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dennis</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>1979</td>
<td>Self employed Gas Fitter</td>
<td>April 2010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alison</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>1979</td>
<td>Self employed Hairdresser</td>
<td>April 2010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tony</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>1977</td>
<td>Manager-Car Mechanics</td>
<td>May 2010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peter</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>1981</td>
<td>Supermarket Assistant</td>
<td>May 2010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sylvia</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>1978</td>
<td>Design Assistant</td>
<td>September 2011</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 2. New Millennium School Leavers.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Age (at time of interview)</th>
<th>Year of leaving school</th>
<th>Current occupation (at time of interview)</th>
<th>Date of interview</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Helen</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>2006</td>
<td>University student</td>
<td>August 2010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mark</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>2005</td>
<td>University student</td>
<td>September 2010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gary</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>2005</td>
<td>Video maker for a careers website</td>
<td>October 2010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alan</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>2008</td>
<td>Further education student</td>
<td>November 2010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rachel</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>2006</td>
<td>University student</td>
<td>November 2010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sean</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>2009</td>
<td>Attends training</td>
<td>July 2011</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Name</td>
<td>Age</td>
<td>Year</td>
<td>Status</td>
<td>Date</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------</td>
<td>-----</td>
<td>------</td>
<td>--------</td>
<td>------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paul</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>2009</td>
<td>Attends training centre</td>
<td>July 2011</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Andy</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>2009</td>
<td>Attends training centre</td>
<td>July 2011</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kevin</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>2009</td>
<td>Attends training centre</td>
<td>July 2011</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jessica</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>2009</td>
<td>Attends training centre</td>
<td>July 2011</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emma</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>2009</td>
<td>Attends training centre</td>
<td>July 2011</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joanne</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>2011</td>
<td>Further Education student</td>
<td>July 2011</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Steve</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>2011</td>
<td>Further Education</td>
<td>July 2011</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Research location

Demographic information in context

It has been detailed earlier in the chapter how the Longbridge area which sits in the wider constituency of Northfield in South Birmingham, was chosen as the main research site for a number of reasons. Predominately the area itself seems to represent many ‘working class’ areas that are described throughout the literature review (Charlesworth 2000; Pahl 1984). This is in particular because much of the direct and indirect employment within the area over many years was based around one large industrial employment base and subsequently the area and its occupants may be impacted in various ways once the industrial employer downsizes and closes over a number of years.

Choosing the site was also to a degree serendipitous in that the researchers’ employment
became based in an adjacent area only a few months before the research process started.

It is also worth noting that although some of the older research candidates were employed at some period within the Longbridge car factory, it was not a prerequisite of the research process that this should be the case, also not all of the research candidates lived directly in the Longbridge area and the majority were from adjoining wards with similar ward profiles. Occasionally a research candidate may have lived a few more miles away, but never more than five miles. All the research candidates also either directly identified themselves as working class either now or at some point within their lives, or if their conception of class was not clear, the researcher made a decision on the suitability of the data generated in the interviews based on the analysis of the discussions within the interviews. In turn decisions were made about individuals dominant class traits by the researcher within the constraints of the model proposed earlier in the research.

However, despite the variety in background location of some of the research candidates, the Longbridge area and surrounding areas are still key symbolic locations in terms of representing a type of working class area. Therefore it is deemed important to provide a brief overview of some of the important demographic information related to the Longbridge ward and wider constituency.

Primarily it is useful to explore the importance of the now closed Longbridge car factory to the development of the area and surrounding areas for the best part of the
By 1961 the Longbridge car plant covered 165 acres, had 21,000 workers of which 3250 had worked at the factory for between 25 and 50 years” (Chinn and Dyson 2000: 17).

In comparison, from the growing mass of workers employed in the factory at the start of the 1960’s through the 1970’s, by the early 1980’s in what was still the first term of the new Thatcher Conservative administration, the workforce had been reduced to 87,000 which was around half of the workforce that existed in the later part of the 1970’s (Chinn and Dyson 2000: 22).

The rise and gradual demise of the Longbridge car factory is deemed to have had a far reaching effect on this part of Birmingham and the surrounding areas.

“Throughout the South West of Brum and in Bromsgrove, tens of thousands of lives are affected directly by the success of the plant, whilst most local traders and small businesses need the spending power of car workers. Elsewhere in our city and in the Black Country, scores of thousands of more people are reliant upon Longbridge for their well being because of the work it gives to suppliers of the car industry” (Chinn and Dyson 2000: 43-44).

As well as analysing some of the theoretical evaluations of the influence of the major
industrial employer within the area it is also useful to evaluate some of the more recent indicators of poverty levels within the local wards and wider constituency in relation to the conditions many of the research candidates find themselves living in.

The Northfield Constituency of Birmingham within which Longbridge is one of four wards, has the fourth smallest population in the city with 97,980 people, 33.1% of the population are aged under 24 leaving the constituency with the second lowest proportion of young people in the city. Black and minority ethnic groups also make up only 7.2% of the total population of the constituency giving it the second lowest proportion of this grouping within the city (Birmingham City Council-Northfield Constituency: Economic and Employment Profile 2009: 4). This last figure correlates with the fact that the vast majority of research candidates volunteering to take part in the project from around the area considered themselves to be of White-British ethnic origin. Although it is also important to stress that other factors may have influenced the ethnic mix of the research candidates, namely the use in part of the researchers own family and friends to aid the finding of research candidates.

In relation to jobs only 5.0% of the jobs within Birmingham as a city are located within the Northfield constituency, making it the smallest constituency in relation to workplace employment. “This is a reflection of Northfields residential make up and the decline of the Longbridge car factory” (Birmingham City Council-Northfield Constituency: Economic and Employment Profile 2009: 6).
Economic analyses by Birmingham City Council around the impact of the closure of the car plant on the local constituency economy and employment profile of the area, are given a voice through the qualitative accounts of some of the interview candidates when asked about the impact of the closure of the car plant on the local area;

“to start with it wasn’t too bad because everyone had got a bit of money with them….after though…..yeah it is now. I go down the rovers club; I stayed a member of that. There’s people in there I see that still haven’t got a job. They only know it from school, they went straight into that and that was all they knew and if they can’t get anything the same, they don’t want to or can’t” (Dennis, Self employed gas fitter; 1970’s school leaver).

In many respects the feedback within the interview with Dennis regarding his own experiences and reflections on the impact of the closure of the car factory, is also reflected within more statistical analyses that summarise the changing industrial landscape within the area.

“The closure of MG-Rover in 2005 means that Northfield’s economy is now a little more service based than Birmingham’s. The industrial
sectors producing most of Northfield’s local job opportunities are retailing & wholesaling, health and social care, hotels and catering, and education. Together these sectors generate 72% of Northfield’s turnover vacancies” (Birmingham City Council-Northfield Constituency: Economic and Employment Profile 2009: 10).

More recently updated economic and employment profiles of the Northfield Constituency conducted by Birmingham City Council (Birmingham City Council 2012) provide an extended and extremely useful overview of the kind of economic, employment and related educational patterns facing individuals living their lives within these areas.

Primarily it is important to note that whilst Northfield Constituency as a whole doesn’t necessarily suffer with some of the key indicators of deprivation in comparison with other areas of the city and country, there are certain wards and locations within wards that are amongst the most deprived in the country.

In a period of heightened unemployment amongst young people, where at approximately 25% unemployed the young peoples’ unemployment rates within the Northfield Constituency largely match the overall rates for Birmingham and England it is useful to initially look at the changing trends in GCSE achievement in recent years.
Between 2005 and 2011 there has been a 15% rise from 36% to 51% in the numbers of students achieving five or more A to C grades in English and Maths within Northfield Constituency. This rate of progression is slower than Birmingham’s overall progression which has seen a 19% rise to 58%, but whilst the constituency still has a 7% deficit in students achieving these grades compared to the overall England average of 58%, the rate of progression in relation to the overall rate for England is comparable. However, looking at individual wards within the constituency starts to highlight some of the vast differences across a small geographical space. For example in the same period of time in the Kings Norton Ward there was only a 9% rise in students achieving these qualifications and at 45% the achievement rate was 13% below both the city and England average.

If, as is consistently argued throughout this thesis, educational experiences and achievements are related to industrial frameworks, it is also useful to evaluate some of the key data on employment patterns and subsequent deprivation as they currently stand within the Northfield Constituency. Table three below highlights recent percentages in both worklessness and Job Seekers Allowance (JSA) within the constituency.

Table Three: Percentage of worklessness and JSA claimants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Area</th>
<th>Percentage Worklessness May 2011</th>
<th>Percentage JSA Claimants January to November 2011</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Kings Norton Ward</td>
<td>21.3%</td>
<td>9.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ward</td>
<td>Worklessness Rate</td>
<td>JSA Claimants Rate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------------------------</td>
<td>-------------------</td>
<td>--------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Longbridge Ward</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>9.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Northfield Ward</td>
<td>17.1%</td>
<td>8.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weoley Ward</td>
<td>20.4%</td>
<td>11.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Northfield Constituency</td>
<td>19.7%</td>
<td>10.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Birmingham</td>
<td>18.1%</td>
<td>12.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>England</td>
<td>11.8%</td>
<td>5.4%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


The information in Table Three indicates that the levels of worklessness within the constituency as a whole and even more so in some wards, is one and two percentage points higher than the overall city average, but significantly eight percentage plus higher than the average for England. In conjunction whilst the constituency and each of the wards individually have slightly lower percentage rates of JSA claimants than the city overall, they are almost double that of the country average.

This information in itself provides an overview of an area that has rising basic educational standards, albeit lower than the national average, but the potential for higher than average deprivation levels due to almost a fifth of its residents suffering worklessness. However, even the raw data doesn’t provide a full picture, whereby in some specific locations within specific wards, notably north west Kings Norton and
north west Longbridge, up to 40% of residents are suffering worklessness. Supporting this information, over a quarter of the population of Kings Norton live in 5% of the most deprived Super Output Areas (SOA’s) in England, with almost half the population of Kings Norton living in the 10% most deprived SOA’s in England (Northfield Constituency: Economic and Employment Profile: Birmingham City Council 2012: p24).

The economic profile utilised describes a mixed area with small elements of affluence, combined with areas of relative poverty, it also highlights the changing nature of an area once heavily dependent on industry and in doing so provides a real example of how successive government educational and wider industrial policies may play out in reality.

The self realisation of reasonable educational attainment being achieved in an environment with few employment opportunities is highlighted through the research process.

“I think it’s getting harder because more people are going to college, I know it gives you a lot more options, but in a way it’s putting you in the same category as everyone else. When you come out of college and you do well and go to Uni, when you finish at Uni you’ve got the same problems. I also think it doesn’t work as I know a lot of people
who dropped out of college, not because they’re not clever enough

but because it just wasn’t for them, they’d be better off with a hands on

job. I know there aren’t many jobs and that’s the problem but I think it

should be encouraged more, not just like a one route like” (Helen,

University Student; New millennium school leaver).

Data Collection

Theoretical basis for data collection

The data for the practical research aspects of this thesis was obtained through means of
the semi structured interview. Silverman (2005: 257) suggests that all research
including ‘scientific’ based research is contaminated by the values of the researcher, in
this theoretical context the very decision to choose scientific or quantitative research
methods contaminates the research process by the researcher exercising a value to
choose a method that they believe to be value free. In a sense therefore, the commitment
to quantitative research methods highlight the political beliefs of the researcher that the
objective of value free research is a flawed aim from the outset.

Free from the theoretical shackles of trying to produce value free data, adopting the
qualitative method of semi structured interview with a relatively small research group,
highlights a commitment that within the research process there becomes a focus on what
Denzin et al (2003: 81) describe as the “existential moments in people’s lives, hopefully
producing richer and more meaningful data”.

In this regard use of the semi structured interview within this research project was partly used because of an epistemological commitment to obtaining an insight to individuals thought processes around certain phenomenon they had encountered and were still encountering within their lives. Practically this particular qualitative method was considered to offer the opportunity to gain richer and more abundant data than other qualitative research methods such as for example the focus group. Semi structured interviews also allowed the researcher access to more people with varying life experiences than other qualitative methods such as for example the use of life histories.

The thesis therefore through its chosen qualitative methodology aims to add individual voice to summarise the impact of educational and industrial policies within the real lives of people living through immense societal changes. The research process comes from the starting point that there is very little research available that allows ‘working class’ groups from across two distinct generations and spending a large part of their lives living within a relatively similar geographical space, to make comment on their own experiences of education and early transition.

Indeed in some cases the research candidates share the critical moments in their lives, which in this study the interviewees themselves define when asked questions about ‘what critical moments in their lives’ led them to where they are today in terms of work or whatever activity they are undertaking instead of work. In this regards the utilisation
of ‘critical moments’ within the practical research enables the drawing down of essential data on the social structuring of key elements with individual participants lives. “The descriptive concept of the critical moment provides us with a way of seeing how social and economic environments frame individual narratives” (Thomson et al 2002: 351).

However, the use of critical moments also caused some of the major methodological issues within the research and this will be evaluated in greater depth in both this chapter and the concluding chapter.

Despite some methodological issues the use of critical moments within the overall usage of the semi structured interview, has an objective of attempting to move away from theoretical analyses that predominately discuss ‘what is done’ to working class people, to focus instead on individual peoples own perceptions of certain abstracted elements of their lived lives and how these perceptions in themselves are formed.

“There is a growing realisation that interviews are not the mythical, neutral tools envisioned by survey research. Interviewers are increasingly seen as active participants in interactions with respondents, and interviews are seen as negotiated accomplishments of both interviewers and respondents that are shaped by the contexts
and situations in which they take place” (Fontana and Frey 2003: 90).

The above quote is useful for also highlighting the importance of the values that the researcher brings to the research process. In particular elements of the researcher’s own biography are highlighted earlier in the chapter and with this in mind, it is important to stress that the interviews and subsequent data produced from them were a result of an interview process of an interviewer with explicit themes to explore resonating with elements of their own social background and interviewees using the opportunity to draw down certain information from their memory to provide data on the chosen subjects.

The interview Schedule and data recording

Two slightly different interview schedules were drawn up for the interview candidates from the two different generations (Appendix Three and Four). There is very little difference in the two sets of interview questions, although the 1970’s school leavers were subject to an additional question regarding the ‘critical moments’ in their lives as already detailed earlier. This question was deemed to be important as it was believed that an interviewees’ self reflection on the major issues that impacted on the direction of their lives would potentially generate rich data. Some of these critical moments will be highlighted in more depth in the later chapters dealing with the full data analysis. However, it is useful to stress that work experiences did seem to be fairly prevalent in what the older interview candidates viewed as having a major influence on their lives.
“where I am now, I was working at another car dealership and which closed down. It got into financial difficulty and it closed so I was out of work for 6 months and this was the first job that I could get after that period. So at the time the distance at the time it didn’t matter at all because it was getting back into employment after being unemployed for a period”. (Tony, Manager, Car Mechanics; 1970’s school leaver).

However, despite the useful information this line of questioning generated with the 1970’s school leavers, a decision was made that because of the age of the ‘new millennium school leavers’ interviewees, their limited life experiences may have made this question a more difficult question for them to respond to in any useful way. In reflection when analysing the data generated by the younger interviewees, many had such clear opinions on their own educational and in some cases work experience and future ambitions, it may have actually been useful to offer these interviewees the opportunity to respond to this line of enquiry.

The only other major difference within the line of questioning for the two cohorts was some questions again posed at the 1970’s school leavers only, focusing on their hopes for their own children if they had any. This was not deemed an appropriate question for the younger interviewees as it was decided that the majority would not at this stage have their own children.
The research questions were structured along four main themes that it was felt would provide data on the main lines of theoretical enquiry established within the literature review. The interviews opened by asking interviewees questions that it was believed the participants would be comfortable answering and shouldn’t have any difficulty with. Therefore they were initially asked about their family background and early home life when they were growing up. It was decided that this would potentially generate data around the candidates’ class background, including information on their parents’ occupation and type of home and community they grew up in. The questioning continued with questions about secondary school experiences, including who chose the school that interviewees attended, the next section focused on early transitional experiences and how they relate to current occupational or educational location. Finally, a group of questions were asked about what the interview candidates thought about how the education system should be run and what the interviewees’ hopes and thoughts for the future were.

All the interviews were recorded on a digital recorder. Once an interview or group of interviews had taken place, they were then downloaded from the recorder onto a laptop, a second copy of each interview was then also downloaded from the laptop onto a disc, so that there were backed up copies of each interview, the interviews were then transcribed. As all the interviews were recorded on a digital recorder and then downloaded onto a laptop, it became a relatively straight forwards task to e-mail files of three and four interviews at a time to the person undertaking the transcribing and to then receive groups of transcribed interviews back via e-mail in Word documents.
Once transcribed interviews were analysed and coded in line with the four main thematic areas detailed earlier in this chapter. The interviews were coded through the use of a colour coding system with four different colours representing each thematic area. From here key data was extracted to support the general themes the research project aimed to cover along with some unanticipated lines of enquiry.

For the most part the methods of recording interviews with the digital recorder didn’t cause any problems and the reasons why the digital recorder was used was explained to each interviewee, with assurances sought by the researcher that they were comfortable with the presence of the recorder throughout the interview. There were occasions however, when some interviewees did seem to a degree a little put off by having the recorder present at all times during the interview. For example, towards the end of the interview with Sylvia from the 1970’s cohort, she asked if “we could just move on” when being asked about ambitions outside of work in the future. When faced with the raw data it could be concluded that this is a reaction to the line of enquiry, however, when taking into account the reading of the situation by the researcher, it can also be concluded that the interviewees’ response may be related to an increased unease with speaking into the recorder as the interview progressed.

In terms of the practical methods of data recording, the benefits of using the digital recorder seem to outweigh some of the potential drawbacks, such as the rare occasions when an interviewee would seem distracted by having to speak towards the recorder. There are though some limitations with the research methods employed overall and these will be outlined in the final section of this chapter. However, it is initially
important to outline some of the ethical considerations taken into account when designing the research methods.

**Ethical considerations**

Some of the ethical concerns emanating from this research project have been detailed earlier within this chapter. In particular concerns arose from the opportunity to interview a relatively large number of participants from one research site. There are however, a number of other ethical considerations that had to be taken on board before the practical research process started.

Initially, the researcher was required to participate in the sponsoring university, the University of Leicester’s, own internal ethical monitoring processes. Predominately this meant a requirement to complete an online research ethics form that then validated the researcher to undertake the practical research elements of this project (https://wads2.le.ac.uk/ethics/Ethics.aspx).

Another important consideration within this particular research project was the age of some of the research participants. It was decided at an early stage of the research design process that although the project wanted to be able to compare qualitative data from school leavers from the 1970’s and school leavers from the contemporary period, careful consideration needed to be given to who exactly was going to be interviewed as part of the ‘new millennium’ cohort.
Of primary importance is the University of Leicester’s own ethical stipulations in regards to the interviewing of people under the age of 18 (https://wads2.le.ac.uk/ethics/Ethics.aspx). Secondly even when targeting recent school leavers of 18 years of age and over to be interviewed, some were still participating at school in the guise of sixth form college when the interview process started to initially take place amongst this group in October 2010.

To avoid ethically compromising the practical research process and to also distance the research process from having to get access to parental or school approval to interview certain participants, a decision was made to wait to interview certain research candidates until after they had left sixth form college and in the summer holidays whilst they were waiting to enter into higher education. In many respects this decision allowed the researcher to maintain appropriate ethical boundaries and still gain access to research participants with very recent school experiences to draw upon within the interview process.

**Limitations of the research methodology**

The two central bedrocks of the research methodology are that people from a certain geographical location, largely considering themselves or considered by the researcher to be working class, but from two distinct generations, would provide useful data on changes in the working class experience of education and transition from within two distinct eras. Secondly, as has already been mentioned within this chapter, that participants come from an area that it can be argued, reflect many of the working class
communities theorised about within some of the academic debates evaluated within this research project (Charlesworth 2000).

In relation to the benefits of specifying a research location and research generations to the research data generated Mannenheim (1952: 291) has argued;

“The fact of belonging to the same class, and that of belonging to the same generation or age group, have this in common that both endow the individuals sharing in them with a common location in the social and historical process, and thereby limit them to a specific range of potential experience, predisposing them for a certain characteristic mode of thought and experience, and a characteristic type of historically relevant action”.

Although choosing to interview people from separate generations may be deemed relevant in relation to capturing data from two specific era’s, some issues with this method can be perceived.

Initially, Pilcher (1995: 70) has debated that;
“young people’s location in historical time means that they are likely to experience problems which arise from their social class position within new historical contexts. Young people’s location in historical time means that they are likely to experience problems which arise from their social class position and their stage in the life course position differently, both to those who have gone before them and to those who will come after them.

Taking such debates on board, a line of argument could be pursued, whereby interviewing two groups of people from different generations that share the same or similar geographical space, will never generate comparable data when asking questions about distinct social phenomena such as educational and employment experiences. This is largely because sharing a geographical space doesn’t necessarily override the influence that the stage in the life course has on individual thought processes, although the idea that geographical location is still of importance in relation to shared generational experience is acknowledged by Pilcher (1995: 138-139).

The complexity within how individual thought processes produce worthwhile data within a project based on the use of qualitative research methods, raises another of the potential limitations of the research methods employed, the fact that the data generated is based on the memories of the interviewees’.
When reviewing the use of life histories within qualitative research, Miller (2000: 3) has suggested that individuals are continually constructing and reconstructing their own biographies as their lives progress, this process he argues allows individuals to orientate themselves to the situations they face within their lives. However, this does raise some issues in relation to the generation and validity of data in a research project such as this one. For example, in her evaluation of the qualitative research method of making use of oral histories, Errante (2000: 19-24) discusses the idea that people taking part in the process of narrating their oral history participate in the process of choosing what they wish to remember and subsequently elaborate to the researcher. “Our memories not only allow us to remember, they also allow us to forget. At any given time, we may remember, forget, and re-invent certain aspects of our personal and collective pasts” (2000: 24).

Libby and Eibach (2011: 716), take this line of debate further by suggesting the way people remember and utilise memories is actually motivated by the internal desire to express self improvement through a life course. In this respect the creation or recreation of negative images of past lives are juxtaposed with more positive images of the current self, to create an overall picture of self improvement.

By reviewing some of the research data it could be argued that the generated memories of school, especially for those people from the 1970’s cohort, where only one went onto higher education straight from the formal education system, will predominately have negative undertones in comparison to more positive memories of current occupational standing. Therefore to a degree even those interviewees from the 1970’s cohort that
stated they liked school, still elaborated a degree of negativity about how and what they were taught and its lack of usefulness to life post school and their current progress in the employment sphere.

Ultimately, the research methods can be critiqued for the over reliance on interesting data being drawn out from the differences in experiences from two separate generations, when it has been debated, the experiences of people from different generations are always going to be vastly different because of their location within different historical contexts. Also the very nature of the research methods and the subjects being discussed, meant that there is a heavy reliance on the use of participants memories to generate data and the use of memory as has been detailed, is subject to internal psychological processes that may distort reality.

Whilst acknowledging these potential flaws it is also important to recognise that this research process will never be able to draw out whether an individual research participant’s memories of school or early experiences of work, are subject to memory distortion or not. What is of importance is that the potential for the distortion of any data based on memory is recognised and taken into consideration when relevant data is utilised to support certain theoretical lines of enquiry.

Conclusions

This chapter has sought to elaborate the methodological approach pursued in the
collection of data for this research project. Initially, it is important to recognise that the data collection is based on the qualitative research method of semi structured interviews. Qualitative methods were chosen as the researcher follows an epistemological approach that believes the goal of more statistically based quantitative methods to produce value free research findings are inherently flawed. This belief is based on arguments (Silverman 2005) that highlight the very process of choosing a particular research method, never mind then choosing a focus of any research is a value laden process in itself.

Through reflexive processes undertaken throughout the research process, the researcher acknowledges the influence of individual biography within the process of choosing a research subject alongside a research method. Semi structured interviews were chosen as the preferred method of data collection, as the researcher discovered when undertaking the review of the relevant literature for the project, there was only a relatively small stock of academic debates that add the ‘working class’ voice and opinion to research conducted around educational and changing employment experiences of groups of people with these class traits.

The research is based around two distinct features that of the interviews being cross generational and set within a relatively small geographical space. Decisions were made about both of these features based on the evaluation of the relevant literature in the fields of study and also because of practical considerations, for example the researchers place of work being located near the chosen research site.
The research site of the Northfield Constituency and surrounding areas was chosen as a site to try and obtain interview candidates from as it was identified as a geographical space that reflected many of the working class communities discussed within the literature as being impacted upon by processes of deindustrialisation over recent decades. The cross generational aspects of the research project were chosen as there is a belief that the comparison of perceptions of education and early transition into the workplace from working class people within a set location, from an era of relative full employment but less post school educational opportunities to the contemporary era of more fragmented workplace experiences and higher levels of post school educational experiences, would be an interesting comparison to make.

Some potential flaws within the chosen methodology have been highlighted. Most notably the interview questions require the recall of earlier experiences of school and then early post school experiences. Debates are acknowledged arguing memory is to a degree a social construct that may in part serve to self justify the current social location of people being asked to remember earlier events.

However, despite the acknowledgement of these potential flaws it is also recognised that it would be very difficult for this research project to have the ability to discover whether memories of interviewees were genuine or indeed constructed to aid the perception of self development. Whilst it is important to recognise the potential for data distortion, it is equally important to recognise that the data from individual thought processes is still a valid and rich source of data about certain working class experiences of education and early transition.
The following chapters will provide a comprehensive overview of the data generated within the research process, as well as comparing the research results with the theoretical debates evaluated in earlier chapters.
Chapter Seven: Voices from South West Birmingham: The Influence of Parents, Work and Ambition in the Self Perception of Class.

Introduction

This chapter aims to build on the earlier review of relevant literature within the fields of class analysis, by exploring how the research participants themselves perceive their class and what factors influence these perceptions.

This exploration of class perceptions is interesting, primarily as in opposition to some contemporary theoretical assumptions regarding class (Savage et al 2001; Bottero 2004) it allows for a broader evaluation regarding the continuing relevance of class within these individual’s lives. Secondly the formation of class perceptions is important as the dynamic social processes that influence how individuals perceive their often transforming class are viewed as also impacting on individual’s ability to navigate through the education system successfully and experience more rewarding transitions post school.

Therefore the chapter evaluates how participants perceive their class of origin, their current class and how they believe their class is formed, sustained and develops.

The research identifies that there is suggestion of some shared perceptions in relation to class within and across the generations. It is argued that these shared perceptions offer
the opportunity for elaboration of shared class experiences that also potentially outline class mediation of educational and transitional experiences.

However, also emanating from within the data and in alignment with the socially stratified model of class analysis favoured within this research, is fragmentation within how personal class is perceived. How differing perceptions develop amongst people from similar backgrounds is also a key focus of this chapter.

The evaluation of data generated around class perceptions contextualises the complexities within the working class experiences of education and transition in certain parts of south west Birmingham over recent decades. In particular there is an analysis of how perception of class may be influenced by parental occupation, parental unemployment and family finance, but also how these variables may influence the chances of educational success, the type of work undertaken post school, or alternatively amongst the new millennium research cohort the progression to further and higher education, or alternatively low end training courses and unemployment.

The chapter therefore explores three clear themes within the field of class perceptions. Primarily the psychological linking and social structuring of personal class to parental occupation is evaluated as of most influence in the creation of self perceived class status, with family income, the type of community and home individuals grew up in and the fact that individuals ‘have to work’ as of additional importance to individuals in the formation of their self perceived class.
The final part of the chapter reviews some of the ambitions relayed by both research cohorts, issues that have been discussed in recent academic texts looking at contemporary working class experiences post school (Macdonald et al 2005; Kintrea et al 2011; Shildrick et al 2012). This part of the chapter extends these debates in potentially new directions by suggesting that all the research participants have varied and complex ambitions that in themselves are potentially mediated by the social processes that influence how they perceive their developing class status. The processes influencing class perceptions through the life course are therefore proposed as integral to the formation of either ‘elaborate’ or more ‘grounded’ occupational ambitions.

**The influence of parents within the creation of class perception**

This project recognises that there are at times vast differences in the lived lives between research participants within each generational cohort and across the generational cohorts, but that many of them share some similar variables and traits. Notably the shared experience of growing up and living in a certain geographical space and time, with all the social interactions with other people and social institutions this brings and to differing degrees at different times in their lives, the reality of existing in lower income streams for most participants.

However, no matter what the similarities and differences within aspects of the social backgrounds of the research participants, there are certain consistent variables that emerge from within the data generated relating to class formation. In particular the importance of parents in terms of working status and occupation seems to be a critical
factor in the formation of class perceptions amongst many participants across
generations.

This section will explore how parental occupation and the financial standing of the
family seems to influence research participants self perceptions of their class, however
the intrinsic complexities that emerge from within this analysis will also be reviewed. In
particular the distinct generational differences between class perception based on
parental occupation and class perception based on family finance will be evaluated in
relation to how industrial transformations may in part help to socially reconstruct the
psychological formation of class amongst research participants.

*The importance of parental occupation on the developing class perception’s amongst
1970’s school leavers*

What is initially striking and to extent challenges Marxist evaluations around the
potential for shared class consciousness around shared inequalities forged within the
labour market (Giddens 1971; Harding 1998), is the distinct minimal association
between either current and earlier forms of occupation undertaken and perceived class
status amongst most of the research participants.

This may be an obvious assumption to make for the new millennium cohort as they do
not on the whole experience immediate transitions into the workplace from school.
However, potentially more surprising is the lack of association between perceived class
and the job that is undertaken or was undertaken in the past amongst most of the 1970’s school leavers when they themselves tend to have had a much clearer association with the world of work from school leaving age.

In itself this element of the research further upholds the critiques of ideas around (working) class consciousness detailed in much of the newer class analyses’ (Bottero 2004; Savage et al 2001; Savage et al 2013; Skeggs 2011; Skeggs and Loveday 2012). However, what is just as important to this research is the greater prevalence within the data of a psychological relationship between perceived class status and parental occupation in particular amongst the 1970’s school leaver cohort when asked why they consider themselves working class.

“Cos both parents, well my dad worked, not so much my mum, but my dad worked on the factory floor for a while. He did go self-employed eventually but for the first part of his working life he worked on the factory floor. He was skilled in coachwork”.

(Sally, Senior Administrative Assistant; 1970’s School Leaver).

Further extracts from interviews with participants from the 1970’s school leaver cohort offer similar psychological links to parental occupation and perceived class background.
“The background I come from is white Irish working class people, we’ve always worked”.

“My dad moved from a kind of manual industry in to, he works in a hospital, in fact, in the operating theatres. My mum’s never really worked full time, she’s been a full time mum. They own their own home, they bought their council house in the 80’s under Thatcher so I think there’s the kind of, people have been encouraged to see the aspirational side of life and they embrace that in a way that I haven’t”. (Sylvia, Design Assistant: 1970’s School Leaver).

Both of the extracts from the interviews with Sally and Sylvia offer examples of the link many of the 1970’s school leavers create between their perceived class and elements from their childhood such as parental occupation. However, they also start to touch on how older interviewees are on many occasions aware of how their class may be subject to analysis that would suggests its changed, even though they are either adamant it hasn’t or are at least ambiguous about whether it has or not. Interestingly, rather than any change in class being necessarily down to a change in their own developing status in relation to work or home ownership, it is the association with their parents occupational and subsequent economic advancement that once again seems influential in the perception of personal class advancement.

“Probably because of my dad going self-employed, he was able to better
himself financially, that doesn’t mean that he’s a better person. But it meant that they could move from a council house to buying their own house so I suppose you feel that your standard of living has gone up a little bit”. (Sally, Senior Administrative Assistant; 1970’s School Leaver).

The lasting psychological influence of a perceived transforming parental class can also be read from extracts from Sylvia’s interview. She acknowledges that because of social phenomena she associates with middle classness, such as the change within her father’s employment from manual to more skilled work and the move to purchase the council home lived in, her parents class has transformed from a working to middle class status.

However, some of the complexities within the psychological relationship between perceived class and parental occupational standing are highlighted by the fact that unlike Sally, Sylvia seems to react against the idea that the perception of her parents transforming class juxtaposes personal class transformation. Instead Sylvia is adamant her working class status has remained a constant in her life, with the reasons for the psychological retention of her perceived class status seemingly related to political beliefs which themselves, as will be reviewed later, seem fostered by employment within her contemporary working environment.

It is also useful to highlight that for research participants such as Sylvia the elements that influence class perceptions are also intrinsically related to how memories of the
period spent at school are formed and these themes will be explored in the following chapters.

The phenomena of the perceived class journey of the 1970’s research cohort being related to parental class in some complex ways is further compounded by data from research participants that, unlike Sylvia envisage their personal class transformation as ascending that of their parents. For these participants there is a perception of a more distinct personal journey from their class of origin as related to their parents’ occupation to their current self perceived advanced class status.

“Er, my origins are lower class, if you’re looking at a free class society that you usually base things on, there’s lower class, middle class and upper class. Certainly my origins in the ‘60’s and ‘70’s that was the case. I come from a very low class environment. I was brought up in back to back housing, I don’t know if you know what those were, but generally regarded as the slums. I have Irish parents, came over, my dad came over after the war, from Northern Ireland, my mother was a cleaner, moved to Harborne and I think I’ve done reasonably well. So I suppose, I’m a home owner, I own this so I suppose people would class me as middle class now”. (Ken, Freight Worker; 1970’s School Leaver).

Analysing this extract from Ken’s interview starts to provide an overview of the complexities in the inter-relationship between how individuals from this generation and
this specific geographical space perceive their parents class at a particular point in time, their own class of origin and the factors influencing the perception of class advancement through the life course.

It is also useful to evaluate that Ken’s perceptions of the extent of his class advancement may in part be subject to psychological processes related to the use of memory. This analysis refers to discussions detailed earlier in the paper that focus on the ways that people can utilise memories to help enhance the perception of personal development throughout the life course (Errante 2000; Miller 2000; Libby and Eibach 2011).

However, utilising memory to psychologically create a perception of personal advancement including class transformation through the life course is not a straight forwards process. In particular perceived personal advancement due to in part, aspects of social life such as occupational progression, home ownership and the educational establishments participants children are sent to, is not always juxtaposed with perceived class ascendancy. In fact for some participants the maintenance of perceived class of origin seems of vital importance within the advocacy of the life journey that encapsulates personal advancement. Amongst the 1970’s school leavers cohort Kenny provides the most extreme example of what would seem to be a psychological attachment to a class of origin that does not seem to correlate with the reality of many aspects of his life as an adult now in his 50’s.

Q “Why do you consider yourself working class”? 
A “Because I was brought up on a council estate, of working class
Parents”

Q “Has your class changed throughout your life”?

A “I think if people look at me they would say it has because they call
me middle class, because I’m an accountant and I’ve got kids at private
school. So people looking at me would consider me middle class. I still
consider myself working class. My perception is I’m working class with
certain middle class views”.

Q “Ok. In terms of what middle class views”?

A “Well, I don’t have any issues with sending my kids to private school,
I want the best for them and also, and what I say about a lot of working
class issues, people who say they’re from a council estate and therefore
they’re disadvantaged, I don’t think that's always the truth”. (Kenny,
Accountant; 1970’s School Leaver).

The data generated through the interview with Kenny provides some contradictions
between the occupation held in relation to the professional status he holds as an
accountant and his ability to sustain a self perception of himself as a working class person. He manages to psychologically sustain his commitment like most of the other 1970’s school leaver cohort, largely through the links he draws to his parents’ class and subsequently the type of home he grew up in. However, some of his views in particular related to the education of his children seem to align themselves more with the relative affluence of his current social position rather than to that of his birth.

Kirk (2008) questions whether it is possible for a person from a working class background to shed the values and identity they may have grown up with when accessing different cultural frameworks through for example, the professional identity they may develop. However, the extract from Kenny’s interview suggests that such processes in themselves are complex, as he on the one hand wants to be identified in relation to his parents’ occupation and the type of home he lived in as a child, whilst simultaneously distancing himself from council house occupants and disadvantages he doesn’t believe exist for people associated with this type of housing.

In this respect Kenny juxtaposes the need to sustain his self perception of being working class as opposed to aligning his class to his professional standing, whilst having an inability to associate himself with arguably fundamental aspects of certain types of working class life, for example the disadvantages associated with certain types of housing.

Parental class is therefore evaluated as the dominant aspect in the formation of self
perceived class amongst the majority of 1970’s research participants. However, self perceptions are highly complex in that they are largely linked to parental occupation when participants themselves were young.

For other research participants a personal journey of class advancement away from their parents class is evaluated as psychologically important to them, however these social processes are further complicated by data that suggests that participants who have potentially made the most obvious physical progression away from their class of origin attempt to maintain a psychological attachment to their class of birth.

This research would suggest that whether participants attempt to disassociate themselves with their class of origin or indeed sustain an attachment, the individual psychological objectives are potentially the same in terms of using memory to project a self perception of a lived life of social advancement.

Although there seem to be similar psychological processes taking place amongst the new millennium research participants there are distinct differences this research argues are fundamentally related to the developing industrial context research participants find themselves growing up within.
As the new millennium cohort also largely relates the class they perceive themselves to be as interrelated in some way to their parents, there is an indication that perceptions regarding parent’s social standing are both cross generational and the most influential factor in the creation of self perceived class in this research location. There are however some distinct differences in the descriptors and language utilised when verbalising perceptions of class amongst the new millennium research cohort.

Nearly half of the new millennium school leaver research participants directly relate their perceived class to that of their parents. Interestingly a number of participants stated that they didn’t know what class they are and some participants stated they thought they must be middle class because “We’re not low, not we don’t do nothing, they do have jobs. But we’re not high class” (Emma, attends training centre; New millennium School Leaver).

This theme of not being ‘low class’ is an important one that is specific amongst the new millennium school leaver participants and starts to highlight a change in the language used to clarify perceptions of personal class from a group of people growing up in the same social space as older research participants but from a different generation (Pilcher 1995: 70).
Therefore, whilst many of the older generation relate their class to their parents’ occupation and also at other times to the type of home they grew up in, all of which are signifiers intrinsically related to family finances, the household income or money in general is rarely discussed in relation to perceived class of origin.

However, whilst many of the younger participants maintain what seems to be a dominant psychological association between their class and the perception of their parents’ class, the idea that class is directly related to either the concept of the money an individual or family earns or has accumulated, is far more prevalent.

“I’d say somewhere between working class and middle class. I haven’t really considered it, especially when I was growing up; it wasn’t an issue at all. It might be the terminology, people just think oh he’s poor, he’s rough, its more about whether he’s rough or he’s posh, rather than what class. It’s really about money; actually it’s more about money than anything else” (Helen, University Student; New millennium School Leaver).

“I’d say my mum’s salary. I mean my mum’s only on about £16,000 a year and my sister’s salary and I’m college now, I haven’t really got a job at the moment, just the basics, I’d say that's what we was”. (Sean, attends a training centre; New millennium School Leaver).
“Probably if you define it by money, I’m broke. Probably just a working
class culture, like that kind of attitude, and what we do in our spare
time”. (Rachel, University student; New millennium School Leaver).

The fact that many of the younger cohort use of terms such as ‘low class’ or high class’
and the far more blatant association between class and money, may be due to a number
of factors. What is particularly apparent and may to a degree be related to the gradual
change in the relationship with work that many working class people now experience
(Charlesworth 2000; Shildrick et al 2012) is the clear differences that exist between the
two cohorts understanding and ability to elaborate what their parents did or do for a
living.

The vast majority of the 1970’s school leaver cohort could clearly verbalise what their
parents did within their jobs when they themselves were school leaving aged children.

“He started off working in the foundry making Triumph Heralds, he got
a little bit of money left to him from a relative with which he
bought….when he used to work at Triumph he used to listen to all the
blokes that worked on the shop floor whinging and whining about how
much they paid for renting houses. So when he got this little bit of
money left to him he bought his first house and he divided it into
multiple occupations really, they were like little bedsits you know”.
(Des, Self employed builder; 1970’s School Leaver).
“Well when my mother was young she used to work at Cadburys until the family came along and then she gave up working to be a mother and a wife. My dad was a cabinetmaker and joiner by trade who was from Switzerland and when he came to England he worked at Cadburys as a carpenter until the early ‘70’s and then he started a building firm of his own”. (Gordon, Self employed painter and decorator; 1970’s School Leaver).

In comparison approximately half of the responses from the new millennium research participants were spilt between those that didn’t show a clear understanding of what their parents did for a living, or more prominently those showing awareness that their parents didn’t work for various reasons.

“No my dad can’t work, he suffers from arthritis, my mum is a full time carer for my sister”. (Kevin, attends training centre; New millennium School Leaver).

“My dad’s just been made redundant”.

(Emma, attends training centre; New millennium School Leaver).

The apparent change from clear recognition of what parents did for a living when
research participants were at school leaving age in the 1970’s, compared to either a lack of clear recognition or an alternative recognition of no current parental occupation, could have impacts on how class perception is verbalised differently amongst the younger cohort.

In turn the lack of clear parental occupational links amongst some of the new millennium school leavers could have clear resonance with some theoretical debates commenting on the changes in working class communities due to processes of deindustrialisation over a number of decades.

Charlesworth (2000; 68-69) argues that processes of deindustrialisation without any adequate forms of replacement in terms of secure work for working people, has effectively culturally disposed working class people of a communal culture based on work in similar industries. Instead the cultural identity across communities is replaced with processes of individuality. However, individualisation within economically poorer communities gets placed within social structures where job insecurity, associated poverty and other forms of social instability are prevalent.

Amongst the new millennium research cohort there seems to be a juxtaposed break in the socially structured association with their parents’ occupation, but maintenance of the psychological link with parental class and subsequent self perceived class. The perception of parental class seems to have shifted to perceptions based on parental class by income and of not being ‘low class’ a term which in itself seems to be associated
with being on a lower family income than the research participants concerned.

It is also important to recognise that whilst this paper may draw out potential differences in how personal class is individually perceived amongst groups of individuals across a distinct geographical space but from different generations, differences in themselves between generations no matter what they are, may be to an extent inevitable. Pilcher (1995: 70) argues that young peoples place within a certain historical time and context means that they will always experience certain problems that emanate largely from their social class differently to people who were young at an earlier period of time.

Taking on board Pilcher’s lines of enquiry and in further adherence to much of the new class analysis evaluated earlier in this paper (Savage et al 2013; Skeggs and Loveday 2012), this paper starts to establish how the ways in which the new millennium cohort perceive their class will be specific to them and will be mediated by numerous factors including but not exclusively, the economic climate they are growing up and leaving school within, the financial standing of their families, their ethnicity, gender and the social space they live their lives within.

Whilst many of the 1970’s school leavers are living or at one time lived when they were younger in the same social space as their new millennium counterparts, the fact that they are at a different stage in the life course also means that they have different social reference points. This in turn means that the way they experience living in similar social
spaces at the same time as younger people and also how they perceive certain social phenomenon such as individual class is likely to be different.

However, within this analysis there are some important anomalies that in turn may help to establish the interconnection between class perceptions amongst the younger research participants, actual knowledge of parental occupation and ability to navigate through the school system successfully. In particular data around the potential link between the new millennium participants advancement within further and higher education or employment and their seemingly greater awareness of what their parents do for a living seems of particular relevance.

Approximately half of the new millennium research participants were at the time of their interview in further or higher education, or in one case in employment. The vast majority of these research participants were able to give clearer explanations of what their parents did for a living. This is in comparison to the majority of the new millennium research participants that didn’t experience successful school careers and were in lower end training courses at the time of their interview. These people showed more of a tendency for either not being clear about what their parents did for a living, or more predominately an understanding that their parents didn’t work at the current time.

“My mum is now a manager at Birmingham University, like an admin manager, but she hasn’t always been like that. Like when I was younger. My dad, I don’t know what he does. When mum and dad were still
together he was like a sales rep, had a company car and now he’s just self-employed I think”. (Helen, University Student; New Millennium School Leaver).

“My dad’s a glazier and my mum’s a nursery manager”. (Gary, Film/Video Maker; New Millennium School Leaver).

“My mum is a social worker and my dad is an accountant”. (Steve, Further Education Student; New Millennium School Leaver).

This data could indicate the possibility that a greater understanding of parental occupation is linked to transference to further and higher education post school and these complex themes will be explored more fully in the following chapters.

However, this analysis needs to be tempered by the further possibility that from within the research cohort those school leavers who are not in further or higher education are possibly more likely to have parents that are currently not employed. Therefore their understanding of how parental occupation relates to parental class and subsequently their reading of their own class will potentially be influenced in different directions, most notably causing conflicting class perceptions;
“Q, What class would you say you are?”

“A, I would say middle class”

“Q, why would you say that?”

“A, I don’t know, just saying it, I’ve no idea”

( Kevin, attends a training centre; New Millennium School Leaver).

Further research would need to be undertaken for a more thorough and in-depth investigation of the possible prevalence of school leavers with unsuccessful school careers within this area and other similar areas having unemployed parents and the longevity or otherwise of patterns of employment and unemployment amongst these groups. Research in this area could build on the lines of enquiry established within this thesis but also more academically established work in the field (MacDonald and Marsh 2004; MacDonald et al 2005; Shildrick et al 2012).

Further research in this field could also expand analyses’ in newer directions by deliberating on the potential for perceptions of personal class amongst recent school leavers to be influenced by parental background but mediated further by variables such as parental employment patterns and these employment patterns subsequent influence
on school leaver transition to further and higher education. Due to limited capacity this thesis cannot expand on these debates further. However, the paper does recommend future lines of enquiry within these aspects of class analysis research should be explored. In particular, this research indicates the existence of fairly consistent signifiers within how young people in certain geographical spaces read their class, but recognises that additional fragmented family employment patterns and individual post school educational experiences influence how these signifiers are read in relation to the self.

The influence of type of work on class perception

The key relationship this research has established within the self perception of class seems to be the complex relationship with perceived parental class. There is however, further evidence from the 1970’s cohort that suggests further stratification within the perception of class and what influences such perceptions. These complexities relate initially to ‘working classness’ being related to the physical fact of having to work no matter what the occupation is. Within this analysis some of the generated data suggests that undertaking certain occupations can actually foster a political awareness of class that may in part facilitate a desire to either hold onto the class of origin or obtain a link to a class that may be different to that of origin.

Work, self sufficiency and class perception

It’s important to stress at this point that this section predominately refers to the 1970’s cohort and this is because only one of the new millennium cohort state they were in
employment over the time period the interviews took place. It is however, still useful to analyse whether there is any correlation between the data generated in regards to work and class from the one new millennium cohort undertaking paid employment.

Primarily it is worthwhile highlighting that a relatively small number of the 1970’s research participants identified the fact that they actually had to work as being related to how they perceived their class. This identification with the physical act of work isn’t necessarily always instead of class perception being built around the perception of parental or family class. At times the two elements were simultaneously acknowledged as influential when participants were questioned about why they considered themselves to be working class.

“Because I go work. Well, I think I’m not upper class cos they’re like mega loaded and I don’t think I’m middle class really, so I just think of myself as er, I don’t like to think that anybody’s better than me but I don’t think anybody’s worse than me”. (Des, Self Employed Builder; 1970’s School Leaver).

“Because I’ve got to work to live”. (Dennis, Self Employed Gas Fitter; 1970’s School Leaver).

“Because I’m self sufficient and independent. Not in an affluent
“Q, What class do you consider yourself?”

“A, Middle class I suppose”.

“Q, Why do you consider yourself that?”

“A, I’ve just worked all my life”.

(Alison, Self Employed Hairdresser; 1970’s School Leaver).

Initially, the fact that a number of the 1970’s school leaver cohort identify the act of working as one of the most significant factors in regards to whatformulates their class perception, could start to form theoretical links with some of the Marxist based discussions highlighted earlier in the paper (Harding 1998; Giddens 1971). However, what potentially undermines’ the formulation of any such sustainable links is some complexities in the relationship some of the participants create within their perceived class status and the process of having to work.
These complexities are most notable in the data generated by Peter, whereby Peter juxtaposes his perception that he is middle class with the idea that he is this class because he has to undertake the act of working.

However, Peter’s own perception of his middle class status could be deemed to be open to question. This is in particular because although Peter states he is a home owner which could be a possible indicator for his stated class status within the middle class, he also generates data throughout his interview that could suggest he has many variables making up his being that are more aligned to being a working class person. For example, his current and former occupation, levels of income and his experiences of education.

However, returning to the idea that the act of working has some sort of influence on the individual perception of personal class, it is interesting to analyse whether undertaking employment as a fairly recent school leaver offers any similarities in the relationship formed between working and class perception. As has been indicated earlier within the chapter, only one of the new millennium research participants was within employment at the time of their interview.

“Q. What class would consider yourself”.

“A. Definitely, say I’m working class”
“Q, Why would that be?”

“A, Probably because I live in an average house and I’ve never had things bought for me or I’ve had to have a job to buy them. I did things on my own, not had my parents buy me a car or buy me anything like that. I just did it for myself really”. (Gary, Film/Video Maker; New millennium School Leaver).

The data generated by Gary provides some useful information on how the physical act of working seems to be related to the independence to be self sustainable and these processes seem to be cross generational amongst the relatively small amount of research participants that recognised the act of working as important to the perceptions of their own class

*The influence of job type on perceptions of class*

The final part of this section evaluates some particular anomalies that occur within the research data and are specifically related to how the actual job undertaken and type of organisation some of the research participants work for, not only seems to influence but foster class awareness. This is in comparison to the vast majority of participants who, as it has already been detailed earlier in this chapter, see their occupation as less important in the development of class perception.
In particular two participants relay how their role as a worker within the trade union movement has fostered certain opinions about their class and ideas around class in general.

Primarily Allan elaborates most clearly the impact he believes that working in an overtly political sphere over many years such as the trade union movement has had on his perceptions of his class.

“mum was professional, my grandparents were professional, my dad was professional, but my mum raised me and my brother on her own. Dad left so we had the same deprivation as the working class, but it’s the class my parents came from more than the class I define myself as”.

“Q, Do you think the class you are has changed throughout your life”?

“A, I think it has, I think it’s become more absorbed in to the working class. I think that the middle is your aspirational parents who basically considered the two holidays a year and things like that. That's not my aspirations so I consider myself working class”.

“Q, Why do you think the way you view your class has changed
throughout your life”?

“A, Experience as being a trade union official. Just the fact that I think I’ve got a more defined view of what class actually is and I think working class are people who…now the middle class, to a certain degree, are people who have to work for a living through necessity but I think that my perception as me as a working class person is through my experience as a trade union official and working with other people who suffered a hell of a lot more than I did”. (Allan, Trade Union Organiser; 1970’s School Leaver).

The extract from the interview with Allan is interesting not only because of the implied influence of his working environment on his developing class perception, but also because it resonates with many of the themes raised within this chapter. Initially, like the majority of the research participants Allan mentions that it is the perceptions of parental class when he was a child that is the central influence on his own perceptions of his class of origin. However, unlike other research participants who either want to maintain psychological attachments to their perceived class of origin even withstanding research data that would contradict such attachments, or research participants that propose personal class advancement, Allan is the only research participant that proposes a type of downward mobility in relation to his class status.

Allan’s reasoning for a conversion from childhood middle class status to working class
status as an adult is complex and seems to be in part due to how he perceives his economic status, but also how he perceives the ambitions of middle class people compared to his own his working class ambitions.

However, what is useful when concluding this section is to analyse how Allan’s employment has fostered what he believes to be a knowledge about what it is to be working class and how he then aligns himself to this model of ‘working classness’. Interestingly Allan starts but isn’t able to complete his definition of what ‘working class people are’, which potentially questions the ways his involvement in the trade union movement has influenced a clear conception of what it is to be working class.

Ultimately how Allan’s political standpoints and views on class have been influenced by employment within the trade union movement, or alternatively employment within the trade union movement has been encouraged by his political standpoints is difficult to elaborate without further research. However, it would seem that at the very least employment within organisations with distinct goals and intrinsic historical and ideological foundations within working class political spheres, is an important factor in maintaining psychological links to a working class culture, even if that culture at times could be based as much on perception as lived reality.

The final section within this chapter will analyse data suggesting that all of the research participants display some form of ambition no matter what their educational or transitional experiences. However, these discussions will be broadened out to delineate
how the data suggests the type of ambition displayed by research candidates can to an extent be read as intertwined with the complex ways they perceive their class.

**Elaborate and Grounded; the interaction between class perception and ambition**

Initially within the research design for this project it was deemed important to ask questions regarding the ambitions that all research participants have with regards to both working life and also life outside of the working environment. These questions are posed in part so this research project could attempt to avoid falling into the methodological pitfalls the paper has critiqued other important academic texts for. In particular some of the influential studies on working class children’s experiences of education (Ashton and Field 1976) are critically analysed earlier in the thesis for the way they offer theoretical explanations of what are deemed the various educational and post school experiences of working class children, without providing much of a voice for the people under consideration.

In addition some more recent research discovers widespread ambition amongst young people surviving within low income streams, often with a lack of educational qualifications and claiming unemployment benefits periodically within some of the most deprived parts of the UK (MacDonald et al 2005; Shildrick et al 2012). This research project deems these contemporary research programmes as particularly important in the current period for the way they counteract rhetoric from policy makers deeming a lack of ambition amongst individual’s on lower income’s as being intrinsic in their educational and subsequent occupational failures.
However, the data generated in this research related to work and non work ambitions also produce lines of enquiry in some unexpected directions. In particular it is suggested that there may be even a casual link between participant’s ambitions and how they view their class or the development of their class through the life course.

For example amongst the 1970’s school leaver cohort it would seem some of the participants that show tendencies towards a more transformative class status, generate what this project terms more elaborate ambitions. Whilst those 1970’s school leavers that perceive less movement within their class status through the life course often purvey more grounded ambitions.

Elaborate ambitions also seem prevalent amongst the new millennium school leaver cohort as well, in particular amongst those participants undertaking further and higher education post school. In contrast those from the new millennium cohort transferring into lower end training courses after formal schooling seem to have more grounded ambitions focused on gaining meaningful employment often within industry or with a trade in mind.

However, in a different trajectory to the grounded ambitions delineated by some of the 1970’s cohort, grounded ambitions amongst young research participants with unsuccessful school careers behind them often have an emphasis on obtaining ‘more money’.
Also, reference to research suggesting occupational ambitions amongst working class school leavers is often mediated by historical associations with certain employment spheres within certain geographical locations (Kintrea et al 2011) is important within the context of this analysis. In this regards it is useful to question whether the ‘grounded’ ambitions of the new millennium school leavers not in further and higher education are actually escapist ambitions, given the occupational opportunities actually available to them in the location they live in within a period of widespread recession.

*The mediation of ambition by class perception*

Initially it is important to clarify that the vast majority of the 1970’s school leaver research participants expressed work and other ambitions that could be considered fairly modest and grounded in the reality of their lived lives. In particular, most of the participants from this cohort when asked what they wanted to be doing in regards to work in the next five to ten years suggested that they were happy in the work that they currently undertook and basically wanted to maintain current working status;

“Probably doing something similar to what I’m doing at the moment, trade union work, I don’t see myself doing anything, at the age of 47 I don’t see a major career change”. (Allan, Trade Union Organiser; 1970’s School Leaver).

“Hopefully doing the same as I’m doing now if I stay fit and healthy as
obviously it’s quite a physical job. But I’d like to be doing the same. I’ve got to do my Corgi again at the end of next year, because every five years you have to re-do it so as long as I pass all that. It’s just getting your head back into all the learning (Dennis, Self Employed Gas Fitter; 1970’s School Leaver).

“Being realistic, there’s, I would like to be doing much the same thing. I don’t have huge ambitions. I won’t be able to retire in that period. It would be nice, as the kids get older to have the stability and just continue as we are”. (Tony, Manager-Car Mechanics; 1970’s School Leaver).

The last extract is interesting as Tony is one of the 1970’s research participants that elaborates in an earlier part of his interview that he considers himself middle class. This is an important factor to explore as it starts to allow for a summary that the perception of class status amongst the older research participants at least, doesn’t necessarily influence the type of ambitions they hold. Instead there may be evidence from within the data suggesting the more secure research participants are within their stated class, whatever that stated class may be, the more grounded their ambitions are. In comparison those participants delineating what this paper would suggest are more elaborate ambitions purvey perceptions of a more transformative class journey through the life course.

“Totally frank, I would like to see myself retiring to Portugal”.
“Q, Any reason particularly for that”?

“A, Easier lifestyle. The reason I’m putting the effort in now is to realise the ambition of retiring when I’m sort of 55, for an easier quieter life, more…a warmer climate if you like”. (Jimmy, Self Employed Builder; 1970’s School Leaver).

Another important element to consider within this analysis is the possibility that grounded or elaborate ambitions and in turn the more linear perception of personal class, might be processes that may or may not be psychologically linked to each other, but nevertheless are processes that are mediated by memories of childhood and in particular the childhood home.

Whereas those participants from the 1970’s cohort purveying more elaborate ambitions and have more transformative class perceptions, also have more negative memories of the childhood home. These differences within the data are most clearly outlined by comparing some of the feedback between how two members of the same family with different ambitions and perceptions of their own class and how their class has developed perceive the home they grew up in simultaneously in different ways.

This data also highlights in possibly a more extreme way how being a working class person in this part of Birmingham is a socially stratified experience. Whereby even
siblings within the same age group and growing up in the same family home can have individual variables as part of their being that facilitate differing social experiences, including how they read their class and life experiences.

“Q, What kind of home did you grow up in as a child”? 

“A, Just a normal happy home. Mum and dad went out to work, we went to school, played out, that's all really”.

“Q, What kind of home do you live in now”? 

“A, The same, a happy home. Got two children, they’re both at home, both happy, whereas both of us work; I’d say they’ve got a good lifestyle”. (Sheila, Part Time Classroom Assistant; 1970’s School Leaver).

“I was raised in, my early memories were a big council house split in two, so it was effectively a flat in Gillott Road. I just remember it being very cold”. (Kenny, Accountant; 1970’s School Leaver).
What is interesting is that Kenny as highlighted earlier in the chapter, attempts to psychologically sustain his perception that he is working class. He does this whilst distancing himself both physically (in terms of where he lives), occupationally but also ideologically from many facets of working class life. However, within her interview Sheila see’s herself as maintaining some aspects of her working classness, but acknowledges she may have moved towards a middle class way of life. Sheila also elaborates more grounded ambitions for the future in terms of wanting to be happy and maintain the current focus of her life.

All of these facets are mediated by at times vastly different readings of their childhood home, where Sheila’s feedback focuses on “playing out” and living in a “happy home”, but Kenny’s views of living in the same home at the same time were mainly that he remembers it “being cold”.

In line with arguments developed earlier in the research and also touched upon earlier within this chapter, the way memories have been constructed by the two participants may serve certain functions in both their lives. In particular the data generated by Kenny in relation to the type of home he was brought up in compared to where he lives now as an adult in his 50’s, “I have a semi-detached home which I suppose is quite a rural, reasonably affluent setting, look out the back garden and there’s fields”, may serve the function of allowing him to construct a life course that has been off self improvement (Libby and Eibach 2011; 716).
In a similar fashion Sheila, communicating memories of a happy childhood and a happy home, may serve in part to reinforce her own feedback of her current home being a happy one.

Further research questions should therefore be formulated relating to how people from the same family, generation and childhood home have different requirements from their class perceptions. From the need for psychological confirmation of a life of personal transformation and success away from many facets of the childhood background, or indeed the requirement of a consistent attachment to social features related to childhood that are utilised as indicators of a ‘happy life’ both as a child and as an adult in their 50’s.

*The variances in new millennium school leaver ambitions.*

Much of the data generated within this section is interesting for a number of reasons. Primarily, like MacDonald and Marsh (2004) and MacDonald et al (2005) found within their studies, young people including those that may be considered from deprived backgrounds and may not for example have experienced high achievement at school, still hold future ambitions.

The ambitions they find easier to elaborate are those related to the world of work, potentially undermining the rhetoric found in some policy fields suggesting many school leavers from lower income families have no ambition and are not interested in
working (Macdonald et al 2005). Also, interestingly an earlier part of this paper acknowledges assertions made by Charlesworth (2000) in relation to how processes of deindustrialisation across a number of generations has dispossessed many people and younger generations in particular from industrial signifiers and a common language associated with working life.

However, in contrast to Charlesworth’s (2000) proposals the data generated within this research relating to the ambitions of the new millennium school leavers with less successful school careers, suggests that despite many associations with parental occupations disappearing for current school leaving generations, a common desire to work in certain ‘traditional’ professions remains intact.

The data also suggests a potential diversification in the ambitions held by those research participants studying within further and higher education at the time of their interview. Although there are anomalies within this comparative data that will be explored, the fundamental trends seem to be that those participants undertaking post school education have what could be described as more elaborate ambitions in relation to the types of job or fields of work they would like to go into.

On the other hand those participants that were either in lower end training courses or unemployed at the time of interview, have what at first glance seems more grounded employment ambitions but with a stronger emphasis on earning lots of money.
Initially it is useful to analyse some of the data generated by those participants in post school education when they were asked what they wanted to do in the next five to ten years;

“I’m really into going away, I love holidays and stuff. If I could do anything I’d probably do some volunteer work abroad, that's the kind of person I want to be anyway. Like work abroad in developing countries and stuff, that's what I want to do. I don’t know if I’d do that, its like practical things that you don’t know”. (Helen, University Student; New millennium, School Leaver).

“I would love to be able to make a living as an artist, like a career artist. I’d love to be a quite well known artist if that was offered at all. Kind of have my name in the art books and the history of art. In terms of, it’s quite a passion, I’d love to set up my own studio and do stuff from there really. I do it at the moment but it’s only part time when the work comes in. I’d love to set up in a studio and expand in that, so obviously in ten years I’d like my own studio”. (Mark, University Student; New millennium School Leaver).

It is difficult to know whether post school educational experiences have produced more elaborate career ambitions, or whether these ambitions are possibly as much escapist rather than just elaborate. Further longitudinal research whereby research participants are
re-interviewed in future years could possibly provide evidence as to whether the career ambitions provided are realistic or not. If the ambitions amongst this group of research participants are further mediated by similar processes that help to develop class perceptions is also difficult to tell. Although it is true that this group did largely have firmer perceptions of their working class status than some of the other new millennium participants.

However, it may be more feasible that a dynamic interaction between numerous factors individual to each person may be continually taking place. Whereby the more secure employment status of parents at school leaving age provides on the one hand firmer psychological signifiers of what it is to be a ‘working class’ person and simultaneously in more practical terms the provision of the financial means to make transference to higher education. Once attendance at university is achieved, divergent social and cultural interactions may in themselves facilitate more elaborate career ambitions.

In contrast the data around ambitions generated by those new millennium research participants that were in lower end training courses or unemployed at the time of interview seems more grounded in terms of the type of work they would like to do, but with more additional emphasis on immediate financial gain.

“Hopefully having a job that pays good money, probably building up computers, selling them on again”. (Andy, attends a training centre; New millennium School Leaver).
“I don’t know, all I want to do is make loads of money. Get some money somehow. I don’t want to sell drugs or anything, I want to do something right, you know what I mean? I don’t want to be like anybody else, I want to earn my money”. (Amy, attends a training centre; New millennium School Leaver).

“I’d say me and my mate who lives two doors away, own our business, hopefully I’ll be having a Jack Daniels in my hand. Working really, just got a job, a house, hopefully I’d have moved out by then”. (Daniel, attends a training centre; New Millennium School Leaver).

Again, like the potentially more elaborate ambitions of the participants in post school education, it is difficult to assess the extent to which the ambitions of these participants are more grounded considering their differing educational and economic starting positions. It is also difficult to gain a thorough understanding of the greater emphasis on financial gain without further research. Although one suggestion could be as their perception of class may in itself be mediated by conceptions of family income and of not being ‘poor’, or ‘low class’, thoughts of earning lots of money may also be related to perceptions of development away from being ‘low class’ during the life course.

**Conclusions**

This research paper has proposed like much of the recent newer class analyses’
documented throughout this thesis (Bottero 2004; Savage et al 2013; Skeggs and Loveday 2012) that defining what it is to be working class is fraught with complexities. In particular as the importance of employment within industry starts to fragment, future research in the field needs to continue to acknowledge the multi-faceted nature of communities that may be considered working class. This paper therefore proposes that being a working class person in the UK within the second decade of the new millennium continues to be a socially stratified experience (Bourdieu 1984).

The data reviewed within this chapter to a degree supports ideas of socially stratified experiences creating some similar and some conflicting views of class, for a group of people living within a certain social space within the south west of Birmingham at specific periods in time. Unlike some research (Savage et al 2001), the research does find that for a relatively large number of research participants across both cohorts, questions related to their personal class are meaningful and produce coherent answers about the class they as individuals believe they belong to. The research is therefore structured around participant self perception of their class including what class means to individuals and how if at all personal class is perceived to develop through the life course.

The chapter outlines the key similarity in class perception across the majority of the research participants. The influence of parental class, or at least parental class in the period the research participants were growing up, is evaluated as of key importance in the development of perceived personal class amongst most of the participants.
This feature emanating from within the data is interesting as in some respects it may question some Marxist assertions regarding the idea of class consciousness being generated through the experience of work within capitalist societies. Within this research personal occupation is rarely conceived as important in the creation of class perceptions, even amongst those participants that had a seemingly more linear transition from school to work. Instead parental occupation and laterally family finance are far more influential within the generation of class perceptions.

However, there are further complexities within how perceived class is influenced by perceived parental class. For example amongst the 1970’s school leaver cohort parental occupation at the time they left school is intrinsic within how they perceive at least their class of origin. However, the interaction between the way memories are used to psychologically justify the current social position of individuals and future ambitions, influence the development of three distinct class perception trajectories amongst this cohort.

Primarily there are those research participants that elaborate a degree of ambiguity regarding whether they are still the working class of their origin or whether they have integrated into the middle class. These participants primarily relate their class of origin and any potential transformation within their class to their parents occupational and subsequent class transformations rather than their own occupational progression through the life course. A second grouping perceive themselves to have made more of an individualistic transformative life time journey away from their parents class largely through occupational progression and the move into home ownership. Interestingly
these participants often hold more elaborate future ambitions that often incorporate further movement away from their current social standing.

A third grouping within this cohort conceive themselves as largely continuing through the life course within the same class grouping. In contrast to the other participants within this cohort this grouping elaborate future ambitions that relate to maintaining the status quo, in regards to their current employment and sustaining the general ‘happiness’ within their lives.

Perceived parental class is also the fundamental influence on the perceptions of their own individual class amongst the new millennium cohort. However, there is often either a lack of clarity regarding what their parents did for a living amongst this group or indeed an acknowledgment amongst many that their parents were currently out of work.

This seems to encourage a general trend in perceptions of class being influenced by family finances rather than parental occupation. This factor may relate to the break in the psychological link between individuals and the world of work within industry across working class communities (Charlesworth 2000). Although in contradiction to Charlesworth’s (2000) assertions, the research also found that many of the younger participants and in particular those with less successful school careers, still held fairly traditional career ambitions, although with an emphasis on gaining immediate financial rewards which in turn may be related to more precarious family finances.
Finally, returning to the socially stratified model of ‘working classness’ referred to earlier, it is important to acknowledge that for both research cohorts the way individual class perceptions have been built up through the life course and continue to be created, may interact dynamically with either recent or more long term memories of educational experiences and immediate transitions post school.

In particular, some of the societal influences on class perceptions may in turn impact on an individual’s ability to navigate through an education system that isn’t necessarily functioning with their intrinsic requirements at its centre. Therefore individual interactions within some of the research participants lives that help to continually create and recreate their class perceptions such as parental employment status, may also practically and psychologically impact on the ability of individuals to achieve educational success that in turn may affect the success or otherwise within transition into whatever industrial landscape exists or existed for research participants. These themes will be analysed in more depth in the following two chapters.
Chapter Eight: Voices from South West Birmingham: Invisible choices, educational individualism and alienated instrumentalism – working class responses to their educational experiences

Introduction

This chapter focuses on the complex working class relationship with the education system over the last thirty years and more in the main research site. The dynamics of working class interactions with the education system in this location are delineated as at times individualised, but also very often a set of shared educational experiences mediated by class and the generation school was attended within.

Educational experiences are therefore perceived to be influenced by the societal factors that help to frame class perceptions as explored earlier in the project. In this regards it is suggested the way the individual educational journey is viewed retrospectively by research participants is impacted upon by aspects of their family biographies, dominant aspects of the education systems they found themselves operating within and the opportunities perceived to be available to them post school.

Three key themes therefore emerge from within the data generated on educational experiences. Primarily, it is clear there are significant and legitimate working class educational decisions and choices made that seem to cross generational boundaries. Some of the key working class educational choices such as the increased involvement of
children within secondary school choices, schools being chosen because of previous attendance by siblings and friends and school choices being influenced by the close proximity of the school to the home, align to an extent with other theoretical debates in the field reviewed earlier in the research (Reay and Lucey 2004; Gerwitz 2001). However, the key area for consideration within this part of the research project is the fact these working class educational decisions show a remarkable longevity, especially given the fact that educational policy over the last three decades has seemed to encourage parents to prioritise all together different educational choices.

In this regards this chapter will propose that some of the legitimate educational choices of this set of working class individuals have been and continue to be dismissed within the educational policy of successive governments in recent years. The paper further suggests that refusals to acknowledge the importance of key working class educational requirements are embodied within education policy that has developed its focus increasingly upon diversifying forms of educational individualism.

It is therefore evaluated that long term dismissal of working class educational requirements are symbolised initially for the 1970’s research cohort by what is viewed as a divisive and elitist grammar school system.

Within the contemporary period facets of the ‘educational choice’ agenda are delineated as effectively disenfranchising some research participants, where the requirement’s of an ever escalating educational market place with parents who are committed consumers
of education at its centre, valorised above the needs of many of the new millennium research participants.

The second key theme to emerge from the data on this subject focuses on how the specific industrial contexts within each era inform specific types of response to some alienating educational experiences.

Primarily some participants predominately from the 1970’s cohort purvey degrees of frustration at school systems which they perceive as not allowing them to achieve academically, but nevertheless expressed enjoyment in relation to some aspects of the school environment. The various educational frustrations remembered by the 1970’s research participants seem to be in part tempered by the wide scale availability of work post school in this period and also some common school experiences facilitated through the comprehensive school system. This paper suggests that the combination of these factors leads to retrospective acceptance of potential educational inequalities from this cohort.

In a different trajectory some of the new millennium research participants offer memories of frustrations with aspects of school but still complied enough to be reasonably successful academically. Whereas other participants elaborate memories of a more overt dislike of school and didn’t achieve academic success. These varying educational experiences and outcomes it is argued, interact with wider policies and societal transformations that have encouraged years of higher educational expansion,
sitting alongside a research site that has been party to decades of deindustrialisation.

This paper suggests the combination of these educational and industrial transformations create polarised transitional outcomes of either entry in further and higher education or lower end training courses post school for these research participants. It is suggested perceptions of the schools role as facilitator of transference into relatively limited post school outcomes helps to create more volatile and angrier responses regarding school experiences from some of the new millennium research cohort.

The final theme to emerge from within this chapter encompasses an analysis of the processes whereby frustrations with time spent at school do not generally escalate into wide scale rejection of the school system. In particular it is suggested that Brown’s (1987) theories relating to alienated instrumentalism being a legitimate working class response to the education system has some resonance.

What is potentially most interesting from within Brown’s (1987) study is his suggestion that processes of compliance from amongst working class children within school may start to breakdown within a deindustrialised society and in times of recession where incentives for complying with the school system to gain adequate qualifications for the transfer into largely industrial employment start to disappear.

Debates initiated in the final section of the chapter refer back to class analyses’
undertaken previously whereby it is proposed that new millennium participant’s willingness to continue to take part in processes of alienated instrumentalism are influenced by their family background and framed by their subsequent class perception. In turn it is further proposed that the ability to participate in processes of alienated instrumentalism influence transference within the contemporary period into further and higher education or lower end training courses and unemployment for the new millennium research participants.

**What is the basis of working class educational choices?**

The changing nature of class perception detailed earlier in the research is important as it is evaluated as being intertwined with the changing industrial environment and the subsequent changes to the psychological and physical relationship with work amongst school leavers within the last thirty years. In turn the integral aspects within the creation and diversification of class perceptions are viewed as intrinsically linked with the way school experiences are verbalised retrospectively. In this regard the changing industrial environment is viewed as influencing the different framing of class perceptions and both these phenomena are evaluated as interacting with developing education policy to create transforming working class educational experiences within south west Birmingham

*The persistence of working class educational choices*

It is within this context the research has found surprisingly little if any cross generational change in the key educational choices participants remember being made
and indeed making about their education. It is therefore suggested that despite a transformation in the signifiers of what it is to be a working class individual, some elements integral to the social make up of working class people show a remarkable resistance to change. In this regards some of the influences on important working class educational decisions purvey a longevity not afforded to other areas of working class life.

The data presents a number of key influences on the educational choices of research participants that span the generational divide. Initially, a lack of parental involvement and extended presence of the child’s involvement in secondary school choice is prevalent in the data from some research participants from both cohorts.

“I did, I wanted to go there”.

“Q, So your parents didn’t have anything to do with it”? 

“A, No I just asked my mum, I said I wanted to go to Shenley cos its closer and things like that”. (Kevin, attends a training centre; New Millennium School Leaver).

“Well I did really because I passed my art exam and I could have gone to
art college, or art school whatever you call it. But in the end it was a bit further away so I had to choose between two or three schools I think and I just chose Bourneville Grammar tech. My brother was there as well”. (Gordon, Self employed Painter and Decorator; 1970’s School Leaver).

“Parents sort of didn’t make that decision; I suppose I did because that was where my friends were going so you tend to follow where your friends are going. I don’t know if that’s what you did in that generation or, but you tend to go where your friends are going”. (Sally, Senior Administrative Assistant; 1970’s School leaver).

“Erm me really as an 11 year old, 11, 12 year old, because I was the one who passed the 11+ which allowed me to choose Northwood or St Phillips, I could have gone to anyone of those because taking the 11+ plus. There was only four of us at St Peters that actually passed them and I happened to be one of them. Why I chose Bestwood was because it’s up the road, all the lads were going there and I was mad about football”. (Ken, Freight Worker; 1970’s School Leaver).

A number of important themes emerge from the data extracts utilised. Primarily as already discussed for some participants parents are perceived as having little to do with secondary school choices. This is extremely interesting within the overall context of the theoretical assertions analysed within the research paper. In particular Ashton and Field
evaluate potential cultural disparities between the education system within the period their study was undertaken and the working class. They assess that this cultural disparity is in part symbolised by a distinct lack of parental involvement in school choice within the period.

However, adhering to Ashton and Field’s (1976) assertions in this regards ultimately means forming agreements with certain assumptions within their study, which are questioned to an extent by the data generated.

In the first instance some of Ashton and Field’s conclusions can be read as suggesting that parents who seem to have limited involvement within their child’s secondary school choices, lack a cultural awareness of responsibilities they are presumably supposed to have as part of their social make up in this regard. However, these very presumptions if they exist, do not take account of the factors this research has discovered are of importance to working class people within the arena of school choices.

Therefore the data extracts referenced earlier suggest that working class secondary school choices whether perceived to be made by children or parents in the research site, are made on the basis of the location of the school being near the home, siblings’ previous attendance at the school and other elements of the community in the guise of participant’s friends intending to attend the school. If these factors are not considered as they do not seem to be within Ashton and Field’s (1976) research, then some of the
fundamental influences on working class parents thinking in regards to their children’s secondary school choices will also be absent from research in the field.

Ashton and Field’s (1976) assertions can also be questioned by data generated within the research that suggests for many of the participants across both generations there was in fact a degree of parental influence in the school of choice.

“I suppose it was my parents that were interested in that school, their choice really because my brothers had been to that school and obviously my third brother would attend the same school, so just being a foregone conclusion really that we would attend the same school”. (Des, Self employed builder; 1970’s School Leavers).

“Q, Who made the decision to send you to Shenley”? 

“A, My dad”.

“Q, Did you talk to him about it”? 

“A, Yeah cos my brothers and my sisters all went there as well”.

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Parental reasons for school choice are often the same as those given when the participant’s themselves remember being the dominant decision makers. This highlights the importance and longevity of the key working class educational decisions in this geographical area, but also the fact these dominant working class modes of thinking in regards to educational choices may be transferable between parents and their children. This may indicate the basis of the educational decisions within working class families may be just as much of an important issue to research as studies on who actually makes the decisions.

This thesis therefore argues that issues relating to the key working class educational choices made across generations within geographical areas such as the research site have been ill considered within some theoretical discussions surrounding working class incompatibility with dominant modes of education. In turn the lack of consideration for the basis of key working class educational decisions may distort academic and also policy readings of some of the complexities within the working class relationship with the education system.

This research therefore recommends the dynamic between working class parents and their children in relation to schooling decisions should be re-assessed and instead evaluated on the basis of how and why the psychological attachment to certain school
choices indentified in this research is sustained over a relatively lengthy period of time. This review should also take into account how a greater academic understanding of working class educational choices could influence more progressive educational policy in the future.

However, it is also important to acknowledge that there are some anomalies within the data across the two generational cohorts, whereby different educational choices were made. The paper argues these different decisions are still class based and analysing them offers an opportunity to evaluate how a parental class aligned towards values based on realising aspiration through educational individualism and elitism, influences some schooling decisions but also at times encourages detrimental memories of the period spent at school amongst some research participants.

*The influence of class and aspiration on educational choices*

Initially it is useful to explore some of the data generated by 1970’s school leaver research participants that attended a grammar school. These research participants produce some diverse feedback, whereby those participants that attended grammar school and didn’t like the experience, have strong perceptions about their working class status that is itself facilitated in part by their employment within an overtly political sphere.

“No I hated it. I absolutely hated it. I just thought the whole…obviously
teaching’s changed since then but I thought that teachers on the whole were sadistic. Unless you, there was an expectation if you went to grammar school that you had managed to get to the top of the pile. There was this whole thing about grammar school “that's it”. Well actually only 10% of people in our school in our year were encouraged, the rest of us were left to sink or swim. I just loathed the whole atmosphere, it was too, I don’t know, something about it. I didn’t like the bullying that went on amongst kids, I didn’t the complete…there were notable exceptions, a couple of teachers were exceptions but the majority of them just weren’t interested in what you did. The fact that I came away with five O’ levels was a miracle in itself”. (Allan, Trade union employee; 1970’s School Leaver).

With these participants, parents are remembered as the key decision makers in regards to secondary school choice, parental schooling decisions in turn are perceived to be made on a differing basis to the majority of comprehensive attending research participants.

The data therefore suggests that grammar school attendance by some working class people is based on different modes of parental thinking in regards to education’s role in their children’s lives and therefore choices may be driven by different class perceptions and life expectations amongst parents, themselves built up through their life course.
However, as discussed earlier in the research it is important to question how much of these participants reflections on their school experiences and their parents role within these processes are impacted upon by in these cases, their employment inspired perceptions of their own working class status. As noted earlier it is interesting that Allan is the only participant across the two cohorts that self perceives a downward trajectory in terms of his current class status and his class of origin. Allan’s class perceptions of his working class status seem to be tied closely with a model of what it is to be a working class person itself based on beliefs forged within employment within the trade union movement.

Interestingly another of the grammar school attendees from the 1970’s cohort (Kenny) has built up perceptions of his working class status throughout his life that like the majority of other participants are largely based on his parents’ occupations and living standards. However, unlike most other participants his self perceived working class status seems to conflict with his occupation and associated income and home ownership in a relatively affluent part of south Birmingham. Therefore Kenny’s desire to hold onto a working class status that seems foreign to other aspects of his life is evaluated within this research as playing an important psychological role within his self perception that he has individually advanced his educational and occupational career. In this respect Kenny indicates a lack of parental involvement within secondary school choices with a degree more force than other participants.

“Me, I don’t ever remember ever having any conversations about my education with my parents”. (Kenny, Accountant; 1970’s School
Therefore grammar school attendance in the 1970’s from amongst research participant’s that still consider themselves working class, although with differing outlooks on what it is to be a working class person, seem to be party to a complex set of educational choices. Parents are perceived by participant’s to be a lot more influential in the choice of school by those grammar school attendees who didn’t enjoy the experience and there is some indication that critical reflections of parental choice of school juxtapose thoughts about parental class that are in opposition to the personal class perceptions formed through a particular kind of working life. How much a lack of individual association with what is perceived as an aspirational parental class influences the casting of responsibility for un-enjoyable school experiences onto the parents are questions that should be pursued within further research.

For the one participant from this cohort that enjoyed a successful grammar school career and transferred post school into higher education, an educational and occupational career that is influenced by the self rather than anyone else including parents is elaborated. This last point relates to debates in earlier chapters suggesting people that seem through their occupation and home ownership to have transcended their class of origin, may psychologically sustain an attachment to being a working class person as a way of self assessing a life of personal achievement and advancement (Kirk 2008).

It is useful to conclude this section by acknowledging that although the prevalence of
the grammar school system has diminished in recent decades, one of the new millennium participants did attend a grammar school. Of particular interest is that choice of a grammar school is once again seemingly influenced by the social interactions that influence the perceived class background of the research participant and her parents.

Importantly in relation to the more contemporary signifiers of policies of educational individualism, the choice of school is also made through engagement in one of the key facilitators of the ‘school choice’ agenda, the school league tables.

“It was my decision but my parents encouraged it cos they knew it was a good school”

“Q, Why was this particular school chosen do you think”?

“A, I think because it's a good school cos, yeah it always did well, it was in the tables, the league tables”. (Joanne, Further education student; New Millennium School Leavers).

The data extract from Joanne is useful in relation to the wider concerns of the research project. In particular this research questions how the distinct and dominant educational
concerns of most of the working class people and their parents within this research project have been subjugated to educational policies focusing on educational individualism. Initially educational individualism is realised through grammar school education and in more recent decades through ideological concerns of educational choice as part of the continuing progression of an educational market. The extract from Joanne’s interview highlights one research participant that along with her parents have actively engaged with educational policies advocating ‘choice’ through interaction with the schools performance within ‘league tables’.

The utilisation of school league tables in facilitating school choice is part of what this research project suggests is the escalation of an educational market in Britain and has been evaluated in depth earlier within the thesis.

Arguments have also been touched upon earlier in the research suggesting that a diversifying educational choice agenda facilitated by a school accountability regime, seems attractive to and engages middle class parents more than it does working class parents. In particular Reay and Lucey (2004; 39-40) identify that education policy dominated by ideologies of educational choice doesn’t take into account that working class people predominately do not have access to the resources available to be able to engage fully with a choice agenda. The example they use within their research is the lack of resources available to working class people that would prevent their children travelling outside of the immediate area to go to a better performing school.
Gerwitz (2001; 366) extends this line of enquiry by suggesting New Labour attempted to actually realign working class modes of thinking in regards to education with the middle class, in particular by encouraging working class parents to use the tools of choice (for example league tables) to direct their thinking regarding their children’s education. Gerwitz (2001) suggests that this attempted redirection of working class thinking in regards to education ignores the realities of many working class people’s lives including their actual educational requirements.

In this respect the data generated by Joanne’s interview relating to engagement in the school choice agenda is actually unusual in comparison to the data generated on this subject by the majority of other new millennium school leavers.

Additionally the research also suggests Joanne’s grammar school experiences are, like the 1970’s grammar school attendees, orientated by the social factors also influencing her perceptions of her own and her parents’ transforming class. Joanne consider herself as ‘probably middle class’, although she states she lives in a nice family home but is not as rich as some others who she attends school with.

“Cos it’s not like we’re poor, or live in a really bad area but we’re not like some of my friends have huge houses, we’re kind of average”.

She also considers her parents as middle class although acknowledges they may have
come from a working class background. In turn it may be evaluated that engagement in the educational choice agenda by Joanne and her parents are classed based decisions even if this is implicit. This seems particularly prominent when analysing the responses of most of the other new millennium research participants earlier in the research, who generally either state they are working class or are confused and unsure about their class status and have simultaneously not engaged in processes of school choice.

The following section will broaden out discussions about how generationally influenced processes of educational individualism realised through the grammar school system and in the contemporary period through facets of the educational choice agenda, have in part caused differing degrees of frustration and at times educational alienation amongst research participants. This evaluation will also scope out how the elaboration of educational frustrations are generationally structured and influenced by both diversifying educational policies and a transforming industrial setting within the research location.

**Educational Individualism: The causes of and responses to educational frustrations**

Educational individualism is viewed within this research project as a phenomena that largely by being underpinned by diversifying cross governmental policy over a number of years, is now the dominant educational ideology influencing most facets of the working class educational experience in one way or another. This section will therefore build on the earlier exploration of how educational individualism was facilitated in the
research location in the 1970’s and how it has advanced and diversified in the contemporary period.

*Educational individualism and elitist education systems*

Policies of educational individualism are symbolised by different facets in the 1970’s to the contemporary period. In this respect as has already been discussed earlier in the chapter, the grammar school system is proposed within this research as the main facilitator of educational individualistic ideals and ambitions within the earlier period. Data is therefore evaluated outlining some of the key concerns the 1970’s school leavers have with the grammar school system in terms of its influence on their own school experiences from within and outside of grammar schools.

The research argues that aspects of the grammar school system are endemic of a culture that encourages the wider dismissal of working class educational requirements and indeed abilities during the period of the late 1970’s onwards.

It is also important to stress that educational alienation resulting from actual experiences of grammar school education differs amongst research participants. Firstly there is the perceived impact on individual educational experiences from within the comprehensive system that the very existence of grammar schools had. In this regards some participants’ educational frustrations seem to be tempered to a degree by both the commonality in experiences in the comprehensive school system and the abundance of
relatively secure work opportunities available post school.

However, as an earlier part of this chapter has already outlined grammar school choices in the 1970’s were potentially influenced by parental class perceptions for some participants. Within this context it is useful to initially explore in the first instance some of the reasons provided by the participants who attended a grammar school as to why they remember a dislike of the grammar school system.

“It was just the whole teaching, as I say there was a couple of exceptions but I mean, it was just a case of well sorry you’re not in the top stream so I’m not really interested in you. Its interesting you go on sites like Friends Reunited that people go on to, you know I went to Kings Heath Grammar school in 1973 and it was a wonderful school, and you feel like saying hang on a minute, I don’t know what school you went to but it wasn’t the one I went to”. (Allan, Trade union employee; 1970’s School Leaver).

“Q, What are you lasting memories of school”?

“A, I hated it to begin with; I did feel a bit like a fish out of water. When I went to sixth form I liked school”.
“Q, Why did you feel like a fish out of water first of all”?

“A, I think some of the girls who went there were quite middle class and I wasn’t so I was quite almost deliberately anti-middle class. Deliberately kind of embraced the whole working class. Thought they were the salt of the earth”. (Sylvia-Trade union employee; 1970’s School Leaver).

Initially, with similarities to some of the data generated within Allan’s interview, the data extracted from this part of the interview with Sylvia provides a basis for theorising her perceptions of her class and how these perceptions are built up and sustained have influenced the memories she has of her time within school. What is not clear from the data analysis is how much Sylvia’s perceptions of her class and what have influenced these perceptions have actually influenced her memories of school as her life has continued post school, in other words it is not clear how much of her school memories were created at school or have instead developed as she herself has developed her thinking regarding for example her class within her adult life.

A prime example would be her assertion that “class is a social concept”. It would take further questioning to establish whether she actually thought this when she was at school, or if it is a thought process that she has developed over time but that she psychologically attaches to her memories of time spent within the school environment.
There is therefore a need for further research and subsequent clarification in regards to how memories of schooling that in particular took place many years previously are influenced by class perceptions built up through the subsequent life course. In the meantime it is useful to acknowledge there is data from grammar school attendees that pinpoints what some of the other main issues with the system are for some research participants. Within his interview Allan mentioned the unfairness of streaming that took place from within the grammar school system and this theme is mentioned again from another of the 1970’s grammar school attendees.

“when we did get into the grammar school, we were streamed after the first year and from the first year we went into what was called a fast class, it began with ‘F’. Whereas everybody else didn’t and the vast majority of them were geared towards, even from the second year at school, were geared towards leaving in the fifth year and all of us who were in the fast stream were geared to stopping on for sixth form and university”.

“Q, What age were you then”? 

“A, I was 12, with very few exceptions, that's what happened, all of us went on to sixth form. Very few people from the other streams stopped on. In our sixth form we had some people who came across from two comprehensives called Stanmore and Portland who had failed their 11+
and they came over to our sixth form and some of those people were more intelligent than us so...I always thought that 11 was too young an age to stream people”. (Kenny, Accountant; 1970’s School Leaver).

This research therefore identifies some 1970’s grammar school attendees memories of their dislike of school being fuelled by conflicts in their personal class perceptions and the differences in how they perceive their parents class, but also in what they perceive as the inequalities in educational experiences sustained from within the grammar school system. Interestingly, the sustainment of inequalities through the process of streaming children within grammar schools is also acknowledged retrospectively by the only participant within the 1970’s cohort that successfully navigated the grammar school system and ended up with an educational career also encompassing further and higher education attendance.

It is useful to denote educational inequality realised through the existence of grammar schools was also identified in some significant ways by some of the comprehensive school attendants from the 1970’s.

“Maybe we didn’t get any of the opportunities, I mean looking back now I don’t whether I would have got better opportunities at the grammar school, because we only could do CSE’s. The only GCSE (for clarification the qualifications referred to would have been O-Levels at the time) I could do was English language".
“Q, But what difference would that have made”?

“A, Maybe if I’d been pushed more academically maybe I would have ended up with different jobs”. (Sheila, Part time Classroom Assistant; 1970’s School Leaver).

It is interesting that Sheila actually recognises there were educational limitations placed on what she was actually allowed to learn within the comprehensive school she attended and the potential impact this may have had on her working life in the decades post her attendance at school. This research therefore argues that in part the existence of the grammar school system caused some of the educational frustrations recognised by some of the 1970’s research cohort. It is however important to temper this line of enquiry by acknowledging frustration with school is elaborated in complex ways that often incorporates enjoyment of some aspects of school as well as an understanding of the educational and subsequent occupational limitations dominant educational policies of the time placed up individuals.

Extracts from the interview with Sally offers a further indication of how, for some of the 1970’s school leavers, frustrations arising from the educational limitations placed upon them, sit alongside an acceptance of the realities of their educational experiences.

“There was class distinction at school, because it was comprehensive you
had friends that were doing their O’ levels, we were X stream as they called them, but they were above you and they were A stream. So I did not like the fact that there was kids there that had passed the 11+ and they were automatically put in for their O’ levels, whereas the ones that had probably just missed out passing the 11+ had to do CSE’s. It didn’t seem to hold me back because I did quite well in the end”. (Sally, Senior Administrative Assistant; 1970’s School Leavers).

Sally continues by elaborating that despite her obvious frustrations with the processes of educational streaming and of the basic restrictions in the qualifications she was allowed to aim for, there were other aspects of school that facilitated more positive memories.

“Secondary school, all good really, I had a good time, I liked school, I liked to learn. I wasn’t bullied and had good close friends that I’ve kept in touch with even now. As I say I was a slow starter but did quite well towards the end and I got grades and quite good qualifications”. (Sally, Senior Administrative Assistant; 1970’s School Leaver).

For comprehensive school attendees within the 1970’s research cohort the aspects of school life that tempered frustrations encouraged by the existence of the grammar school system revolve largely around, as in the case of Sally, memories of the friendships formed, the collective activity of undertaking sports within the school and the prospects of available work post school.

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Analysing some further data generated by this research cohort supports the wider exploration of how some of the alienation felt when at school is retrospectively viewed in an accepting and fatalistic way by 1970’s school leavers and how communality experienced at the time may play a role in subjugating negative memories. Initially Dennis offers some useful insights into the causes of his own individual reservations with regards to the time he spent at school, but how on the whole these reservations were appeased by his involvement in group activities.

“There was more that they should have educated us in, i.e. mortgages and banks. They didn’t get you ready for life, life skills. They could have done more down that line I think. I thought it was all right”. (Dennis, Self employed Gas Fitter; 1970’s School Leaver).

Dennis continues with retrospections on time spent at comprehensive school in 1970’s south west Birmingham.

“I liked school; I liked the sporting side of it. Because Bourneville was a rugby school and I used to do football for an outside team on a Saturday morning and rugby for the school, so I had a mixture of sport. Mainly sport, school was alright, sport and friends”. (Dennis, Self employed Gas Fitter; 1970’s School Leaver).
As well as examples of alienation with aspects of school being tempered through group activities and friendships, there is also some evidence that wide scale availability of work post school also encouraged more accepting memories regarding insufficient school experiences.

“Q, Looking back now, what do you think the point of school was”?

“A, Supposedly put you on the right track for life but I think you learn more out of school”. (Peter, Supermarket Assistant; 1970’s School Leaver).

“In those days it was just to get you to working age, just for filling in the years between birth and working age and then education started when you left school. In terms of further education, college courses, day release courses were more popular back then”. (Tony, Manager-car mechanics; 1970’s School Leavers).

The extracts from Peter and Tony’s interviews are interesting for the implicit and in the case of Tony, explicit elaboration of their ‘education’ beginning once they left school and entered into the world of work. The paper argues that the more robust and secure jobs market the 1970’s school leavers entered into encourages less vociferous critiques of frustrating school experiences. Even when a research participant expresses a more
cynical attitude to time spent at school, as in the case of Tony, the fact it was understood that work was going to be available once formal schooling was over ensures that any reflections regarding school are at worst fatalistic.

However, as education policies progressed ideologies of educational individualism have advanced in new trajectories. The advance of educational individualism across recent decades is therefore contextualised by a diversifying educational market that it is argued is increasing its dominance over most forms of formal education and working class people’s experiences within school and beyond.

*Educational individualism and the education market*

This research project has already analysed an abundance of academic and policy debates in the field of educational choice. However, it has been difficult to establish meaningful data from all research participants around what their understanding’s are in relation to the potential growing and transforming educational market within the UK. Nevertheless the new millennium research participants do purvey opinions on some of the central aspects underpinning the school choice agenda that are perceived to have impacted on their individual school experiences in some significant ways, including encouraging memories of degrees of frustration within the time spent at school.

This research in turn proposes the impacts of aspects of the school choice agenda combined with wider educational advances such as expansion of attendance within
higher educational institutions and dramatic industrial transformations within parts of
the UK, have encouraged different responses to the educational alienation experienced
from some of the new millennium research cohort. These responses evaluated in greater
detail in the final section within this chapter, purvey in some cases a greater anger and
resentment towards the period spent within school than elaborated by the 1970’s cohort.
This paper suggests developing responses are possibly related to more polarised and
limited post school options within the contemporary period.

However, before reviewing some of the important data generated in this part of the
research, it is useful to contextualise the interview responses. As has been detailed
earlier in the project the inception of a standardized curriculum and introduction of
school league tables arose initially under Thatcher’s Conservative administration within
the 1980’s and developed further under the Labour Government’s of the late 1990’s
onwards (Doherty 2007). This research has also proposed such educational strategies
have continued at an advanced pace under the contemporary Coalition Government’s
administration since 2010. School league tables are therefore perceived as underpinning
an escalating educational market within the UK, by facilitating the choice of school by
active educational ‘consumers’ based on school performance. In turn and in simplistic
terms, inspections of the day to day activities of schools by Ofsted are utilised to
effectively grade a school and to inform their position within the school league tables.

Interestingly all new millennium research participants held an understanding of when
Ofsted was inspecting their school or elements of their school. The participants also
elaborate opinions about the Ofsted visits that primarily call into question the validity of
the information Ofsted establish on their school visits and subsequently the very basis of the information driving schools position within the league tables.

“It was just, I don’t know, it was expected. The class that we was in were okay, so whenever there was like “Oh Ofsted’s coming in to view my progress”, said the teacher. It was like “oh okay let’s be on our best behaviour”. When they said lets be on our best behaviour that's when I found myself I’d learn more. For me it was a good thing but for other people, my mates wasn’t like, they wanted to mess about”. (Sean, Unemployed-attends a training centre; New Millennium School Leaver).

“Yeah everyone had to be good for the day”.

“Q, What happened after they left”? 

“A, everything went back to normal”.

“Q, What was normal”? 

“A, Shouting and things”.
“Teachers make it aware to you that you’re being tested by Ofsted and they do change what they do a bit when Ofsted comes in”.

“Q, In what way”?

“A, They do prepare lessons but extra plans, like set out every detail and might do a more detailed PowerPoint or have extra sheets to give out. They definitely change or put new work on the board around school and they make more of an effort”.

“Q, What do you think of that”?

“A, I think it's a bit fake because they should do that all year round not just try to impress them when they come to the school”.

(Joanne, Further Education Student; New Millennium School Leaver).

Although some of the new millennium research participants are critical of the change in
teacher behaviour when Ofsted came to visit their school, this paper would suggest there are a number of complex factors involved encouraging understandable behavioural changes amongst teachers when the lessons they deliver are effectively being externally judged. However, it is not in the remit of this study to focus attention on the impact on teachers of the school inspection regime and future studies may provide more insights into such important fields of enquiry.

What is of interest is how a key mechanism influencing the continuation and transformation of the educational market impacts on the school leavers within this study. In this regards there is some evidence from the extracts utilised that there are certain expectations created amongst research participants through an Ofsted visit, predominately focused around the better behaviour of pupils that to an extent encourages a more productive learning environment that seemingly can’t be sustained within the normal day to day activities within the school.

Possible reasons as to why pupils temporarily change their behaviour to be more compliant with the general requirements of the school will be explored later in the chapter. In particular an analysis is undertaken about the potential suitability of Brown’s (1987) theoretical model of ‘alienated instrumentalism’ in relation to the evaluation of some of the behaviour’s of the research participants taking part in this study.

Leading up to this analysis it is useful to evaluate one of the other key data extracts from the new millennium research cohort relating to the impact of Ofsted visits on him
and some of the other children he attended school with.

“Yeah, the inspectors came to school and every time they wanted us to be sensible and act correctly so they can show that the school’s a good school, but it weren’t really like that. When the inspectors went it all changed again. Most people hung around in gangs and causing trouble and fighting all the time but when inspectors were there the people that did the gangs were kept in isolation and things like that”. (Kevin, unemployed-attends training centre; New Millennium School Leaver).

When asked to elaborate further on the impact of the Ofsted visits on the groups of children including himself that he deemed to be in gangs, Kevin continued his assessment.

“Sometimes it’s bad, if your mates are in a gang and you get put in an isolation room, then you get gangs trying to cause trouble in the same room. But when the inspectors came they took all the gangs out so the inspectors didn’t know nothing. All I knew that was our school was a real bad school but it changed for the inspectors but when the inspectors left it went back to how it used to be”. (Kevin, unemployed-attends a training centre; New Millennium School Leaver).
The information in some of the new millennium interviews within this study adds diversity to earlier research in similar fields (Willis 1977; Sewell 1997). In particular it places the much discussed subject of working class educational alienation firmly within the context of a transformative educational market place.

Within such an environment one of the mechanisms upholding the advancing educational market is perceived to at best force untenable raised expectations on a temporary basis for research participants and at worst actually cause one of the research participants to outline how he and other children within the school became forcibly invisible to those responsible for inspecting the school.

This research suggests an educational market creates an environment where schools feel required or able to only offer temporary change for working class children or to even deny their very presence within the school. These processes take place in order that schools perform better in a market engineered by Government, not making real attempts at engaging many working class families and in turn ultimately failing to meet the educational needs of some working class people within this geographical space on a number of levels.

The final section in this chapter will summarise the discussions so far by exploring more responses in particular from the new millennium research cohort to alienating and frustrating educational experiences, including an analysis of what underpins the differences between those school children who successfully navigate the school system
and those that do not. In this respect an evaluation will be undertaken as to whether the theoretical model of alienated instrumentalism (Brown 1987) can be adequately utilised when exploring the different responses to the educational alienation this paper has identified amongst relatively contemporary school leavers within the research location.

Alienated Instrumentalism within a post industrial context

This chapter has already proposed that responses to alienating educational experiences vary from degrees of acceptance to the educational inequalities faced in the 1970’s to at times more overt anger and hostility espoused from some of the new millennium research participants. It is from within this context that the paper proposes Brown’s (1987) theoretical model of alienated instrumentalism may be appropriate to utilise within the evaluation of differing responses to alienating educational experiences.

Contextualising alienated instrumentalism

As detailed in more depth earlier in the research Browns (1987; 67) main argument focuses on the idea that alienated instrumentalism takes place amongst working class children, whereby they are aware to an extent of the educational disparities they face, but comply for the most part with the education context they find themselves in. Brown (1987) suggests mass working class compliance from within an education system offering degrees of inequality is a legitimate response, predominately because the fundamental educational goal of most working class children is to gain enough school based qualifications to obtain adequate work either in the short or long term.
Brown (1987) progresses his analysis by evaluating that processes of alienated instrumentalism might only be facilitated in certain industrial and economic climates. He therefore argues the cultural incompatibilities that he believes exist between the education system and working class children have been to a large extent masked by an abundance of reasonably paid jobs mainly in industry in the post war decades up to the late 1970’s (1987: 111).

However, once processes of deindustrialisation take hold, combined with periods of economic recessions such as that in the 1980’s when Brown’s research was undertaken, or indeed the recession occurring during the period this research has taken place, Brown (1987) questions whether acquiescence to oblige with an education system that doesn’t meet with many of the needs required by working class children may start to diminish.

Within this analysis it is also important to further contextualise Brown’s (1987) debates within this field by acknowledging that he wouldn’t of been subject to the foresight that a decade after his research on ‘ordinary kids’ school experiences was published, a Labour Government under the guise of ‘New Labour’ was elected in Britain. As has been detailed earlier, the election of the New Labour Government in 1997 heralded significant expansion in investment within education with a particular focus on escalating entry into further and higher education amongst school leavers from all social backgrounds (Ball 1999; Alexiadou 2002; 2002; Dolowitz 2004; Doherty 2007).

The potential ambiguities and flaws within New Labour’s educational strategy, in
particular in its relation to the development of working class children in a largely deindustrialised society are discussed in detail in earlier parts of the research and are also juxtaposed to relevant data in this and the following chapter.

However, it is the idea that a combination of policies encouraging post school educational expansion and decades of continued deindustrialisation potentially have the ability to subvert engagement with processes of alienated instrumentalism amongst working class children that is of particular interest.

*Anger, disengagement and polarised post educational choices*

Earlier parts of this chapter have analysed data from 1970’s research participants that highlights some of their educational frustrations with aspects of the education system within their school leaving era. However there are other aspects of their experiences within school that appeased much of the educational alienation they felt. The chapter has then progressed with an analysis of how facets of the contemporary educational market in the guise of Ofsted inspections has had a potentially negative impact on many of the new millennium research participants educational experiences, causing degrees of educational alienation.

The remainder of this chapter will initiate discussions in regards to whether the appeasement to unsatisfactory educational experiences in the 1970’s has diminished in the current era.
It is argued that the combination of alienating factors within school and limited opportunities post school have influenced more overtly angrier responses to the contemporary educational experience within the research location. Therefore it is suggested that Brown’s (1987) model of alienated instrumentalism has resonance with contemporary working class school leavers, leaving school into a recession hit society. Decades of deindustrialisation will, it is also suggested, strain the sustainability of processes of alienated instrumentalism amongst working class school children even further.

Initially it is important to acknowledge the responses to educational experiences from the new millennium research cohort are complex and multi faceted. The responses encompass data from participants who from their transference into further and higher education it can be assumed had reasonably successful academic careers at school, but still purveyed degrees of anger and frustration towards their school experiences. There is also data generated from participants that have had difficult post school experiences and possibly didn’t do as well academically, but are still relatively positive about their time at school. Finally it is proposed that a third identified grouping are those more inclined to psychologically and at times physically refuse to undertake processes of alienated instrumentalism and they are a group who didn’t achieve academically and purvey a more overt dislike of time spent at school.

In addition the chapter suggests new millennium research participants’ ability and willingness to take part in processes of alienated instrumentalism is intertwined with societal influences on their class perceptions. In particular the relationship between their
class perceptions and their parent’s employment status is viewed as operating alongside their parent’s employment status’ influence on their ability to circumvent alienating educational experiences.

Analysing the difference in alienating factors amongst new millennium school leavers with different post school outcomes is useful when exploring the factors that may determine alienation and how they may be intertwined with the ability to succeed academically at school. It is therefore useful to initially analyse some of the data from those new millennium research participants that raise issues with some of their school experiences but still transfer to further and higher education post school.

“I didn’t like it at all. I hated school, I liked year 7 when I started, I liked it in year 11, I went from having lots of friends in my primary school then going to secondary school and I fell out with the people I was friends with. I got in with a bit of a wrong crowd really. Nothing too bad but they just weren’t very nice people that I was friends with then”. (Helen, University Student; New Millennium School Leaver).

Whilst Helen’s dislike of school seems to be related to a relatively straight forwards breakdown in her friendships, through the analysis of other data emanating from within her interview it can be established that the complexities in the relationships she formed with others in the school were related to different levels of pupil behaviour and subsequent engagement with school. In this respect a complex interrelationship
becomes apparent between Helen’s parent’s employment status, her willingness to engage with school in some capacity and also her views on the inadequacy of the school’s ability to offer advice to pupils who struggle to achieve academically.

Breaking down some of the data generated by Helen further allows for a summary of how her relationship with at least one of her parents has been influential in her decisions to participate in school despite a dislike for the majority of her time spent there.

“For me, my mum, it was always important in my house to do well. It wasn’t as if she pressurised us or said you’ve got to do well. It was just the way, my sister’s had to do well and I just thought the point of school was to get out there and go to college. Because I wanted to go to college” (Helen, University student; New Millennium School Leaver).

It is also useful to explore any possible links between the influence of Helen’s mother on her desire to participate in school and her assertions when asked about her class and its links to her parents’ employment status.

“Because both of my parents worked, even my mum worked full time, from when my little sister was a month old or something like that. So they’ve always worked hard” (Helen, University student; New Millennium School Leaver).
The interview process allows for a potential profile of Helen to be built up as someone whose perceptions of herself as a working class person are strongly associated to her views on her parents’ employment status. However, what is of particular interest to the discussions in this chapter is that her ability to engage in school despite an overt dislike of it, seems to be also related to her parents and in particular her mother’s influence. It is in turn interesting that the seeming disruptive influences in Helen’s time at school are friends that maybe didn’t manage to engage in school in the same way.

Interestingly other data generated by new millennium research participant’s whose transitional experiences encompassed attendance at university, express similar traits in that dislike of the period spent at school is largely influenced by other children struggling to navigate the academic requirements of the school in the same way.

“I didn’t really enjoy school, it was based on image and I was quite a geek and I was like bullied and that” (Rachel, university student, New Millennium School Leaver).

Continuing with this line of enquiry it becomes possible to establish that there are some new millennium research participants that didn’t manage to undertake processes of alienated instrumentalism in the same way as Helen or Rachel and they in turn seem to have parents with different employment backgrounds. These participants largely transferred into low end training courses instead of the other option of entry into further and higher education. In turn it could be argued these research participants purvey traits
potentially similar to those school children that influenced negative memories of school from research participant’s like Helen and Rachel.

“Q, What did you think of school?”

“A, Shit”

“Q, Why was that?”

“A, Boring, you couldn’t do nothing at all. You just had to keep your head down and stay quiet”

“Q, Did you have any subjects that you liked at all?”

“A, No, apart from IT”

“Q, Why did you like IT?”
“A, I love computers, I’m a whizz on computers”

“Q, Did the lessons teach you wanted you needed to learn about IT?”

“A, They taught us what we needed for exams, but that stuff I already knew about”. (Andy, attends a training centre; New Millennium School Leaver).

The extracts from the interview with Andy primarily highlight a potential link between other elements of the school accountability regime, notably the pressure some schools and teachers within them feel to teach pupils predominately to pass exams rather than providing a more overarching educational experience.

The extracts also allow for further potential theoretical links to be established between parental employment status and the simultaneous influence on individual class perception and the ability or willingness to take part in processes of alienated instrumentalism. Other data extracts highlight a similar pattern of disengagement with school from research participant’s who like Andy had parents not in stable employment.

“Mainly it was just the teachers, they didn’t have any respect for any of the pupils”.
“Q, What do you think the point of school was, looking back now?”

“A, I’ve no idea, I thought school was going to be so I could get a good education and go to college and stuff like that but it never really happened like that cos most of the time I was with the counsellor. Before I went to that school I was all right but when I went to that school, within a year of being there, I was having anger management cos I was angry all the time” (Kevin, attends a training centre; New Millennium School Leaver).

Like many of the new millennium cohort Kevin delineates anger towards the period spent at school only emanating from the 1970’s cohort on rare occasions. Unlike those new millennium research participants that gravitated towards further and higher education, Kevin’s dislike of school doesn’t seem to transcend from other children but like many of those participant’s from this cohort it seems to be targeted towards the teachers within his school. Other participants that didn’t have successful school careers elaborate similar relationships with their teachers.

“Q, Was there anything that school could have done to help you do you think?”

“A, Yeah listen to me. Listen to me, cos basically some of the teachers
didn’t like me, I don’t know why, they just hated me. There was only one teacher that used to help me and when I got the help I used to get something done. Just teachers, they didn’t like me” (Jessica, attends a training centre; New Millennium School Leaver).

This paper suggests an interesting point to pursue in further research is the fact that most of the new millennium research cohort that are not in further or higher education post school, themselves express an awareness that their parents are either unemployed, cannot work because of a disability, or have recently been made redundant. The research does indicate key impacts of parental unemployment amongst these participants includes less surety regarding their ‘working classness’ especially in relation to their class perceptions not being as influenced by what their parents do for a living.

One of the subsequent impacts of this more conflicted class perception may be that it potentially creates a lack of clarity amongst these research participant’s in regards to the world of work and what needs to be achieved at school in order to enhance employment possibilities. This in turn potentially establishes an environment whereby these children struggle to take part in processes of alienated instrumentalism because to an extent they cannot visualise what a stable working environment looks like.

An added possibility is that some of the children struggling to achieve in school may then in part create negative memories of school for those working class children that did
manage to navigate through school to higher education. However, such theoretical assumptions needed to be tested more vigorously and this project therefore suggests the casual theoretical links generated within this research should form the basis of new research questions to be explored.

However, whilst further research in the field may be necessary there are many more complexities that should be taken on board if further robust research is to be initiated. Primarily, as has been indicated throughout this chapter the educational choice agenda in the guise of the facets supporting school league tables, such as Ofsted visits and teaching to the test, have alienated and disenfranchised some of the participants. This alienation is then verbalised through anger and disenchantment largely directed towards teachers who are perceived as the perpetrators of a system that doesn’t listen.

Secondly, as is discussed in more detail in the following chapter the post school options available to many working class children in the new millennium seem increasingly limited to entry into further and higher education, low end training courses or unemployment, a situation that seems to be becoming even more polarised during the current economic recession. For those children in the new millennium research cohort who do not have clear parental occupational reference points because their parents are themselves struggling to find stable work, an education system based on the pursuit of achievement in league tables may not be capable of guiding them through the necessary psychological as well as financial hurdles towards entry into the only other option available, higher education.
As discussed in the next chapter if higher education is an unobtainable goal for many of these children in the immediacy, an education system that offers little other careers advice combined with the lack of any kind of adequate stable jobs within the economy may encourage further angrier memories of the period spent in school.

This chapter therefore suggests parental employment status does have an influence on class perception and these factors may interact to in turn impact on some research participants both psychologically in terms of perceiving entry into higher education as an unobtainable goal and financially in relation to university ever being a viable option (Goldthorpe 1996). The chapter however does not suggest there is a lack of aspiration amongst any of the new millennium research cohort. The chapter or project as a whole also doesn’t adhere to current Government rhetoric suggesting those who have had unsuccessful school careers often live their lives within families suffering generational unemployment.

In this regards the following chapter details offers clear alignments with recent research from Shildrick et al (2012) regarding the persistence of traditional aspirations to work even amongst those unemployed young people in the most deprived parts of the UK and Kintrea et al (2011), who suggests aspiration may actually be structured by the geographical location lived in. In this regards the Northfield Constituency research site used within this project aligns with some of Kintrea et al (2011) analysis' in that it is home to many of the white working class young people whose aspirations are to an extent still based on a structure of industrial employment that has been systematically eradicated within the area over a number of years.
Conclusions

This chapter summarises the data generated by the research participant’s regarding memories of their secondary school based educational experiences. The chapter suggests the educational experiences of all the research participants are framed by factors that also influence their class perceptions. These factors include the general ideological direction of the education system they found themselves placed within and the industrial context they have transferred into post school. In this respect the research explores the idea that transforming educational policies spanning recent decades have been based around ideologies of educational individualism.

The chapter suggests educational individualism is contextualised by the grammar school system for 1970’s research participant’s and for the new millennium participant’s through an advancing educational market.

In relation to the grammar school system in particular, educational frustration and alienation differs depending on whether participant’s actually attended a grammar school or instead felt educationally disenfranchised from within the comprehensive system by what they perceived as the inherent inequalities sustained by the existence of grammar schools during the period.

Therefore many of the 1970’s school leaver cohort attending a comprehensive school held negative memories of the inequalities caused by the existence of grammar schools,
but these negative memories are to a degree tempered by both some positive memories of school forged within collective activities and friendships and the knowledge of adequate available work post school. The research suggests these factors along with a clearer conception of their working class status, whether this is perceived to be transforming through the life span or not, create more accepting and to a degree fatalistic memories of the educational frustrations and inequalities faced when at school.

In a different trajectory the new millennium school leaver cohort purvey in general angrier responses to the educational frustrations and disengagement they experienced. However, once again educational experiences amongst this cohort are also complex with clear boundaries between those participants who experienced some educational frustrations but navigated school successfully enough to transfer into further and higher education and those who experienced more overt educational disengagement and transferred into low end training courses or unemployment post school.

Again some of the key influences on class perceptions such as parental employment or unemployment are delineated as being influential in the psychological and practical decisions made in relation to levels of engagement with school and the ability to transfer with relative success into the given industrial environment.

In this regard the research suggests long term processes of deindustrialisation that have impacted severely on the research location, combined with twenty years of higher educational expansion have altered the post school options available to the new
millennium school leavers to either entry into further and higher education or into unemployment and low end training courses. Within this context the research argues contemporary educational systems based on systems of choice that effectively render some working class children invisible at times when for example the school is being inspected, will only continue to facilitate fragmented and unequal transitions.

The following chapter will provide an overview of the contrast in transitional experiences between the two research cohorts which in turn offers a context to the industrial changes that have taken place within the research site. This evaluation will also serve to explore research participant’s hopes for the future.
Chapter Nine: Voices from South West Birmingham: Transitional fragmentation, changing communities and hopes for the future.

Introduction

This chapter has the objective of evaluating participant’s thoughts regarding their post school transitions. The evaluation subsequently relates participant’s transitional experiences to their educational experiences and the processes which influence their class perceptions.

The chapter is structured around three overlapping themes. Primarily an analysis takes place regarding how working class post school transitions have developed and changed within the decades between the two research cohorts leaving school. The evaluation considers how transitional changes are related both to the developing industrial environment research participants left school within, the transformational relationship with the world of work and the education system in this location. In this regard and as has been detailed earlier, the developments in the processes by which participants perceive their class are also viewed as intrinsically intertwined with transforming educational and transitional experiences in this location.

Therefore participant’s thoughts on their post school transitions are related to wider academic discussions evaluated throughout the study (Furlong and Cartmel 1997; Cieslik and Pollock 2002; Goodwin and O’Connor 2002; Vickerstaff 2003; MacDonald
and Marsh 2004) regarding how the changing nature of in particular working class transitions over the last thirty years has been influenced in part by various governmental policy initiatives that for example have encouraged mass deindustrialisation combined with higher educational expansion.

Subsequently this section undertakes an exploration of the impacts on individuals living within a research site that has been subject to many of the processes of deindustrialisation discussed at length within the thesis. However, given the increased focus within policy in recent years of espousing post school transference into further and higher education, there is a juxtaposed analysis of participants perceptions of the usefulness of the careers advice available to them within the final period of their time at school.

The second key theme to emerge from the data in this area relates to debates reviewed in earlier chapters, regarding how processes that are potentially in part politically engineered such as deindustrialisation and educational expansion have additional side effects on the wider communities many of these people grew or are still growing up within (Charlesworth 2000; MacDonald and Marsh 2004 Macdonald et al 2005; MacDonald 2008; Chapman 2008; Kintrea et al 2011; Shildrick et al 2012).

Specifically the research participant’s thoughts on the communities they live in and how if at all their views highlight the possibility of any significant change within these communities is evaluated.
Evaluating participants thoughts on the communities they live or lived in is also useful for the way it allows for a further exploration of how the developing industrial context research participants find themselves existing within, potentially influences their class perceptions.

The evaluation in this chapter is particularly important in terms of capturing data from a specific historical moment in time from young people attempting to make their initial steps into the post school landscape, but also from the older research participant’s reflecting from their own life on how they believe the experiences of young people today will differ significantly to their own.

**Work, higher education and non employment related training: Three post school transitional routes.**

Reviews of the relevant literature with the fields of working class post school transition earlier in the thesis, establish lines of discussion regarding the potentially more straight forwards and linear transitions for working class people from school into mainly manual work in the decades post the Second World War.

The linear transitions proposed have been questioned to an extent in some quarters with notably Goodwin and O’Connor (2003) suggesting that young working class school leavers from the 1960’s often experienced transitions that were more complex. Whereby they were often subject to frequent job moves, disillusionment with the working
environment they encountered and anxieties regarding the lack of future employment prospects. Whilst the Goodwin and O’Connor (2003) research does offer an interesting analysis, they do also acknowledge that there was more available employment for school leavers than within the contemporary period.

The research data related to these subject matters provides some evidence towards radically changing transitions for school leavers from this part of Birmingham between the mid to late 1970’s to the latter period in the first decade of the new millennium. These changes predominately purvey transition to employment in the earlier period with a relative abundance of readily available jobs, which also acted to support the ability to change jobs frequently when needed or desired. This is in comparison to transition into either further or higher education or alternatively lower end training courses for the younger participants. In turn immediate post school destinations seem related to distinct social and psychological processes that also influence the perception of their class by each individual interviewed.

*Immediate transitions in 1970’s South West Birmingham.*

Despite the fact that the changing nature of transition is well documented within academia, it is nevertheless useful to highlight some key examples from within the data that adds voice to the nature of the changes that have taken place. Initially data from some of the 1970’s research participants relates to what they remember doing post school.
“I really was stuck, I didn't know what I wanted to do. I developed an interest in cars so I asked my housemaster would he try and sort me something out in car manufacture. The obvious place was, what was then, Austin or British Leyland cars at Longbridge so he wrote to them on my behalf and sorted out an apprenticeship which is why I left school one year early because I saw the opportunity of doing an apprenticeship as a continuation of academic study”. (Colin, Driver; 1970’s School Leaver).

“This girl I used to go out with said there’s some jobs going and I went for an interview at Longbridge and they said after about 45 minutes, well we’ve got a job in exports and technical drawing cos I’d done GCSE or something like that in technical drawing and I thought this sounds good, I might get to travel. So I said I’d take that one. Things were like that I’d just turn up and they’d say which one do you want, that was that mainly, it was that easy. That's what I did, I was about 18 or 19 and then I worked my way up to become a manager at Landrover”. (Ken, Freight Worker; 1970’s School Leaver).

“It was just basic sales assistant, really. I just used to work on the tills in Boots and just put out stock and then I left there after nine months. I wanted to try and better myself, I went for something then, I went through I think three jobs in ten weeks, cos you were able to do that then. I think one was like a jewellery factory, in the offices and I didn’t like
that, I only stayed there a month. Then I went to work for Top Shop, which I hated. It was just boring. Then I got a job at Habitat and that's where I stayed then for thirteen years. I started off as a sales assistant and then worked up to floor manager”. (Sheila, Part-time Classroom Assistant; 1970’s School Leaver).

“Immediately after leaving, well I was already doing it, I was part time in a supermarket, I used to do Thursday evening, Friday evening, all day Saturday. When we left school they changed the signing on, the year before I left they could sign on the day left school, after their exams. When we left they said we’ve changed it now, you’ve got to go through the summer and sign on in the September when the schools go back. I ended up part time at Kwiksave and then during the school holiday I was doing different areas offering me overtime and stuff and then they offered me a full time job. Which I took as I hadn’t got anything lined up so I took the full time job and ended up stopping there 4 years”. (Peter, Supermarket Assistant; 1970’s School Leaver).

This data is interesting for a number of reasons, primarily for the way it substantiates academic discussions that summarise there was a high proportion of work and apprenticeships available for working class school leavers in the 1960’s and 1970’s (Vickerstaff 2003; 271). In this respect the data also provides some evidence in regards to the availability of jobs for school leavers being such that it facilitated the easy transfer from one job to another if research participants found that they were unsuited to
a particular job, or there were greater prospects available to them by moving to another position.

The data also provides some useful information on the potential genderisation of immediate post school choices within the 1970’s, an issue that is recognised by Goodwin and O’Connor (2002) in their retrospective research on the transitional outcome and aspirations of working class girls in 1960’s Leicester. This study doesn’t detect some aspects of the Goodwin and O’Connor (2002) research findings, in particular related to their women research participant’s occupational outcomes in part being directed by the desire or more markedly the expectation to marry, start a family and give up working. However, this research does note distinct differences in male and female immediate occupational outcomes.

In particular amongst the relatively small group taking part in the research from this particular cohort, women seemed to be more inclined or directed towards jobs within retail, hairdressing and office work, whilst many of the men obtained apprenticeships or other types of jobs within some of the key industries of the time, notably within the Longbridge car factory.

The other interesting aspect of this data is that it also starts to delineate the complexities within the occupational journey’s for 1970’s school leavers, providing some adherence to debates suggesting transitions in earlier decades were not necessarily as linear as suggested in some academic discussions (Goodwin and O’Connor 2003).
Some research participants point to obtaining jobs soon after leaving school that then allowed them to progress to managerial levels over a number of years within the employing organisation, whilst others indicate a degree of short termism in relation to their immediate occupational decisions. Interestingly, initial conclusions could be drawn in regards to an apparent lack of occupational progress amongst research candidates such as Peter who started out in a certain unskilled occupation and is now currently undertaking a similar job within a similar organisation (supermarket) some thirty years later. However, with the benefit of access to all of the research data it can be argued that such presumptions do not take into account the complexity of Peter’s occupational journey.

For example Peter, at another stage in his early working life also worked at the Longbridge car factory and the reasons for his current occupational destination being similar to that of what he was doing within his youth is itself in part related to the processes and affects of deindustrialisation. These issues will be discussed in more detail later in the chapter when what the participant’s perceive as the critical moments in their lives are analysed.

The most interesting aspect of the data on immediate transitions from amongst the 1970’s cohort is how it offers a vision of a different way of making the early steps into the post school world for this group of individual’s, compared to the group of people living their lives in the same geographical space thirty years later.
Therefore with an opposite trajectory to the transitions experienced by the older research participant’s, the new millennium cohort almost all undertook immediate transitions from school that did not involve entry into employment. Instead transitions took three distinct paths, into further and higher education, into employment after a period spent in further and higher education, or into lower end training courses.

*The changing nature of transition within deindustrialised South West Birmingham.*

As has been mentioned at numerous points in the chapter the new millennium research cohort elaborate vastly different post school transitions than those of the 1970’s research participants.

“I think I sort of thought about it but I’m sort of glad I didn’t (go to work) because I wouldn’t have a career if I had. In terms of Fine Art and that sort of thing I know so much, even in sixth form, I learned more than what I did in GCSE and carried on progressively if you know what I mean”. (Mark, University student; New Millennium School Leaver).

“I’ve finished my brick laying course, my construction course, I’m finishing off my revision as I’ve got exams so I can get better grades so I can get in to Bourneville College”. (Kevin, attends a training centre; New Millennium School Leaver).
“I wanted to do arty stuff or travel & tourism but that never happened cos I never got the right grades. Not many choose to do that lesson, I’d rather go for a different one that's easier”. (Emma, attends a training centre; New Millennium School Leaver).

“Again college, I remember in tutorial time or form time, the only thing we used to talk about was going to Uni and that was all they talked about. It was like ‘oh we’re going to college’ it was a natural thing. I remember there was one boy in our class that wasn’t going, he was like ‘I’m going to get a job’. The teacher was like are you sure? I remember having meetings with my parents about finance and money, no one ever talked about work”. (Rachel, University Student; New Millennium School Leaver).

“I did work experience, I worked with my dad and I just thought I’d do that. Then when I came to sixth form I did media and stuff like that and I really loved making animations and things like that and I progressed from there really. I’m a film maker now so I work in the media, I make videos and film interviews for a careers website”. (Gary, Film maker- careers service; New Millennium School Leaver).

The vast difference in immediate post school transitions compared to the 1970’s cohort are clear and are most obvious in the fact that only one of the new millennium cohort
was in work at the time of interview and this was preceded by immediate transition to further and higher education. However, what is of most interest in regards to the data from the younger participant’s is not just the obvious differences with the older research participant’s, but the fragmentation between the individual transitional experiences of the new millennium research participant’s. Offering an evaluation of some of these differences starts to outline the potential actual impacts that long term industrial and educational policies spanning successive governments of different political persuasions can have on the decisions taken or impinged upon some young working class people in contemporary British society.

There are some obvious and distinct differences in the early transitional outcomes notably between those who have entered into further and higher education and those that are undertaking short term lower end training courses at the time of interview. What is initially interesting is the difficulty in establishing any significant trends within the data for gender to mediate the transitional experiences of the new millennium cohort in the same way as it seems to for the older research participant’s. Therefore transitions into further and higher education or non employment related training seem to be undertaken fairly equally amongst both sexes, possibly indicating some erosion in the expectations amongst the young women research candidates to undertake short term transitions that largely stop when they start to have a family.

Equally the research highlights diminishing trends for women school leavers to transfer into some of the ‘traditional’ occupations they used to, or hold some of the same occupational interests that were prevalent in earlier generations. In this respect the class
status of the research participant’s and the factors in relation to how their class perceptions are influenced, is proposed by this research as a more important element in determining how transitional outcomes are impacted upon in the contemporary period.

However, although the influences on class perceptions are suggested as a mediating factor in relation to current transitional outcomes within the research location, these issues are themselves fraught with complexities. For example earlier parts of this thesis explore the possibility that processes influencing how new millennium research participants perceive their class are intrinsically intertwined with parental employment patterns at school leaving age. In turn it is argued that the social and psychological processes influencing these class perceptions subsequently have at least some influence on participant’s ability to navigate through school successfully enough to facilitate attendance within further and higher education. Alternatively, those participant’s who transferred from school into lower end training courses that may or may not be supported through benefit claims, largely discussed their parents as not working, including at times parents that had recently lost their jobs, or were in low paid insecure work.

It is important to point out at this stage that this paper adheres too many of the arguments proposed by MacDonald (2008) that suggests governmental rhetoric pointing to generational unemployment within some parts of Britain may be misleading. His research set in deprived parts of Teesside in the north east of England suggests that even though his research participant’s had largely not benefited from successful school careers, their transitional paths were complex and included short term, low prospect,
insecure employment, combined with spells in low quality adult training with also a littering of spells of periodical unemployment. However, what MacDonald also discovered was that his research participant’s had no desire to remain unemployed, or to claim benefits for a long period, but instead held traditional ambitions with regards to obtaining reasonably paid secure employment.

In adherence to MacDonald’s (2008) findings this research project finds that despite research candidates with unemployed parents seeming to focus some of their ambitions on undertaking work that provided them with a ‘lot of money’, their ambitions were still related to working as opposed to remaining out of the working environment.

Future research could question whether parental employment status possibly informs psychological associations amongst young working class school leavers such as their perceptions of their class status and its interdependent relationship with family income, but also the practical decisions relating to engagement in education.

In this respect the thesis has evaluated academic debates (Goldthorpe (1996) that suggest there are primary and secondary effects influencing working class decisions in regards to transference into further and higher education post school. One of the main thrusts of Goldthorpe’s analysis is that children of working class parents whose income is starting to plateau or even decline as their children get to school leaving age may, along with their parents make very practical decisions regarding incurring the short or long term expense of entering into post school education (1996; 493-494).
It would be interesting to know whether explicit or implicit decisions were made by the school leavers in lower end training courses in regards to further and higher educational choices and whether these choices were in turn influenced by their parent’s more precarious employment status. Likewise, it would also be interesting to question whether decisions regarding not transferring to post school education were psychologically made at a stage that would in turn impact on engagement with school amongst this group. Whether these processes (if they exist) could subsequently influence the attainment of qualifications that would allow for entry into further education, or would enhance prospects of better paid employment and gaining employment at all, are also lines of enquiry that could be pursued in the future.

On this point it is useful to point out that the lower level training some new millennium research participant’s undertake was in part seen by them as allowing them to gain the qualifications needed to go onto further education not necessarily immediately into work.

This is a particularly important point as it relates to the feedback many of the participant’s gave on the directions they were influenced to take post school, where virtually none of the participant’s remember being talked to about entering into the world of work in their final periods of time in school. Instead it is elaborated throughout the research that entry into further education post school was the main advice schools seemed geared up to offer participant’s, even when it may have been inappropriate advice for some of the participant’s who were experiencing issues of disengagement with the school system and were unlikely to gain the necessary qualifications.
Limitations within contemporary schools based careers advice.

The careers advice on offer to new millennium participant’s within their final months within school seems to reflect the educational expansion agenda within recent years and in particularly under successive New Labour Governments (1997-2010) that has been critiqued earlier. This paper also argues that offering advice regarding entering into further education for young people that are not engaged within many aspects of the school system for what may be a complex combination of psychological and practical reasons is perhaps unhelpful to these school leavers.

At the same time young people who have experienced unsuccessful school careers are often living their lives within communities whereby the main industries have been systematically downgraded over a number of decades and are therefore left with limited transitional opportunities which for many means immediate transition into unemployment, low paid insecure work or lower end training courses. These processes in turn seem to expose numerous contradictions with earlier New Labour educational and industrial policies, but also with the policy direction of a Coalition Government elected in 2010 that seems entrenched within an ideological agenda of expansion of educational choice, increasing fee’s to attend higher education with a continued lack of investment in an industrial infrastructure, all policies taking place within a period of severe economic recession.

With these debates in mind some of the thoughts of the young school leavers in relation to the type of careers advice on offer from within the school system are laid out in the
following interview extracts. It is initially useful to offer an overview of an apparent awareness regarding the inadequacy of careers advice that is focused predominately on transition to further education, amongst new millennium research participant’s that despite elaborating some disenfranchisement with school detailed earlier, had successful enough school careers to allow for entrance in further and higher education.

“There was nothing else I could do. Like the only options when you leave school is you go to college, most people did really, it was expected of you to go to college to do something”.

“Q, Who expected people to go”? 

“A Like just the teachers, it was just the general atmosphere. It wasn’t really a question. I can’t really remember asking people are you going to college, it was just the way” (Helen, University Student; New Millennium School Leaver).

Helen was one of the new millennium research participant’s that seems to have had a fairly successful transition from school to further and then higher education so in many respects the careers advice on offer to her from her school may have been adequate for her abilities and ambitions.
However, whilst careers advice may have been useful to some of the research participant’s that were experiencing complex but successful school careers, the limited advice was viewed by the research participant’s that transferred into lower end training courses as indicative of a school system that didn’t have anything to offer them if they were not going to transfer to further education.

“Q, What do you think the point of school was”?  

“A, I don’t think there was one”.

“Q, Did you have any ideas what you wanted to do after you left school”?  

“A, No I didn’t know what I wanted to do”.

“Q, Was there any part of school that helped you to do what you’re doing now at all?  

“A, No”. (Paul, attends a training centre; New Millennium School Leaver).
“At school you’re kind of like pushed into the whole kind of like, it’s expected that you go to university, it’s not really. I had one friend who didn’t want to go to university, he just wanted to get a job afterwards, he was kind of treated as an after thought. It was kind of like, you know everyone goes to university, but hang on there’s that one who doesn’t want to do it. They would try and help him out but it was “oh just remind him that he needs to get his CV done”, they wouldn’t offer him any help”. (Dean, Unemployed; New millennium School Leaver).

Therefore years of educational expansion sitting alongside an increasingly deindustrialised society, seems to have positioned the schools the new millennium research participant’s attended as only being able to offer advice predominately related to transition into further education post school. This research suggests that this helps to offer limited transitional routes for those working class children managing to experience relatively successful school careers. However, in terms of those working class pupils whose disengagement with the school system is arguably critical, this type of advice seems to only increase antagonistic memories of school and to ultimately add nothing positive to transitional outcomes that seem destined to adhere to the cyclical processes that lead to the economic marginality that MacDonald (2008) identifies.

It’s also important to be acknowledge that rather than just critique the schools system for the inadequate careers advice it may offer, it is important for further research in this field to question what possible advice schools can provide to working class pupils. This seems an especially critical line of questioning when considering there is no longer the
bedrock of decently paid secure jobs for working class people and the only options available seem to be to get better qualified in order to escape the economic limitations of the communities individuals are born into.

Returning to the data, there is one other interesting aspect of the information generated on the lack of adequate careers advice received by working class school leavers from this part of Birmingham. The scope of this particular set of data is beyond the issues related to educational expansion, deindustrialisation, or even economic recession within recent years and instead alludes to the potential for poor careers advice from schools to be a cross generational issue that is merely mediated by the educational and industrial environment of the given period.

_Infringement of ambition amongst 1970’s school leavers_

The data evaluated in this section offers an insight into the potential for disparities to exist in the adequacy of the careers advice from within the school environment for some working class school leavers even within a period of relative full employment. This analysis in itself highlights the potential for inadequate advice to be mediated by the industrial and educational environment of the period but to still be cross generational and subject to class bias;

“My maths teacher, obviously working for a bank I required 4 O’ levels, one of them has to be English and one of them has to be Mathematics
and my maths teacher said there’s not a cat in hells chance that he’s
going to pass his maths. Well, not in so many words but made it clear to
the bank but as it was I got a B grade and I felt like going back to the
maths teacher and saying “stuff you” sort of thing. No I don’t think there
was any practical...we didn’t have careers teachers because we weren’t
part of that stream so we were just left to sink or swim, so basically
anything I picked up I picked up from people that could give me advice
on how I’d approach an interview”. (Allan, Trade Union Organiser; 1970’s School Leaver).

“I didn’t have any dreams or ambitions at all and the careers officer
didn’t help. They just sort of dismissed me; I just didn’t have any
ambition”. (Gordon, Self employed Painter and Decorator; 1970’s
School Leaver).

“The only thing I didn’t like we never had a dedicated careers teacher,
just one of the teachers used to do it and I wasn’t naughty at school but if
I got distracted that was it. I was never disruptive but I didn’t listen as
much as I could have done. I was taking it all in and they told me I
needed 5 O’ levels to be a draughtsman and I was taking 4 O’ levels and
4 CSE’s so I knew if I got a grade 1 CSE that’s an O’ level. When we had
the careers evening I said I want to be a draughtsman and all that, my
mum and dad was with me and she said what does your dad do and I said
he works down at Longbridge and she said “you’ll be better off doing
that”. Honestly I always remember it, I said I’d rather do the draughtsman and she said, she had a look on a bit of paper and she said “you won’t get the O’ levels, you won’t get the exams”.

“When I started at Rover I started as a craft apprentice, I’d been there about 3 or 4 months and I don’t know who’d been looking at my record but they come to me and they said to me “you can change over to be a technician if you want”. They said you’ve got enough qualifications, I’d been there 3 months, I was already signed up to the college and I thought Bromsgrove College, met all my mates and I thought, no”. (Dennis, Self employed Gas Fitter; 1970’s School Leaver).

The data extracts provide a vivid insight into how the initial employment decisions of some working class school leavers in the 1970’s from this part of Birmingham were structured to an extent by the advice they received or didn’t receive from within the school. This advice is both at times ignored in apparent defiance (in the case of Allan), or seems to in the case of Dennis, to have constricted his ambition to such an extent that even only a few months later when the employer recognises his talents he decides not to take up the opportunities open to him because he had now met a group of work mates.

In many respects offering employment advice that is to the detriment of the abilities of working class pupils in the 1970’s can be juxtaposed with more contemporary advice directing the majority of pupils to further education in disregard to the educational
disengagement that has built up. This in turn can create an image of a school system that despite many changes in direction over recent decades still maintains a misunderstanding or an incapability to adequately assess or meet the needs of many working class school leavers.

An apparent cultural incompatibility between many elements of the working class and the school system, influenced in the contemporary period by policies of educational choice, creates the potential for educational disengagement amongst elements of the working class to grow and fragmentation in working class educational success rates to exist. Juxtapose these issues alongside years of deindustrialisation that removes the safety net of a robust working class jobs market, what Charlesworth (2000; 68-69) has described as a ‘desperate urban environment’ seems to have the potential to become a reality for some working class people within south west Birmingham particularly within a period of economic recession.

With this educational and industrial framework in mind the next section of the chapter looks towards what the 1970’s school leavers remark were the ‘critical moments’ in their working lives. As industrial downsizing looms so heavily within this analysis the evaluation is undertaken alongside a further exploration of what all research candidates think of the communities they live in and how they perceive these communities have changed in recent years. Whilst the final element within this analysis will look at participant’s hopes for the future within an economic climate of recession and what seems to be an educational agenda committed to the ideological dismantling of state education.
Critical moments as a reflection of changing communities

Initially it is important to acknowledge some gaps within the construction of the research questions. Fundamentally when deciding to ask research participant’s what the critical moments within their lives were, an overarching decision was made to only ask the 1970’s research cohort this specific question. This direction was taken as it was believed that the younger research participant’s would possibly not have the necessary life experience to be able to offer answers that in turn would provide rich data.

Through the process of analysing the research data and academic discussions in the field (Thomson et al 2002), it has become clear that whilst the younger research participants have less experience in terms of lived years, the question on critical moments would probably still have distinguished some data that would have been worth analysing. Future researching within similar fields using a similar methodological framework should reconsider the position taken in regards to questions relating to ‘critical moments’.

Nevertheless despite the acknowledged methodological gaps the responses from the older research cohort on critical moments provides some extremely useful data, particularly relating to some of the actual effects of policies of deindustrialisation on individuals from this part of Birmingham.
Looking back on a lived life: critical moments in the lives of 1970’s school leavers

The data within this section is interesting as amongst the abundance of critical moments individuals who left school some thirty years earlier could have referred to, work issues were extremely prevalent. This could be due to the nature of the overall discussion and context of the interview. It could also purvey the importance of work to many of these people’s lives.

“The company was splitting then. At the time if you did more Rover work, you were put in the Rover camp, if you did more Landrover you were put in the Landrover camp, and I was in the Landrover camp because I was in exports. I was offered, I didn’t particularly want to go all the way to Gaydon because I live here and Longbridge is there, it’s a big difference, its a 100 mile round trip a day, and there was no sort of sweeteners or tempters and I was offered a job with more money to work at Longbridge and I took it. That’s gone to the wall now, Landrover’s gone”. (Ken, Freight Worker; 1970’s School Leaver).

The extract from the interview with Ken is interesting for a number of reasons, primarily because the closure of the company and site he worked for, for many years has obviously had a lasting impact. However, it’s Ken’s assertion that he could off moved to a different job that was further away from where he lived at the time that is equally important and starts to introduce the possibility of a distinct theoretical framework. In particular assertions can be made that the community individuals live or
lived in is integral to early post school occupational decisions for 1970’s school leavers and the subsequent long term psychological attachment to places of work. In addition it seems in the case of Ken that any psychological attachment formed between the place of work and the community lived within is ultimately to his detriment when his long term employer closed down anyway.

It is worth further exploring the idea that processes of deindustrialisation undermine the values of community fostered to an extent around a psychological attachment to a place of work based within the locality working class people live their lives within. Such an assertion suggests that individuals that are more willing to forsake communal workplace associations and the psychological attachment between community and work will be the individuals that cope better with industrial downsizing. Some interview extracts relay the coping mechanisms employed by some 1970’s research participants, with some seemingly more successful than others in regards to acceptance of the need for transformation in occupation and workplace location.

“Obviously Rover closing down, that was a good one, I did try and get out, I had a couple of friends that were on the technical side, 26 years we was there. They said to me if they offer you… take it. Rover have only got a year but don’t spread it around, so I tried to get out and it was on offer but it was selective and they wouldn’t let me have it. So I could have left with £13,000 instead of £3,000 that they give me. But having said that I would have to have paid for my own gas course, which I didn’t because the LSC (Learning and Skills Council) paid for it. They
gave me some money towards tools, it was hard to get the money off them and you had to keep on at them all the time but when you got it, it was worth it. Just you had to chase them all the time, 12 months to get a gas course”. (Dennis, Self employed Gas Fitter; 1970’s School Leaver).

“I was working at another car dealership and which closed down. It got in to financial difficulty and it closed so I was out of work for 6 months and this was the first job that I could get after that period. So at the time the distance at the time didn’t matter at all because it was getting back in to employment after being unemployed for a period”. (Tony, Manager-Car mechanics; 1970’s School Leaver).

“Being bone-idle was one when I first left school. Not applying for apprenticeships and stuff. I thought I’ve got the summer off and you know and then when I did apply for all the stuff I was too late. I suppose really I should have been a bit quicker off the mark. Being made redundant from Rover was one”. (Peter, Supermarket Assistant; 1970’s school leaver).

Therefore, there are divergences in the willingness and ability of some participant’s to accept and engage in transformations in the local labour market, meaning at times accepting work in locations further from home, or re-training to undertake self employment away from the community. There is particular evidence for this when
evaluating Tony’s willingness to travel to work when being made redundant and also Dennis’ determination to gain financial assistance that would enable him to pursue an alternative career as a self employed worker after spending over a quarter of a century within one workplace.

Those participant’s that were unable to adapt to the processes happening around them also acknowledge redundancy from the large local employer as a critical moment in their lives, but alternatively seemed to face a downward trajectory in terms of their occupation and income.

Interestingly for the women research participant’s from this cohort redundancy seems a less prevalent critical moment, with establishing independence in some capacity and issues related to the family unit more critical in terms of the direction life has taken;

“Erm, I suppose having children was one, moving to Habitat was another, that's it really probably, that's the main things”. (Sheila, Part time Classroom Assistant; 1970’s School Leaver).

“Key moments are an apprenticeship, taking my exams and achieving them, learning to drive, being independent financially and just my own common sense”. (Alison, Self employed Hairdresser; 1970’s School Leaver).
The women participant’s critical moments could be viewed as more individualised than the men’s. It could also be argued that the critical moments are subject to a degree of genderisation. This suggestion would need to be subject to research in the future and in this regards there seems to be some patterns emerging that could be pursued.

In particular these women were often not the main breadwinners in their families and this may make the threat of redundancy less influential for them as individuals, they also all worked and work within jobs and industries such as hairdressing, retail and office administration that are arguably less prone to the impacts of processes of deindustrialisation. Finally their critical moments whilst individualised also seem to relate to distinct processes that may impact on women workers in particular, notably the desire to establish independence through work after having to undertake caring responsibilities within school years and giving up work for a period to raise a family.

Therefore within this research the critical moments of the 1970’s school leaver cohort seemed to be either a set of shared experiences or indeed individualised experiences and this diversification seems largely related to gender. Nevertheless even within such shared or individualised experiences there are further complexities, whereby individuals growing up in a similar location at a similar time with similar family backgrounds seem able to adapt to the processes of deindustrialisation happening around them more than others. This research suggests that further in depth interviews with research participant’s may help to establish any patterns within how some individuals adapt more successfully within a changing industrial environment.
However, what the research has established is that no matter what the ultimate ability to adapt amongst individuals, many of the 1970’s cohort did maintain employment within one major industrial employer based within the community where they lived, for the main part of their working lives. As indicated earlier such longevity of attachment forges distinct psychological bonds between the workplace and the community lived within and in turn influences the perception of their transforming class. Within this context it is useful to assess what changes processes of deindustrialisation amongst other issues are perceived to have had on the communities that research participant’s live in.

What is of particular use in this analysis is a comparison between views of changing communities from the older research participant’s with perceptions on what it is like to grow up in similar communities now for the new millennium cohort. This evaluation also recognises what Pilcher (1995; 70) suggests is the tendency for young people’s place within a specific historical time to influence them to experience and read social problems within their social world in different ways from people who have experienced specific age related issues within a different period.

*Perceptions of a changing community amongst 1970’s school leavers*

It is important to acknowledge at the outset of this analysis that the older research cohort in particular may be predisposed to what Mannenheim (1952; 291) evaluates as a sharing of spatial and historical location that potentially limits experiences and establishes certain modes of thought regarding certain social phenomena. Therefore
thoughts on spending the life course within similar communities over a number of decades may provide valuable data on how these communities may have developed. However, the data analysis also needs to be tempered with an understanding that the way participant’s perceive the development of their community may always be limited to a degree by the reality of being situated within these communities at certain historical times.

“I suppose it's a generalisation but I think people are more individualistic, people are more bothered about themselves and their family, not too bothered about what happens around them. I think we’ve just moved in to a mentality now where people have just said you know, this perversion about self-reliance that the Tories came up with it’s like you know number one is the more important, greed is good and this sort of thing and people have bought in to it”. (Allan, Trade Union Organiser; 1970’s School Leaver).

“I don’t think we had so much materialistic things. As a child all I remember was playing outside with the rest of the children, that's the thing really. Round where I live it’s very quiet, you don’t really see many people so its, people aren’t in and out of each other’s houses. You say hello to people. I think it was just the area you lived in I suppose. Now because I think people tend to keep themselves to themselves, I mean I only know people through walking, cos I walk or I say hello to people, just neighbours. I wouldn’t say the same closeness at all”.
“I think trying to get something around here where a jobs more local. Before 90% of the people round here was indirectly or directly employed by Rover. Now, you’ve got to travel to get work, Bromsgrove town, there’s nothing there, Kings Norton I suppose is the nearest place where there’s a factory centre for manufacturing like, but there’s nothing round here now. Nothing at all”. (Peter, Supermarket Assistant; 1970’s School Leaver).

This extract provides valuable data on how some 1970’s participant’s perceive their communities being influenced by societal changes such as perceptions of increases in individualism and materialism. At the same time some of the real impacts on the community of the deindustrialisation that has taken place within the area are elaborated clearly by Peter who, as has been evaluated earlier in the chapter, has experienced downward occupational mobility to the extent that he is now undertaking similar employment to that when he first left school over thirty years earlier.

In many respects the data evaluated here aligns with impacts on working class communities that Charelsworth (2000) has argued has been accelerated through decades of deindustrialisation and result in an actual sense of self amongst working class people changing from a collective sense forged through the communal activity of shared labour, to an individualistic nature supported through consumerism (2000; 50).
However, other data within this research may question the validity of some of the assertions purported by Charlesworth. In particular data extracted from the interview with Dennis offers a more complex perception of the development of the community he has always lived within. Specifically Dennis presents an image of his community that juxtaposes a continuation of the themes related to the impact of the closure of the Longbridge car factory, a diminished sense of collectiveness within the community, but also a more positive view of the young people living in the area than is found in many of the interviews with the 1970’s cohort.

“To start with it wasn’t too bad (the closure of the Longbridge car factory) because everyone had a got a bit of money with them to… after that though…yeah it is now. I go down the Rovers club; I stayed a member of that. There’s people in there I see that still haven’t got a job. They only know it from school, they went straight into that and that was all they knew and if they can’t get anything the same, they don’t want to or can’t”.

Dennis also has specific thoughts on how things have generally changed within the community he lives in;

“I think people; because people are so busy now, they’ve all got cars and they just come out the front door, get in their tin box and go. Whereas before people would get the bus or they’d be walking and you’d see
more people in your road. If it snowed, everyone would be out cleaning the snow now people… they moan, they do their own drive but they don’t clean it off anyone’s… I remember in the cul-de-sac them cleaning the whole road”.

However, what is just as interesting about Dennis’ interview is the alternative viewpoint he offers in regards to the role young people play in the changing nature of the community.

“It always seems different because we were brought up with a bit more discipline and respect. But some of the kids now are brilliant, I think they get tarred with the same brush; they’re not all like that. There are some, don’t get me wrong, there are some and they will push the boundaries, they’d do stuff like we’d never do, like nicking cars and all that. But at the end of the day they’re still kids, but they’re all tarred with the same brush”.

In opposition opinions generated by Gordon are fairly commonplace amongst older research participants.

“Just the way society’s gone. Society’s got bad ways, because the parent’s don’t discipline the children, I’m only talking in general. You
can’t tell a kid off if he smashed your window because his dad will come out and thump you for speaking to his kid like that. The values are all wrong now” (Gordon; Self employed painter and decorator; 1970’s School Leaver).

There may be a number of reasons why the likes of Dennis have less negative views about their community or at least young peoples’ role in its development. One element that could be explored in other research is the idea that Dennis along with some of the other 1970’s research cohort benefited from being able to adapt to the deindustrialised community better than some of the other 1970’s cohort, who in turn expressed more negative views regarding their community and in particular young people’s role within it. Dennis’ alternative evaluation of how he views young people within the community also offers a useful introduction to how the new millennium cohort themselves view the communities they live in and how these views compare to their older counterparts.

Changing views on community in the new millennium

A number of interesting themes emerge from the new millennium research participant’s thoughts on the communities they live in. Notably and not surprisingly given the changing nature of transition, the impact of industrial downsizing doesn’t have any real resonance with the younger participant’s. This may also be influenced by the younger participant’s generally having less understanding or direct links with their parents occupations and places of work.
The other interesting aspect with this part of the data analysis is that many of the young research participant’s had similar negative perceptions of other young people in their communities as those held by the older participant’s. The main difference in negative perceptions of younger people by the new millennium cohort relates notably to drug use and crime, which in themselves are issues that may point to a transforming working class community.

“there’s loads of stereotypes if you’re a Northfield lad. You’re stereotyped as a drug dealer or a druggie. Or being a kind of tramp, but to be honest you don’t really see that anymore, it’s changed now”. (Sean, attends a training centre; New Millennium School Leaver).

“It’s disgusting. Don’t know, just boarded up houses everywhere and drugs everywhere”. (Paul, attends a training centre; New Millennium School Leaver).

“No I don’t talk to people around my area, they’re only crack heads and drug dealers”. (Andy, attends a training centre; New Millennium School Leaver).

There are some comparisons that can be made between this data and earlier debates initiated by Charlesworth’s (2000), whereby he indicated that in the communities in
South Yorkshire where his research took place, community forged through communal work in industry had been replaced with unemployment and insecure low paid work, which in turn encourages an urban environment where alcohol and drug use, poor health, crime and poor housing were rife.

The thoughts on their communities amongst many of the new millennium research cohort may offer an insight on some of the ways that this community has developed in recent decades. Indeed when analysing this data in conjunction with data evaluated in earlier chapters, this research summarises the way the younger participant’s perceive their class being based on family income and of not being ‘poor’ and ‘low’ as opposed to class being based on parental occupation, is indicative of a changing relationship with a form of working life in these communities. In this regards changing perceptions of community it is suggested, are equally indicative of a research location no longer dominated by huge industrialised employers.

This analysis is further progressed by other data generated on community emanating from the new millennium interviews that establishes differences regarding what participant’s view as the positive elements of the communities they live in. Interestingly whilst 1970’s participant’s indicate being able to ‘play out’ and having close friendships with immediate neighbours as children, younger research participant’s seem to view short term escape routes from the community lived in as a positive.

“Yes, it’s close, it’s just off the Bristol Road, one bus route up to town,
one bus route up to Longbridge. It’s got MacDonald’s, it’s got all the essentials, it's a nice place to live”. (Sean; attends a training centre; New Millennium School Leaver).

“Bus stops about 5 minutes away it’s about 20 minutes from town, but really local areas as well”. (Joanne, Further education student; New Millennium School Leaver).

This research suggests the positives in the way young people see their communities is reliant on the escape routes from that area. However, such analytical jumps would need substantiation or otherwise within further field work. It does though seem apparent that the local community doesn’t hold the same feelings in regards to either play when younger or socialising and working now, that it does for those research participant’s leaving school within the 1970’s. This potentially suggests the nature of how these young people live their lives in south west Birmingham as a whole has changed and working’s lack of involvement in these processes as young adults has potentially situated the community as somewhere where these young people have a family home, but do not necessarily live their daily lives or have an affinity towards.

The final part of this chapter looks at what both sets of research participants see as the future prospects for the young. This data is viewed as particularly relevant as this research project is being undertaken within a period when the severest economic recession within Britain since the 1930’s is on-going. In this regards the data offers
information on how, in particular the younger participants view their employment and life prospects over the coming years.

The future for working class school leavers in deindustrialised Birmingham

Largely because of the time period this research is initiated within much of the critique of the education system has been targeted at some successive New Labour Government educational initiatives. However, two important factors occurred whilst researching and subsequently writing up research findings. Firstly the onset of a severe world wide recession occurred and is still occurring and secondly a new Conservative – Liberal Democrat Coalition Government was elected in Britain in 2010.

The recession it would seem has influenced the opinions of the research participant’s. This paper additionally argues that the Coalition Government’s desire to expand educational choice and to effectively extend the opening out of the education system to the market and private ownership, combined with a lack of any clear strategy to encourage the large scale creation of secure reasonably paid jobs for working class people, will only enhance the dim view of the future explored here.

Whilst all of the 1970’s research participant’s expressed concerns about the future for young people and in particular their own children, it seems more important to offer an elaboration of what the young research participant’s themselves think about the future. What is of particular interest is not only the negative general view regarding the future
for young people, but how despite the negative economic and social environment their own ambitions remain relatively in tact. This in turn seems to resonate with research by MacDonald (2008) and Shildrick et al (2012) that comments on the fairly remarkable resilience in the desire to work amongst people that have been largely disregarded within educational and industrial policy.

“Depends if you’ve got money and stuff. If you’ve got money you can get jobs with family members and stuff. For other people it’s hard isn’t it”?

“Q, What do you see yourself doing in 5 or 10 years time”?  

“A, I don’t know, on a site brick laying and stuff”. (Paul, attends a training centre; New Millennium School Leaver).

“I don’t know, it’s going to be hard. There’s no jobs for you to get, there isn’t anything. Higher education or something, cos you can’t get a job. You still need your college; you still need what you’ve got behind you. Something like graphic design or interior design. I want to do something like that, I like designing things, I like designing as I’m going along at the same time, that's what I like”. (Jessica, attends a training centre; New Millennium School Leaver).
“I don’t know, because everything’s changing at University at the moment, so it could go back more like apprenticeships and more work experience, I don’t know. There’s always a chance that even if you go to University, even if you’ve got a good degree so many people are coming out, you might not actually get a job in what you want to do. I’m not sure, it's a bit unsettled”. (Joanne, Further education student; New Millennium School Leaver).

The extracts utilised are consistent with almost all of the feedback received from the new millennium research participant’s and it purveys both an inherent understanding of the potential hardships ahead for many young people around the lack of jobs that will be available now and in the future. However, whilst much policy rhetoric seems to lay the blame on high youth unemployment at the feet of the un-ambitious working class youth, this research clearly shows that sitting alongside an understanding of the hardships ahead lies clear and concise work ambitions.

Conclusions

This chapter contextualises earlier discussions about developments within education and how they have and potentially will continue to structure radically changing working class school leavers future transitions.

The research has found that unsurprisingly given the abundance of research in this field
already referred to, transitions from school for working class school leavers from the research location were largely into an abundance of available employment opportunities in the 1970’s. The research also discovered that alternatively transitions for working class school leavers from this area were predominately not into employment within the contemporary period. Instead transitions are more fragmented and into either further and then higher education for those who have more successful school careers and into low end training courses and unemployment for those research participant’s who had heightened disengagement with the school system.

Contemporary transitional experiences are theorised to be predominately related to successive governmental educational and industrial policies that have witnessed rapid deindustrialisation, further and higher educational expansion and a diversifying educational choice agenda. Within this context parental employment in terms of whether they are employed, unemployed or in low paid and insecure employment towards the period of a child’s school leaving age is considered important. Parental employment patterns are particularly important in regards to socially structured, psychological and practical decisions of working class families in relation to children both engaging sufficiently at school to gain qualifications and subsequently transferring to further and laterally higher education.

One unexpected outcome of the research in this area is the apparent cross generational influence of inadequate careers advice for working class children from within schools. This careers advice is identified as being mediated by the economic and industrial climate of a given period, whereby new millennium participant’s were largely directed
towards further education however inappropriate this may be and older participant’s were directed towards at times detrimental work positions.

Finally, the chapter considered participant’s thoughts on their diversifying communities and their hopes for the future. Not surprisingly the research found that links made by older participant’s between their communities and their early work experiences are not apparent with the younger research cohort, who instead elaborate positive aspects of their communities being transport links away from the place where they live.

However, this chapter also evaluates that younger research participants show clear and concise appreciation of the consequences on their generation of the current economic recession. Also in adherence with earlier research by MacDonald (2008), despite the adversity many of these young people face and will probably continue to face they elaborate consistent and traditional work ambitions and a remarkable tendency towards sustainable hope within an uncertain future.
Chapter Ten: Conclusion

This final chapter summarises the research and its key findings within three central elements. The first part of the chapter analyses the adequacy of the research methodology employed, particularly in the context of the subsequent results generated. This analysis will also make recommendations for the adoption of future research methodologies in order to offer a potential structure for any research proposed around many of the findings emanating from this thesis. The chapter will progress by evaluating the key findings established within the research. The final section will draw on the research findings to offer suggestions for future research projects in the fields under discussion.

Analysis of method

Whilst an in depth overview of the methodology utilised within this study is undertaken earlier, it is helpful to evaluate the usefulness of the research methods in helping to meet the main objectives of the project.

Initially it is important to explore how useful the qualitative research methods of the semi structured interview has been in establishing some key advantages when attempting to add to the stock of knowledge in the fields of study being researched.
The methodological approach underpinning this research allows for the drawing down of extensive and rich data relating to both memories of how research participant’s feel about their school and transitional experiences and importantly what their perceptions are regarding what influenced their life experiences within these areas. In particular the research methods allow for an expression of some of the potential real and lived impacts of long term educational and industrial policy on individuals in a way that statistical based evidence can never really do.

Prime examples of this can be found within the data when for example the 1970’s school leavers discuss their own post school transitions and the ubiquitous nature of available employment, the ability to move jobs frequently if desired and the opportunity to transcend to managerial levels over a number of years. In a similar fashion a sense of some of the problems with the contemporary educational choice agenda is delineated in a direction that would be fairly hard to quantify statistically. In particular when some new millennium research participant’s detail the raising of unsustainable classroom experiences and also the forced invisibility experienced when school inspections were taking place.

The use of semi structured interviews also allows for new and significant lines of enquiry to be drawn out. For example, whilst an analysis of the construction of class is a fundamental element of this research project and research questions were therefore produced to attempt to draw out data on how participant’s own class is constructed, unexpected and ultimately influential data emanates from questions around how participant’s perceive their own class.
In this regards most of the research participant’s responded to questions about their class by providing an abundance of data not so much as was anticipated on how they related their class to their job or possibly the type of home and area they lived or live in, but instead on how their perceived class was intrinsically related to memories of their parents class and related occupation. The generation of such data allowed for some unanticipated theoretical assumptions to be made particularly in terms of how the class perceptions amongst this group of research participant’s, are potentially both socially and psychologically structured by the educational experience in a particular era and also by the industrial climate they found themselves living in, within the formative years of the final periods at school and post school transition.

In turn through further probing of the subject matter with both structured and ad hoc questions influenced by the direction of each conversation at a given time, the research was able to propose that processes by which class perceptions are structured are influential in how successfully each participant in particular from the new millennium cohort, was able to navigate through their school career.

Therefore examples of the way the methodology allowed for data to be established on such subject matters can be evidenced from within the parts of the research that suggests that those new millennium participant’s that had clearer conceptions of their working class status also had clearer conceptions of what their parents did for a living. With their parents in more secure employment than those participant’s who had less clear or more confused conceptions of their class status. In turn those participant’s with parents in more secure employment were also the participant’s who ended up
transferring into further and higher education as opposed to unemployment or low end training courses.

It is predominately because questions were structured in a way that encouraged the flow of conversation and the extraction of memories by participant’s, but were also flexible enough to allow some divergence in topics under discussion when those situations arose through the course of natural conversation, that such key theoretical directions such as those discussed were pursued through the course of the project.

However, it is also acknowledged throughout the research that there are some significant gaps within the methodological approach undertaken and also the execution of the research methods. In particular the research establishes some important data on what the 1970’s school leavers reflect upon being some of the ‘critical moments’ in their lives that had led them to where they are now occupationally. Questioning of the older research cohort around these critical moments heralded some important theoretical themes to explore in more depth in future research, predominately the prevalence of redundancy as a shared critical moment, the links between thoughts on redundancy and reflections on the development of the community lived within and the genderisation of these processes.

Decisions were made when establishing the research methodology and subsequent questions underpinning the practical research not to question the new millennium participant’s around their ‘critical moments’. The justification for this decision is
detailed earlier within the paper, however when reviewing the complete data set and when analysing it in terms of establishing clear theoretical arguments, it became apparent that it would have been equally valid to question the younger cohort about the perceived critical moments in their lives as well.

Undertaking this line of questioning may have helped to establish any potential further social structuring of critical moments by for example geographical area, family background and associated poverty levels as has been established in earlier research referenced within this project (Thomson et al 2002). In turn establishing data from the new millennium cohort along these lines may have opened up new theoretical avenues to explore, potentially drawing out an interrelationship between educational experiences, transitions, class perceptions and critical moments and may have also highlighted any distinct generational differences particularly in relation to the changing relationship with work across the generations in this location.

Further reflection on the execution of the practical research highlights some of the drawbacks related to the inexperience of the researcher. In particular a set of fairly rigid research questions were drawn up (Appendices Three and Four) in the early stages of the research design, based on what were perceived as the central areas of research that data was required on.

In the early interviews in particular these questions were stuck to fairly rigidly sometimes, in reflection, at the expense of more elaborate answers from research
participant’s. This rigidity resulted in at times shorter answers being provided, less lengthy interviews and ultimately the potential for vital data and new and unexpected research themes to be lost.

As the practical research took place over a period of two years confidence in the execution of semi structured interviews grew and the researcher became more comfortable in allowing research participant’s to speak more freely. Additionally as familiarity with the subject matter grew there became less reliance on the utilisation of the number of research questions originally formulated.

However, use of the structured research questions remained throughout the practical research process. In further reflection the very creation of such research questions would be considered unnecessary for future research in these fields. Primarily, even as confidence within the implementation of the practical research grew the very existence of the rigid research questions meant that at the very least, the questioning of participant’s stuck to the same rigid structure. It would be astute to say that silence within the interview process was feared and instead voids in conversations were filled with questions to research participant’s from the fairly substantial list.

Therefore, when conducting future research within these fields consideration will be given to having much fewer questions and having confidence in the research candidate’s willingness to speak on subject matters. Additionally having the internal confidence in the subject matters under discussion is vital in order to having the ability
to be able to fill over extended voids in conversations with more spontaneous questioning of participant’s. Whilst there were some research participant’s that were uncomfortable with being questioned and provided limited responses, having a large number of questions didn’t do much to overcome this and instead allowed for numerous short answers rather time for these participant’s to gain confidence and maybe provide more considered responses.

Future research in these fields will therefore benefit from the reflective processes undertaken that enables the realisation of some of the gaps within the practical research design.

**Key findings**

The key findings emanating from this research project are most coherently outlined across three distinct but interrelated themes. Primarily, how socially and psychologically structured class perceptions within this locale have a longevity across generations, but how the focus of these perceptions are transforming across the generations and how these changes may be interlinked with educational and industrial transformations.

Secondly, working class educational experiences within this location have been heavily influenced by diversifying forms of educational individualism over the generations. However, other differences within the facilitation of some communal educational
experiences rather than those left to the vagaries of the market, combined with the vastly developing industrial landscape, encourage responses to being subject to processes of educational individualism that are generationally structured and span acceptance to anger.

Finally, the relationship with the surrounding community is one that’s development seems also to be intrinsically linked to processes of deindustrialisation. Widespread availability of work in the local community is apparent in previous generations, although dependence on the community seems to be of less benefit to individuals when taking place in an arena of deindustrialisation. In comparison, positive aspects in the contemporary community seem to be related to escape routes from the place lived within.

As has been discussed earlier the most unexpected outcomes generated from within the practical research are those based around the participant’s perceptions of their own class and how it is structured and to different extents transforming. In this regards there are cross generational similarities in relation to most participant’s from both cohorts primarily relating their own class to that of their parents. This factor in itself is interesting in its own right, particularly when relating it to established research debating the intrinsic relationship between class and the job undertaken (Goldthorpe et al 1969; Salaman 1980; Engels 1987; Harding 1998). However, this research holds its predominate focus on other aspects of how class perceptions are formed and it is suggested that amongst other subject matters, class perception formation and its relationship or otherwise with the job undertaken should be therefore subject to further
qualitative research in the future.

What this research found most interesting in regards to class perception is the possible social and psychological structuring of class perceptions in terms of the developing process of them being related to parental and family class and in turn for this relationship to have longevity across generations.

Therefore whilst the 1970’s research cohort predominately relate their own class to their parents class and then relate this largely to their parents occupation around the time they themselves were leaving school, the younger participant’s focused their own class on parental and family finances and in turn not being perceived as ‘low’ class or poor economically.

It is important to stress that this evaluation is a simplification of what are complex themes emanating from the data. In particular earlier chapters detail the often self perceived class journey that some, particularly older research participant’s indicate they have been through and indeed the insistence from other participant’s of a static personal class status when other aspects of their lives including income, the home lived in and personal views, would indicate a transformation in their class within the life course. This research offers support to earlier academic research in this field that suggests class perceptions and especially ones relating to upwardly mobile class status, are often related to psychological processes that indicate to the self that the life journey has been one of achievement (Kirk 2008). However, the research also indicates that such
processes are even more complex whereby there are participant’s with a strong desire to sustain their working class status when their lifestyle and views on aspects of working class life suggest physical and psychological transcendence from their class of origin.

Whilst the importance of such phenomena is emphasised within the research and should be subject to further research, the potential social restructuring of class perception indicators is still the most important data to emerge from this part of the practical research. In this regards the fact that the data shows that the relationship between personal class and parental class has transcended from a relationship based on parental occupation to parental or family finance, could indicate that class perception is socially structured and in these cases largely influenced by the drastically changing industrial landscape in the thirty years or more between the different research cohorts leaving school. This thesis therefore proposes how class is perceived is strongly related to the changing relationship with a stable working environment not just for the individual research participant’s but for their parents as well.

The factors this research evaluates influences developing class perceptions are also potentially intrinsically intertwined with individuals ability to progress through their school careers successfully. It is therefore suggested within the thesis those participant’s from the new millennium cohort that didn’t have clear perceptions of their class or their perceptions were convoluted, were also the individuals who were more likely to have parents that were either out of work or in unstable employment and were also less likely to have successful school careers. In contrast those participant’s from this cohort that transferred to further and higher education post school had clearer conceptions of their
working class status and in general their parents were in more stable employment.

The thesis acknowledges there are other related factors that could influence transference from school to further education such as affordability if parents are in lower income streams (Goldthorpe 1996). However, one of the key conclusions emanating from the research is that processes of deindustrialisation within this research locale have impacted upon the stable employment opportunities once available to adults in the area. In turn whilst there has been maintenance of the psychological links between parental class and personal class, the fact that more parents in the area are now in unstable employment or unemployment, socially structures the indicators of parental class away from occupation to that of family finance. Added to such phenomena, those participant’s with unemployed or low income parents struggled to achieve at school and then transferred into unemployment immediately after leaving school.

Conclusions drawn from the class analysis elements of the research are therefore wide ranging touching upon the social restructuring of class perception, but also on the implied impacts of parental employment status not only on how class perceptions are formed, but also on the ability of individuals to perform well in school.

Processes of deindustrialisation therefore are proposed as integral in many aspects of these participant’s lives and it is in this regards that the research also suggests that Browns (1987) assertions that processes of alienated instrumentalism amongst working class school children may wane within periods of deindustrialisation and recession has
some resonance.

Indeed the fact that some of the younger research participant’s may no longer have clear parental occupational indicators to hone their own personal perceptions of themselves as working class individuals, combined with the acknowledgement amongst many of the participant’s that there is little stable work to be obtained post school, may impact on their ability and willingness to succeed academically within school. It is acknowledged within the research that such theoretical leaps will have to be substantiated within future research. Nevertheless it is interesting that those participant’s with parents in stable work, whilst sustaining reservations about their time spent within school, were able to adapt enough to transfer into further education whilst maintaining a clearer conception of themselves as working class people.

In regards to the interrelationship between the development of class perception, processes of deindustrialisation and ability to succeed within the formal education system, the research also concludes that transforming processes of educational individualism has been the dominant ideological direction of the education system over the last three decades and the impacts have been felt by research participant’s in some differing ways that are largely generationally structured.

Firstly it is important to highlight that there seem to be key working class educational requirements that manage to have consistency across the generational divide but are largely and consistently ignored by those developing educational policy. Predominately
whilst there is some indication that there is a trend amongst some working class families for children to be the key decision makers in the choice of secondary school (Ashton and Field 1976), there are three main educational objectives emanating from participant’s no matter who was viewed as the dominant decision maker. It is important to participant’s to attend a good school in close proximity to where they live, to attend a school where siblings either attend or previously attended and to attend a school where friends within the community intend to also attend.

It is concluded within this research that the dominant educational ideology is moving ever increasingly away from a model that will be suitable to many working class children and their families and continued escalation of an educational choice agenda will be of detriment to many working class children.

Educational choice in the contemporary era is viewed as being upheld by school league tables that are themselves underpinned by school inspections to effectively publicly grade schools on their performance, in turn to inform parental choice of a school. The research has questioned the benefit of such processes to working class families when the evidence from this project at least is that they base their school decisions on very different but understandable criteria.

The long term cultural, social and ideological disparities between the educational choice agenda and working class educational requirements has been detailed earlier in the research and at length in other academic studies (Gerwitz 2001; Reay and Lucey 2004).
However, there is important data emanating from this project suggesting that not only are working class educational requirements continuously being ignored, the facilitators of the educational choice agenda actively work to the detriment of many working class children. This research proposes these processes take place amongst most predominately those working class children that are already at most disadvantage because of the socially structured lack of awareness of themselves as working class people, who also do not have access to the key indicators of work and subsequently do not have access to the financial and psychological incentives and support to be able to succeed at school sufficiently.

For those new millennium research participant’s that fall into such categories key aspects facilitating the educational choice agenda such as Ofsted inspections, heighten the disenfranchisement from the educational experience that other socially constructed aspects of their lives have already influenced. The research therefore delineates research participant’s that at best have their school experiences improved in a unsustainable short term period whilst an Ofsted visit takes place, only to have normal unsatisfactory experiences resume once the inspections are over. At worst some participant’s were physically removed from sight so as to be rendered invisible whilst inspections were taking place so that their very being wouldn’t negatively impact on the inspection or the subsequent result.

The research has therefore questioned the suitability of the choice agenda on a number of levels and suggests the continued pursuance and escalation of the agenda under the current Coalition Government should be subject to further research in light of the
potential extremely negative impacts on some of the most vulnerable working class children.

These educational experiences amongst the new millennium cohort combined with the realisation of more polarised post school options of either pursuing in many cases unachievable transference in further and higher education, or otherwise transference into low paid, low skill, unstable employment or unemployment, creates what this research concludes are more angrier responses to educational experiences amongst the majority of new millennium research participant’s.

In contrast the 1970’s school leavers also acknowledge educational frustrations relating largely to processes of educational individualism. However, their frustrations largely emanate from either on a handful of occasions experiences of class conflict from within the grammar school system of the period, or more predominately feelings of inequality that the very existence of the grammar school system created even for those attending a comprehensive school.

Inequalities are largely elaborated as being engendered through the streaming of individuals at a very young age as potential grammar school attendees and the subsequent disparity in qualifications allowed to be pursued at secondary school level by children within the two different groups.
However, unlike the younger research cohort and despite many complexities analysed in more detail within the main body of the research, the 1970’s school leavers in general purveyed more acceptance of the educational inequalities and frustrations they perceived themselves as facing. The research concludes that the differences in reactions to educational frustrations largely stem from two main factors. Firstly the commonality in many communal educational experiences from within the comprehensive school system that encouraged enjoyment of some aspects of school. Secondly and more importantly the knowledge and understanding that despite some reactionary educational experiences there was a widespread availability of fairly stable employment post school and this factor potentially more than any other tempers any overt memories of disengagement with the school system of the time.

Despite some major divergences in the reaction to the different types of educational individualism experienced across the generational divide, there are some similarities in school experiences that both point to longevity in some of the cultural disparities that may exist between the education system and some working class children and to the influence of the changing industrial landscape.

Notably the careers advice received from schools in the final months of attendance was viewed as inadequate from both research cohorts. The 1970’s school leavers point to advice that indicated little faith or knowledge in their academic abilities as individuals and ultimately encouraged in some circumstances the taking up of detrimental initial work positions. However, the new millennium research cohort point to advice only geared up to point them in the direction of entry into further and higher education and
not work however inappropriate for the individual this may be.

The research concludes that whilst there may be long standing issues in regards to schools being geared up to advise working class children appropriately, in the contemporary era at least it seems difficult for schools to advise working class school leavers on a whole variety of transitional options that do not seem to exist.

This final point leads into the final set of conclusions emanating from the research that focus in particular on how processes of deindustrialisation have not only impacted upon class perceptions and the ability to undertake processes of alienated instrumentalism, but also on the link between polarised post school options, thoughts on the community and hopes for the future.

Initially it’s important to evaluate that the research adheres to earlier studies suggesting post school transitions have radically altered in the last thirty to forty years and changes largely relate to deindustrialisation and educational expansion (Goodwin and O’Connor 2002 and 2003; Vickerstaff 2003). However, this research points to evidence from this location indicating that whilst indeed in the 1970’s there does seem to have been more direct transference from school into reasonably paid, widely available work, some of which had long term opportunities to progress to managerial levels, it is not simply a case that these opportunities no longer exist for the new millennium cohort.
The opportunities indeed do not seem to exist, but the processes taking place are more complex. Primarily sitting alongside decades of deindustrialisation without adequate work being made available within areas like the research site to replace former manufacturing jobs, there has also been two decades of higher educational expansion. The wider aspects and implications of such processes are outlined in greater detail earlier in the project, however it is important to note this research concludes that these processes have not only made the transitional process for working class children less linear but also more polarised.

This research suggests that depending on a whole variety of interrelating aspects such as parental employment patterns, family income, the self awareness of the individual as a working class person, the psychological, social and financial likely hood of being able to successfully navigate through the academic aspects of school, working class school leavers in the new millennium in this research location will either transfer into further and then higher education or unemployment and low end training courses.

In relation to the lack of available work post school in this locale, thoughts on the community lived within offer an indication on how industrial and educational transformations have in turn impacted on the individual relationship with the area where the majority of the participant’s live their life.

In particular the 1970’s school leavers generally entered into stable employment post school near to where they lived. This in turn seems to have engendered in some
participant’s a close affinity with the community lived within at least in some stages of their life. However, the research also highlights that redundancy is also viewed amongst this cohort as the key critical moment in their lives and although critical moments are to a degree genderised, these findings indicate the changing nature of the industrial community these people live their working lives within. From a community based on stable employment opportunities for school leavers and where employees could work in some cases for the best part of a quarter of a century within a single employer, to a community whereby redundancy has touched a majority of participant’s at some stage and become a central aspect within their memories (Charelsworth 2000; MacDonald et al 2005).

What is potentially most interesting from within these findings is that the participant’s who came through redundancy situations most unscathed were those that were more willing to forego some aspects of their community ties, for example they were more willing to travel further afield to work, or they were willing to retrain in a field of work that was outside of what they had worked within most of their working life. On the other hand those participant’s that stuck with an employer because they wanted to retain the working relationship with a given company in the locale, ended up losing out financially. These findings would seem to indicate processes of deindustrialisation as undermining aspects of the bonds that tie some working class communities together.

Highlighting further the changing nature of the relationship with the community in the contemporary era, most of the younger participant’s do not share the same affinity with the local area and in some cases paint a picture of an area suffering with social problems
such as drug abuse and poor housing, not apparent from data generated from the 1970’s cohort.

The most predominant generational difference therefore emanating from this research in regards to the community lived within, is that the research locale would seem to be an area that participant’s from the 1970’s not only lived within, but worked within and to some extent socialised within. Now, the research proposes that the most positive aspect the younger cohort could find with the area they live within is regular escape routes out.

This research therefore concludes that the data generated within the practical research suggests educational and industrial transformations within this research location have in turn influenced the generational transformations in individual school leavers experience of school and transition and the subsequent way they live their lives. From the development of how individuals perceive their own class and their own persona’s in relation to the world of work, the subsequent ability to succeed at school and the acutely more polarised post school ‘choices’ available in the contemporary era compared to the past.

The research proposes the combination of the escalation of educational choice, the continuation of processes of deindustrialisation, the growth of low pay, low skill, unstable employment and the current recession, render the continuation of the educational disengagement, anger, unemployment and polarisation of working class school leavers within fragmented communities inevitable. In light of these conclusions
and in contrast to much contemporary Government rhetoric, the research has found ambition to work and hope for the future still remarkably intact amongst many of the younger research participant’s.

**Future Considerations**

The research is driven by a desire to unearth whether cyclical educational, occupational and income deprivation exists amongst the working class, in particular in the research location identified.

In this regards the research highlights that some long term but transforming educational disparity exists for many working class people within this location. Importantly further research is required to substantiate the key working class educational requirements emanating from the participant’s within this project and then to question with more vigour why these requirements seem to have been continually ignored by policy makers within all political parties over recent decades.

Alongside research in this area this project would recommend that further questions are formulated that open out some of the current key elements of the educational choice agenda for investigation. In particular further research should question in more depth how working class children in particular are potentially disenfranchised by aspects of the educational choice agenda, including the school inspection regime. In this regard future research in the field of educational choice and working class children’s
educational experiences, should question further what the actual experiences are of working class children when school inspections are taking place, how do these processes make them feel, why do schools feel compelled to seemingly involve themselves in such processes and to whose advantage are such actions.

Also as the Coalition Government and their educational policies that seem intent on escalating not only educational choice but effectively educational privatisation, are in their relative infancy during the researching of this project and writing up of the findings, future research should attempt to evaluate the impacts of these policies on the educational and transitional experiences of working class school leavers.

The research also delineates the polarised choices now available to working class children post school and how the careers advice received at school seems only set up to facilitate such polarisation further. Future questions should be constructed that asks how careers advice could change for working class school leavers and how could it change in any adequate way given the industrial climate contemporary working class school leavers find themselves transferring into. In relation to this future research should also consider further the impact of deindustrialisation and recession on the future prospects of working class school leavers in localities like the research site. Also as many of the new millennium research participant’s still purveyed ambition to work, research should question not necessarily the ambitions of working class unemployed people, but what can change within society to meet their occupational ambitions.
Finally, the new and to a degree unexpected lines of enquiry emanating from within the research detail how class perceptions seem inherently related to perceptions of parental class. More in depth research could be undertaken that attempts to substantiate this data, but that also adds to the new wave of class analyses’ by reviewing the potential impacts on theoretical assumptions relating class perception and class consciousness to the individual relationship with the employment sphere.

Relating to this area of study, further research questions should be formulated on how industrial and to an extent educational transformations may not be going as far as undermining the creation of personal class perceptions, but may be undermining the relationship between class perception and the idea of being a working person, themselves largely based on familial working biographies.

Future research in this area could consider how the very ability of many working class people to successfully engage in the education system and overcome inherent social and financial disadvantages, may be related to the processes by which personal class perceptions are increasingly socially constructed away from a historical understanding of what parents and families do for a living and towards the obtainment of more finance. Future research in this field could therefore use as a starting point questions relating to whether an increasing lack of a framework of stable work in many working class families is conducive to the personal motivation and the practical financial resource needed to be educationally successfully within contemporary Britain.
12th February 2010

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN,

This is to certify that Mr Andrew O’Callaghan is a bona fide PhD student at the University of Leicester. Mr O’Callaghan commenced his studies in September 2009 and is currently undertaking research for his thesis. If you have any queries in this regard, please do not hesitate in contacting me.

Yours sincerely

Dr John Goodwin
Head of Department
Tel +44 116 2525979
Appendix Two

Dear Research Participant

Thank you for agreeing to take part in the practical research that forms a part of the thesis I am writing to attempt to gain the qualification of PhD with the Centre for Labour Market Studies at the University of Leicester.

The information that you provide as part of this interview will be really important in helping me to make some evaluations of the impacts on people in this area of the changes within the education system, industry and the jobs market over the last thirty years or so.

However, I can assure you that anything you say within the interview and any information that is used in the final draft of the thesis will be totally anonymous. I am also more than happy for you to have a copy of the transcript of your interview if you wish.

I hope this reassures you about the interview that you have agreed to take part in.

Kind regards

Andy O’Callaghan

Appendix Three
‘The impact of educational and industrial policy developments on working class school leavers across two generations’.

The draft questions are initially aimed at people who are in their late 40’s/early 50’s and who left school in the early to mid 1970’s.

Section Two – Your Background

1. Name, age, year of leaving school, ethnic background?
2. What class do you consider yourself?
3. Why do you consider yourself this particular class?
4. Has your class changed through your life?
5. Why do you think your class has changed?
6. Is your class the same as your parents?
7. In what ways is your class different to your parents?
8. Is your children’s class different to yours?
9. Why is your children’s class different to yours?
10. What kind of home did you grow up in?
11. What was important to the people in the area you grew up in?
12. What kind of home do you live in now?
13. Why are you living in the home you are living in now?

Section One – School Life

1. Where did you go to school, was it near where you lived?
2. Did everybody you know go to the local school?
3. Who made the decision to send you to this school?
4. Why was this school chosen?
5. What are lasting memories of school?
6. What were your favourite subjects?
7. Why did you enjoy these subjects?
8. What did you not enjoy about school?
9. Why didn’t you enjoy these parts of school life?
10. What do you think the point of school was?
11. Do you think school was just there to help you get a job/career?
12. What did you want to do after leaving school?
13. Did you end up doing what you wanted after leaving school?
14. What if any part of school helped you get a job/career?
15. How could school off helped you get a job/career?
16. In what other ways did school help you?
17. How did your school experiences differ to your parents?

Section Two – Work Life

1. What did you do when you left school?
2. Is it what you imagined doing?
3. Why do you think you ended up doing what you were doing on leaving school?
4. What did you like and enjoy about what you were doing?
5. What didn’t you enjoy?
6. What did your school friends end up doing when they left school?
7. Why do you think your friends ended up doing what they did after they left school?
8. Where was your work when you left school in comparison to where you lived?
9. Looking back is there anything in your education that helped you when you left?
10. Is there anymore that you would liked to of done in your education that would of helped you when you left?
11. What did your parents think of what you did when you left school?
12. How did what you did when you left school differ to what your parents did?

Section Three – Now

1. What are you doing in work now?
2. How did you end up doing what you are doing now?
3. Is what you are doing now what you thought you would be doing when you left school?
4. Why do you think you ended up doing what you are doing now?
5. Are you still in contact with your school friends, if so what are they doing now?
6. How do you know your current group of friends?
7. What are your current group of friends doing for work?
8. Why do you think your friends and peers have ended up doing what they are doing now?
9. Where is your work situated now compared to where you live?
10. What do you think is important to the people that live where you live now?
11. How is what you ended up doing different to what you wanted to do when you left school?
12. What do you think was the critical moments in your life that affected where your working life has ended up at this moment?
13. How is what you are doing now different to what your parents did?
14. Why do you think it is different?
15. Is anything you experienced at school helping you now?
16. Is there anything else you could off experienced at school that could of helped you now?

Section Four – The future

1. What do you see yourself doing in 5 and 10 years time?
2. What would like to be doing in 5 and 10 years time?
3. What are your main objectives with regards to work?
4. What are your main objectives outside of work?
5. If you have children, what are your hopes for your children?
6. What would you like your children to get out of the school system?
7. What do you think that the main role of school is now?
8. What kinds of things do you think should be taught at school now?
9. Do you think the role of school has changed compared to when you went to school?
10. In what ways has the role of school changed?
11. Who do you think should control how schools are run and what is taught?
12. Do you think schools should be run and controlled by the state or should they be privately run?
13. Why do you think schools should be run in this way?
14. If you have children, how do you think their school experiences will differ to yours?
15. If you have children, how do you hope their school experiences will differ to yours?
16. What are your hopes/thoughts on the generation leaving school now?
17. Will their experiences be different or similar to yours when you left school?
Appendix Four

‘The impact of educational and industrial policy developments on working class school leavers across two generations’.

The draft questions are initially aimed at people who are in their late teens/early 20’s and who left school in within a maximum of 5 years of the interviews taking place.

Section Two – Your Background

14. What area do you live in?
15. What kind of area is it?
16. What do you like about where you live?
17. What don’t you like about where you live?
18. How long have you lived where you live-how long have your parents lived there?
19. What do you think is important to the people where you live?
20. What class do you consider yourself?
21. Why do you consider yourself this particular class?
22. Is your class the same as you parents?
23. In what ways is your class different to your parents
24. What age are your parents?
25. What do your parents do for a living?
26. What is important to your parents?
27. What kind of a house do you live in?
28. What kind of a home did your parents grow up in?

Section One – School Life

18. Where did you go to school, was it near where you lived?
19. Did everybody you know go to the local school?
20. Who made the decision to send you to this school?
21. Why was this school chosen?
22. What are your lasting memories of school?
23. What were your favourite subjects?
24. Why did you enjoy these subjects?
25. Is there anything else that you of wanted to study-why do you think you couldn’t study everything that you wanted to?
26. What did you think about being tested whilst at school?
27. Were you aware when the school was being inspected-did this affect you or your friends in any way?
28. What else did you enjoy about school?
29. What did you not enjoy about school?
30. Why didn’t you enjoy these parts of school life?
31. What do you think the point of school was?
32. What did you want to do after leaving school?
33. Did you end up doing what you wanted after leaving school?
34. What if any part of school helped you get a job/career/enter further education?
35. What would off helped you?
36. What if any part of school prepared you for life after school (FE, HE, work).
37. How did your school experiences differ to your parents?

Section Two – After School

13. Why do you think you ended up doing what you were doing on leaving school?
14. What did you like and enjoy about what you were/are doing?
15. What didn’t/don’t you enjoy?
16. What did your school friends end up doing when they left school?
17. Why do you think your friends ended up doing what they did after they left school?
18. Where was your work/college when you left school in comparison to where you lived?
19. Looking back is there anything that you did at school that helped/prepared you for when you left?
20. Is there anymore that you would liked to of done at school that would of helped/prepared you for when you left?
21. What did your parents think of what you did when you left school?
22. How did what you did when you left school differ to what your parents did?
23. Is what you are doing now changed since you left school?
24. How has it changed?
25. Is what your friends did when they left school different to what they are doing now?
26. Are the friends that you have now the same as when you left school?
27. How do your new friends differ to your school friends-has this impacted on your life at all?
Section Four – The future

18. What do you see yourself doing in 5 and 10 years time?
19. What job or career would you like to be doing in the future?
20. What are the main things you would like to achieve outside of work?
21. How optimistic are you of achieving your aims?
22. Is there anything that you did at school that will help you achieve your aims?
23. What kinds of things do you think should be taught at school now?
24. Who do you think should control how schools are run and what is taught?
25. What do you think the future holds for people leaving school now?
26. Will their experiences be different or similar to yours when you left school?
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