The Overseas Working Holiday and Graduate Employment Trajectories: A Cross-Cultural Comparison

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The candidate confirms that the work submitted is her own and that appropriate credit has been given where reference has been made to the work of others.

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Acknowledgements

Abstract

This thesis examines claims that transnational youth mobility represents a means for students and graduates to invest in employability through the adoption of a cross-national comparative approach. It employs qualitative interviews with former working holidaymakers, careers advisers, and employers in Britain and Japan, comparing accounts both within and across country contexts. The research investigates how student and graduate aspirations, orientations, and career trajectories - and employer perceptions and values - are shaped by both the economic and socio-cultural context(s) within which they are situated and their own position within this context. The research further explores variation in how experiences are mobilised and valued (i.e., as cultural and symbolic capital) according to national context, employment sector, institutional arrangements, and cultural values. It highlights how differing perceptions of experiences of work and travel overseas, and different ideas about what constitutes the ideal employable graduate, are embedded within - and illuminate key features of - specific economic and socio-cultural contexts. This challenges notions of employability that position graduate skills and attributes as discrete and measurable objects existing in an external world, carried by students and graduates, and valued by a neutral labour market. Further, the relationship between mobility and privilege itself is also shown to vary with economic and socio-cultural context. What constitutes the "right story" about experiences of work and travel overseas - and how such activities may be linked to the (re)production of social inequalities - is thus also shown to be highly contingent on context.

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Transcription and Language Conventions

When presenting quotations from interview data I use underlining to show text that has been translated from Japanese. I use italics to show text originally spoken in English. (A minority of interviews in Japan were conducted in English.)

Quotations have been edited for readability (i.e., to remove false starts, repetitions, and hesitations).

Omissions are signalled by four dots in square brackets.

All translations are my own.

List of Abbreviations

AGCAS	Association of Graduate Careers Advisory Services
BIS	Department for Business Innovation & Skills (BIS) (UK)
CBI	Confederation of British Industry
CHEERS	Careers after Higher Education - a European Research Study
CIA	Central Intelligence Agency
DLHE	Destinations of Leavers from Higher Education
DIBP	Department of Immigration and Border Protection (Australia)
ERASMUS	European Region Action Scheme for the Mobility of University Students
ESSL	Faculty of Education, Social Sciences and Law, University of Leeds
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
HEFCE	Higher Education Funding Council for England
HEIPR	Higher Education Initial Participation Rate
HESA	Higher Education Statistics Agency
ISSP	International Social Survey Programme
JAOS	Japan Association of Overseas Studies
JAWHM	Japan Association for Working Holiday Makers (JAWHM)
JGAP	Japan Gap Year Organization
JILPT	Japan Institute for Labour Policy and Training
LUBS	Leeds University Business School
METI	Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry (Japan)
MEXT	Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (Japan)
MIC	Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communication (Japan)
MOFA	Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan
NPO	Non-profit Organisation
NS-SEC	National Statistics Socio-Economic Classification
OE	Overseas Experience

OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
OFFA	Office for Fair Access
ONS	Office for National Statistics
TOEIC	Test of English for International Communication
UCAS	University and Colleges Admissions Service
UKCES	UK Commission for Employment and Skills
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
WHM	Working holidaymaker
WWOOF	Willing Workers on Organic Farms

Chapter 1 Introduction

1.1 Overview

In recent decades, participation in higher education has increased dramatically (Altbach and Reisberg 2009). This is said to have led to an "opportunity trap" where university education is increasingly a necessary but not sufficient prerequisite for access to graduate jobs (Brown 2003). In this context, extra-credential activities (e.g., work and study abroad; extracurricular activities; internships, placements, and volunteering) are argued to be increasingly important. Orientations towards - and participation in - such activities have been identified as important factors influencing graduate employment in Britain (e.g., Brown and Hesketh 2004), in Japan (e.g., van Ommen 2015), and elsewhere (Lehmann 2012; Rivera 2011, 2012, 2015). Relevant here are the experiences of young people who take time out of formal education and employment to work and travel overseas (e.g., gap years, working holidays, and/or overseas experience ("OE")). For some, such temporary experiences of transnational mobility are a perfect exemplar of social changes brought about by processes of individualisation and globalisation (Bauman 2000; Beck 1992; Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 2002; Giddens 1991). Within this broader context, gap year travel is frequently seen as a potential investment in employability.

This conceptualisation of overseas gap years as an investment in employability appears especially relevant in Britain, where government and institutional discourses emphasise their potential benefits in the arenas of education and employment (e.g., Cremin 2007; Heath 2007; Simpson 2005b; Snee 2014a). Indeed, a number of scholars have expressed concern that overseas gap years may exacerbate existing inequalities, with those with the resources to pursue such opportunities able to draw on their experiences upon their return to gain further advantages in the competition for educational and employment opportunities (Heath 2007). However, many claims about the benefits of the gap year are based on perceptions rather than evidence, and further research into its impact is required (Heath 2007: 100). There is an important gap in the literature specifically exploring the overseas gap year in the context of the transition into employment. In particular, it is often simply assumed that gap year experiences can be automatically drawn upon when participants return home so as to gain career benefits. We know little about how skills and attributes accumulated

overseas may be mobilised after the gap year and to what effect (Snee 2009: 229). The perspective of employers has rarely been taken into account. Snee (2009: 202, 229) suggests research should investigate how capital accumulated via gap years is deployed. She observes that some are more able than others to tell the "right story" to gain such advantages. The aim of this research was to explore such questions, focusing specifically on the context of graduate transitions to employment and early career trajectories.

Recent research around temporary transnational youth mobility highlights the significance of the specificities of the context in which such mobility occurs (e.g., Bagnoli 2009; Kawashima 2010). The cross-national qualitative comparative case study design of the research seeks to explicitly consider the influence of both economic and socio-cultural context(s) and social position. Of particular significance is the impact of different institutional arrangements, standard career trajectories, and cultural values in shaping aspirations, norms and values, orientations to the labour market, and perceived outcomes in relation to mobility and the development of the ideal (employable) self.

Given the relative prevalence of gap years in Britain and their discursive positioning as a source of enhanced employability, Japan offers a rich comparison. First, perceptions of the likely career impact of experiences of work and travel overseas vary significantly across these different country contexts. Snee (2014a: 142) describes a "general consensus" in Britain about the value of gap year experiences. These benefits are thought to encompass "certain kinds of knowledge and skills that will have future currency in the education and employment markets" (Snee 2009: 31). Attributes frequently cited in this context include initiative, maturity and independence, flexibility, intercultural sensitivity, and the ability to take responsibility for one's own development (e.g., Heath 2007; O'Reilly 2006; Snee 2014a). In contrast, tensions have been identified in Japan between recent discourses about the benefits of international mobility on the one hand, and the (often apparently negative) career consequences of such mobility on the other (e.g., Kato 2013; Kawashima 2010; see also Kobayashi 2013). Kawashima (2010: 279) reports, for example, that working holidaymakers returning to Japan felt that the confidence, initiative, and assertiveness they had developed while overseas were not sought by local employers. Rather, employers were perceived to value cooperativeness and a pleasant personality. Second, existing literature outlines significant

differences in recruitment and employment structures and practices between the two contexts, which might be hypothesised to influence such perceptions. Specifically relevant here are traditional practices such as lifetime employment, systems of payment and progression emphasising seniority, and on-the-job training in Japan (e.g., Dore 1990/1973). These are contrasted with greater mobility of employment, market-based wages and salaries, and publicly provided training in the UK. Third, evidence of tension and change with regards to the positioning of activities such as the gap year within the contemporary Japanese context makes this a particularly timely investigation.

This research examines the phenomenon of young people's temporary transnational mobility comparatively in Britain and Japan. The research design builds upon existing research by incorporating an explicitly comparative dimension and considering the perspectives of university careers advisers and employers, in addition to those of university students and graduates. This facilitates investigation of variation in how experiences are mobilised and valued according to national context, employment sector, recruitment and employment structures and practices, cultural values, and social position. This enables engagement with and contribution to several major debates in the sociological literature.

Data are first analysed in the light of key tenets of individualisation theories. These theories stipulate that individuals in contemporary modernity are increasingly "disembedded" from social context (Bauman 2000; Beck 1992; Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 2002; Giddens 1991). Instead, they are compelled to self-consciously, routinely, and continuously create their selves through narratives and lifestyle choices. Critics, however, challenge conceptualisations of social action as disembedded (e.g., Irwin 2005: 13-14). Furthermore, the extent to which people approach decisions strategically and reflexively in accordance with these theories has been questioned (e.g., in relation to gap years, see Snee 2014a). The current research contributes to these debates by adopting a cross-national comparative perspective. This brings to the foreground some of the otherwise invisible structures that contribute to the popularity of the gap year and similar activities in Britain. Analysis highlights the relatively good fit between British institutional arrangements, standard career trajectories, and broader societal understandings on the one hand and gap year practices on the other. In Japan, in contrast, a relative lack of fit highlights barriers discouraging the pursuit of such opportunities.

In the context of graduate employment, there is an increasing emphasis in government policy on the need for workers to be "enterprising" and invest in their own development, employability, and "lifelong learning" (du Gay 1996a, 1996b; Edwards 2002; Kariya 2010a; Moreau and Leathwood 2006). This can be interpreted through Rose's (1990, 1996) concept of governance through freedom, which suggests that citizens in contemporary societies are governed indirectly, *through* their choices, aspirations, and behaviour. Following and extending the work of Haverig (2007, 2011; Haverig and Roberts 2011), this thesis examines the applicability of Rose's arguments to experiences of work and travel overseas. Particular attention is paid to exploring the variety of responses of young people to the state's attempts to shape enterprising selves (e.g., Holford 2007). In addition, the cross-national comparative perspective facilitates investigation of the socio-cultural construction of the ideal (employable) graduate, challenging realist conceptualisations of employability.

Furthermore, this thesis provides insight into contemporary understandings of how experiences of transnational mobility might be associated with the accumulation of cultural and symbolic capital (Bourdieu 1990, 1997/1983, 2000). British research frequently conceptualises qualities perceived to be developed through gap year travel as forms of cultural and symbolic capital valued by employers (e.g., Heath 2007; Simpson 2005b; Snee 2014a). Extending this research in a comparative direction highlights the importance of institutional arrangements - in combination with broader societal norms and values - in shaping whether such experiences can be mobilised as capital within any specific field. These analyses shed further light on the relationship between privilege and mobility (Bauman 1998; Florida 2008), highlighting variation in mechanisms by which social inequalities are (re)produced in different economic and socio-cultural contexts.

To provide some background to the study, section 1.2 defines the gap year and working holiday; section 1.3 explores how these forms of temporary transnational youth mobility are positioned in policy, institutional, and media discourses in Britain and Japan; section 1.4 introduces the aims and objectives of the research; and section 1.5 outlines the contents of subsequent chapters of the thesis.

1.2 Defining the overseas gap year and working holiday

This research draws on the following broad definition, from a report commissioned by the UK government, which sees the term "gap year" as referencing:

> any period of time between 3 and 24 months which an individual takes 'out' of formal education, training or the workplace, and where the time out sits in the context of a longer career trajectory.
>
> (Jones 2004: 24)

Organisations lobbying for the introduction of the gap year in Japan draw on this same definition (Gap Year Platform 2013: 3-4). Defining the gap year as a "life event" (Jones 2004: 23-24) positions the gap year within a broader career trajectory, emphasises its varying possible durations, and distinguishes between a variety of different possible timings. Jones (2004: 25-26) argues that *when* a gap year is taken is the most useful form of categorisation, distinguishing between gap years taken post-school, during a break from university study, post-university, and during breaks in employment. His review, however, focuses on literature referring to gap years taken by individuals up to the age of 25. Jones (2004: 32) suggests gap years typically involve six types of activity, often in combination: work (paid and voluntary), learning, travel (organised and independent) and leisure. It should be emphasised that according to this definition, gap years do not inevitably involve spending time overseas. In terms of prevalence, Jones (2004: 46) estimates that between 200,000 to 250,000 young Britons are taking gap years at any one time. Comprehensive statistics are difficult to obtain, although longitudinal surveys and statistics on university applications and admissions provide some information about the subset of gap years taken between school and university. Estimates based on such data suggest approximately 45,000 young people annually may be undertaking pre-university gap years in Britain (Heath 2007; Snee 2014a: 6). In contrast, these forms of pre-university gap years are unusual in Japan (Kobayashi 2007; Yoda 2010).

Existing gap year research tends to use heterogeneous populations and/or focus disproportionately on pre-university gap years and overseas volunteering. This research focuses specifically on individuals working and travelling overseas during breaks in university study or post-university. Because of the relative infrequency of pre-university gap years in Japan, this enabled more targeted comparisons to be made across country contexts.

Furthermore, experiences undertaken with closer proximity to employment were considered to be the most appropriate focus for the research, given my particular interest in the significance of such activities in the employment context. Specifically, the research focuses predominantly on Britons and Japanese pursuing opportunities to work and travel overseas via the working holiday visa, one of the most popular schemes facilitating such experiences.

Working holiday visas allow young people meeting specific criteria to work, study, and/or travel in another country temporarily (typically 1-2 years) (Tan et al. 2009: 1). They are granted through reciprocal visa agreements, established between Australia and the UK in 1975, Australia and Japan in 1980, and the UK and Japan in 2001 (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan [hereafter, MOFA] 2016; Tan et al. 2009; Wilson 2008). In Britain, the Tier 5 (Youth Mobility Scheme) visa was introduced in 2008, as a successor to the "working holidaymaker" and "Japan Youth Exchange Scheme" visas (Grimwood and Thorp 2008: 12). The stated aim of these agreements is to "promote international understanding by helping young people experience other cultures" (Department of Immigration and Border Protection, Australia [hereafter DIBP] 2015a; see also MOFA 2016). Employment is permitted, but should be incidental and not the primary purpose of the journey. Australia, the most popular destination country for working holidaymakers, stipulates - as does Japan - that work should only be undertaken to "supplement" travel costs (DIBP 2015b; MOFA 2016). Britain similarly emphasises that Tier 5 visas are granted to "people coming to the UK to fulfil primarily non-economic objectives" (Home Office 2008: 2). Eligibility is limited by nationality, age (typically 18-30), and financial and health requirements. Applicants must not have any dependent children. They must not have entered the country on a working holiday visa previously, although those who work in a specified industry in an eligible regional area in Australia for at least three months may apply for a second visa (DIBP 2015b). Financially, applicants must possess funds to support themselves initially and a return or onward ticket or funds to purchase one - AU $5,000 for Australia[1] (DIBP 2015d), £1,500 with ticket - or £2,500 without - for Japan (Embassy of Japan in the UK no date), and £1,890 for the UK (gov.uk 2016b).

The number of countries with which the UK has working holiday visa agreements has fluctuated over time. The scheme was originally restricted

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[1] Approximately £3,000 at current exchange rates (1 March 2017).

to "the 'white' Commonwealth countries" (Grimwood and Thorp 2008: 7). It was expanded in 2002, then subsequently contracted. Currently - under the Tier 5 (Youth Mobility Scheme) umbrella - agreements are in place with Australia, Canada, Japan, New Zealand, Monaco, the Republic of Korea, Taiwan, and Hong Kong (gov.uk 2016a). Britain is the most popular source country of working holidaymakers to Australia (Tan et al. 2009: 3), with 44,730 Britons issued visas between July 2014 and June 2015 (DIBP 2015c). Japan currently has 16 working holiday agreements, with (in chronological order) Australia, New Zealand, Canada, the Republic of Korea, France, Germany, the United Kingdom, Ireland, Denmark, Taiwan, Hong Kong, Norway, Portugal, Poland, Slovakia, and Austria (MOFA 2016). In 2013, over 20,000 Japanese were issued working holiday visas (Japan Association for Working Holiday Makers no date). Australia is the most popular destination for Japanese working holidaymakers (Kawashima 2010; Wilson 2008), with 11,481 Japanese issued Australian visas between July 2014 and June 2015 (DIBP 2015c).

This research focuses on experiences of work and travel overseas, and how economic and socio-cultural context and social position shape aspirations, norms and values, and perceived outcomes in relation to such temporary forms of transnational youth mobility. While participants in this research primarily travelled overseas on working holiday visas, individuals who taught languages abroad (e.g., Collins 2013; Lan 2011) were also recruited. These participants are referred to as working holidaymakers throughout, although they did not always necessarily travel on working holiday visas. Further, the research is located within a broader literature on transnational youth mobility. A variety of (overlapping) labels have been used to represent relevant populations in previous research; these include gap years, working holidaymakers, backpackers, working tourists, volunteer tourism, and overseas experience ("OE"). I draw on this broader empirical literature in situating this research, comparing and contrasting where relevant and appropriate with literature on study abroad experiences.

1.3 Economic and socio-cultural context and the positioning of experiences of work and travel overseas

A number of writers have reviewed how gap years (and experiences of work and travel overseas) are represented by institutions and providers in Britain (Cremin 2007; Heath 2007; Simpson 2005a, 2005b), Canada (Amit 2010), and Australia (Lyons et al. 2012). These authors identify key themes in such

representations as emphases on opportunities for active and global citizenship, development and enrichment of the self, and employability. This research focuses on the third of these themes (although they inevitably overlap to some degree). In Japan, the gap year has emerged recently as a topical issue. Government committees, employers, newspaper editorials, and universities have described the British example favourably and advocated its implementation (e.g., Education Rebuilding Council 2007: 30-31; Education Rebuilding Implementation Council 2013: 5; Ito 2011; Japan Business Federation 2013a, 2013b; The Japan Times 2013a). This section of the chapter investigates similarities and differences in how experiences of work and travel overseas are positioned in policy, institutional, and media discourses in Britain and Japan.

A number of writers to date have identified the positioning of the gap year or year out as a "normal", institutionally recognised part of the life course in Britain, almost a "rite of passage" (Bagnoli 2009; Heath 2007; Simpson 2005b; Snee 2014a). This contrasts sharply with the relative rarity of such gap years in Japan (Kobayashi 2007; Yoda 2010). In Britain, this is evident in - and reinforced by - the frequent provision of the option of deferring entry to university (gap advice.org 2015; The Complete University Guide 2015), and the prevalence of discussion of such opportunities in the media (e.g., Doughty 2016). Such discussions are particularly prominent around the time that A level results are announced. This terminology is also drawn upon by the British media and university careers services to refer to post-graduation gap years (e.g., Martin 2007; University of Sheffield Careers Service 2015). A burgeoning gap year industry (e.g., Clarke 2004b: 413; Jones 2004: 68-83) has no doubt played a large role in soliciting and reinforcing such representations (Simpson 2005a, 2005b). Behind these trends lie the tradition of the Grand Tour and broader societal understandings presuming a positive association between mobility, independence, and growth (Amit 2010; Bagnoli 2009; Holdsworth 2009; Simpson 2005a).

Discourses about (overseas) gap years in Britain emphasise the benefits in the spheres of education and employment of "constructive" (Cremin 2007) and "structured" (Heath 2007; Simpson 2005a, 2005b) gap years. Baroness Underwood, in the House of Lords in 2000, for example, described young people who had undertaken "structured" gap years as "highly sought after by recruitment agencies, employers and universities" (HL Deb 2000). References to such benefits have been made in debates in both houses of parliament and public statements by government ministers and chief

executives of the Universities and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS) (Cremin 2007: 527; HC Deb 1998; HL Deb 2000; Simpson 2005a: 137-140). A theme commonly endorsed across these institutional representations is the notion of competitive advantage (Simpson 2005a: 139). Gap years, it is suggested, so long as they are constructive and structured, not only enhance educational and employment opportunities, but also distinguish participants from their competitors for these limited opportunities. One recruiter for PricewaterhouseCoopers, for example, has been quoted as saying that they "encourage gap years", emphasising that they had "thousands of applicants" and were in need of "something to differentiate people, to help us decide whether to invite them for an interview" (Simpson 2005a: 142). Recent advertisements by STA Travel (2015a, 2015b) present working holidays as opportunities to "give your CV something to shout about", "hoist you high above the same-old-same-old crowd", and "help you to attract job offers for years to come".

Empirical literature further suggests that there may also be variation in how overseas experience is perceived by employers across different sectors in Britain. For example, such experiences may be valued more highly in the travel industry (Munt 1994: 109, 112; O'Reilly 2006: 1012-1013); in sectors where "flair" is considered important, such as film or advertising (Desforges 1998: 185-188); and in academia or the international arena (Brooks, Waters and Pimlott-Wilson 2012: 289). In contrast, they may be less favourably perceived in sectors "where institutional expertise is important, such as accountancy, law or science" (Desforges 1998: 188).

In Japan, in the context of an apparent decline in the motivations of young Japanese to work and/or study overseas, there has recently been an increasing emphasis on the need to cultivate "global talents" and/or "people who can excel in the global arena" (Japan Business Federation 2011, 2013a, 2013b). One of the major focuses of discussion has been the question of changing the academic year at Japanese universities (Cabinet Office of Japan 2013: 53; Education Rebuilding Council 2007: 30-31; Education Rebuilding Implementation Council 2013: 5). This would allow students to enter university and start their studies in September (i.e., autumn), instead of starting in April. This is advocated as something that would align with academic years in many other countries, making student exchanges in both directions easier. It has been argued that facilitating autumn university admissions would enable young people to gain varied experiences during a gap year or "gap term". Furthermore, it is suggested that this will combat a

supposedly increased tendency for Japanese young people today to be "passive" and "inward-looking" (Japan Business Federation 2013a; The Daily Yomiuri 2012). GCS Group Australia (2012) references these ideas in advertisements encouraging Japanese to "become a global talent by undertaking a working holiday". Japan's Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT) has recently budgeted 240 million yen[2] in financial support (20 million annually per institution, for up to five years) to be allocated between 12 universities newly establishing gap year programmes (The Mainichi 2015). There are thus some similarities across contexts in terms of how government, university, employer, media, and provider discourses position overseas experiences. Increasingly, these are described as ways of boosting employability and developing global talent, in order for businesses to survive in an increasingly competitive global market.

However, concerns have been expressed in Japan that gap years and working holidays will be dismissed by employers as simply "play" (*asobi*), "a waste of time" (*jikan no muda*), or "empty space" (*kūhaku jikan*) (Etō 2012; Gap Year Platform 2013: 3; Hada 2009: 80-81, 169). Young adults fear taking time out from job hunting or failing to commence employment at the same age as their peers (i.e., deviating from age-based norms of linear progression) will adversely impact their careers (Committee on the Diversification of Academic Trajectories and the Gap Term 2014: 5; Hada 2009: 166-169, 237; see also Kawashima 2010). Some government bodies, stakeholder groups, employers, newspapers, and universities in Japan are thus lobbying for employers to implement more flexible recruitment schedules and evaluate overseas experiences more positively (Education Rebuilding Implementation Council 2013: 6; Gap Year Platform 2013; Japan Business Federation 2013a; The Japan Times 2013b; The University of Tokyo 2012). In a recent initiative, the Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare has commissioned the Japan Association of Overseas Studies to offer assistance in the form of career consulting to young Japanese who have spent short periods of time overseas on working holidays or as language students (Nikkei Business Daily 2013).

This description of the Japanese context, therefore, highlights tensions that have been identified between policy, educational, employer, and media discourses about the benefits of international mobility on the one hand, and the (often apparently negative) consequences of such mobility on the other

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[2] Approximately £1.7 million pounds at current exchange rates (1 March 2017), or £142,450 annually per institution.

(e.g., Kawashima 2010; see also Kobayashi 2013). Initiatives reviewed above suggest that the Japanese context in particular may be evolving, and there are signs that attitudes to overseas experience in particular sectors may be increasingly positive. A recent report by the Japan Association of Corporate Executives (2014: 21) highlights that such experiences may be considered more important by employers in the manufacturing sector. This may be associated with concerns about a shrinking domestic market and increased competition forcing companies in this sector to expand further into global markets in order to survive (e.g., Global Human Resource Development Committee 2010: 11). In other sectors and more generally, however, changes appear small in scale and slow to implement. The recent push by the University of Tokyo to start the academic year in autumn did not garner wide support, and instead, the university adopted a quarter system (i.e., introducing four terms instead of two semesters) from April 2015 (Kameda 2013b). The university's president, Junichi Hamada, reportedly stated that a single institution was unable to overcome all of the obstacles to shifting the academic year (Japan Today 2013). Specific obstacles cited included the scheduling of recruitment activities by companies based on the assumption that students would graduate in March.

This review of the positioning of the gap year and working holiday in the UK and Japan thus highlights interesting similarities and differences between these different country contexts. A review of recent developments illustrates tensions and changes present in the contemporary Japanese context. This further speaks to the value of extending research on the significance of the specificities of the historical, economic, and socio-cultural contexts of temporary transnational youth mobility with an explicitly cross-national comparative design. The following section of the chapter introduces in more detail the aims of the research.

1.4 Aims and research questions

This research explores young adults' experiences of temporary transnational mobility from a cross-national comparative perspective. It will show very significant differences in young people's aspirations for overseas mobility and in their orientations to the subsequent mobilisation of such experiences in the employment context. These will be related to the economic and socio-cultural contexts within which they are embedded. Differences in perceptions of the impact of such mobility - as articulated by careers advisers and

employers - will similarly be shown to be produced by and embedded within specific economic and socio-cultural contexts.

Existing gap year research has focused on pre-university or heterogeneous populations, exploring the significance of economic and socio-cultural context within rather than across settings. Often there is speculation about the impact of such mobility in the employment context without empirical exploration of the views of employers. The focus of this research, therefore, is not just on the experiences of university students and graduates from Britain and Japan. Rather, the research incorporates also the views of employers, university careers advisers, and other informants knowledgeable about graduate career trajectories. This approach enables detailed consideration of the specificities of different contexts. The phenomenon of the working holiday can thus be used to highlight significant differences in institutional arrangements and cultural values across contexts, as well as differences in the aspirations, norms and values, and orientations that arise within these different contexts.

Drawing on relevant empirical literature and sociological theories, this thesis aims to investigate the following research questions comparatively in Britain and Japan:

1. What are the motivations of university students and graduates for pursuing experiences of work and travel overseas? How do these vary within and across country contexts?
2. How do employers and careers advisers perceive temporary forms of transnational mobility such as the working holiday? What do they identify as the consequences of such mobility? How do such views vary by employment sector and by country context?
3. What do university students and graduates perceive as the consequences of experiences of work and travel overseas (with a particular focus on career-related consequences)? How do these vary within and across country contexts?

To answer these questions, this thesis draws on analysis of data generated through retrospective semi-structured qualitative interviews with graduates (or university students) with experiences of work and travel overseas. Interviews were also conducted with university careers advisers and others knowledgeable about graduate employment trajectories, as well as with graduate employers. In sum, this data serves as a lens through which to view aspirations, norms and values, and orientations in relation to mobility and the ideal (employable) self. In particular, it facilitates exploration of the

significance of economic and socio-cultural context and social position in shaping these for students, graduates, and employers in Britain and Japan. The following section sets out the content of the chapters of the thesis.

1.5 Outline of chapters

Chapter Two introduces the conceptual framework informing the research, reviewing existing research on transnational youth mobility and graduate career trajectories in the light of theories of individualisation and governance, and Bourdieu's theory of practice. I argue that exploration of young people's aspirations, norms and values, and orientations as they relate to their pursuit and mobilisation of experiences of work and travel overseas facilitates evaluation of these different ideas about social action. I highlight areas where this thesis builds particularly on existing research. This includes analysis of the influence of institutional arrangements and cultural values in shaping social action; consideration of the extent to which such action may be strategic and reflexive as opposed to pragmatic and pre-reflexive (i.e., unconscious); and consideration of the mechanisms by which social inequalities may be (re)produced across different contexts.

An introduction to the economic, socio-cultural, and historical contexts within which British and Japanese graduates transition to employment is the focus of **Chapter Three**. This chapter summarises existing literature and empirical data about graduate transitions into employment and early career trajectories in each context. It highlights how institutional arrangements (e.g., recruitment and employment structures) and standard career trajectories create a context of relative flexibility in Britain and a context of relative rigidity in Japan. Discussion illustrates the relative fit between gap year practices and institutional arrangements, standard career trajectories, and cultural values in Britain, in contrast to Japan. Further, the chapter outlines evidence suggesting the skills and attributes perceived as valuable by employers in each context vary in ways that are congruent with institutional arrangements in the respective contexts.

The methodological and ethical approach to data generation and analysis in this study is discussed in **Chapter Four**. This chapter introduces the qualitative cross-national comparative case study approach implemented in Britain and Japan and discusses challenges and rewards specific to cross-national comparative research. A key theme is conceptual equivalence and the chapter explores what this meant in relation to sampling and recruitment, data generation and analysis, and ethical issues. In conducting this

research, I recognised the impossibility of asking the "same" questions of an "equivalent" population across different country contexts, with different institutional arrangements, cultural values, traditions, and languages. Instead, I sought to identify such differences and to treat them as additional sources of data. The research used a qualitative approach that prioritised sampling for range, and working holidaymakers and employers from a range of sectors participated in the research. (Employers represented ranged from manufacturing and technology companies to broadcasting, finance, and the public sector). Findings are not claimed to generalise across all sectors, rather I seek to explore how evaluation criteria drawn upon within contexts fit with institutional arrangements in each context. Grappling with questions of equivalence was an ever-present challenge in the design and conduct of the research. Nevertheless, the scope of such a design to de-naturalise and contextualise practices is identified as a key strength of the research.

Chapter Five investigates the significance of economic and socio-cultural context and social position in shaping young people's aspirations for experiences of work and travel overseas. The chapter highlights how motivations were embedded within - and shed light upon - quite different contexts and shaped by social position within each context. It shows how the gap year is positioned as a "normal", institutionally recognised life stage in Britain but not Japan. The British structural context confers a measure of "freedom to" pursue *temporary escapes*, especially upon recent graduates with the resources to take advantage of this. In contrast, deviations from "straight" trajectories and age-appropriate career progression are perceived as atypical and risky in the context of Japanese labour market processes and practices. For the majority of Japanese participants, structural constraints (e.g., dissatisfaction with harsh working conditions and a lack of alternatives) appeared significant in shaping a desire to *transform their lives*. These accounts challenge conceptualisations of social action as disembedded. Furthermore, participants rarely embarked upon experiences of work and travel overseas strategically and reflexively as projects of the self intended to enhance employability.

The influence of institutional arrangements, standard career trajectories, and cultural values on employer perceptions of the ideal (employable) graduate is the focus of **Chapter Six**. The gap year was generally described as something akin to preparation for adulthood in Britain, while delaying entry to the labour market or quitting a job to pursue a working holiday, especially, was often perceived as "running away" from adult responsibilities in Japan.

British employers expressed a greater readiness to associate experiences of work and travel overseas with forms of cultural and symbolic capital (e.g., pro-activity, maturity and independence, flexibility, intercultural sensitivity, and the ability to take responsibility for one's own development). In contrast, for Japanese employers such experiences appeared to function more readily as forms of "negative symbolic capital" (Bourdieu 1990, 2000), at times signalling a lack of perseverance and a potential excess of independence/individuality. Accounts were consistent with suggestions that evaluators assess merit in ways that validate strengths and experiences similar to their own. Processes of "looking-glass merit" (Rivera 2012, 2015) thus appear to reinforce these different structural positionings. The potential significance of economic, social, and cultural resources in shaping student and graduate capacities to "package" activities in ways that are favourably evaluated by employers is discussed.

Chapter Seven examines the significance of economic and socio-cultural context and social position in shaping the employment-related aspirations, orientations, and trajectories of students and graduates participating in this research. It explores their approach to the accumulation and mobilisation of various experiences, including those of work and travel overseas, in advancing employment options. The chapter illustrates how British and Japanese graduates differed in terms of the language in which they oriented to the task of attaining desired employment, their understandings of what it took to be successful in this task, and their perceptions of the relative flexibility or rigidity of the context within which they were developing their careers. Furthermore, British participants frequently perceived overseas experiences to function as forms of cultural and symbolic capital, while Japanese participants suggested employers often overlooked these or perceived them negatively. Indeed, in Japan, experiences of work and travel overseas at times appeared to function as "negative symbolic capital" (Bourdieu 1990, 2000). In both contexts, successfully mobilising such experiences appeared to be associated with the nature of the work participants undertook overseas and the sector within which they sought employment. The chapter concludes by exploring how social position (e.g., access to economic, social, and cultural resources and gender) impacts on aspirations, orientations, and trajectories post-graduation, and how mechanisms of social stratification in the context of graduate career trajectories differ between Britain and Japan.

Chapter Eight concludes by drawing together the key themes identified throughout the thesis. The cross-national comparative perspective employed in this research highlights the invisible structures that encourage the pursuit of experiences of work and travel overseas in the UK context. These are shaped as relatively low risk and common (for those with the resources to afford them), and are bound up with the development of qualities perceived as valuable by employers. In Japan, in contrast, such activities fit relatively poorly with recruitment and employment structures and practices. They are therefore more commonly positioned as atypical and risky. The relationship between mobility and privilege thus varies with economic and socio-cultural context. What constitutes the "right story" about experiences of work and travel overseas - and how such activities may be linked to the (re)production of social inequalities - is highly contingent on context. The implications of findings for supporting students and graduates in their transitions from education into employment are considered. The chapter concludes with reflections on the significance and limitations of the project and recommendations for future research.

Chapter 2 Transnational youth mobility and graduate career trajectories: A conceptual framework

2.1 Introduction

Gap years and similar experiences of work and travel overseas are often represented as potential investments in employability. In other words, as outlined in the previous chapter, governments, universities, employers, the media, and gap year providers frequently position such mobility as a form of work on the self. Often, this is associated with the development of skills and qualities considered valuable by employers. Despite the frequency of such claims, however, little empirical research has been conducted in relation to this question. We know little about how skills and qualities accumulated overseas may be mobilised after gap years, and to what effect (e.g., Snee 2009: 229). The perspective of employers has rarely been taken into account, despite acknowledgement that it is their situated judgements that are crucial to determining how such experiences are evaluated (e.g., Brown and Hesketh 2004: 38; Snee 2009: 133). Furthermore, the influence of the specificities of context on how such experiences are mobilised and evaluated has rarely been systematically or rigorously investigated, despite growing recognition of the importance of such questions in shaping variation within national contexts (e.g., Desforges 1998, 2000; O'Reilly 2005: 163-164) and across different country contexts (e.g., Bagnoli 2009).

This chapter reviews ongoing academic debates central to understanding the influence of economic and socio-cultural contexts, and especially different institutional arrangements, in shaping the aspirations, orientations, norms and values, and outcomes of students, graduates, and employers in relation to mobility and the ideal (employable) self. It focuses on existing empirical research investigating overseas gap years, working holidays, and other forms of transnational youth mobility. The chapter outlines and critically evaluates theoretical frameworks drawn upon within this literature, and the broader theoretical debates within which these accounts are situated. Building on the work of Snee (2014a), it separates existing accounts of transnational youth mobility into three different (sometimes overlapping) broad groups, based on the different models of social action underpinning the authors' analyses. One group of accounts follows Giddens (1991) in presenting these forms of mobility as individualised and reflexive "projects of the self". These accounts conceptualise identity as actively and continuously constructed - in a world of uncertainty and an ever-increasing array of

choices - through reflection, decisions, and narratives. A second group draws on Rose's (1990, 1996) concept of governance through freedom to suggest that aspirations to work and travel overseas do not simply represent the free choices of individuals, but are simultaneously shaped by the alignment between individual desires and institutional, political, and social goals. A third major group of accounts conceptualises transnational youth mobility in relation to Bourdieu's (1990) theory of practice. Scholars grounding their analysis in a Bourdieusian framework argue that taken-for-granted dispositions generated within a particular social context may shape aspirations for such mobility. This may then be favourably evaluated by gatekeepers within the fields of education and employment (i.e., as cultural and symbolic resources or capital).

The conclusion of the chapter identifies key empirical and theoretical questions emerging from this review of the literature. In order to summarise these questions, I present - drawing upon and extending the work of Snee (2014a: 18, 62) - the "hypothetical figures" of the reflexively mobile, the governed mobile, and the habitually mobile. These explain, respectively, how transnational youth mobility is conceptualised by each group of accounts. Exploring the applicability of these conceptualisations to the accounts of individuals participating in this research facilitates contribution to a number of ongoing debates in the literature. These include questions about the significance of social context and social position, reflexivity, and strategic planning in shaping social action.

2.2 Individualisation and reflexive modernisation

Young people's temporary experiences of transnational mobility (e.g., gap years, working holidays, and/or overseas experience ("OE")) have frequently been conceptualised in the literature as individualised and reflexive projects of the self (e.g., Bagnoli 2009; Desforges 1998, 2000; O'Reilly 2005, 2006). These accounts position individuals undertaking such activities as actively seeking to construct and present their identities through reflection, decisions, and narratives. This section of the chapter opens with an exploration of the key claims of theories of individualisation and reflexive modernisation (Beck 1992; Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 2002; Beck, Giddens and Lash 1994; Giddens 1991). This is followed by an overview of empirical research applying these concepts in the context of transnational youth mobility. Critiques of these theories are presented, alongside evidence highlighting the ongoing importance of structural factors and social position in shaping

such mobility and its outcomes. Importantly, much of this evidence emerges from these very same studies reviewed in this section.

2.2.1 Overview of theories of individualisation and reflexive modernisation

A number of scholars have highlighted the increasing importance, in the postmodern world, of processes of individualisation and reflexive modernisation (Beck 1992; Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 2002; Beck, Giddens and Lash 1994; Giddens 1991). A key claim of these theories is that individuals have become "disembedded" from their social context (Beck 1992: 128; Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 2002: 202-203), as traditional sources of identity and behaviour patterns decline in importance (e.g., class and social status, gender roles, family, neighbourhood, ethnicity, nation). Certainties once taken for granted have eroded, as "[l]ife loses its self-evident quality" (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 2002: 6-7). Instead, individuals are compelled to create individualised biographies, self-consciously, routinely, and continuously creating their "selves" through narratives and lifestyle choices:

> [I]n order to survive the rat race, one has to become active, inventive and resourceful, to develop ideas of one's own, to be faster, nimbler and more creative – not just on one occasion, but constantly, day after day. Individuals become actors, builders, jugglers, stage managers of their own biographies and identities and also of their social links and networks.
>
> (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 2002: 23)

These authors argue that globalisation, detraditionalisation, and individualisation have generated greater uncertainty and an increased need for individuals to reflexively maintain a coherent sense of self-identity through the decisions they make and the stories that they tell about their selves (e.g., Giddens 1991: 5, 14):

> Self-identity is not a distinctive trait, or even a collection of traits, possessed by the individual. It is *the self as reflexively understood by the person in terms of his or her biography.* Identity here still presumes continuity across time and space: but self-identity is such continuity as interpreted reflexively by the agent.
>
> (Giddens 1991: 53, emphasis in original)

Beck (1994: 174) describes the reflexivity that is central to these accounts as "the ability [of people] to reflect on the social conditions of their existence and to change them". Reflexivity is said to be heightened at *fateful moments,* "moments at which consequential decisions have to be taken or courses of action initiated" (Giddens 1991: 112-114, 243).

Although Beck and Giddens both position identity in contemporary society as increasingly fragile, Giddens (1991) is considered more "optimistic" in emphasising freedom and empowerment (Atkinson 2010a; Dawson 2012; Heaphy 2007). Beck, in contrast, does not claim that people experience greater autonomy, but rather that "institutionalized individualism" represents a new form of social control. Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (2002: 24) highlight institutional guidelines and regulations in education, employment, and welfare that "compel the self-organization and self-thematization of people's biographies". In fact, what they describe is more a compulsion to choose, as people "are forced to take into their hands that which is in danger of breaking into pieces: their own lives" (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 2002: 23). There are parallels here with Rose's (1990, 1996) concept of governance through freedom, although Rose emphasises continuity rather than change and does not see processes of individualisation as an altogether new phenomenon (e.g., Irwin 2005: 12-13; Korpela 2014). The discussion that follows focuses on theories of individualisation and reflexive modernisation as applied in the area of transnational youth mobility, which generally draw upon Giddens' more optimistic conceptualisation. A later section of this chapter elaborates upon applications of Rose's ideas.

2.2.2 Transnational youth mobility as reflexive project of the self?

Young people's temporary experiences of transnational mobility are often analysed from the perspective of theories of individualisation and reflexive modernisation. Indeed, McLeod and Burrows (2014: 369) comment critically on the preoccupation of many researchers with a "quite circumscribed set of analytic concerns [....] foregrounding issues of [....] individualisation, reflexivity, self-identity and subjectivity". Frändberg (2015: 555) critiques the assumption in much existing research of a positive relationship between mobility and notions of individual choice and self-realisation. This section of the chapter introduces and critiques empirical research conceptualising transnational youth mobility in the light of theories of individualisation and reflexive modernisation. In the course of this discussion, I suggest Frändberg (2015) and McLeod and Burrows (2014) oversimplify existing

literature. I observe that even literature drawing on Giddens (1991) to position such mobility as a reflexive project of the self acknowledges the ongoing role of social context in shaping young people's experiences and outcomes in relation to such mobility.

Accounts of backpacker and gap year travel, working holidays, and other forms of transnational youth mobility drawing on the work of Giddens (1991) typically conceptualise these forms of mobility as a means of "discovering", "(re)constructing", "transforming", and/or "developing" the self. Desforges (2000) and O'Reilly (2005, 2006), for example, explain how the long-haul travellers and backpackers they interviewed incorporated experiences of travel into their biographies in describing their decision to embark upon their travels, while travelling, and upon their return home. They suggest participants drew on their experiences in order to construct and represent themselves as, for example, educated, fulfilled, adventurous, youthful, and/or mature. King (2011) focuses specifically on the notion of "identity work". He describes instances where young people mobilised gap year accounts (in the context of higher education) to distinguish their current selves from their former selves and/or themselves from others. This often related to (re)gaining attributes such as confidence, maturity, and/or independence.

Many of these authors (e.g., Bagnoli 2009; Clarke 2004a; Desforges 2000) draw on Giddens (1991) to describe participants departing overseas at fateful moments of transition (e.g., leaving higher education or employment, parental divorce, broken relationships, dropping out of a course). Clarke (2004a: 504-505) suggests that the risk and upheaval associated with pursuing working holidays (e.g., leaving partners, disrupting habits and routines, breaking career trajectories, encountering new people and places) makes this "an opportunity for re-skilling, for the display or demonstration of certain qualities, to WHMs [working holidaymakers] themselves and to others". He highlights in particular how the British working holidaymakers he interviewed in Australia described becoming "confident in their ability to tolerate difference and cope with change" (Clarke 2004a: 499).

However, empirical literature suggests experiences of transnational youth mobility ought not simply to be assumed to represent decisions undertaken at fateful moments that are "irreversible" or "consequential" (Giddens 1991: 112-114). Conradson and Latham (2005: 293), for example, suggest that one of the attractions of London for New Zealanders working abroad was that it might be "an experimental life" as described by Beck and Beck-

Gernsheim (2002: 26), yet "it does not demand that things get too experimental" (see also Duncan 2004: 6-7). Amit (2010: 61) observes that there was often little at stake in these forms of mobility for Canadian working holidaymakers and student travellers. In the words of one of her participants, Rosanne, "*You can't really go wrong, it is, it is something that if you decide 'I'm not having fun anymore', you can be home in two weeks.*"

Conceptualisations of transnational youth mobility as reflexive forms of identity work are also challenged by empirical research observing an absence of hypothesised forms of reflexivity in participant accounts. Snee (2014b: 843, 851), for example, highlights that the narratives of participants in her research often "stick to standard scripts" and rely on "collective ideas of what gap years should be about". This can be seen when considering the benefits that one of her participants, Tim, anticipated gaining from his experience before his departure: "*This trip is going to offer me so much, such as a good step up the career ladder, becoming more independent, and realizing how lucky I am to have things in life I do take for granted*" (Snee 2009: 191; 2014a: 158). In other words, rather than actively and reflexively pursuing gap years as projects of self-development, Snee (2014b: 845) suggests her participants often approached their gap years in ways that were shaped by pre-reflexive dispositions "that are the result of being embedded in a particular social context". Waters, Brooks and Pimlott-Wilson (2011) similarly conceptualise the pursuit of fun, happiness, and adventure as dispositions influencing their British interviewees' decisions to study abroad. In contrast to the claims of theorists of individualisation and reflexive modernisation, this highlights the ongoing significance of social context in shaping aspirations, orientations, and behaviours.

Indeed, the significance of social context in structuring young people's experiences of transnational mobility is highlighted in many of these very same accounts conceptualising such mobility as individualised and reflexive projects of the self. Clarke (2004a: 500-501), for example, acknowledges the influence of Australia's "increasingly competitive and professional backpacker industry" (e.g., those offering flights, accommodation, tours, and other services); family and friends; and guidebooks in constraining and structuring the practices of British working holidaymakers in Australia. Alongside young people's agency in (re)constructing their identities through the experience of travel, Bagnoli (2009) considers the role of structures (e.g., societal expectations and norms; the encouragement of parents, employers, and educational institutions). She argues that in England particularly, this

"may actually predefine some forms of travel as 'institutional' rites of passage" (Bagnoli 2009: 325). Bagnoli's (2009) work shows the promise of adopting a cross-national comparative approach to youth mobility. She highlights how differences in the English and Italian contexts position the option of a year out overseas as a valid response to uncertainty about what to do after school for young people from England but not from Italy.

In the Japanese context, both Kawashima (2010) and Kato (2013) have drawn upon the work of Giddens (1991) in conceptualising working holidays as projects of "self-searching" and self-development. Nevertheless, Kawashima (2010: 273) also observes the role of commercial institutions (e.g., migration and tourism agencies, English language schools) in shaping paths followed by working holidaymakers pursuing "individualism on a mass scale". Furthermore, she highlights the significance of economic context and employment structures and practices in shaping the aspirations of Japanese working holidaymakers and their subsequent career trajectories. Specifically, she suggests they are often motivated by dissatisfaction with their experiences in the labour market. Furthermore, they do not necessarily perceive their experiences to be valued by employers upon their return to Japan. Her work forms part of a small but growing body of literature pointing to the significance of the broader economic and socio-cultural context in shaping perceptions, experiences, and outcomes in relation to such mobility (see also Bagnoli 2009; Brooks, Waters and Pimlott-Wilson 2012; Wilson, Fisher and Moore 2009; Yoon 2015).

Drawing on the broader literature on transitions to adulthood, there is considerable evidence that theories of individualisation and reflexive modernisation fail to take into account the ongoing significance of structural pressures, constraints, and resource limitations in shaping young people's aspirations, orientations, and trajectories (e.g., Brannen and Nilsen 2005). A number of authors highlight the continued impact of variables such as class, race, gender, and sexuality (Furlong and Cartmel 1997; Valentine 2003). Furlong and Cartmel (1997: 4) highlight in particular the danger of the "epistemological fallacy", where young people feel responsible for the paths they take in life despite structural pressures which may limit the paths available to them. Bynner (2005: 379) similarly argues that individualisation is "constrained by forces that are fundamentally social, cultural and structural in nature". It has been observed by a number of authors that people may be increasingly *narrating* their life stories in more individualised and reflexive ways. Dawson (2012: 314), for example, draws on Mills (1940: 906-907) to

identify "disembedded individualization" as "the common vocabulary of motives for late modern society". Nevertheless, as argued by Snee (2014b: 858), a discursive emphasis on choice does not necessarily mean that individuals are freely choosing. Following Snee (2009: 56), in the analyses that follow I draw to a greater extent on other theories, "in attempts to curb the over-emphasis on agency in the picture of identity work put forward by the reflexive modernisation thesis".

A number of authors have expressed scepticism about the emphasis on reflexivity in theories of individualisation and reflexive modernisation. Questions have been raised about whether reflexivity is necessarily created and mobilised equally amongst individuals of different social positions and whether reflexivity and strategic life planning are necessarily associated with the trajectories of more advantaged individuals (Atkinson 2010b; Brooks and Everett 2008; Farrugia 2012; McNay 1999). Furthermore, there are fundamental incompatibilities between theorisations that locate youth travel within individualistic conceptions of identity and conceptualisations of such practices as ways of accumulating cultural capital (Snee 2014a: 40-41, 44). In a later section of this chapter, I explain what a perspective grounded in Bourdieu's (1990) theory of practice would look like and the analytic purchase facilitated by such a framework.

An important insight emerging from analyses conceptualising the mobilisation of gap year experiences as identity work is an acknowledgement that experiences of work and travel overseas may be mobilised in situated interactions in various contexts, for a variety of different purposes, with varying levels of success (e.g., Desforges 1998, 2000; King 2011; O'Reilly 2005: 163-164). Desforges (1998, 2000) refers specifically to the use of such narratives in attempts to demonstrate qualities perceived attractive by employers, suggesting that these qualities may be viewed differently by employers in different sectors. This literature offers valuable insights into these differences, and these ideas will be taken up in Chapters Six and Seven of the thesis. Nevertheless, to fully explore the significance of context, I conclude that there is a need to go beyond theories of individualisation and reflexive modernisation in explaining these patterns.

2.3 Governance through freedom and the enterprising self

An alternate conceptualisation of experiences of work and travel overseas draws on Rose's (1990, 1996) concept of governance through freedom to problematise the relationship between mobility and choice (Frändberg 2015).

These studies argue that such activities are "simultaneously enabled and constrained" (Haverig 2011: 118; see also Haverig and Roberts 2011). This section begins by outlining what is meant by the notion of governance though freedom and exploring how such ideas have been applied to overseas gap years and working holidays. It highlights the advantages afforded by such an approach, as well as potential shortfalls. This perspective shows promise in addressing some of the criticisms that can be levelled at "optimistic" conceptualisations (Heaphy 2007: 71) of mobility that overemphasise the role of agency. Specifically, such a perspective appears to have been valuable in explaining norms that have emerged in Britain, Canada, and New Zealand around the appropriateness of travelling when young, before "settling down" (Amit 2010, 2011; Haverig 2007: 108-110). However, the literature suggests young people respond in a variety of different ways to discourses about how they "ought" to develop themselves (e.g., Holford 2007), and to provider representations of transnational youth mobility (Simpson 2005a: 19, 143). Accounts predicated solely on the concept of governance through freedom are insufficient to explain this diversity.

2.3.1 Overview of notions of governance through freedom

Broadly speaking, Rose (1996: 155) argues that citizens in contemporary liberal democratic societies are governed indirectly, "*through* the freedom and aspirations of subjects rather than in spite of them". Governments act indirectly and/or "at a distance" upon citizens and their choices, aspirations, desires, values, and behaviour, rather than through direct coercion (Rose 1990: 10). Such governance seeks to align institutional and political values and strategies (e.g., consumption, profitability, efficiency, and social order) with individuals' own ambitions and objectives (Rose 1990: 10-11). The concept of governance extends government from something done by the state, to encompass the idea that "'governing' is done by employers, administrative authorities, social workers, parents, schoolteachers, medical personnel, and experts of all kind" (Lukes 2005: 97). Government is seen as encompassing the myriad of ways actors have sought to "conduct the conduct" of human beings (Foucault 1986) and "to structure the possible field of action of others" (Foucault 1982: 221).

Like Giddens (1991) and Beck (1992; Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 2002; Beck, Giddens and Lash 1994), Rose (1990: 226) describes the project of the self as the way people shape their own lives and identities through their lifestyle and consumption choices (see also Rose 1999: 178). Paradoxically,

he argues that "modern individuals are not merely 'free to choose', but *obliged to be free*, to understand and enact their lives in terms of choice" (Rose 1999: 87). According to Rose (1990: 226), contemporary neoliberal societies are premised on the assumption that the most beneficial way of structuring the economy (for everyone) is in the form of exchanges between discrete units - each of which boldly and energetically pursues their own undertakings and interests. He highlights the importance of the idea of enterprise, which prizes "energy, initiative, ambition, calculation, and personal responsibility" (Rose 1996: 154). The project of the self, therefore, is the construction of an enterprising self:

> an entrepreneur of itself, seeking to maximise its own powers, its own happiness, its own quality of life, though [sic] enhancing its autonomy and then instrumentalizing its autonomous choices in the service of its life-style.
>
> (Rose 1996: 158)

Young people's temporary experiences of transnational mobility (e.g., gap years, working holidays, and/or overseas experience ("OE")) have only infrequently been analysed from the perspective of theories of governance through freedom. The discussion that follows introduces existing research and theorisation in this area and expands upon the potential value of applying these ideas in the area of transnational youth mobility.

2.3.2 Transnational youth mobility as governance through freedom?

Haverig (2007, 2011; Haverig and Roberts 2011) draws on Rose's concept of governance through freedom in explaining how regulatory frameworks create fields of possibilities within which New Zealanders can pursue the overseas experience ("OE") or working holiday. Her analysis highlights ways in which aspirations to work and travel overseas are shaped by institutional, political, and social agendas. Haverig (2007) points out that the regulatory framework and social imaginaries within which working holidays are undertaken do not free participants from age-based norms and expectations about their behaviour. Rather, they allow for a *temporary* period of work and travel overseas before "settling down" (see also Amit 2011). Haverig (2007: 5) considers the desire to boost one's CV and impress potential employers more relevant for Britons volunteering abroad on gap years than for working holidaymakers from New Zealand. Perhaps for this reason, she does not apply Rose's ideas specifically to enjoinders to develop employability

through experiences of work and travel overseas. This further highlights the importance of considering such forms of mobility in relation to their economic and socio-cultural context, and constitutes a gap in the literature targeted by the present research.

Within the UK context, scholars have begun to consider overseas gap years in the context of government and employer agendas in relation to enterprise, employability, and the individualisation of responsibility. Simpson (2005a: 136-137) analyses gap year representations made within debates in the British House of Lords. She observes that "enthusiasm" about gap years is in keeping with government agendas promoting volunteering, referenced several times during the discussion. Elsewhere, Simpson (2005b: 448) argues that the forms of citizenship young people are encouraged to develop through the gap year emphasise the importance of individuals being able to compete for employment.

Snee (2009: 50-51) elaborates upon the overlap in characteristics perceived to be shared by "well-travelled" and "employable" individuals, and more specifically, the enterprising worker. She draws here upon du Gay's (1996a: 56) observation that to be successful in contemporary neoliberal market economies, workers must display "certain enterprising qualities - such as self-reliance, personal responsibility, boldness and a willingness to take risks in the pursuit of such goals". O'Reilly (2006: 1012) highlights that qualities perceived to be developed through transnational youth mobility (e.g., confidence, broad-mindedness, flexibility) are "particularly suited to the current context of flexible employment conditions". The orientation towards self-development and doing something "worthwhile" found in the accounts of Snee's (2014a, 2014b) participants is significant here. In the Japanese context, Kawashima (2010: 275) observes the "primacy of the idea of self-improvement" in participant accounts and states that this "has become the new moral standard, at least at the discursive level".

These accounts should be situated within broader debates about how individuals in contemporary neoliberal societies are encouraged to prioritise self-development and being enterprising, taking individual responsibility for choices, and investing in their own development and employability (Edwards 2002; Kariya 2010a; Moreau and Leathwood 2006). Existing empirical literature, however, cautions that one ought not assume that people will uncritically buy into these discourses, explaining that there are a variety of ways people can respond to attempts from the state and employers to shape enterprising selves (Holford 2007; Storey, Salaman and Platman 2005).

In the context of the gap year specifically, Simpson (2005a: 153) observes that media and provider discourses position gap year packages as commodities that "will give one competitive, corporate advantage, will increase one's social status and make one a more interesting person". She highlights, however, the multiple and variable ways gap year participants understand and represent their experiences, suggesting they may seek or consume a product that differs considerably from that packaged and sold by the gap year industry (Simpson 2005a: 19, 143). O'Reilly (2005: 160-161) suggests that references to personal development may be used strategically by those wishing to travel in attempts to justify these plans to others, whether or not this motivated the journey in the first place (see also O'Reilly 2006: 1004).

Existing research thus partially supports suggestions that individuals undertaking gap years and/or working holidays may internalise ideas that they ought to use their time productively to develop their selves and employability, taking individual responsibility for choices and their consequences. However, there is also evidence of variation in how people interpret and respond to such discourses. Furthermore, as will be explored in Chapter Three, there are many reasons to challenge both realist conceptualisations of employability (Holmes 2013a, 2013b) and individualising discourses of employability more broadly (Chertkovskaya et al. 2013). The current research extends existing literature by investigating how young people respond to discourses about the need to shape enterprising selves in the context of gap year travel and graduate employment. It explores variation across different economic and socio-cultural contexts in terms of the skills and attributes perceived as valuable in the employment context, and the mobilisation of experiences by students and graduates. Chapters Six and Seven of this thesis explore these questions in further detail.

2.4 Bourdieu's theory of practice

Transnational youth mobility has frequently been conceptualised in relation to Bourdieu's (1990) theory of practice, as a means of accumulating cultural and symbolic capital and (re)producing social inequalities. In this literature it is often claimed that overseas gap years allow young people to accumulate and subsequently deploy social and cultural resources or capital so as to gain an edge over their peers in the competition for educational and employment opportunities (e.g., Heath 2007). As explained in an earlier

section of this chapter, taking Bourdieu's explanatory framework seriously means that such claims sit uneasily with notions of gap years as reflexive projects of the self. Indeed, scholars who have grounded their analysis in a Bourdieusian framework argue that pre-reflexive dispositions generated within a particular social context may contribute to the shaping of aspirations for such mobility, which may then be favourably evaluated by gatekeepers within the fields of education and employment (e.g., Snee 2014a; Waters, Brooks and Pimlott-Wilson 2011). In this section, I outline the concepts of capital, habitus, and field comprising the key features of Bourdieu's (1990) theory of practice. I discuss the advantages and disadvantages of a Bourdieusian-inspired theoretical perspective. One strength of this approach is in its ability to consider questions about whether unconscious orientations and dispositions may nevertheless be associated with the (re)production of social advantages. The centrality of the concept of field facilitates consideration of how differences in institutional arrangements may be associated with dramatic variations in what is valued in different contexts. It is important to consider, however, what is gained and what is lost when questions of "value" are discussed through the lens of "capital".

2.4.1 Overview of Bourdieu's theory of practice

Bourdieu's broader theory of practice developed out of a desire to resolve what Thomson (2008: 68) refers to as "aimless debates about the primacy of either social structures or human agency" (see also Burke 2016: 6-7). To understand this approach fully, and account for people's *practices* or actions within a Bourdieusian framework, capital needs to be considered in conjunction with the related concepts of habitus and field (Edgerton and Roberts 2014: 195; McDonough and Nunez 2007: 151). These concepts should be considered "inter-dependent and co-constructed [....] with none of them primary, dominant or causal" (Thomson 2008: 68):

> People's *practices* or actions – their behavioral repertoire – are the consequences of their habitus and cultural capital interacting within the context of a given field.
>
> (Edgerton and Roberts 2014: 195)

The field is frequently overlooked when a Bourdieusian perspective is applied in empirical research (Burke 2016: 15). Nevertheless, it is a key component of this triad, with Bourdieu (2005/2000: 148) arguing that an examination of *social space* or field is crucial to achieving a full understanding of practices. Edgerton and Roberts (2014: 195) explain that

"[t]he term *field* refers to the formal and informal norms governing a particular social sphere of activity (e.g. family, public school, higher education, art, politics, and economics)". Fields are semi-autonomous but overlap, and often share many similarities, with smaller fields (e.g., families) often nested within larger fields (e.g., education) (Edgerton and Roberts 2014: 195).

Bourdieu argues that within these social spaces or fields, individuals are motivated to maximise social status, and use and convert a variety of different forms of capital in attempts to achieve this goal (McDonough and Nunez 2007: 142; Melguizo 2011: 410-411; Thomson 2008: 68). In addition to *economic capital,* money and assets which can easily, directly, and immediately be converted into money, he describes *social capital* and *cultural capital,* suggesting that in the right circumstances these can be converted into economic capital (Bourdieu 1997/1983: 47). Social capital includes the size and social position of one's contacts and networks (Burke 2016: 11). Cultural capital "consists mainly of linguistic and cultural competence and that relationship of familiarity with culture which can only be produced by family upbringing when it transmits the dominant culture"[3] (Bourdieu 1973: 80). Bourdieu further describes a fourth, composite form of capital, referring to this as *symbolic capital*. This denotes "legitimate levels of these capitals", and he argues that individuals possessing such capital "can shape the doxa, the norms (that benefit the dominant group) or common sense of the field" (Burke 2016: 11). Many new class theorists prefer the concept of "resources" over "capital", considering the former to encompass more personal and subjective resources such as parents' efforts to build their children's self-confidence (e.g., Bertaux and Delcroix 2000: 80-82). In the text that follows, references to the work of individual authors tend to be presented drawing upon the language used by the original authors. For the purposes of the arguments central to this thesis, however, references to capital should be interpreted in a broad sense, as incorporating subjective resources not necessarily explicitly incorporated into Bourdieu's original framework.

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[3] Bourdieu further conceives of cultural capital as existing in three separate forms, describing these as the *embodied* state (i.e., "long-lasting dispositions of the mind and body"); the *objectified* state (i.e., "cultural goods (pictures, books, dictionaries, instruments, machines, etc."); and the *institutionalised* state (i.e., "a form of objectification [....] [that] confers entirely original properties on the cultural capital which it is presumed to guarantee", e.g., educational qualifications) (Bourdieu 1997/1983: 47).

Finally, the concept of habitus is pivotal to Bourdieu's philosophy of action. Habitus refers to "a system of lasting, transposable dispositions which, integrating past experiences, functions at every moment as a *matrix of perceptions, appreciations, and actions*" (Bourdieu 1977/1972: 82-83). It is a "practical sense for what is to be done in a given situation – what is called in sport a 'feel' for the game" (Bourdieu 1998/1994: 25). It incorporates "distinct and distinctive practices" that differ by class, and differentiate between classes – what and how we eat; the sports we practice and how we practice them; and the political views we express and how we go about expressing them (Bourdieu 1998/1994: 8). Bourdieu argues that dispositions to think, perceive, and act in certain ways are inculcated into individuals as they move across different fields (Webb, Schirato and Danaher 2002: xi, 38). These dispositions comprise the habitus and are both durable (i.e., lasting) and transposable (i.e., they travel with people across contexts) (Webb, Schirato and Danaher 2002: 36-37). Such dispositions may incline people to act like a "fish in water", taking their surroundings for granted, and being unaware of the weight of the water in which they are swimming (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992: 127).

Bourdieu's thesis is that social and cultural resources - including those provided by an individual's social position and family background - are actively "invested" within different fields in order to generate social profits (Lamont and Lareau 1988: 154). Bourdieu (1976/1972; cited in Lamont and Lareau 1988: 154) likens this to the way that players in a card game start with different hands, but achieve varying outcomes depending on the cards they possess (i.e., capital); the rules of the game (i.e., the norms of this particular sphere of social activity); and the skill with which they play the game (i.e., attitudes, values, behaviours, and dispositions inculcated into the habitus). He argues that socioeconomic inequalities are perpetuated by education systems that legitimate existing social hierarchies by recognising the culture of dominant social classes as legitimate, positioning arbitrary signals of cultural worth (i.e., dominant culture) as intrinsically valuable (Bourdieu, 1997, 2006; Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977). Because such cultural capital may be misperceived as innate, it is "predisposed to function as symbolic capital, i.e., to be unrecognized as capital and recognized as legitimate competence" (Bourdieu 1997/1983: 49). Through the concept of cultural capital, Bourdieu (1997/1983: 47-48) posits differential rates of profit on investment in education, based on the uneven distribution of cultural capital between different classes. After exploring the various

conceptualisations of Bourdieu and others, Lamont and Lareau (1988: 156, emphasis in original) propose defining cultural capital as:

> *institutionalized, i.e., widely shared, high status cultural signals (attitudes, preferences, formal knowledge, behaviors, goods and credentials) used for social and cultural exclusion*, the former referring to exclusion from jobs and resources, and the latter, to exclusion from high status groups.

The section that follows explores how Bourdieu's ideas, and the concepts of cultural and symbolic capital in particular, have been applied in the context of research on transnational youth mobility.

2.4.2 Transnational youth mobility as accumulation of cultural and symbolic capital?

There is a large body of literature conceptualising the benefits of transnational youth mobility in terms of Bourdieu's forms of capital. Snee (2014a: 142), for example, describes "a general consensus" in the literature about the value of gap year experiences. The benefits thought to derive from such experiences include "certain kinds of knowledge and skills that will have future currency in the education and employment markets" (Snee 2009: 31). Simpson (2005a: 60, 142) conceptualises incorporated or embodied cultural (or corporate) capital accumulated through gap year experiences as skills that are valued in the employment context (e.g., maturity, problem solving, leadership, and teamwork).

One of the first to conceptualise independent travel in relation to the accumulation of cultural capital with specific reference to employment was Munt (1994). He conceptualises consumption of independent travel products as a way of accumulating cultural capital, in the form of objects and experiences (e.g., holidays) and the embodied personal qualities these experiences are thought to signify (e.g., strength of character, adaptability, sensitivity, and "worldliness"). He argues that this turns travel "into a commodity with exchange value", and this is increasingly acknowledged in occupations in the travel industry and overseas development in particular, for which overseas experience is increasingly a prerequisite (Munt 1994: 109, 112). Munt here returns to ideas referenced earlier in this chapter (e.g., Desforges 1998), suggesting that context (e.g., sector of employment) matters in determining how such experiences are evaluated.

Clarke (2004c: 120-124) questions the relevance to the British working holidaymakers he encountered in Australia of Bourdieu's (1984/1979)

description, as interpreted by Munt (1994), of class struggles for differentiation through education, jobs, and commodities such as holidays. He suggests these arguments are inapplicable because his participants privileged "relaxation, laughter and enjoyment" rather than taking travel seriously. This, however, is precisely one of the strengths of Bourdieu's (1984/1979) framework. These orientations first highlight the relatively advantaged position of these working holidaymakers, compared to others for whom such experiences are not an option. Second, they highlight how "disinterested" and/or "aesthetic" "investments" may nevertheless have a monetary exchange value (Moore 2004: 446). A strength of Bourdieu's (1997/1983: 46) work is in its challenging of the distinction implied by economic theory between *self-interested* exchanges motivated towards maximising profit and *disinterested* forms of exchange. This emphasis facilitates consideration of the possibility that activities undertaken for "disinterested" motivations such as "fun" and "escape" may nevertheless be associated with the "accidental" accumulation of capital (Waters and Brooks 2010; Waters, Brooks and Pimlott-Wilson 2011).

Heath (2007) focuses specifically on pre-university gap years in the context of expanding participation in higher education. She draws here upon the work of Brown and colleagues (Brown 1995; Brown and Hesketh 2004; Brown, Hesketh and Williams 2003). The argument here is that when educational qualifications alone are no longer enough to secure success, students are required to find new ways of achieving distinction (Heath 2007: 92). Brown (2003) posits, in the face of increasing numbers of graduates competing for a limited number of jobs, the existence of an "opportunity trap". In other words, he argues that university education is increasingly seen as a necessary but not sufficient prerequisite for access to increasingly competitive graduate jobs. The positional conflict theory of these authors argues that success in the competition for graduate employment involves "packaging" *personal capital* into a "*narrative* of employability", presenting "experiences, character, and accomplishments in ways that conform to the competence profiles scrutinized by employers" (Brown and Hesketh 2004: 35-36):

> Within the middle classes, the development of the 'charismatic' qualities of their children is becoming as important as arming them with the necessary credentials, contacts and networks. There is nothing new about this focus on the 'rounded' person, but whereas a range of broader interests and hobbies which offered time-out from

academic study was seen as a form of cultural *consumption* which was enjoyed for its own sake, it has increasingly become a form of *investment* as part of the construction of a value-added *curriculum vitae*. This involves an increasing 'commodification' of the socio-emotional embodiment of culture, incorporating drive, ambition, social confidence, tastes and interpersonal skills.

(Brown 1995: 42)

Heath's (2007) arguments sit within the context of a growing body of literature highlighting the importance of "extra-credential" activities (e.g., work and study abroad; extracurricular activities; internships, placements, and volunteering) - and the non-meritocratic factors such as personality and dispositions that they may signal to employers - in influencing graduate employment. Such observations have been made across a variety of contexts, including Britain (Bathmaker, Ingram and Waller 2013; Brown and Hesketh 2004; Cook, Faulconbridge and Muzio 2012; Jacobs 2003; Stuart et al. 2009; Tomlinson 2008); Japan (McDonald and Hallinan 2005; McDonald 2009; Miller 2013; van Ommen 2015); the USA (Rivera 2011, 2012, 2015); and Canada (Lehmann 2012).

Scholars have further suggested that there may be a hierarchy of gap year experiences, such that employers may value certain activities more than others (Heath 2007: 91, 95; Simpson 2005a: 141; 2005b: 453). Specifically, it has been suggested that the activities that appear to be particularly valued require substantial investments of time, energy, money, and/or social capital; and working-class students may lack the economic resources and connections to pursue such opportunities (Ashley et al. 2015: 39; Lehmann 2012; Rivera 2012: 1017; 2015: 97). From a Bourdieusian perspective, this is highly significant, because these hierarchies may act in such a way as to stratify young people (Simpson 2005b: 453). Relevant here also are suggestions that participants and employers perceive gap year experiences as valuable because they confer the status of being "interesting" (Simpson 2005a: 151) and "different" (Frändberg 2015: 565) and can be used by employers to "differentiate" between candidates (Jones 2004: 61; Simpson 2005a: 142).

Cultural capital has been theorised to influence (graduate) recruitment processes in a variety of different ways. Rivera (2012, 2015), for example, describes processes of "looking-glass merit" and postulates that recruiters at elite firms in the USA engaged in a process of "cultural capital matching", drawing upon their own experiences in evaluating and interpreting the merit

of different candidates. She suggests employers were seeking candidates with cultural similarity in terms of leisure time activities, experiences, and the way they presented themselves. Interestingly, the same leisure activities might be valued differently by different recruiters and at different firms, supporting and extending notions about the importance of field to the deployment of cultural capital. Evidence of participation that was both formal and intensive was sought. This led Rivera (2012: 1002) to conclude that to be successful, applicants needed a "cultural tool kit" (Swidler 1986) that had both variety and depth, in order to be able to cash in on the potential benefits of cultural similarity.

Other authors emphasise the importance of narrating one's experiences in the "right" way in order to obtain advantages in the fields of education and employment (e.g., O'Reilly 2005: 163-164). Snee (2009: 202, 229) observes that this "right story" was something that some of her participants could tell more easily than others and advocates for research specifically exploring how capital accumulated via the gap year is subsequently deployed. It may be that this ability to tell the right story can be likened to a feel for the game, inculcated into one's habitus through socialisation. This could be seen as a type of cultural capital (i.e., attitudes, knowledge, and practices shaping how one positions/narrates the gap year), such that people with different levels of (cultural) capital may be differentially able to mobilise various experiences (including gap years) in ways that advantage them. In some ways, such accounts are consistent with research with employers in Britain highlighting the importance of criteria such as "fit" and "polish", and suggesting that these attributes "can be mapped on to middle-class status and socialisation"(Ashley et al. 2015: 6, 38-40; see also Brown and Hesketh 2004: 156-161).

In the field of graduate recruitment, Brown and Hesketh (2004: 9, 124-146) distinguish between two "ideal types" of approaches to the labour market, the "player" and "purist". Players, they argue, approach the search for employment as a positional competition, within which the goal is to stand out from other applicants. They selectively mobilise experiences to demonstrate that they meet employer requirements, accessing various sources of information in attempts to "'decode' the winning formula" and "tailoring" experiences to requirements (Brown and Hesketh 2004: 127-128). In contrast, purists view this search as a meritocratic competition, where their task is to find a job that is a good "fit", communicating honestly in applications "who they are and their genuine suitability for the job" (Brown

and Hesketh 2004: 140, 142). Brown and Hesketh (2004: 126) do not suggest that players will always be more successful, rather that they "appear to have a positional advantage if they understand the rules of the game and have been properly coached". Importantly, Brown (2005) does not see a focus on graduate orientations as incompatible with or superseding a Bourdieusian approach. Rather, he suggests orientations to the mobilisation of different forms of capital should be considered alongside analysis of the nature and distribution of such capital. This, he argues, facilitates a more comprehensive understanding of the role of both agency and structure in shaping graduate trajectories. The analysis in Chapter Seven draws on these concepts - alongside notions of cultural and symbolic capital - to explore how different country contexts and different levels of resources influence student and graduate orientations to the accumulation and mobilisation of various experiences in advancing employment options.

Central to Bourdieu's explanation of how cultural capital can be leveraged for advantage is the notion that "the value of a species of capital (e.g. knowledge of Greek or of integral calculus) hinges on the existence of a game, of a field in which this competency can be employed" (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992: 98). Snee (2009: 228) alludes to this point when she states that the values of "home" are important in shaping opinions about what is worthwhile in the fields of gap year travel and graduate employment. This idea is at the forefront of her claim that the work of Bourdieu and the concept of cultural capital, specifically, "is a way of understanding how cultural practices such as gap years are invested with values that are institutionalised and recognised as legitimate *in specific fields and contexts*" (Snee 2009: 133, emphasis added). Brown and Hesketh (2004: 38) similarly emphasise that "the value of personal 'capital' [....] depends on the judgements of others". One strength of a Bourdieusian approach to such questions is in the explicit attention paid to the context within which different experiences are mobilised and evaluated.

An additional advantage to applying a Bourdieusian-inspired conceptual framework to this research is that this allows scope to consider how experiences functioning as symbolic capital might secure "a positive or negative profit of distinction" (Bourdieu 1990: 140). The need to consider in analysis the presence of "a brand of cultural capital that is recognised as negative" (Barker 2013: 362), or "negative symbolic capital" (Bourdieu 1990: 140; 2000: 241-242), has been acknowledged in research with self-initiated career expatriates returning to France, Germany, and Denmark (e.g.,

Andresen and Walther 2012; Walther 2014, 2015). Sin (2013) similarly highlights the "under-researched" "potential negative currency of foreign cultural capital" in the context of a discussion of the experiences and outcomes of Malaysian students studying at British universities.

The current research explores the characteristics of specific fields within which practices such as transnational youth mobility are invested with particular values. Given the significance of the situated judgements of others in shaping evaluations, this research expands on the valuable contributions of Snee (2009, 2014a) and Simpson (2005a, 2005b) by incorporating an explicitly comparative approach and exploring the hitherto relatively neglected perspective of employers and careers advisers. Chapter Six specifically explores the perspectives of employers, while Chapter Seven takes up the question of the mobilisation of experiences across two different country contexts and a variety of different employment sectors.

Bourdieu's ideas - in combination with the player and purist ideal types - are considered particularly useful in exploring these questions. This is because of the framework they offer for considering the orientations that have been inculcated into individuals as they move through different contexts, the resources they have available, and the specific norms and values of the fields within which they are seeking employment. The dramatically different perceptions of experiences of work and travel overseas and the attributes that they are perceived to signal in the British and Japanese contexts highlight how the same activities may be valued as signals of cultural capital in some contexts but not others.

Nevertheless, while this framework facilitates understanding of how experiences of work and travel abroad are mobilised and evaluated within the graduate recruitment process, there are limitations to its applicability. Given the diversity of aspirations, experiences, and outcomes reported by working holidaymakers, any single theoretical perspective can offer only a partial account, paying attention to some aspects of experience while neglecting others. Bourdieu's framework may be particularly suited to exploring how students, graduates, and employers in different contexts mobilised and evaluated experiences of work and travel overseas in different ways, with different outcomes, consistent with institutional arrangements and cultural values prevalent in each context. However, the situated presentations of participant narratives in Chapters Five and Seven suggest that these were not always the primary concerns of the working holidaymakers who participated in this research. While the cross-national

differences identified in this research are interesting and significant, it is important to consider also the myriad of other ways in which such experiences have meaning and significance to those partaking in them.

2.5 Conclusion

This chapter reviews existing empirical research about overseas gap years, working holidays, and related forms of transnational youth mobility, identifying key empirical questions and theoretical debates to which this research contributes. In order to summarise these questions, I present - drawing upon and extending the work of Snee (2014a: 18, 62) - the "hypothetical figures" of the reflexively mobile, the governed mobile, and the habitually mobile. Theorists of individualisation and reflexive modernisation posit that young people pursuing experiences of work and travel overseas seek instrumentally, strategically, and reflexively to construct and represent themselves in particular ways (e.g., as developing skills and qualities perceived to make themselves more "employable"). Examining the aspirations and practices of these individuals by drawing on the concept of governance through freedom may help account for how these aspirations and practices may have been shaped by invocations from governments and employers to prioritise self-development, become more enterprising, take individual responsibility for choices, and invest in employability. Finally, a Bourdieusian approach conceptualises such individuals as imbued with dispositions generated within specific social contexts. To the extent that their actions align with those considered valuable by gatekeepers, they are theorised to be able to gain further advantages, thus (re)producing social inequalities.

In exploring the applicability of these different conceptualisations to young people's experiences of work and travel overseas and the perceptions of such experiences by employers, I engage with broader empirical and theoretical debates. These include questions about the influence of different social contexts and social positions on aspirations, orientations, and outcomes for students transitioning from university to employment and beyond; the role of reflexive and strategic planning for young people navigating such transitions; and questions about how what is valued in graduate recruitment contexts is shaped by institutional arrangements, cultural values, and the individual backgrounds of evaluators. The focus of the research is upon student and graduate aspirations for overseas experiences, employer perceptions and values relating to such experiences,

and student and graduate accounts of how they subsequently mobilised (or did not mobilise) these experiences in the employment context in Britain and Japan. In order to address such questions, it is first necessary to explain in more detail relevant features of these different country contexts. The chapter that follows introduces institutional (e.g., employment and recruitment) structures and practices, cultural values, and standard career trajectories of graduates in Britain and Japan, in order to contextualise the analyses that follow.

Chapter 3 Graduate transitions to employment and early career trajectories in Britain and Japan

3.1 Introduction

A key concern of this thesis is investigating how different institutional arrangements and cultural values shape aspirations, orientations, and trajectories in relation to experiences of work and travel overseas and graduate employment in Britain and Japan. Data generated through this research acts as a lens through which these respective country contexts and the socio-cultural construction of employability can be investigated. The purpose of this chapter is to introduce these contexts in more detail, to inform the analyses that follow.

Section 3.2 outlines the economic, socio-cultural, and historical context of graduate transitions to employment in Britain and Japan. Discussion highlights how institutional arrangements create a context of relative flexibility for graduates in their early 20s in Britain, and a context of relative rigidity in Japan. Furthermore, the fit between arrangements prevalent in each context and practices such as gap years is explored. Section 3.3 presents data on trends in graduate employment outcomes over time and evidence for increasing polarisation of outcomes in each context. Section 3.4 illustrates how the skills and attributes commonly described as valuable in the British and Japanese contexts vary in ways that are congruent with institutional arrangements in the respective contexts. Further, it critiques "realist" conceptualisations of employability underpinning much policy, practice, and research and introduces an alternate conceptualisation underpinning the analyses that follow.

3.2 Graduate transitions in country context: Institutional filters as mediators of the impact of globalisation

This section considers aspects of the educational, employment, and economic contexts of Britain and Japan impacting on graduate recruitment and employment over the last 50 years. The pressures of globalisation and the advent of mass higher education (i.e., the dramatic rise in the proportion of the population continuing to university) have significantly altered the landscape of graduate transitions to employment in both contexts. However, differences in education and employment systems, welfare regimes, and

historical and economic contexts need to be considered in evaluating the impact of these changes.

Globalisation refers to the "intensification of worldwide social relations which link distant localities in such a way that local happenings are shaped by events occurring many miles away and vice versa" (Giddens 1990: 64). Mills et al. (2008: 562) describe four interrelated and simultaneous trends characterising processes of globalisation since the 1980s. The first is the internationalisation of markets, such that labour, goods, services, and capital can move across national borders with greater ease and less expense. Second, this exposes companies and nations to increased competition, prompting the introduction of measures such as deregulation, privatisation, and liberalisation in attempts to enhance competitiveness. Third, changes in information and communication technology have resulted in increased interconnectedness; the growth of the service industry; the promotion of the "knowledge-based economy" involving a "greater reliance on intellectual capabilities than on physical inputs or natural resources" (Powell and Snellman 2004: 199); and organisational restructuring. Fourth, they describe a rise in the importance of the global market, with markets becoming increasingly dynamic and unpredictable. In the context of employment, Buchholz et al. (2011: 6) suggest globalisation has shifted labour market power relationships, as employers attempt to shift increased market risks - and a greater need for flexibility - onto their workers. However, these authors further suggest that institutional filters such as different education and employment systems and welfare regimes mediate and channel the impact of globalisation differently in different country contexts (Buchholz et al. 2011; Mills et al. 2008).

3.2.1 Education systems and the advent of mass education

The last few decades have seen an expansion in the proportion and diversity of young people entering higher education in both Britain and Japan, as depicted in Figure 3.1. In England, 30% of those aged 18 in 1994/95 entered higher education by the age of 19 (i.e., in 1994 or 1995) (Higher Education Funding Council for England [hereafter HEFCE] 2010: 4). By 2015, participation rates had increased such that 42.1% of young people aged 18 in 2014/15 entered higher education by the age of 19, the highest rate ever recorded (UCAS Analysis and Research 2015: 12, 36-37)[4]. University and

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[4] UCAS rates differ slightly from HEFCE young participation rates, as the former cover only those applying via UCAS, and are based on accepted applicants (cf. actual entrants) (HEFCE, personal communication).

Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS) statistics underestimate overall participation in higher education as part-time students and those entering university after the age of 19 are excluded. For comparison, the provisional Higher Education Initial Participation Rate (HEIPR) estimate for 17- to 30-year-olds domiciled in England who entered higher education for the first time in the 2013/14 academic year was 47% (Department for Business Innovation & Skills 2015b: 1). In Japan, the proportion of the 18-year-old population attending university has increased even more dramatically. Japan's Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology [hereafter MEXT] (2016) reports participation rates increased from 32.1% in 1995 to 51.5% in 2015. Gender gaps in participation depicted here are discussed later in this chapter.
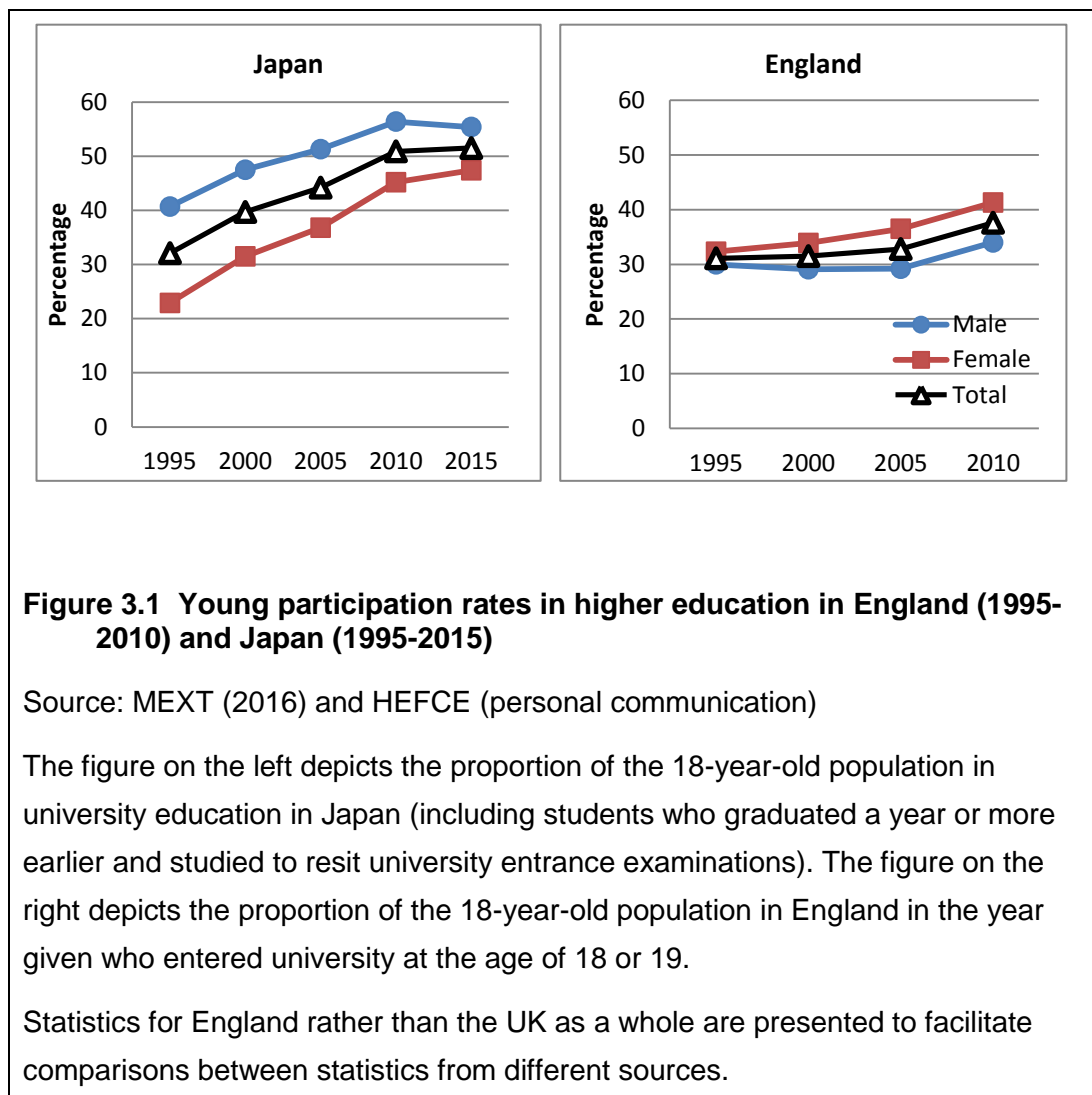
Figure 3.1 Young participation rates in higher education in England (1995-2010) and Japan (1995-2015)

Source: MEXT (2016) and HEFCE (personal communication)

The figure on the left depicts the proportion of the 18-year-old population in university education in Japan (including students who graduated a year or more earlier and studied to resit university entrance examinations). The figure on the right depicts the proportion of the 18-year-old population in England in the year given who entered university at the age of 18 or 19.

Statistics for England rather than the UK as a whole are presented to facilitate comparisons between statistics from different sources.

Drivers for this "massification" of the higher education system include increased educational attainment at secondary school, increased demand, and policies to widen access (Tapper and Palfreyman 2005). As more people graduate from university, the labour market value of all qualifications is argued to depreciate, as employers demand qualifications for jobs for which they were not previously required and progression rates further increase (Brown 2003; Kariya 2011; Kariya and Dore 2006; MacDonald 2011; Roberts 2009; UK Commission for Employment and Skills 2012: 6; Wolf 2011: 30).

One recent analysis argues that up until very recently, the labour market in the UK has absorbed increasing numbers of graduates without a significant decline in their relative wages (Blundell, Green and Jin 2016: 5). These authors suggest that in the 1990s and 2000s, organisations were shifting from a centralised to a decentralised organisational form. During this transitional period, relative wage differences between graduates and school leavers remained relatively constant. Extrapolating into the future, however, these authors suggest continued increases in the proportion of graduates in the labour market will result in a reduction of graduates' relative wages. They observe in the private sector, amongst 30- to 34-year-olds, declines in the median ratio of graduate-to-school-leaver wages from 1.63 in the 2000s to 1.55 in the 2010s. While questioning the completeness of previous accounts, these authors are nevertheless in broad agreement in their forecasts of future trends.

Higher education funding models differ significantly across the different countries involved in this research (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development [hereafter OECD] 2015a). Tuition fees are not payable by Scottish students studying in Scotland. In contrast, tuition fees in England are amongst the highest in the OECD, after the cap on annual tuition fees was increased in 2012 from £3,000 to £9,000. Average annual fees for students in England starting their studies in the 2015/16 academic year have been reported at £8,703 (Office for Fair Access 2016a). Tuition fee loans and/or maintenance grants are accessed by 92% of full-time national students in the UK (OECD 2015a: Indicator B5, Table B5.4). In contrast, the bulk of expansion in higher education in Japan since the 1960s has been in the private sector, following deregulation in the 1980s and 1990s, and underpinned by the "beneficiaries pay" principle (Kariya 2011; Uenishi 2011). The proportion of Japanese tertiary students enrolled in private institutions (79% in 2013) is extremely high (OECD 2015a). A large

percentage of funding for Japanese tertiary institutions comes from household expenditure (51.6%), compared to an OECD average of 21.7% (OECD 2015a: Indicator B3, Table B3.1). In practice, this means parents typically pay students' tuition fees and costs of living, while students work part-time to earn spending money (Johnston and Little 2007: 36; Kariya 2011; Yano 1997, 2013). Average annual tuition fees for undergraduate degrees are approximately £4,096 at national (public) universities and between approximately £6,711 and £27,726 at private universities, depending on programme (Japan Student Services Organization no date)[5]. Students are also liable for a one-off admission fee of approximately £2,154 at national (public) universities and between approximately £1,794 and £9,908 at private universities[6]. Despite high fees, student support systems are relatively "less developed" (Jongbloed and Vossensteyn 2016: 582). Only 38% of students access public loans (OECD 2015a: Indicator B5, Table B5.4). As will be shown in Chapter Five, differing funding systems (and the financial costs of university education) are one reason cited for the lower prevalence of gap years in Japan.

These different funding systems also shape differences in the age distribution of university students. OECD data shows that in Japan the 20th, 50th, and 80th percentiles of the age distribution of new entrants to university in 2010 were 18, 19, and 19 (i.e., 20%, 50%, and 80% of first-time entrants were aged under 18, 19, and 19 respectively) (OECD 2012: 355). Yano (2013: 70) observes that most other new entrants are aged 19. At least in part, he suggests, this is because it would be difficult for Japanese students to rely on parental funding or self-fund university studies later in life. In the UK, in contrast, the 20th, 50th, and 80th percentiles were 18, 20, and 25 (OECD 2012: 355). The number of mature students entering university in England in particular has fallen significantly in recent years (Office for Fair Access 2016b). Nevertheless, significant differences between contexts remain. In 2012/13, 37.5% of first year UK domiciled first degree students were aged 20 years and above (Higher Education Statistics Agency 2014). This is one indicator of the relatively greater flexibility of the British context, a point that will be elaborated upon later in the chapter.

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[5] 535,800 yen and between 877,751 and 3,626,243 yen. Conversion at current exchange rates (10 November 2016).

[6] 282,000 yen and between 234,828 and 1,297,261 yen. Conversion at current exchange rates (10 November 2016).

In Japan, as in Britain, there are clear differences in status and prestige between universities. Students from more "elite" universities generally secure more favourable employment outcomes (e.g., Kariya 2011; Kariya and Dore 2006; Komikawa 2012b: 44-45; Uenishi 2011: 91). This is one reason why there is such fierce competition for entry to the highest-ranked universities in Japan. In order to prepare for competitive entry examinations, many students attend *juku* or cram schools (Clark 2005; OECD 2013). As many as 30% of high school students may spend an additional year, or more, preparing to resit entrance examinations (Ono 2007). The term *rōnin* (masterless samurai) is used to refer to these students, and their prevalence leads some to describe the Japanese education system as having "an extra year built into it" (Clark 2005).

The expansion of the higher education system and declining size of the 18-year-old population in Japan has resulted in a situation where some universities have more places available than applicants (Kariya 2011; Uenishi 2011; Yano 2013). These authors further observe that concerns have been raised about the "quality" of graduates from less selective universities. More broadly, tertiary level survival rates presented by Yano (2013: 71; see also Burrows 2014) offer some support for the common belief that Japanese universities are "easy to graduate from" (Uenishi 2011: 87). This rate is calculated by dividing the number of graduates by the number of new entrants in the year of entrance. In Japan, this is exceptionally high, at 91%. In Britain, in comparison, this rate is 78%. This - along with the timing of new graduate recruitment - may help to explain the relative lack of emphasis Japanese employers place upon academic performance at university in selection processes (Honda 2010: 51-53; Yoshimoto et al. 2005: 35).

Differences in funding systems and the relative importance of academic performance, therefore, are likely to filter the impact of increased participation in higher education on graduate employment outcomes in Britain and Japan. The next section of the chapter outlines further differences between contexts in relation to employment systems and welfare regimes.

3.2.2 Employment systems and welfare regimes

Britain and Japan also differ in terms of employment systems and welfare regimes. Significant here are differences in labour market fluidity and flexibilisation associated with different levels of employment protection legislation and different histories and levels of centralisation of labour-capital

negotiations (Mills and Blossfeld 2005; Mills et al. 2008; Regini 2000a, 2000b; Sakaguchi 2016/2014). It is argued that in the context of the market-oriented liberal labour market in Britain, employers can meet the increased need for flexibility globalisation demands by adjusting wages and laying off excess staff. This results in comparatively high job mobility and wage differentials but simultaneously higher prospects of (re)employment because overall turnover is relatively high (Buchholz et al. 2011: 17). Purcell, Flynn and Chatrakul Na Ayudhya (2011: 262) attribute to this flexibilisation the greater stratification of the workforce visible in Britain (e.g., by socioeconomic background, qualifications etc). In contrast, in countries with higher levels of employment protection and lower levels of labour market fluidity (e.g., Japan), globalisation has lead to increased use of non-regular (e.g., temporary) workers. This is argued to have deepened the chasm between a "core" of protected majority male workers, and a "periphery" of younger and especially female workers (Sakaguchi 2016/2014).

Another significant difference between contexts relates to the type of welfare regime each represents. As a liberal-residual welfare state regime, Britain is characterised by passive labour market and employment policies; residual welfare provision (i.e., minimal support via conditional and/or means-tested benefits for the neediest); and an emphasis on the importance of the market in securing welfare (Esping-Andersen 1990, 1997; Mills et al. 2008). Japan shares aspects of the liberal regime, such as residualism and strong reliance on private welfare (Esping-Andersen 1997). However, it has in common with the conservative-corporatist regime relatively generous social insurance based on employment and contributions (segmented by occupational status); commitment to a traditional "male-breadwinner" model; and an emphasis on family as welfare provider (Esping-Andersen 1990, 1997). This impacts on gendered trajectories in education and employment in ways explored in a subsequent section of this chapter.

3.2.3 Economic context and labour market

In exploring the capacity of the labour market to absorb increasing numbers of graduates, it is also important to consider the broader economic context. Figure 3.2 illustrates trends in annual Gross Domestic Product (GDP) growth rates in Britain and Japan from 1961 to 2014. Despite periods of recession in the early 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s, the British economy showed continued growth through the late 1990s and into the 2000s. In contrast, Japan experienced "unprecedented economic growth" between the 1960s and 1980s (Central Intelligence Agency [hereafter CIA] 2016). These high levels

of growth facilitated the development of a relatively "distinctive" (Honda 2004: 105) system of transitions from education into employment. In the latter half of the 1980s, there was a "massive bubble" (i.e., price changes or cash flows that were not sustainable) in Japan's real estate and stock markets (Kindleberger and Aliber 2005: 1). After this "bubble" burst in the early 1990s, Japan experienced two decades of "sluggish growth and persistent deflation" (OECD 2015c: 4). This period has come to be known in Japan as the "lost decades" (Funabashi and Kushner 2015), and these circumstances are considered largely responsible for the "collapse" of Japan's distinctive system of transitions (Honda 2004: 110; Komikawa 2011: 68, 106).
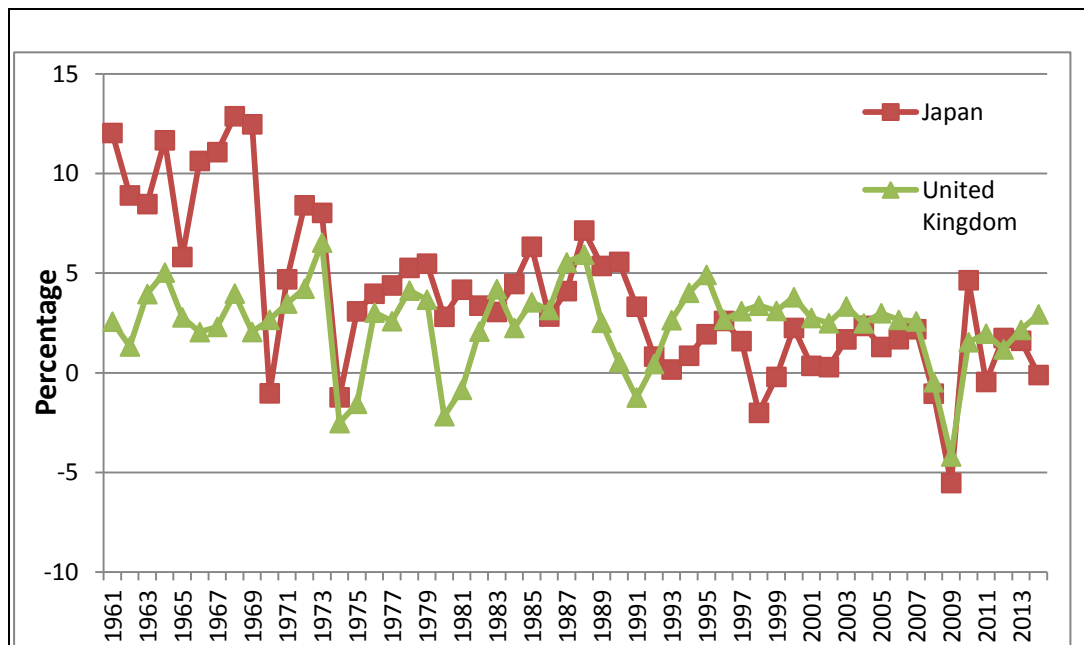
Figure 3.2 GDP growth (annual percent) in the UK and Japan (1961-2014)

Source: http://databank.worldbank.org/data/ (data extracted 11 June 2016)

Annual percentage growth rate of GDP at market prices based on constant local currency. Aggregates are based on constant 2005 US dollars.

The Conservative government elected in Britain in 1979 prioritised neoliberal policies such as free trade, deregulation, and privatisation, eroding legal protection for workers and trade union support, reducing public expenditure, and shifting much employment from the public to the private sector (Purcell,

Flynn and Chatrakul Na Ayudhya 2011). Observers suggest that Japan has undergone similar social changes (i.e., neoliberalism, deregulation, and privatisation) since the latter part of the 1990s (Suzuki et al. 2010: 514-515). Because of relatively high levels of legal protection for "regular" workers, however, this has manifested as a decrease in regular employment and increase in non-regular employment (Kariya 2011: 76-77; OECD 2013: 2). This increase is characterised by observers as "the most important change in the Japanese labour market", particularly since the 1990s (Keizer 2008: 411). The term "non-regular" (or "atypical") employment in Japan refers to part-time, temporary, agency, or dispatch workers (Japan Institute for Labour Policy and Training 2011; Macnaughtan 2006).

Both Japan and Britain were severely impacted by the 2008 global financial crisis (CIA 2016). Growth in Britain picked up subsequently, although the recent referendum vote to leave the European Union is anticipated to have a negative impact (Kierzenkowski et al. 2016). Growth in Japan declined following the triple disaster (earthquake, tsunami, and nuclear accident) of 11 March 2011. Under the Abe government, a three-pronged approach to revitalising the economy and addressing deflation was launched ("Abenomics"). Annual GDP growth slowed after an increase in consumption tax in April 2014, and resumed in 2015 at an estimated 0.5% (CIA 2016).

The service sector constitutes the majority of the labour market and generates the majority of GDP in both Japan and Britain (approximately 70% in Japan and 80% in Britain) (CIA 2016). Industry comprises a greater share of the labour market and GDP in Japan (approximately 25%) than in Britain (where it accounts for approximately 15% of the labour market and 20% of GDP) (CIA 2016). In recent years, increasing emphasis has been placed in the Japanese business and policy context on the shrinking domestic market, heightened competition from other (East Asian) economies, and pressure to expand overseas to remain competitive (e.g., see discussions of the Global Human Resource Development Committee (2010)). These pressures form an important part of the context of this research, as reflected in Chapter One's discussion of recent calls for the development of "global talents" by Japanese employers (Japan Business Federation 2011, 2013a, 2013b).

3.2.4 Recruitment and employment structures and practices, and their influence on young people's orientations

This section of the chapter introduces recruitment and employment structures and practices in Britain and Japan. Discussion highlights as specifically relevant greater mobility of employment, market-based wages

and salaries, and publicly provided training in Britain; this is contrasted with a recent history of practices such as lifetime employment, systems of payment and progression emphasising seniority, and on-the-job training in Japan (e.g., Dore 1990/1973). Also important here is the practice of "periodical blanket recruitment" of new graduates (Honda 2004: 105). The emphasis throughout this section is on how these institutional arrangements, cultural values, and "standard" career trajectories constitute a context of relative rigidity for those seeking employment in Japan (Jacobs 2010), in contrast to the greater levels of fluidity and flexibility characterising labour market structures in Britain (Purcell, Flynn and Chatrakul Na Ayudhya 2011).

This relative fluidity and flexibility in the UK context is manifested in the variety of possible routes into the labour force, new graduates' relatively short-term orientations, and comparatively high levels of post-graduation job mobility. Routes into the labour market for British graduates include "graduate schemes" providing structured education and training and potentially rotation within a variety of positions in a given department (Yoshimoto et al. 2005: 47). There are also direct entry positions and "ad hoc"/"just in time" year-round recruitment (Connor, Hirsh and Barber 2003; Hogarth et al. 2007: 19; Williams, Tassinari and Ball 2015: 63). Yoshimoto et al. (2005) suggest one difference between Britain and Japan may be the assumption of British employers and employees that a graduate's first job need not be long term. British graduates frequently exhibit a relatively short-term orientation and relatively high levels of mobility in the years immediately following graduation (Brooks and Everett 2009: 340; Schomburg and Teichler 2006: 77-78; Smetherham 2004: 33-34; Tomlinson 2007: 288-289). Furthermore, entering the labour market into a "lower-qualified" job, or on a temporary contract, is less likely to lead to "entrapment in lower status positions" in the British flexible labour market than in Germany and Italy, where markets are more tightly regulated and segmented (Scherer 2004). However, because of relatively high levels of turnover, institutional arrangements in Britain are not supportive of long-term relationships warranting company investment in on-the-job training in the same way as in Japan (Soskice 1993).

In contrast, scholars describe a number of features of graduate transitions in Japan as "distinctive" (Honda 2004: 105) and/or "unique" (Komikawa 2011: 106). At "the heart" of this system is the "periodical blanket recruitment" of new graduates (*shinki gakusotsu ikkatsu teiki saiyō*), the key feature of which is immediate transfer from education into employment without time

spent looking for jobs after graduation (Honda 2004: 105). Komikawa (2011: 121-122) describes this system of periodical blanket recruitment as intimately connected to the system of lifetime (long-term) employment (*shūshin koyō [chōki koyō]*) and seniority-based systems of payment and promotion (*nenkō joretsu seido*). Larger employers have historically sought graduates with good general ability and "trainability", recruiting a cohort of new graduates for generalist positions every year, providing them with company-specific on-the-job training, rotating them between positions as needed, and providing relatively slow and steady prospects for progression and promotion (Borovoy 2010; Hashiguchi 2006; Hatvany and Pucik 1981; Nagano 2014; Nakamura 1992; Sugimoto 2010). Careers are expected to follow an "idealised norm of linear progression" (Kawashima 2010: 280-282). There is relatively low labour mobility (i.e., less frequent changes of employer) and an expectation of long-term employment (Dore 1990/1973: 264; Japan Productivity Center 2015; Schomburg and Teichler 2006: 77-78; Yoshimoto et al. 2005).

Traditionally in Japan, semi-institutional linkages between companies and schools/universities (e.g., selectively advertising vacancies, seeking recommendations, and links between universities and alumni) were important parts of the recruitment process (Honda 2004; Kariya 2010b; Uenishi 2011). In Japan's booming economy of the 1960s and 1970s, the distinctively Japanese transition mechanism of periodical blanket recruitment was expanded to secondary school graduates in blue-collar jobs (Honda 2004). This resulted in a system with a particular reputation for efficiency, and during this period of economic growth educational background tended to have less of an impact on job security and socioeconomic status (e.g., Brinton 2010; Honda 2004). Honda (2004: 109) suggests that for this reason "new school leavers and university graduates have been able to enjoy an assured position in the Japanese labour market for about two decades, even after the period of high economic growth".

However, job hunting is argued to have become more individualised in a context of mass higher education and "open" recruitment via the internet (Kagawa 2010: 192; Uenishi 2011: 89-90). Periodical blanket recruitment - as implemented in an environment of mass education - means that major companies recruit graduates for entry-level positions once a year, according to a fixed timetable and an increasingly time-consuming process (e.g., Firkola 2011; Honda 2010; Ishiwatari and Osawa 2008; Komikawa 2012b; Nakamura 1992). Komikawa (2011: 106) notes that this system is

particularly Japanese, in contrast with Europe and America, where employment restrictions based on age are legislated against as discrimination, and year-round recruitment (*tsūnen saiyō*) is the norm. For the bulk of the last two decades, as described by Firkola (2011), students have typically commenced job hunting activities while still in their third year (of a four-year degree). Concerns about the distraction that this poses to their studies and the inefficiencies imposed by such an intensive process have built over time (Burrows 2014; Firkola 2011; Honda 2010; Komikawa 2012b). This is perceived to be a barrier to the take-up of gap year opportunities, due to young adults' concerns that failing to search for jobs and commence employment at the same age as their peers may have a negative impact on their careers (Committee on the Diversification of Academic Trajectories and the Gap Term 2014: 5; Hada 2009: 166-169, 237; see also Kawashima 2010).

A variety of recruitment schedule agreements, ethics charters, and guidelines have been implemented in Japan since the 1950s, stipulating the dates at which companies should commence publicity and selection activities and issue preliminary job offers (Burrows 2014; Gakujō 2013; Japan Business Federation 2015). In April 2013, Prime Minister Abe made a request to Japan's leading business groups that companies delay the start of the recruitment cycle so students could focus on their education, and so those who wished to study abroad would not be disadvantaged by rigid recruitment timeframes (The Japan Times 2013c). For students graduating in March 2017, the current guideline stipulates that companies should begin publicity activities in March 2016 and selection activities in June 2016, with formal offers being made from October 2016 (Japan Business Federation 2015). Nevertheless, there is a sense that these agreements are regularly flouted, and changes in timeframes have not meaningfully reduced the intensity of students' job hunting activities (Burrows 2014; Kawai 2015; Willoughby 2015).

The combination of periodical blanket recruitment, company-specific on-the-job training for regular employees, and seniority-based remuneration systems means that there are fewer opportunities to change companies mid-career in Japan (Brinton 1993: as cited in Kawashima 2012: 58; Komikawa 2011: 121-122; Kosugi 2014; Mühlau 2007: 168; Nagano 2014). Graduates who do not secure a satisfactory position before leaving university are in danger of missing "a bus that comes but once", in the words of Japanese sociologist Yuki Honda (Komikawa 2012b:46). A recent report by the Japan

Institute for Labour Policy and Training [hereafter JILPT] (2016: 49) comments that it is "generally believed that young people who fail to be hired as permanent employees immediately after graduation have few chances to become permanent employees thereafter". Furthermore, even young people who successfully transition into permanent employment appear to work in poorer conditions than those who are first hired as permanent employees (JILPT 2016: 49).

The relative rigidity of the Japanese context described here is particularly concerning given recent acknowledgement that the distinctive system of transitions in Japan is collapsing (Honda 2004: 110; Komikawa 2011: 68, 106). This is a matter of policy concern, with acknowledgement in the Japan Revitalization Strategy of 2013, for example, that:

> The system of life-time employment, where young people graduate from school, find employment, and work for the same company until retirement is now a thing of the past.
>
> (Cabinet Office of Japan 2013: 6)

This document suggests Japanese people are seeking a "society that supports flexible and diverse work styles" and a "society that provides people with the opportunity to try again as many times as they want" (Cabinet Office of Japan 2013: 12). In support of such aims, the government implemented a guideline in 2010 encouraging companies to treat graduates as if they were new graduates (i.e., eligible for periodical blanket recruitment) for up to three years after graduation (Komikawa 2012b: 52; OECD 2011: 159). Komikawa (2011: 133) points out that the market for mid-career recruitment (*chūto saiyō*) in Japan is expanding, and there is even a word for "second new graduates" (*daini-shinsotsu*). Nakamura (1992: 12) translates this term as "another class of new graduates", stating that they comprise "young persons leaving work a few years after they have initially entered the job market". However, Komikawa (2011: 133) cautions that these opportunities tend to be targeted at those who have succeeded in entering the Japanese-style employment system in their first job, not those who are employed as non-regular workers (see also Nagano 2014). There is scepticism in some quarters as to how much things are changing. This is particularly relevant to Chapter Seven's discussion of the experiences of working holidaymakers after their return to Japan. Kawashima (2010: 280), for example, suggests that the accounts of the working holidaymakers she spoke to after they had returned to Japan highlight "the major problems of current youth employment practice in Japan and how difficult it is for lost

generation youth to flexibly (re)establish their careers once they deviate from the idealised norm of linear progression".

Other changes have been occurring in the Japanese context. These include decreases in the proportion of companies only recruiting new graduates annually in a spring hiring cycle - from 69.4% in 2012 to 59.7% in 2014 (Japan Association of Corporate Executives 2012: 27; 2014: 29). Companies recruiting new graduates with study abroad experience were more likely to utilise both a spring and an autumn hiring cycle, or year-round recruitment. Even amongst those only conducting recruitment in the spring cycle, 54.5% saw a need to implement autumn and/or year-round recruitment. Careers fairs have been established to facilitate the hiring of individuals with study abroad experience for new graduate positions (e.g., Kameda 2013a). Systems of payment and progression based on seniority alone are declining, with merit considered increasingly important (Pudelko 2006; Sugimoto 2010). Despite these changes, however, this chapter and the analyses that follow highlight the ongoing importance of traditional institutional arrangements in shaping the perceptions and values of employers and the orientations of students and graduates. This is particularly clear when viewed through a cross-national comparative lens.

For example, data on job changes and job tenure in Britain and Japan shows the greater prevalence of career mobility in Britain. Data from the CHEERS Project (Careers after Higher Education - a European Research Study) - a cross-national survey of graduates from the 1994/95 academic year - shows that more British (67%) than Japanese (27%) graduates had more than one employer in the first four years post-graduation (Schomburg and Teichler 2006: 77, 78). Data on average job tenure compiled by Matanle (2014; see also Matanle and Matsui 2011) and presented in Figure 3.3 shows average tenure has consistently been higher for both men and women in Japan than in Britain. The gender gap in Japan is attributed to the (persistent but declining) tendency for Japanese women to leave regular employment upon marriage or childbirth and return as non-regular workers (Macnaughtan 2006: 33-35; Matanle and Matsui 2011). Also relevant in explaining the Japanese data are increases in the retirement age to 60 - and subsequently to 65 - that took place in a number of organisations between 1989-1997 and 2002-2009 (Matanle and Matsui 2011). Between 1997-2002 and more broadly after 2002, average tenure for younger and middle-aged employees decreased (see also Kawaguchi and Ueno 2013).
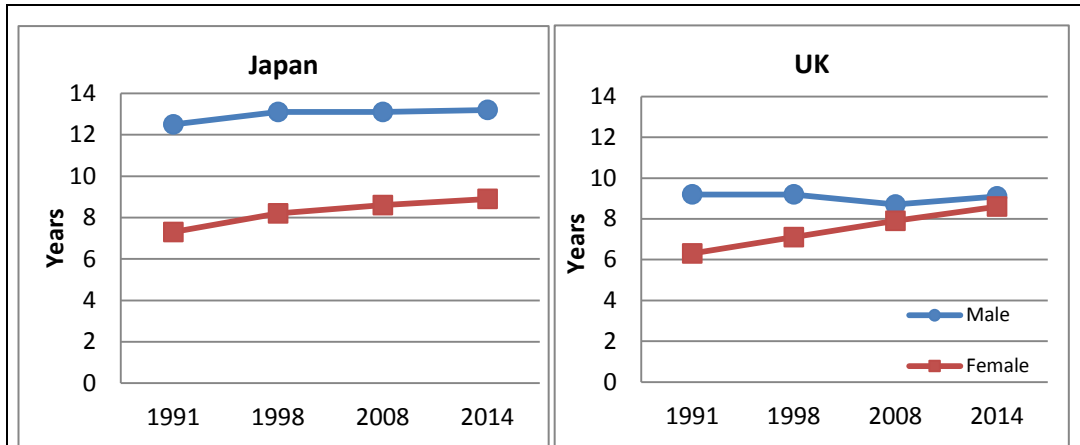
Figure 3.3 Average job tenure in the UK and Japan (1991-2014)

Source: Matanle and Matsui (2011) and Matanle (2014)

Attitudes to job changes in Britain and Japan vary in ways that are consistent with the information reviewed above. Data from the Eighth World Youth Survey suggest that (as shown in Figure 3.4) young Japanese (aged 18-24) are more wary of the prospect of changing jobs than young Britons (Cabinet Office of Japan 2009). The majority of Japanese respondents (57.5%) and only around 20.6% of British saw changing jobs as something that should be done only out of necessity (option 2). In contrast, the majority of British respondents (55.3%) and only 17.2% of Japanese saw changing jobs as something that was preferable if dissatisfied with conditions at their place of employment (option 3). Attitudes to changing jobs in Japan also varied by gender as shown in Figure 3.5, with more men than women responding that people should not change jobs (males 15.8%, females 9.2%) and more women than men responding that people who were dissatisfied with the conditions at their place of employment had no choice but to change jobs (males 52.2%, females 62.7%).

	N	Should not change jobs /1	No choice but to change jobs /2	Better to change jobs /3	Best to change jobs /4	Don't know /Refused	(%)
Japan	1,090	12.5	57.5	17.2	10.7	2.1	
Korea	1,002	10.4	35.3	22.1	29.4	2.8	
U.S.A.	1,011	6.4	20.6	54.5	14.3	4.2	
U.K.	1,012	2.4	20.6	55.3	17.0	4.7	
France	1,039	4.8	32.3	45.7	15.6	1.5	

1 Even if life at work is really tough, a person shouldn't change jobs; a person should work for the same company for all their working life

2 If a person is very dissatisfied with conditions at his or her place of current employment, he/she has no choice but to change jobs

3 If a person is dissatisfied with conditions at his or her place of current employment, it is better to change jobs

4 Even if a person is not dissatisfied with conditions at his or her place of current employment, it is best to change jobs to make the most of his or her individual abilities

Figure 3.4 Views on changing careers (by nationality)

Source: Cabinet Office of Japan (2009: Table 3-3-3-1)[7]

	N	Should not change jobs /1	No choice but to change jobs /2	Better to change jobs /3	Best to change jobs /4	Don't know /Refused	(%)
Male	538	15.8	52.2	17.5	13.2	1.3	
Female	552	9.2	62.7	16.8	8.3	2.9	

1 Even if life at work is really tough, a person shouldn't change jobs; a person should work for the same company for all their working life

2 If a person is very dissatisfied with conditions at his or her place of current employment, he/she has no choice but to change jobs

3 If a person is dissatisfied with conditions at his or her place of current employment, it is better to change jobs

4 Even if a person is not dissatisfied with conditions at his or her place of current employment, it is best to change jobs to make the most of his or her individual abilities

Figure 3.5 Views on changing careers (by gender)

Source: Cabinet Office of Japan (2009: Table 3-3-3-3)

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[7] The legend for option 2 in figures 3.4 and 3.5 has been edited for clarity, to more closely reflect the full text of the response options. In the original this stated: "No choice to change jobs".

In sum, data reviewed in this section highlights the relative rigidity of the Japanese labour market context (Jacobs 2010), in contrast to the greater levels of fluidity and flexibility characterising the British labour market (Purcell, Flynn and Chatrakul Na Ayudhya 2011). This will be important background to discussion of how different country contexts and institutional arrangements shape aspirations for experiences of work and travel overseas (Chapter Five), employer perceptions and evaluations of such activities (Chapter Six), and student and graduate orientations to the accumulation and mobilisation of these and other experiences in the employment context (Chapter Seven).

The last few decades have seen dramatic increases in the number of university graduates seeking employment. This section of the chapter has explored differences in education and employment systems, economic context, and recruitment and employment structures and practices impacting the absorption of increasing numbers of graduates into the labour market in Britain and Japan. Relevant here are concerns that despite rhetoric about the increasing need for highly skilled workers in the knowledge economy, and the benefits to "investing" in education, there has not in fact been a significant and/or sustainable increase in demand for skilled workers (e.g., Blundell, Green and Jin 2016; Brown 2013; Kariya 2011; Keep and Mayhew 2014; MacDonald 2011). The following section of the chapter explores what is known about graduate employment outcomes over time in each context.

3.3 Graduate employment outcomes in Britain and Japan

Overall, labour market outcomes in Britain and Japan are more favourable for graduates than for non-graduates. However, as the number of graduates increases, concerns about levels of graduate unemployment and underemployment - and polarisation of opportunities *within* the graduate population - have grown. The discussion that follows explores how these trends have played out in these two country contexts. Discussion also highlights gendered aspects of transitions and different forms of labour market segmentation that have arisen in each context.

Graduates in Britain and Japan have lower unemployment rates and higher earnings, on average, than non-graduates. Looking firstly at the population of working age as a whole, 3.9% of British 25- to 64-year-olds in the labour force in 2014 were unemployed, compared to 3.5% in Japan (OECD 2015a: Indicator A5, Table A5.2a). In Britain, graduates with a bachelor's degree or equivalent had lower unemployment rates (2.7%) than those whose highest

qualification was upper secondary (3.2%) or lower secondary education (7.7%). In Japan, graduates with a bachelor's degree or equivalent (2.5%) had lower unemployment rates than those whose highest qualification was a short-cycle tertiary qualification (e.g., junior college graduates with a 2-3 year associate degree) (3.4%) or upper secondary education (4.1%). Furthermore, the earnings advantage for workers (aged 25-64) with any form of tertiary education, relative to upper secondary education, was 51% in Britain and 52% in Japan (OECD 2015a: Indicator A6, Table A6.1a).

Graduate employment outcomes can also be investigated by examining the employment destinations of recent graduates. These statistics are compiled differently in Britain and Japan. These differences are associated with - and serve as further evidence of - the relative flexibility of the British context and the relative rigidity of the Japanese context. The Destinations of Leavers from Higher Education (DHLE) survey conducted in Britain reports on "immediate occupation outcomes", surveying graduates six months after graduating (Prospects and Association of Graduate Careers Advisory Services 2016: i). In contrast, graduate employment rates, issued annually by Japan's Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology, are based on university reports of the destinations of their students as at May 1 (or at the time of graduation, i.e., in March) (MEXT 2016; Uenishi 2013). This further illustrates the importance and prevalence of periodical blanket recruitment in the Japanese context.

For British graduates from the 2014/15 academic year, six months after graduating, 76.4% were working[8]; 13.1% were in further study, training, or research; 5.7% were unemployed (including those due to start work); and 4.9% were categorised as "other" (Prospects and AGCAS 2016: 2). For Japanese graduates of March 2015, by 1 May, 72.6% had secured full-time employment; 13.8% continued on to graduate school or clinical/specialised training colleges; 2.1% were in temporary work; 1.1% were of unknown status or deceased; and 10.3% were categorised as "other" (i.e., were entering neither higher education institutions nor employment) (MEXT 2016). This "other" category includes "those involved in household work, etc". Additional data provided in 2012 divided this "other" category (15.5%) into "persons preparing to advance to higher education" (0.6%), "persons preparing to find employment" (8.8%), and "others" (6.0%) (Uenishi 2013).

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[8] Breaking these statistics down further: 56.5% were working full-time in the UK, 12.9% were working part-time in the UK, 5.1% were working and studying, and 1.8% were working overseas.

The sectors employing the largest proportions of full-time first degree leavers from the 2014/15 academic year in Britain were human health and social work (20.3%); wholesale and retail trade (13.9%); education (12.1%); professional, scientific, and technical activities (12.0%); and information and communication (7.0%) (Higher Education Statistics Agency 2016)[9]. Only 4.8% of graduates found employment in the manufacturing industry. In contrast, in Japan, the sectors employing the largest proportions of graduates in 2012 were wholesale and retail (17%); medicine and welfare (13.7%); manufacturing (13.1%); and education (8.5%) (MEXT 2012). Public sector employment is also more prevalent in the UK (comprising 21.5% of the labour force in 2013) than in Japan (at 7.6%) (OECD 2015b).

There is evidence from CHEERS data that Japanese graduates are less satisfied with the jobs in which they find themselves four years after graduation, and more likely to report some forms of underemployment (Schomburg and Teichler 2006: 111). Overall, 51% of Japanese and 24% of British graduates reported that their current work situation was worse than they expected when they started their studies; 28% of Japanese and 18% of British graduates were dissatisfied with their current employment. More specifically, Japanese graduates were more likely to report having little opportunity to use the knowledge and skills they had acquired during their studies (47% cf. 25%); working in an area of employment not corresponding to their field of study (42% cf. 34%); and working in jobs where a lower level of education was more appropriate (31% cf. 23%). Japanese graduates also reported working an average of 49 hours per week (Schomburg and Teichler 2006: 83), compared with an average of 44.6 hours per week for British graduates (Einarsdottir 2007: 187). A compilation of data from the year 2000 by the International Labour Office shows that 28.1% of Japanese workers (cf. 15.5% of UK workers) worked over 50 hours a week (Messenger 2004: 42). Between 15-20% of male regular employees in their 20s and 30s in Japan work at least 60 hours a week according to the Employment Status Survey conducted by Japan's Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communication [hereafter MIC] (2012: Figure I-14). These comparative statistics are relevant to Chapter Five's discussions about working holidaymaker motivations.

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[9] Wholesale and retail trade includes the trade and repair of motor vehicles and motorcycles; professional, scientific, and technical activities include, for example, law, accounting, architecture, engineering, advertising, and market research (Office for National Statistics 2009).

The discussion that follows explores trends in graduate employment outcomes separately for each country context. It addresses not only the relative advantages of graduates over non-graduates but also concerns about increasing polarisation of opportunities *within* graduate populations. Discussion explores how mass higher education and credential inflation have impacted mechanisms of social stratification differently in different country contexts.

3.3.1 Graduate transitions to employment in Britain: Flexibility and resource-based inequalities

As the number of graduates increases, concerns about rising levels of graduate unemployment and underemployment in Britain have grown (MacDonald 2011; Scurry and Blenkinsopp 2011). Tomlinson (2016: 21) highlights that historically, dual labour market theories (Doeringer and Piore 1985/1971) suggested graduates secured relatively stable employment within the "core" of the labour market, while employers met the increasing need for flexibility globalisation demanded by displacing workers in the "periphery". Now, however, he suggests such segmentation of the labour force - although more pronounced across qualification levels - may exist even amongst those with graduate qualifications.

Figure 3.6 depicts data from the Labour Force Survey compiled by the Office for National Statistics [hereafter ONS] (2013), illustrating trends in unemployment rates by age and educational attainment in Britain. This shows how these have fluctuated with the state of the economy. The figure further illustrates how graduate status (defined here as leaving education with qualifications above A level standard) served as something of a buffer during the recent global financial crisis. Unemployment rates for non-graduates aged 21-30 increased most sharply at this time. The unemployment rate for recent graduates (i.e., those who left full-time education within the last five years), however, was consistently higher than that of older employees, both graduate and non-graduate alike.

UNEMPLOYMENT RATES
1992 to 2013

Non-graduates aged 21 to 30 experienced the sharpest rise in unemployment rates following the 2008/09 recession

Non-graduates aged 21 to 30

Recent graduates

Non-graduates aged over 30

Graduates out of full-time education for more than 5 years

Recent graduates have consistently higher unemployment rates than older graduates and older non-graduates

Unemployment rates for **all groups** remain **above** the level they were at before the 2008/09 recession

Figure 3.6 Unemployment rates by age and educational attainment (UK, 1992-2013)

Source: ONS (2013: 7), Labour Force Survey

Figure 3.7 illustrates the earnings advantage of graduates. Graduates initially earn less than those completing apprenticeships and approximately the same as those who left education with GCSEs or equivalent (ONS 2013: 15). This relates to the recency of entry to the labour market and the possibility that they may be working in lower skilled positions while seeking other employment (ONS 2013: 15-16). Over time, the income of graduates tends to increase more rapidly and to a higher level than that of non-graduates.

PAY PROGRESSION BY HIGHEST QUALIFICATION

Annual wages are calculated as an average wage for each age from 2003 to 2013, adjusted to 2013 earnings levels

Average Gross
Annual Wage (£)

Annual **graduate** earnings level out at a later age and higher level compared to the other groups

Graduates

Apprenticeship

A level*

A* to C GCSE**

The decline in average annual wages that occurs as people get older happens at a faster pace for **graduates**

At young ages **graduates** earn **less** than those who left education with an **apprenticeship**

Age

* or equivalent qualification (excluding apprenticeship)
** or equivalent qualification

Figure 3.7 Pay progression by highest qualification (UK)

Source: ONS (2013: 15), Labour Force Survey

A number of scholars have expressed concerns about increasing levels of graduate underemployment in Britain (e.g., MacDonald 2011; Scurry and Blenkinsopp 2011). Figure 3.8 depicts, alongside an increase in the graduate population, a corresponding increase in the proportion of recent graduates (i.e., those graduating within the last six years) employed in lower skill jobs, from 26.7% in 2001 to 35.9% in 2011 (ONS 2012: 1-2). In this context lower skill jobs are defined as those such as cleaners and retail assistants that generally require competence acquired through compulsory (rather than post-compulsory) education (ONS 2012: 1).

Figure 3.8 Recent graduates by skill level of occupation (percent) (UK, Q2 2001 - Q4 2011, seasonally adjusted)

Source: ONS (2012: 2), Labour Force Survey
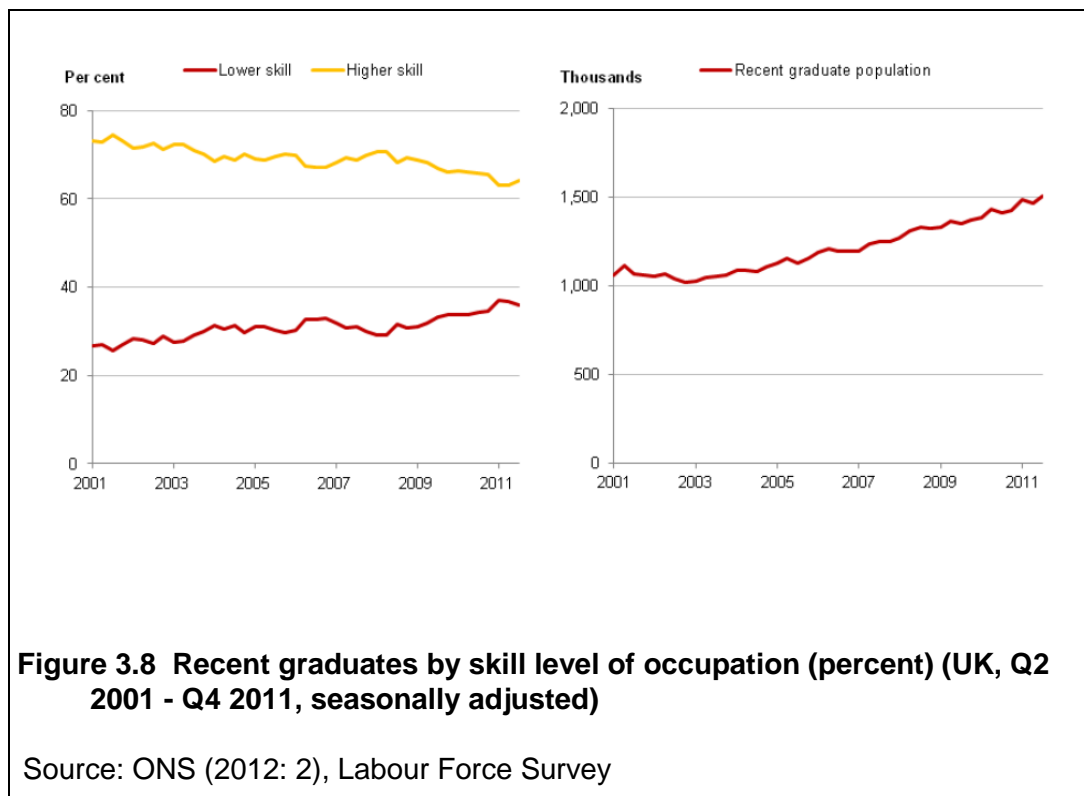
Drawing on a classification system developed by Elias and Purcell (2013), the ONS (2013: 13-14) further identify a trend for recent graduates - in particular - to be increasingly employed in non-graduate jobs, as depicted in Figure 3.9. They define non-graduate jobs as receptionists, sales assistants, and other roles "in which the associated tasks do not normally require knowledge and skills developed through higher education to enable them to perform these tasks in a competent manner" (ONS 2013: 13).

Figure 3.9 Employed graduates in non-graduate roles (UK, 2001-2013)

Source: ONS (2013: 14), Labour Force Survey
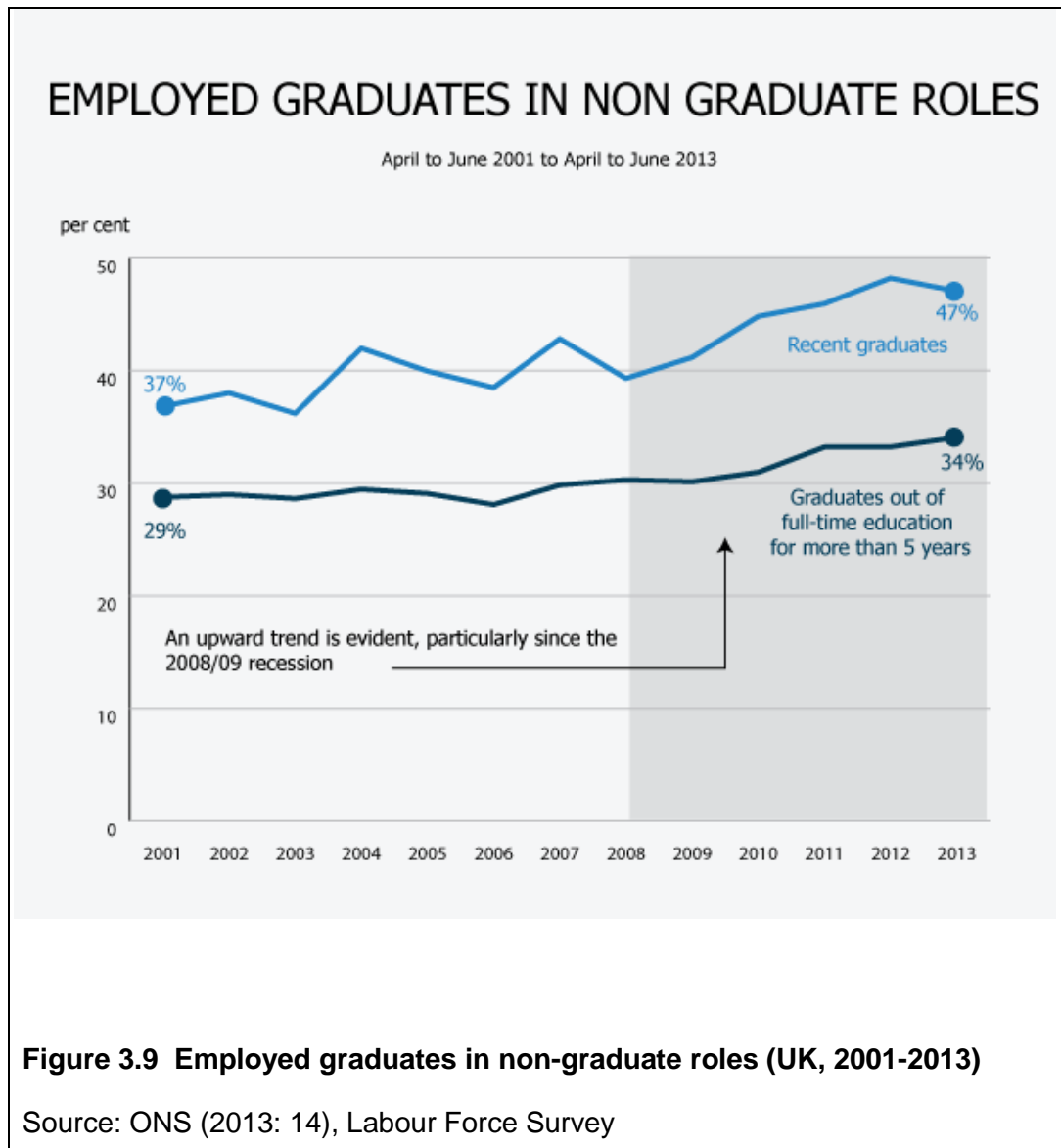
Existing literature highlights the importance of considering disaggregated graduate outcome data, given variation in outcomes associated with subject choice, institution attended, area of employment, social class, gender, and ethnicity (Furlong and Cartmel 2005; Green and Zhu 2010; Purcell et al. 2013; Smetherham 2006). In this context, as outlined in Chapter Two,

activities undertaken at university and immediately post-graduation (e.g., extracurricular activities; placements and internships; and experiences of work, travel, and study abroad) are described as increasingly important factors influencing employment (Bathmaker, Ingram and Waller 2013; Brown and Hesketh 2004; Cook, Faulconbridge and Muzio 2012; Jacobs 2003; Stuart et al. 2009; Tomlinson 2008). In an era of credential inflation and social congestion, research suggests that for at least some employers, academic or "paper" qualifications may increasingly be taken for granted. Brown and Hesketh (2004: 31) describe employer perceptions that qualifications are merely "the first tick in the box" before "the real selection" (see also De Weert 2007: 232).

Furthermore, there is a growing awareness in the literature of a "'liminal' period of insecure, temporary employment" in the early years post-graduation (Brooks and Everett 2009: 340; see also Burke 2016: 117-119; Muddiman 2015: 125-126, 171-172). Several authors highlight that graduates with greater access to economic, social, and cultural resources may be better positioned to "hang on" and progress into desired opportunities (Brooks and Everett 2009; Burke 2016; Furlong and Cartmel 2005). In contrast, Burke (2016: 109) suggests that graduates from less advantaged backgrounds may not be afforded this "luxury" but are instead forced to take any available option to meet more immediate needs. This forms a significant part of the context within which claims have arisen that taking an overseas gap year allows participants to accumulate and subsequently deploy social and cultural resources so as to gain a competitive advantage over their peers in relation to educational and employment opportunities (e.g., Heath 2007). These contextual features will be particularly relevant when exploring the aspirations and trajectories of British working holidaymakers participating in this research in Chapters Five and Seven. The following section of the chapter explores trends in graduate employment outcomes in Japan.

3.3.2 Graduate transitions to employment in Japan: "A bus that comes but once" in a context of relative rigidity

The discussion that follows explores trends in graduate employment outcomes in Japan. As in Britain, graduates are advantaged overall relative to non-graduates and increasing variability in graduate outcomes is highlighted. In Japan, however, this variability relates particularly to differences between a "core" of protected regular workers and a "periphery"

of younger and especially female "non-regular" workers (Sakaguchi 2016/2014).

Figure 3.10 shows trends in the proportion of Japanese university graduates gaining employment at the time of graduation alongside the proportion of the population advancing to university. This figure shows pronounced gender differences throughout the 1970s and 1980s, suggesting this system maintained high levels of immediate employment upon graduation (around 80%) for men especially, during Japan's economic boom (Komikawa 2011: 127-132). The figure also shows that with increases in the proportion of the population entering university, the likelihood of finding stable employment upon graduation decreased, particularly after the collapse of the bubble economy in the 1990s.
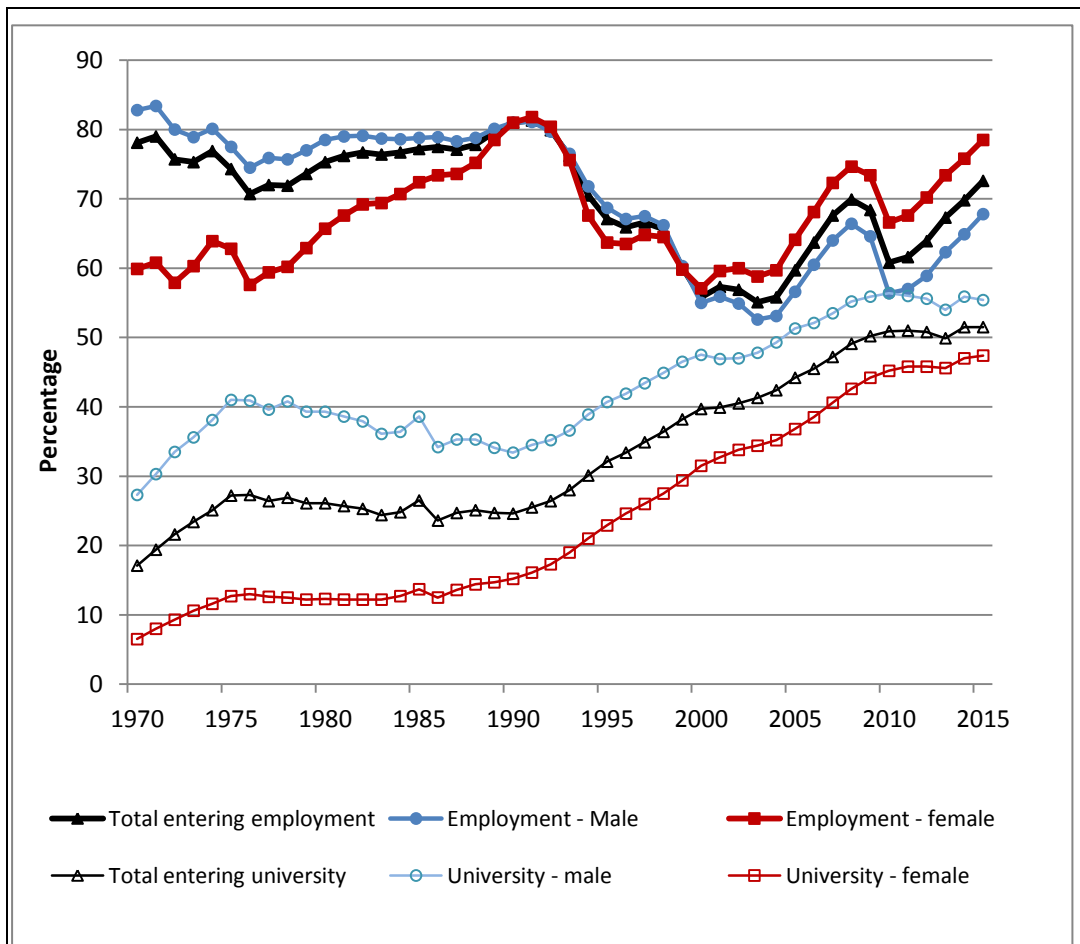
Figure 3.10 Proportion of men and women entering employment upon graduation and proportion advancing to university (Japan, 1970-2015)

Source: MEXT (2016), see also Honda (2010: 32)

Following the economic collapse of the 1990s and changes in employment legislation, Japanese employers have increased their reliance on non-regular employees, to reduce personnel costs and boost flexibility (Honda 2004: 111-113; 2005a; Inui, Sano and Hiratsuka 2007; Kariya 2011; Keizer 2008; Kojima 2015; Komikawa 2011: 29-30, 76-88; OECD 2013: 2). Increasing numbers of young Japanese (including graduates) are employed in non-regular positions, characterised by low wages, few mechanisms for on-the-job training, poor social security, and difficulties in changing status from non-regular to regular employment (Fu 2016; Hiratsuka 2014; Hommerich 2012; Ishiguro 2008; Komikawa 2011: 166; 2012b: 38-39; Kosugi 2010, 2014). Once primarily the province of women wishing to return to work part-time after marriage or childbirth, non-regular employment has increased in prevalence amongst young men and women (Ishiguro 2008; Kosugi 2014; Macnaughtan 2006, 2014), although rates remain higher for women. Data from the Employment Status Survey (MIC 2012) indicates non-regular employment is more prevalent in tertiary or service sectors of the economy with fluctuating levels of demand (JILPT 2016: 25). It accounts for 73.3% of employees in the food, beverage, and hotel industries, for example, as opposed to 26.3% of employees in the manufacturing sector.

Figure 3.11 shows that there has been a pronounced decline in the proportion of graduates from upper secondary school and university starting their careers in regular employment. This figure presents data from approximately 370,000 respondents to the 2012 Employment Status Survey aged 15-44 (Kosugi 2015). As depicted, the collapse of the bubble economy, in a context of credential inflation, has resulted in markedly poorer employment prospects for those excluded from higher education (Brinton 2010; Honda 2004; Kariya 2011: 91; Komikawa 2012a: 36-38). Furthermore, variability in the destinations of university graduates (i.e., with respect to their chances of starting their careers in regular employment) has increased (Honda 2010; Kariya 2011: 88-89).

Upper secondary school

Percentage

100
80
60
40
20
0

1986-1990 (age 40-44)
1991-1995 (age 35-39)
1996-2000 (age 30-34)
2001-2005 (age 25-29)
2006-2010 (age 20-24)
2011-2012 (age 18-19)

University

Percentage

100
80
60
40
20
0

—●— Male
—■— Female

1990-1994 (age 40-44)
1995-1999 (age 35-39)
2000-2004 (age 30-34)
2005-2009 (age 25-29)
2010-2012 (age 22-24)
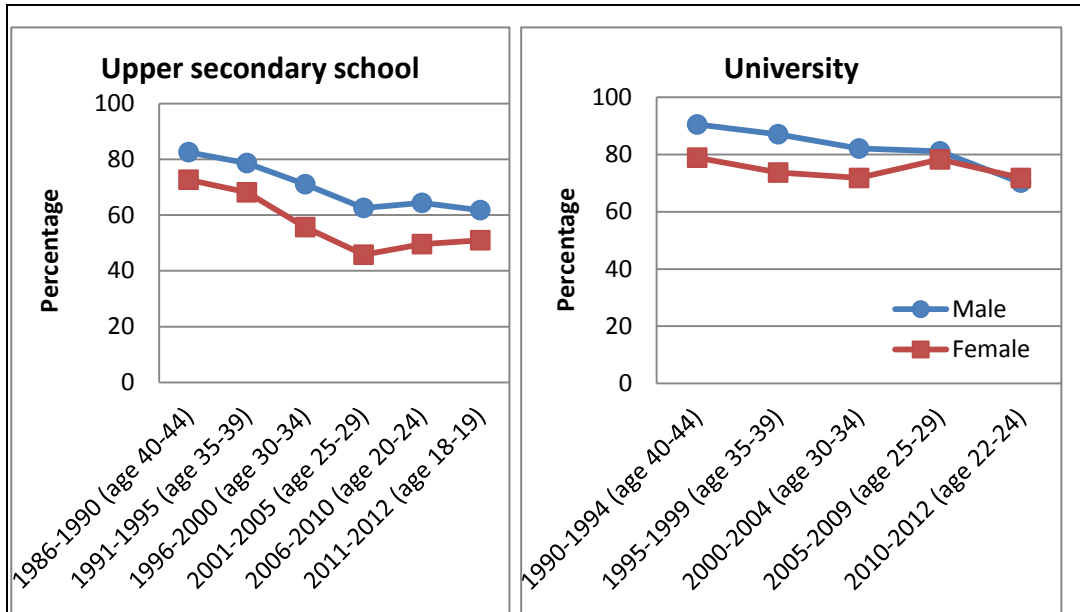
Figure 3.11 Percentage of upper secondary and university graduates in the labour force who started their careers in regular employment by year of graduation (Japan, 1986-2012)

Source: Hori, Kosugi and Kishi (2014: 33)

Year of graduation is estimated from educational background and age, and includes cases not coinciding with actual year of graduation.

In "welfare corporatist" Japan, firms, rather than the state, are the major source of social welfare provision (Fu 2016: 567). It has been assumed that long-term employment, seniority-based systems of payment and progression, and benefits and allowances offered by companies (e.g., for housing and commuting) will be sufficient to support (male) workers and their families (Dore 1990/1973; Fu 2016; Komikawa 2011: 35-36; Suzuki et al. 2010: 513, 519). Non-regular employees are more likely to be excluded from access to social security (e.g., pension, health, and unemployment insurance; unemployment and various other allowances and benefits); vocational education and training; membership in major unions; and paid leave (Fu 2016; Hiratsuka 2014; Ishiguro 2008; Macnaughtan 2006; Weathers 2001). To receive a comparatively small unemployment benefit, for example, one must have worked in the same job for 12 months or more, excluding many dispatch and other non-regular workers from eligibility (Fu 2016: 570). The instability of non-regular employment is an obstacle - for men in particular,

who are still expected to be breadwinners - to marriage and family formation (Cook 2013, 2014; Fu 2016).

Figure 3.12 presents cross-sectional data from the 2012 Employment Status Survey to highlight the significance of these problems, showing that age is associated with increases in income for regular - but not non-regular - employees.
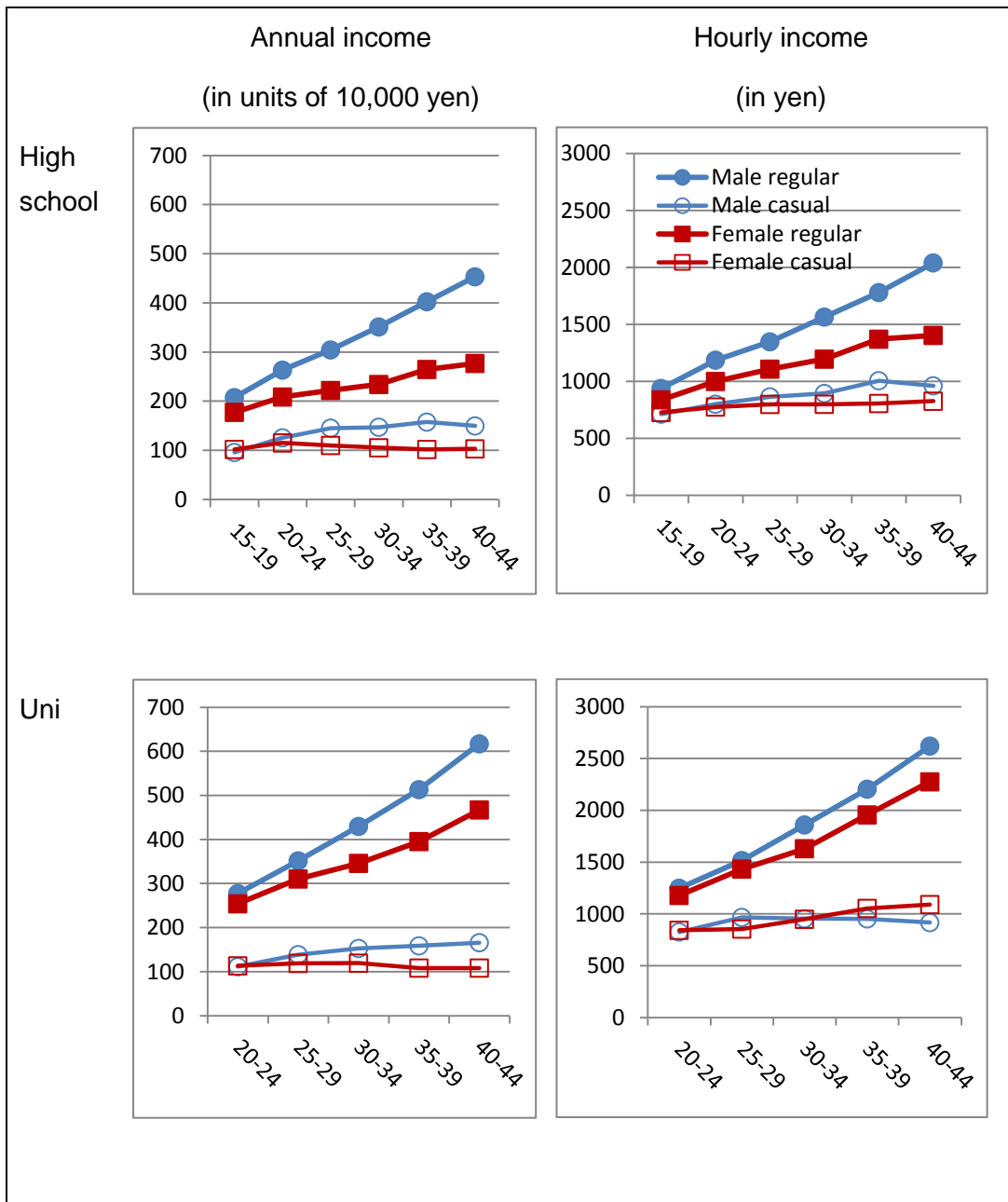
Figure 3.12 Annual income and hourly rate by age, gender, and education level (Japan)

Source: Hori, Kosugi and Kishi (2014: 140, 142), see also Kosugi (2014)

Concerns have also been raised about Japanese graduates who initially manage to secure regular employment. Komikawa (2011: 47-50) points out that even these graduates have no security of receiving training within the company and remaining employed. In times of recession in particular, graduates may be forced to take whatever jobs are available, increasing the likelihood of "mismatch" and subsequent job separation (Fujii, Shiraishi and Takayama 2013; Genda and Kurosawa 2001). Thirty percent of new graduate hires quit their jobs within three years (Cabinet Office of Japan 2010: 28). Honda (2004: 109-110) cites this increase in "voluntary quits" as an indicator of the "collapse" of Japan's transition system, alongside increased youth unemployment and non-regular employment. Lack of detailed information about positions and working conditions at the time of hiring (Honda 2010: 29, 51-53) and demanding and sometimes exploitative conditions (Komikawa 2011: 134-139, 157) are argued to contribute to these trends. There is growing awareness of so-called "black companies", which force employees to work long hours without paid overtime (Konno 2012; Mie 2013).

The Japanese context poses particular challenges for those who commence their careers in non-regular employment or quit new graduate positions, because of the relative lack of fluidity and low levels of mobility in the Japanese labour market. Opportunities to move from non-regular to regular employment do exist (e.g., Kosugi 2012). Overall trends, however, are for subsequent job changes to be into increasingly negative conditions (JILPT 2016: 49; Komikawa 2012b: 38-39). It has thus been suggested that in Japan disadvantages may accrue to individuals who pursue activities other than full-time regular employment immediately following graduation, leave or change jobs, and/or otherwise "deviate from the idealised norm of linear progression" (Kawashima 2010: 280; see also Komikawa 2012b: 38-39; Kosugi 2010). This will be particularly relevant when exploring the aspirations and trajectories of Japanese working holidaymakers participating in this research in Chapters Five and Seven.

These features of the Japanese context also impact on mechanisms of social stratification. In Japan, in contrast to Britain, the relative lack of mid-career mobility makes one's first job after graduation an important stratification mechanism at all education levels (Fong and Tsutsui 2015). This is considered "decisive" for subsequent career trajectories (Honda 2008: 23, as cited in Hommerich 2012). The prolonged and resource-intensive process of job hunting, especially given this relative decisiveness,

is an increasingly recognised arena for the (re)production of social inequalities in Japan (Borovoy 2010; Honda 2010: 45-51; Yōhei 2009: 3). Further, concern about increasing polarisation of opportunities centres around distinctions between a shrinking "core" of regular employees and an expanding "periphery" of non-regular workers (Fong and Tsutsui 2015; Honda 2008: 34; Ishiguro 2008; Kariya 2010a: 98; Kosugi 2015). There are also important gender differences here, and it is these differences that are explored in more detail in the section that follows.

3.3.3 Gendered aspirations and trajectories

A number of gender differences in young people's experiences of higher education and employment in Britain and Japan have been identified in data presented in this chapter. First, there are gender gaps in participation in higher education in both contexts, although these are in opposite directions. Second, the proportion of women in the labour force in Japan is lower than in Britain. Third, in Japan, the proportion of women in non-regular employment is higher than the proportion of men in non-regular employment. This section of the chapter explores these differences in more detail, and explains their relevance for the present research.

In England, as demonstrated in Figure 3.1, young participation rates in higher education for women are higher than for men, and the gender gap has increased over time. For the cohort who were 18 in 1994/95, 30% of women and 29% of men had entered higher education by the age of 19 (HEFCE 2010: 9). Entry rates (by the age of 19) for those aged 18 in 2014/15 were 46.1% of women and 35.9% of men (UCAS Analysis and Research 2015: 110). In Japan, in contrast, the proportion of 18-year-old men in university education has consistently been greater than the proportion of 18-year-old women, although this gap is narrowing. Enrolment rates in 2015 were 55.4% of the 18-year-old male population, and 47.4% of the female population (MEXT 2016). An additional 1.1% of males and 9.3% of females enrolled in junior colleges offering two- to three-year programmes leading to associate degrees (e.g., in liberal arts, nursery education etc) (MEXT 2016; n.d.). MEXT (n.d.) characterises such junior colleges as having played a major role in expanding higher education in Japan to women and providing practical vocational education. As participation in university education has increased, enrolment rates in junior colleges have fallen, after peaking at 13.1% (2.1% of males and 24.6% of females) in 1995 (MEXT 2016). These trends in participation by gender make Japan one of only three OECD countries where tertiary education has been attained by a larger

percentage of 25- to 34-year-old men (42%) than women (31%) (OECD 2015a).

Japanese data on trends in labour force participation show a so-called "M-shaped" curve in women's participation (JILPT 2016: 23-24; Macnaughtan 2006) persists to a greater extent than in Britain. As depicted in Figure 3.13, participation rates for Japanese women decline in their late 20s and into their 30s (as women leave employment upon marriage and/or childbirth), and subsequently increase. This figure shows that there has been less of a decline in participation over time. The "valley" part of the M-shape has moved upwards and to the right, and the curve has flattened. This can be attributed to increases in average ages at marriage and childbirth, more women remaining in employment and/or returning to work more quickly, and an increase in the percentage of women who do not marry (JILPT 2016: 23-24; Macnaughtan 2006).

Figure 3.13 Changes in labour force participation by gender and age (Japan, 1980-2014)

Source: JILPT (2016: 24, Figure II-4), Labour Force Survey
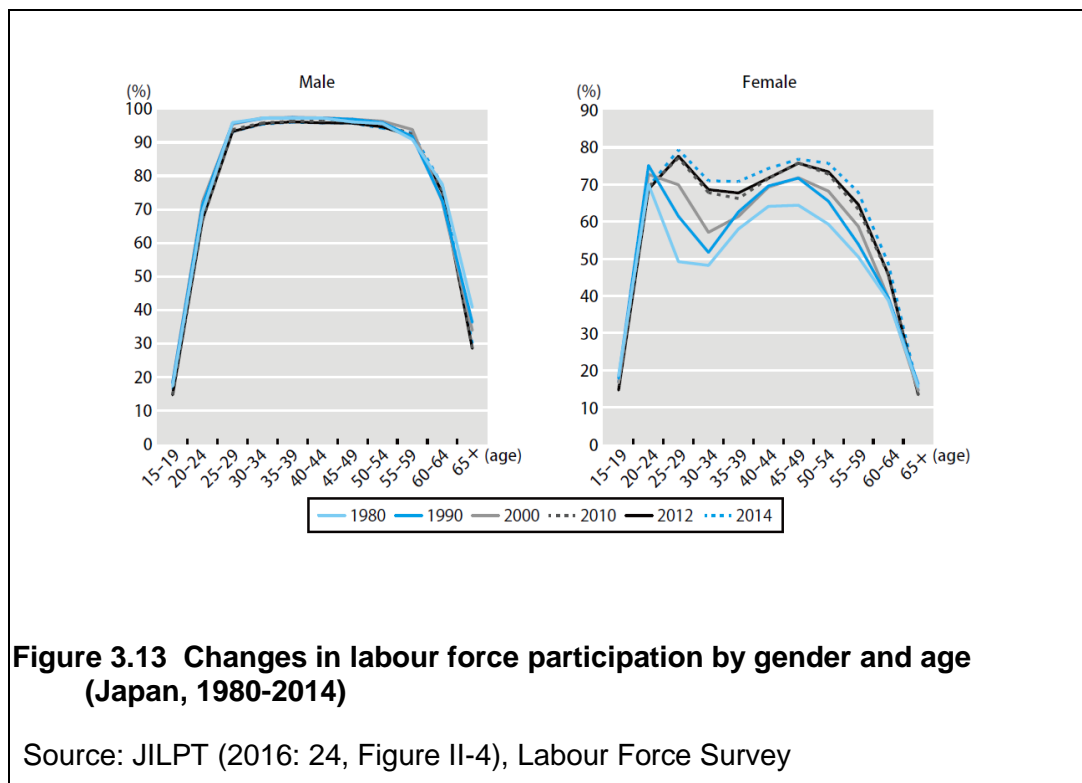
Female labour force participation rates by age in Britain and Japan in 2015 are depicted in Figure 3.14. This figure shows that labour force participation for women in their 30s in Japan tends to drop to approximately 70%, whereas participation rates for women in their 30s in Britain remain comparatively stable around 80%.
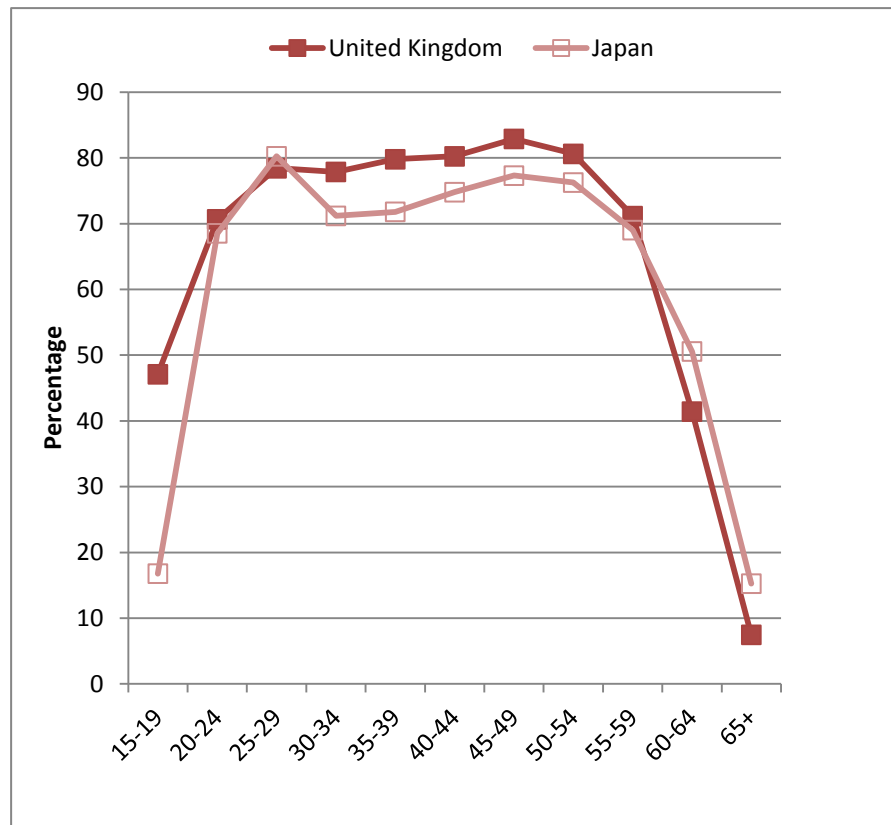
Figure 3.14 Female labour force participation by age in the UK and Japan (2015)

Source: https://stats.oecd.org/ (data extracted 17 July 2016)

Many commentators have highlighted the persistence of gendered expectations and normative ideals of male breadwinners in Japan (Cook 2013, 2014; Fu 2016; Macnaughtan 2014, 2015). Data from an internet survey conducted in 2014 ($n = 3,616$) is consistent with the suggestion of strong male breadwinner norms, with 39% of men and 43% of women in their 20s to 40s (42.5% and 46.1% for married respondents) agreeing with the statement that "husbands should work full time while their wives stay at home" (Macnaughtan 2014; The Japan Times 2014). Comparative data from the International Social Survey Programme's 2012 module on Family and Changing Gender Roles (ISSP 2016) provides further support for these ideas. More Japanese respondents (27% of men and 23% of women) than British (14% of men and 12% of women) agreed or strongly agreed that "a man's job is to earn money; a woman's job is to look after the home". Approximately 70% of Japanese men and women responding to the survey (compared to 44% of British men and 51% of British women) agreed or

strongly agreed with the statement that "being a housewife is as fulfilling as working for pay".

These attitudes appear to be supported by a variety of institutional practices, such as the corporate welfarism described earlier in this chapter, and a historical context within which long-term employment for a substantial proportion of Japan's male employees was only achievable at the expense of the exclusion of many women (Komikawa 2011: 127-132). An important additional influence, described by Macnaughtan (2014), is the Japanese system of spousal tax credits. Under this system, married women with an annual income under a certain threshold are not required to pay income tax or social security, while a deduction is applied to their husband's income tax.

Researchers have suggested that it is Japanese women's more marginal status that paradoxically frees them to pursue opportunities such as work and travel overseas while men experience more normative pressure to continue in their careers and secure an income sufficient to support a family (Kato 2010: 55-56; Kawashima 2010: 281-282; Maksay 2007: 40-41). Within the context of his research into the temporary employment services industry in Japan, Weathers (2001) observes the tendency for many female office workers to leave their first regular position at the age of around 24-25, in order to pursue interests such as travel. There is thus a history of gendered labour force participation in Japan, and a persistence of gendered expectations that shape trajectories through the labour market and differences in employment outcomes. This is but one source of polarisation in graduate labour market outcomes discussed in this section of the chapter.

In both Britain and Japan, initiatives to enhance "employability" have been advocated as strategies for helping students and graduates navigate transitions from university into employment within this changing context. The next section of the chapter discusses recent conceptualisations of employability found in the theoretical and empirical literature.

3.4 The socio-cultural construction of employability

Conceptualisations of employability underpinning much policy, practice, and research position graduate employability as a possession, predicated upon "the assumption that there are discrete, existent, objectively real and (in principle) identifiable characteristics of graduates that constitute their identity and employability" (Holmes 2013b: 1045). Frequently drawn upon - and

"uncritically adopted" - is the following definition and variations thereupon (Holmes 2013b: 1047; 2015: 220), which takes employability as:

> a set of achievements - skills, understandings and personal attributes - that makes graduates more likely to gain employment and be successful in their chosen occupations [....]
>
> (Knight and Yorke 2003: 5)

These conceptualisations have been critiqued on a number of grounds. Holmes (2013a, 2013b, 2015) points out the "plethora" of different lists of supposedly desirable "skills" and "attributes" (frequently originating from combinations of previous lists and based on employer *perceptions* rather than skills analysis). He draws the reader's attention to research highlighting a lack of consensus on what each of these means in practice. Further, he suggests realist models of employability cannot account for differences in employment outcomes by race/ethnicity, gender, and social background (e.g., Purcell et al. 2013; Smetherham 2006).

Whether or not an individual is considered "employable" varies in association with a variety of contextual factors such as country, time frame, and economic situation; employer attitudes and behaviour; educational and training opportunities; the sector of the economy within which employment is sought; organisational culture; the number and calibre of other people seeking similar employment; and the interaction between these factors (e.g., Berntson, Sverke and Marklund 2006; Brown, Hesketh and Williams 2003; Clarke 2008; de Grip, van Loo and Sanders 2004; Hillage and Pollard 1998; Hogan, Chamorro-Premuzic and Kaiser 2013; McQuaid and Lindsay 2005: 206; Williams et al. 2016). Thijssen, Van der Heijden and Rocco (2008: 174) argue that such contextual factors, while "important conditions for someone's success [....] are not part of the *essence* of employability". It is my contention, however, that there is no "essence of employability" that exists separate from the context within which it is shaped. Moreover, the very concept of employability can be critiqued for downplaying and masking structural issues through individualising rhetoric; exacerbating rather than alleviating social exclusion, marginalisation, and inequalities; and shaping dissatisfied and empty individuals (Chertkovskaya et al. 2013). The concluding chapter of this thesis further explores the implications of this research for interventions seeking to foster graduate employability.

The analyses that follow are grounded in a relational-constructionist (processual) model of graduate employability suggested by Holmes (2000,

2013a, 2013b, 2015). Such a perspective facilitates exploration of the mobilisation and evaluation of different experiences within the context of graduate recruitment, while circumventing the problems of realist conceptualisations of employability outlined above. This model does not see graduate skills and attributes as discrete measurable objects existing in an external world. Rather, they are "vocabularies" (Mills 1940) normatively drawn upon in the recruitment context (i.e., generally expected and accepted) to "warrant" (Gergen 1989) claims to being worthy of graduate level employment and the affirmation or disaffirmation of such claims by employers/recruiters:

> An individual who warrants their claim on the graduate identity in the language that employers would themselves use, is thereby more likely to be considered suitable for employment. Thus, where a candidate presents in their application form, or interviews, examples of activities and achievements that a recruiter may relatively easily frame as an example [of] some particular skill or attribute, or set of skills/attributes, they are more likely [to] be successful in gaining the desired employment. This is more than just using "the right words": it requires a significant degree of fluency, rehearsal in communicating the aspects of claimed experience and achievement in the modes of discourse that enable recruiters to warrant their identity ascriptions.
>
> (Holmes 2015: 232-233)

These arguments overlap with literature arguing that ideas of "talent" (Ashley et al. 2015; Rivera 2015: 267), "natural ability" (Smart et al. 2009), and the "ideal" worker (Allen et al. 2013) drawn upon in the graduate recruitment context are not neutral and objective. Rather, they are shaped by the characteristics of evaluators, and underpinned by assumptions which are classed, gendered, and racialised (in relation to employability, see also Morley 2007). This is consistent with observations about the importance of "polish" and "cultural fit" in graduate recruitment (Ashley et al. 2015: 38-39; Rivera 2012, 2015; Williams et al. 2016: 13).

In what follows, I explore literature supportive of the idea that different vocabularies of skills and attributes have been drawn upon and considered credible for warranting claims to being worthy of graduate level employment in different historical, economic, and socio-cultural contexts. I specifically consider the significance of institutional (e.g., recruitment and employment) structures and practices in shaping how the vocabulary used to warrant such claims varies in different times and places.

3.4.1 Emphasis on flexibility, autonomy, and individual responsibility for development in Britain

A number of interrelated social, economic, technological, and political transformations (frequently referred to in abbreviated form as globalisation) are said to have influenced the nature of employment and employer expectations of graduates in contemporary Euro-American societies (e.g., Humburg and van der Velden 2013; Mills et al. 2008). A common theme in these discourses relates the expressed need for workers with increased levels of creativity, problem-solving skills, and autonomy to globalisation and associated economic, technological, and social changes (e.g., Expert Group on Future Skills Needs and Forfás 2006: 3; see also Humburg and van der Velden 2013). Not all commentators agree that more initiative is required of workers in the so-called "knowledge-driven economy" (e.g., Brown 2003; Brown, Hesketh and Williams 2003). Nevertheless, these attributes are frequently emphasised at the discursive level.

du Gay (1996b: 154) highlights discursive formulations positioning globalisation - "the intensification of patterns of global interconnectedness" - as a predicament involving increased competitive pressures and advances in information and communication technologies. "Bureaucracy" is described as an impediment to dealing with these problems, and "entrepreneurial" forms and practices are identified as the solution. du Gay (1996b: 155) further suggests that in this context individuals are encouraged to display "a plethora of characteristics such as initiative, risk-taking, self-reliance, and the ability to accept responsibility for oneself and one's actions (Keat 1990: 3)".

Gee, Hull and Lankshear (1996) argue that the discourses of the "New Work Order" stipulate that the attributes valued in workers have changed as a result of increased competition and the need for innovation and streamlining of organisational hierarchies:

> [I]t is a principle of the new capitalism to push down control and responsibility to the lowest possible level, closest to the actual products, services, and customers of the business. This, however, requires workers now who can learn and adapt quickly, think for themselves, take responsibility, make decisions, and communicate what they need and know to leaders who coach, supply, and inspire them.

> Workers must now take responsibility, usually in teams, for whole and meaningful tasks which they understand and seek to improve.
>
> (Gee, Hull and Lankshear 1996: 18-19)

I argue that the discourse of employability itself has grown in a context of growing individualisation of employment contracts and a shifting of risks and responsibilities onto individual workers (Brown and Hesketh 2004: 222; Buchholz et al. 2011: 6; Humburg and van der Velden 2013). Humburg and van der Velden (2013) suggest that the growing proportion of workers on fixed-term contracts and the increased frequency of labour market transitions - whether voluntary or involuntary - requires flexibility of graduates. This involves being willing and able to adapt to changes and learn new things, as well as "employability skills (e.g., the willingness to invest in further education and training and the ability to plan and take responsibility for one's own career)". Humburg and van der Velden (2014: 11) report that the majority of European employers participating in their research valued graduates with experience that would enable them to "hit the ground running" (see also Brown and Hesketh 2004: 32-33). (A minority preferred "fresh" graduates who could be more easily trained in the firm's preferred way of working.) These results resonate with suggestions that technological change and increased competitiveness in a global market have contributed to an environment where upgrading skills is increasingly perceived as the responsibility of individual workers (e.g., Brown, Hesketh and Williams 2003: 123).

Similar discourses have been identified in the Japanese context. Komikawa (2011: 29-30) theorises that the focus on employability by Japanese businesses and government ministries developed in response to changes in corporate hiring practices in the 1990s, which sought to cut personnel and training costs. Rear (2013: 180) notes that a report on generic skills commissioned by Japan's Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry (METI 2006) explicitly references reports from the USA and the UK. This report describes globalisation and associated economic, technological, and social changes as reasons for increased demand for skills such as creativity, problem solving, and autonomy. The section that follows, however, explores tensions between these "new" discourses at the policy level and evidence on graduate recruitment in Japan.

3.4.2 Emphasis on cooperativeness and perseverance in Japan

In Japan, qualities historically valued in the context of graduate recruitment include a pleasant personality, perseverance, and trainability. This section of the chapter explains how the characterisation of such attributes as valuable is congruent with institutional arrangements in Japan (e.g., practices of long-term employment). Empirical evidence comparing and contrasting the Japanese and British contexts is presented. Further, evidence of tension and contradiction within the Japanese context is considered.

Rear (2013: 173-174) observes that graduate recruitment in Japan has traditionally prioritised not specific skills or fresh thinking, but "the ease with which they could be inculcated into the firm's culture and fashioned into productive 'company men' over the long-term". In the literature these preferences are linked to practices of periodical blanket recruitment of new graduates, assumptions of lifelong employment, seniority-based systems of payment and progression, and provision of on-the-job training. Within this context, the literature on (graduate) recruitment in Japan emphasises the importance of general ability and "trainability" (*kunrenkanō*) and "harmonious personality traits" including enthusiasm (*nesshin*), perseverance (*nebari tsuyosa*), stamina (*tairyoku*), and cooperativeness (*kyōchōsei*) (Japan Association of Corporate Executives 2014; Rear 2013: 173, 178-179; Rear and Jones 2013: 382).

Nagano (2014: 24) describes Japanese employers as using the analogy of "white cloth" to explain their preference for new graduates, stipulating that "white cloth (i.e. new graduates) can be dyed any color, but a piece of cloth that has already been dyed (i.e. already experienced workers) is difficult to re-dye another color". Iwata (1981) - as cited in Kariya (2010b: 14-15) - describes Japanese employers as having traditionally recruited not in response to immediate need, but on the basis of long-term personnel plans. In doing so, they took into account factors such as the age composition of the workforce and rarely decided specifically where to post individuals before employing them. In this context, he argues general capacity/trainability, on-the-job training, and experience within the company (i.e., firm-specific capital) is highly valued by employers.

These discourses, however, have not been static over the last few decades. Rear and Jones (2013: 382) identify a "neoliberal philosophy, emphasizing independence, self-reliance, creativity and diversity" as "[t]he most pervasive discourse apparent in Japanese work skills and education policy" since the collapse of Japan's bubble economy in the 1990s. Government and

business reports describe the importance of cultivating "vigorous Japanese who think and act on their own initiative" (MEXT 2002) and "people with unique and exceptional talent who are often described as 'nails that stick out' of a conformist society"(Innovation 25 Strategy Council 2007: 7). An increasing emphasis on autonomy, creativity, flexibility, and innovation has been identified in the discourses of Japanese employers (Matanle 2006; Miller 2013). These discourses sometimes coexist with more traditional emphases on the ability to work well in teams. At other times, they are accompanied by references to a need to shift what is described as an orientation towards homogeneity, conformity, and dependence (Rear and Jones 2013). Tensions between valuing cooperativeness and independence/creativity may be increasingly prevalent in the contemporary Japanese context, although it would be a mistake to assume this is a purely Japanese phenomenon (e.g., Morley 2007: 197), or a purely recent trend (e.g., Rear 2013: 188; Rohlen 1974: 69).

One cross-national study comparing graduate job advertisements in the UK and Japan identified a greater emphasis on "working harmoniously with others and adapting to the firm's way of working" (i.e., fitting in) in advertisements from Japan and more of an emphasis on "driving change and influencing one's surroundings" in advertisements from Britain (Rear 2013). Research exploring the experiences of Japanese seeking employment after overseas sojourns, furthermore, suggests that they perceive employers to value cooperativeness and a pleasant personality over qualities they felt they had developed overseas such as confidence, initiative, and assertiveness (Kawashima 2010: 279). Mori (2004: 159, 162) suggests some individuals returning to Japan after schooling overseas were "shunned" by Japanese employers for "perceived 'individualism'". These emphases are consistent with those reviewed in this section of the thesis, and congruent with institutional arrangements described earlier in this chapter (i.e., periodical blanket recruitment of new graduates, assumptions of lifelong employment, and seniority-based systems of payment and progression).

This review and discussion of the literature suggests, therefore, that although the distinctive Japanese system of transitions to employment has to some extent collapsed, broad differences in what is valued in the British and Japanese national contexts appear to remain. Specifically, attributes such as pro-activity, independence, flexibility, and the ability to take responsibility for one's own development are frequently positioned as

valuable by employers in Euro-American contexts. In contrast, research suggests that qualities such as perseverance and cooperativeness are particularly valued in Japan, and independence and individuality are more ambivalently perceived. The contribution of this current research is to highlight the significance of economic and socio-cultural context in shaping variation in the socio-cultural construction of the ideal employable graduate.

3.5 Conclusion

This chapter introduces the economic, socio-cultural, and historical contexts of the research. It outlines institutional arrangements shaping graduate transitions to employment in each country context. These include lifetime employment, systems of payment and progression emphasising seniority, and on-the-job training in Japan. This is contrasted with greater mobility of employment, market-based wages and salaries, and publicly provided training in Britain. The chapter illustrates how such arrangements create a context of relative flexibility for new graduates in Britain and a context of relative rigidity in Japan. The relatively good fit between institutional arrangements in Britain and practices such as gap years is discussed, and this is contrasted with the relative lack of fit of such practices with arrangements in Japan.

The final section of the chapter challenges conceptualisations of employability that see graduate skills and attributes as discrete measurable objects existing in an external world, carried by students and graduates, and valued by a neutral labour market (Holmes 2013b: 1045). Instead, it is argued that the discourse of employability itself, and the specific skills and attributes described as valuable, function as vocabularies (cf. Mills 1940) drawn upon by students and graduates within the recruitment context. Literature reviewed in this section of the chapter suggests that institutional arrangements prevalent in each country context significantly influence the specific skills and attributes perceived as valuable by employers, and thus the vocabularies that are more likely to be associated with successful recruitment outcomes. This perspective informs the analyses that follow. Before progressing to this discussion, the next chapter introduces the approach to data generation and analysis drawn upon in this study.

Chapter 4 Methodology

4.1 Introduction

The preceding chapters have explained the rationale for a cross-national comparative investigation of aspirations, orientations, and outcomes relating to transnational youth mobility. This chapter outlines methodological, practical, and ethical considerations informing the research design and methods. I first introduce the qualitative cross-national comparative case study approach implemented in Britain and Japan, incorporating a discussion of sampling and recruitment. I explain my approach to data generation and analysis. I consider ethical issues that arose throughout the research process and reflect upon my own positionality as a researcher. In the conclusion, I draw together observations made throughout the chapter about the challenges and rewards of cross-national comparative research.

As defined by Hantrais (1999: 93), cross-national comparative research aims "to observe social phenomena across nations, to develop robust explanations of similarities or differences, and to attempt to assess their consequences, whether it be for the purposes of testing theories, drawing lessons about best practice or, more straightforwardly, gaining a better understanding of how social processes operate". A key methodological challenge that arises in cross-national comparative research relates to questions of conceptual equivalence (Hantrais 1999: 104). This is due to the impossibility of asking the "same" questions of "equivalent" populations across different country contexts, with different institutional arrangements, cultural values, traditions, and languages. In conducting this research, I adapted approaches to accommodate to different conventions and expectations, while maintaining conceptual and functional similarity to the extent possible. Where this was not possible, I sought to identify these differences and to treat them as additional sources of data. This chapter explores what this meant in relation to how research participants were selected and approached; the generation, analysis, and presentation of data; and the ethical conduct of research.

4.2 Detailed research design and methodology

4.2.1 Cross-national qualitative comparative case study approach

This research adopted a cross-national qualitative comparative case study approach in Britain and Japan. A case-based approach is indicated when researchers seek in-depth understanding of complex phenomena, retaining "the holistic and meaningful characteristics of real-life events" (Yin 2009: 4). These approaches allow for the "identification of patterns of multiple conjunctural causation" or "causal complexes" (Ragin 1987: 49). Advantages of cross-national comparative approaches include the ability to facilitate enquiries that are "disruptive of what was assumed as logical and natural" and "to make discoveries through different ways of seeing things" (Yengoyan 2006: 2, 4). Such research has "highlighted weaknesses in the generalisations applied and exported to 'foreign' cultures" (O'Reilly 1996: 2), challenging "the blithe assumption that what holds in one country will surely hold elsewhere" (Livingstone 2003: 483).

I argue that a cross-national qualitative comparative case study is particularly suited to this investigation of how students and graduates from Britain and Japan approached - and mobilised within the recruitment context - experiences of work and travel overseas, and to what effect. These two countries were selected because of their contrasting employment systems and evidence outlined in Chapter One of significant differences across contexts in terms of perceptions and outcomes of transnational youth mobility. The research explores how different national contexts, institutional arrangements (including recruitment and employment structures), and cultural values are associated with differences in the aspirations, orientations, and trajectories of students and graduates pursuing temporary experiences of work and travel overseas. It further explores how these differences in economic and socio-cultural contexts are associated with differences in the perceptions and values of employers. The study thus involves comparison of the accounts of students, graduates, careers advisers, and employers across these different contexts. In addition, I seek to draw comparisons within national contexts and particularly by sector of employment.

Recent research around temporary youth mobility highlights the significance of the specificities of the context within which such mobility occurs (e.g., Bagnoli 2009; Brooks, Waters and Pimlott-Wilson 2012; Kawashima 2010).

Nevertheless, very few studies have specifically sought to investigate such questions comparatively (cf. Bagnoli 2009). There is a similar dearth of research exploring employment and recruitment practices and their relationship with the skills and attributes described as valuable by employers from a comparative perspective (cf. Rear 2013; Rear and Jones 2013; Yoshimoto et al. 2005). This was thus a core and valuable part of the research design, and an important way in which the present research sought to build upon and extend existing literature.

In this thesis I draw upon a broad definition of "culture" as "'the way of life of a people' (Mathews 2000: 4): the way people living within a particular society are linguistically, culturally, socially and institutionally shaped to relate to the world, and behave in certain distinctly recognizable ways" (Mathews 2012: 304). I hypothesise later in this chapter that the emphasis in participant accounts on "culture" as an explanatory variable (in Japan in particular) was more pronounced because of my own positionality as an "outsider". I do not seek in this thesis to present an essentialised account of "Japanese culture" or "British culture", nor do I believe that any such things exist. In fact, I am wary of oversimplified attributions of cross-national differences to "culture" because of their tendency to assume homogeneity, assume the "uniqueness" of the culture in question, and neglect the historical dimension (Sugimoto 2010: 4). Rather, I explore through participants' accounts the meaning, significance, and implications of particular institutional and organisational practices, and the norms and values that they perceived as significant within their cultural context. I am influenced in adopting this position by Rear's (2013: 177) conceptualisation of "Japanese-style management" as "in one respect [....] a discourse that structures key elements, such as lifetime employment, seniority wages, enterprise unions, a communitarian ethos and so on, into a coherent whole". Related ideas can be found in discussions of Japanese culture as constructed by discourses (Kubota 1999), Confucian ethics as "invented tradition" (Suzuki et al. 2010: 516), and theories of Japaneseness (*Nihonjinron*) (Befu 2001).

In sum, this research explores young adults' experiences of temporary transnational mobility using a cross-national qualitative comparative case study approach in Britain and Japan. Fieldwork was conducted in Britain between September 2013 and March 2014 and in Japan between April and September 2014. This fieldwork consisted of two separate but interlocking components. The first involved retrospective semi-structured interviews with graduates (or university students) with experiences of work and travel

overseas (10 from Britain and 18 from Japan). The second component - undertaken simultaneously with the first - involved qualitative semi-structured interviews with two groups of key informants. Specifically, I interviewed university careers advisers and others knowledgeable about graduate employment trajectories (6 from Britain and 8 from Japan), and individuals responsible for (graduate) recruitment in companies across a variety of sectors (5 from Britain and 8 from Japan). These components were designed to complement each other and offer a window onto different aspects of the phenomena studied.

The next section of the chapter addresses sampling and recruitment. Discussion begins with a key question that arises in comparative cross-national research. This revolves around "how to deal with conceptual equivalence in different cultural and linguistic settings", given that concepts often "do not [....] travel well across national boundaries" (Hantrais 1999: 104). Questions of conceptual and functional equivalence were key concerns in the design and execution of this research and will be discussed frequently throughout this chapter.

4.2.2 Sampling and recruitment

Cross-national comparative research is challenging to conduct, in that it is very difficult, if not impossible, to ask the "same" questions of an "equivalent" population in different countries, cultures, traditions, and languages. This can be an issue in any research, but it is particularly salient when the research design is explicitly comparative. This posed questions that needed to be addressed at every stage of the research. First, I needed to consider how to conceptualise the topic of the research and introduce this to participants, how to phrase publicity material, and who to recruit for the study.

One of the earliest questions of conceptual equivalence that arose in this research related to differences in the salience, prevalence, and broader societal understandings of the "working holiday" and "gap year" within Britain and Japan. This significantly influenced sampling decisions and how I designed material publicising the study. (These materials are included for reference in Appendix A.) My broad area of interest related to "experiences of work and travel overseas". In describing the research in more detail, in Britain I described my interest in "*young people's international mobility*" and specifically "*the gap year/overseas working holiday*". In Japan I referred to

"<u>short-term overseas sojourns (e.g., gap years and working holidays)</u>"[10]. This choice of terminology involved a delicate balancing act where I sought to use descriptive terms that were broadly compatible across contexts, as well as tailoring materials to use terminology familiar to (and preferred by) informants in each context. Thus in my approaches to careers advisers in Britain, I frequently used expressions such as "*taking time out overseas after graduation (for example on a gap year or working holiday)*". Such descriptors were used in career centre literature and by careers advisers in the UK but had no conceptual equivalent in Japan.

Approach letters were not literally translated. Rather, the intent was to ensure that the meaning of the text remained as consistent as possible, while being presented in a culturally appropriate fashion. For example, when approaching potential key informants in Britain, I typically concluded e-mails with the following:

> *I'd really appreciate any assistance you might be able to provide, and will be following this e-mail up with a phone call to discuss further in the next few days.*

In contrast, the approach letters sent in Japanese ended with (literally translated) the following:

> <u>I apologise for bothering you with this request when you are busy, but I request your kind cooperation after careful consideration of this request.</u>

Conceptual and functional rather than linguistic equivalence were prioritised in my approach to translation, to the extent possible. I attempted to adapt approaches to accommodate to conventions and expectations about what is appropriate in each context, instead of seeking a more literally equivalent translation. In what follows, I further elaborate upon my approach to sampling and recruitment for each group of participants in the research.

4.2.2.1 Working holidaymakers

The major component of this research consists of retrospective semi-structured biographical-style interviews with a specific group of gap year participants, those with experiences of work and travel overseas (predominantly, but not exclusively, on working holiday visas). In total, 28

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[10] Throughout this thesis, I use italics to represent text written or spoken in English and underlining to represent text that has been translated from Japanese. See section 4.3.2 for further explanation.

interviews were conducted with individuals who undertook working holidays as university students or post-graduation (10 in Britain and 18 in Japan), predominantly within five years of graduation. Pen portraits of working holidaymakers can be found in Appendix B; summary information about working holidaymaker demographics and interviews is presented in Appendix C. The research aims to provide in-depth accounts of the working holiday and return for a diverse group of working holidaymakers, in order to explore how their aspirations, perceptions, and trajectories may be shaped by institutional arrangements and cultural framings, as well as their own social position (e.g., gender, social class). It does not seek a random and representative sample of a broader population from which findings can be generalised, but rather aims to explore diversity (Ragin 1994: 41) and test specific theoretical propositions (Ragin 1994: 35-37). Therefore, the concept of "sampling for range" was used (Mason 2002b: 124; Small 2009; Weiss 1994: 22). I sought, as much as possible, to maximise the diversity of those recruited in terms of their gender and social class background, the timing of their working holiday, the activities they engaged in while overseas, and the sector within which they worked upon their return. Specifically, I wished to ensure representation from individuals who worked in routine/menial jobs while overseas as well as those who worked in more highly skilled positions. Preliminary reading suggested that these might be significant sources of variation in the aspirations and career trajectories of working holidaymakers.

The focus of this research was upon substantive periods of work and travel overseas while a university student or post-graduation. Thus study abroad programmes, short-term programmes lasting for three months or less, and pre-university gap years were excluded from analysis. The decision to focus specifically on individuals who had taken working holidays or gap years during breaks in university study or post-university was made for a number of reasons. These were to some extent pragmatic, as evidence reviewed in the preliminary phases of project design suggested gap years were very rarely taken between high school and university in Japan (e.g., Kobayashi 2007; Yoda 2010). Reducing the scope of the research was considered important to allow more targeted comparisons to be made across country contexts. Furthermore, because of my specific interest in how experiences of work and travel overseas are mobilised in the employment context and perceived by employers, I believed experiences undertaken with closer proximity to employment would be most relevant for exploring such questions. Finally, post-graduation gap years (while increasing in salience and prevalence) remain relatively unexplored in the literature.

Participants were recruited through a variety of methods in Britain and Japan, as outlined in Table 4.1. These included personal networks; gatekeepers willing to help publicise the research (e.g., travel agencies, university careers advisers, language departments, and the Japan Gap Year Organization (JGAP)); and snowball sampling (i.e., asking participants to suggest possible additional participants from amongst their own friends and acquaintances). Pocock and McIntosh (2011) argue that returnees from overseas experience ("OE") in New Zealand constitute a sample that is "hard to reach" (Browne 2005) because of the lack of any organisation or institution that can be used to identify and contact potential participants. They advocate snowball sampling on these grounds. In the present research, I attempted to supplement snowball sampling and maximise diversity by publicising the study and recruiting participants through a variety of other methods. My concerns about recruiting a large proportion of my sample via a single gatekeeper in Japan were somewhat allayed by the diversity of accounts elicited within this subsample, the larger overall number of interviews I was able to conduct in Japan, and my ability to supplement this sample via recruitment through other sources.

Table 4.1 Sources of interview sample (WHMs)

Source	Japan	UK
Gatekeepers	10 WHMs (2 via JGAP; 8 via one specific travel company)	5 WHMs (2 separate travel companies, 2 separate careers adviser networks, 1 university language department)
Personal networks (e.g., friends of friends)	4 WHMs	4 WHMs
Snowball sampling (i.e., recommendations from other interviewees)	4 WHMs	1 WHM

4.2.2.2 Key informants

Data generated through interviews with former working holidaymakers was supplemented with data generated through semi-structured qualitative interviews with key informants (careers advisers and graduate recruiters/employers). In total, 12 interviews were conducted with 14 university careers advisers and others knowledgeable about graduate employment trajectories (6 from Britain and 8 from Japan). These "others" included a professor in lifelong learning and career studies and representatives from a company that managed an information website for graduates seeking employment. Additionally, 13 interviews were conducted with individuals involved in recruitment (e.g., graduate recruitment managers and similar) for a variety of employers (5 from Britain and 8 from Japan)[11]. Summary information about participant demographics and interviews is presented in Appendices D and E.

A variety of methods were used to recruit participants, as outlined in Table 4.2, and these varied somewhat across national contexts. In Britain, I secured interviews with a number of careers advisers through a direct approach to careers centre staff, via e-mail and/or telephone, and via an e-mail sent on my behalf to members of the Association of Graduate Careers Advisory Services (AGCAS). I attended a university careers fair (with the permission of the relevant university careers centre) to make initial approaches to a number of employers. From a shortlist of approximately 30 potential employers, I secured a total of 5 interviews, prioritising attempts to secure interviews with employers from a range of different sectors.

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[11] I also interviewed representatives of a not-for-profit organisation providing opportunities to work overseas and a youth work service. These interviews informed my thinking, but are not explicitly incorporated into the thesis.

Table 4.2 Sources of interview sample (key informants)

Source	Japan	UK
Gatekeepers		4 careers advisers (recruited via AGCAS)
Personal networks (e.g., friends of friends)	2 employers	
Academic and research-related networks (e.g., academic adviser, conference and event attendees)	2 employers/ 4 careers advisers	
Snowball sampling (i.e., recommendations from other interviewees)	2 employers/ 2 careers advisers	
Cold contact	2 employers	5 employers/ 2 careers advisers

The importance of securing introductions when conducting fieldwork in Japan should not be overlooked (e.g., Burton 2003: 73; Creighton Campbell 2003: 231). Indeed, all of the interviews conducted with careers advisers in the Japanese context - and two-thirds of the employer interviews - were arranged because a contact (and sometimes an interviewee) introduced me to someone they thought might be suitable and willing to participate in the study. Additionally, I perused employer listings on two major job hunting information sites (www.rikunabi.com and job.mynavi.jp) and posted or e-mailed invitation letters to the relevant contact address for graduate recruitment as presented on these websites. In Japan, as in Britain, I generated a shortlist of approximately 30 employers to approach. From these, I secured 8 interviews. Once again, I attempted to sample for diversity. I was particularly keen to include employers from sectors such as manufacturing, due to reports that individuals with overseas experiences are increasingly sought after in this sector (Japan Association of Corporate Executives 2014: 21; Nagano 2014). However, practical considerations of who was willing to participate in the research influenced the composition of my final sample more than any attempts that I made to control for variables such as occupational sector. Ultimately, participating employers represented

a broad range of sectors in the UK and Japan (from manufacturing and technology to broadcasting and finance). The inclusion of careers adviser perspectives was considered important in the design of the research, in order to elicit broader perspectives less contingent upon occupational sector.

Detailed information about the employers I spoke to, the types of vacancies for which they were recruiting, and their recruitment processes is presented alongside analyses in Chapter Six. This information was considered an essential component of the analysis, in order to contextualise findings. Discussion now progresses to consider my approach to data generation and analysis.

4.3 Data generation and analysis

4.3.1 Semi-structured interviews

Data was generated firstly through retrospective semi-structured interviews with graduates (or university students) with experiences of work and travel overseas, and secondly through semi-structured interviews with careers advisers and employers. Interviews were conducted in a place and/or by a method of the participant's choosing. These included face-to-face interviews, telephone and Skype interviews, and (on two occasions) via written questions and responses. Participants were located across the UK (from the south of England to Scotland) and Japan (predominantly centred around Tokyo). A small proportion of working holidaymakers had remained overseas after their working holidays and were interviewed while overseas. In Japan, interviews were conducted in the language of the participant's choice (I am a fluent Japanese speaker). With participant consent, interviews were audio-recorded. As indicated previously, details about interview length and method are summarised in Appendices C, D, and E. Interview schedules are attached in Appendix F.

The majority of interviews were conducted face-to-face. These were generally conducted at workplaces, in a private room on a university campus, or at various cafes convenient for participants. Interviews were conducted by telephone or Skype where this was the participant's preference (e.g., due to time constraints) and/or their location made conducting face-to-face interviews impossible. On two occasions, participants expressed an interest in participating in the research but preferred to respond to the questions in writing instead, due to time constraints or personal preference. Although this data was not as rich and

detailed as that generated via face-to-face, telephone, or Skype interviews, it was considered important to honour these participants' preferences and incorporate their perspective to the extent possible. Interviews with working holidaymakers were on average approximately 2 hours and 10 minutes in length; interviews with employers and careers advisers varied from approximately 25 minutes to 1 hour and 40 minutes in length. On average, interviews were longer in Japan - and more likely to be conducted face-to-face - than in Britain..

Devising interview schedules and interviewing in two different languages brought additional challenges in relation to issues of conceptual equivalence. In this context, thinking about "equivalence" meant being aware of differences in job hunting and recruitment practices in the two countries, for example, and in the vocabulary used to discuss these. Such differences can also be seen as interesting pieces of data in their own right. However, this meant that when referring to "graduate recruitment" in Japan, I needed to be mindful of different terminology that reflected distinctions made in Japan that did not necessarily have British equivalents. The interview schedules I used in Japan involved firstly eliciting from employers (as in Britain) details about the positions into which they recruited graduates. In Japan, however, I needed to distinguish between *shinsotsu saiyō* (i.e., periodical blanket recruitment to new graduate positions of individuals while they are still university students); *daini-shinsotsu saiyō* (i.e., recruitment of individuals who have already graduated and typically have a few years of work experience; Nakamura 1992); and *chūto saiyō* (i.e., mid-career recruitment).

It was also important for me to pay particular attention to words used during the interviews and their meanings, particularly with reference to words and concepts that did not necessarily have a clear equivalent across contexts. I went to key informant interviews in Japan with a printed definition of the "gap year" (consistent with that presented in Chapter One) available for reference for participants, if necessary. Within the interviews, I, in turn, frequently needed to probe for the meanings of words drawn upon by participants. I argue that this is important even in qualitative research conducted in one's own language, due to the different ways in which different individuals can understand the same concept. However, this was particularly significant in the Japanese context when dealing with words for which there were no direct one-to-one equivalents. For example, the Japanese word *sunao* can be translated variously, per Crossman and Noma (2013), as representing a range of sometimes potentially contradictory-seeming qualities (i.e.,

obedience, cooperativeness, meekness, frankness, and honesty). I sought to elicit participants' own definitions when they drew on concepts such as these. When presenting this data, I include original Japanese terms in italics in the thesis text, and include interview extracts to elaborate further upon what these words meant to the participant drawing upon them. Rear (2013: 188) further cautions that it is necessary to avoid assuming that terms such as independence and pro-activity and their Japanese "equivalents" (e.g., *shutaisei* and *sekkyokusei* or *kōdōryoku*) have identical meanings in terms of social practice in Britain and Japan. Once again, it was important to seek examples from participants about the specific sorts of meanings they saw these words as conveying. This need and opportunity to explore in detail how participants interpreted particular concepts and their significance in the context of overseas mobility and employment represented both a challenge and a strength of the choice of interviews as a primary research method for the study.

It is also important to consider some of the more general limitations of interview methods. It is possible, for example, that researchers using interviews - and especially biographical-style individual interviews - may generate data and interpret findings in ways that overemphasise ideas of agency, coherence, and rationality (Mason 2002a). This does not mean that different research methods will generate findings that are more "correct" or "true", but that we need to be mindful that all research findings are generated in particular contexts and take this into account in interpretation. In other words, "[w]e need conceive of data (from different sources and different methods) as offering specific kinds of evidence, as particular rather than all-revealing slices through our research problems" (Irwin 2008: 419).

More broadly, in interview research it is unavoidable that participant narratives will be framed by their understandings of the interview context and expectations about what the researcher wants to hear. I tried to mitigate such concerns in a variety of ways. When approaching participants, I presented my research interests as neutrally as possible, stating for example that I was interested in hearing about people's perceptions of the positive and negative impacts of their working holiday experiences. Furthermore, I began each interview segment by asking broad general questions (e.g., can you tell me about your working holiday?; would you say your working holiday had much impact on your life afterwards?), and only subsequently following up with more specific probes (e.g., what, if anything, did you get out of it?;

were there any challenges that you experienced as a result of taking your working holiday?).

One of the strengths of my approach is in the use of multiple complementary perspectives to explore claims that position experiences of work and travel overseas as investments in employability. Considering the perspectives of not only working holidaymakers, but also careers advisers and employers, facilitates the investigation of such claims in a more nuanced and comprehensive way than would research with any single one of these groups. In what follows, I describe my approach to data generation and further examine the strengths and limitations of interview methods separately for each group of participants in the research.

4.3.1.1 Working holidaymakers

Retrospective biographical-style interviews were selected as the method for generating data with working holidaymakers because they focus on participants' own narrations of experiences, the things that most matter to people as they live their lives, and the way events unfold over time in a relational context (Atkinson 1998: 20; Plummer 2001: 40-41). Interviews began with general questions about people's lives and working holidays. These were followed by more specific probes about their motivations and the perceived consequences of these experiences, including, but not limited to, those relating to employment.

The issue of measuring social class across contexts was another site where issues of conceptual equivalence arose in my research. I asked British participants if they could tell me about their class background. Research in the Japanese context, however, frequently avoids explicitly using the words "*social class*" and I instead used language "typically used in Japan", according to documentation describing the translation process for the World Values Survey (2015a, 2015b). Specifically, I asked participants to "describe your standard of living before you entered university from a general perspective". (I modified this question by adding the phrase "before you entered university" in an attempt to elicit data more broadly comparable with questions about "class background" in Britain.) I elicited information from all participants about their parents' educational backgrounds and the occupations within which their parents were employed when they were aged 14. I also asked about participants' own occupations upon graduation and at the time of the interview. I used the National Statistics Socio-Economic Classification (NS-SEC; Rose, Pevalin and O'Reilly 2005) to roughly categorise these. However, because this classification system is based on

employment structures and practices in Britain, these categorisations should be taken as indicative only when applied to the Japanese context.

Returning to the question of interview methods more generally, there are dangers in relying solely on evidence from retrospective interviews. Sin (2013: 851), for example, suggests the risks of retrospective interviews include "*post hoc* rationalization and distorted memory of aspirations and experiences" (see also Frändberg 2015: 557). A number of researchers advocate longitudinal research as a particularly rich way of gaining insight into questions about experiences and outcomes of transnational youth mobility (Clarke 2004c: 108; Duncan 2007: 115, 122). However, these researchers simultaneously acknowledge the logistical difficulties and time-consuming nature of such an approach, suggesting this would be inadvisable within the scope of a PhD project.

Although their limitations should not be forgotten, retrospective interviews were in fact essential for gaining perspective on respondents' working holidaymaker experiences within the context of their broader life trajectories. The need for such research is highlighted in the work of other researchers. Scholars have observed that the overwhelming majority of research conducted with young travellers to date has been conducted "on the road" (e.g., Riley 1988; Sørensen 2003) by participant-observer researchers (Richards and Wilson 2004: 4; Wilson and Richards 2008: 188). Most studies have interviewed working holidaymakers during their time overseas (Amit 2010, 2011; Clarke 2004a, 2004c; Kato 2010, 2013; Yoon 2015)[12]. Alternatively, Haverig's research focuses on New Zealanders planning to embark upon an OE (Haverig 2011; Haverig and Roberts 2011). This is particularly significant because studies that have interviewed working travellers on the road have observed that participants described needing time to reflect to consider bigger questions about the "meaning" of the experience (Duncan 2004: 10; 2007: 121). Alternatively, they presented narratives that seemed less integrated than those of people who had returned home (Roberts 2007). In particular, retrospective interviews were considered essential in order to address the gap in the literature targeted by this research (i.e., specific exploration of graduates' experiences of drawing

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[12] For rare exceptions see research by Kawashima (2010) and Roberts (2007). A small number of studies have examined retrospective accounts of individuals in relation to pre-university gap years (King 2011); backpacking and long-haul travel (Desforges 1998, 2000; O'Reilly 2005, 2006); and the New Zealand OE (Pocock and McIntosh 2011).

upon episodes of work and travel overseas within the context of job applications and interviews). These interviews were supplemented with interviews with university careers advisers and employers from a variety of sectors, to which I now turn my attention.

4.3.1.2 Key informants

Semi-structured interviews were selected as the method for generating data with key informants. Interviews focused on recruitment practices and values, asking specifically about respondents' perceptions of international mobility and its impact in the employment context. They elicited informant views of - and experiences with - applicants who had taken gap years/working holidays; their perceptions of the skills/qualities that can be developed through such experiences; and their accounts of the skills/qualities they considered valuable. Employer interviews were considered a valuable source of data because they provided information about how employee attributes and experiences were perceived differently in different contexts and about the contexts within which these perceptions were embedded. The accounts of careers advisers were considered particularly valuable in designing the research because they could provide a broader (informed external) perspective on employer values and perceptions, less specific to any particular industry sectors.

There are limits to the research questions that can be addressed by drawing on data generated through interviews with employers. This was an important consideration in the design of this project. In particular, researchers highlight the need to exercise caution in interpreting such data. It is important not to assume that employer statements about their attitudes and perceptions necessarily explain their behaviour *when making selection decisions* (e.g., Brown and Hesketh 2004: 147-148; Holmes 2013b: 1048-1049). In the initial design phases of this project, I considered supplementing interview data with data gathered through observation of recruitment processes, following Brown and Hesketh (2004) and Rivera (2011, 2012, 2015). My focus in this project, however, was less on explaining selection decisions made by employers, and more in exploring variation in the context(s) within which they made their decisions. Specifically, I was interested in exploring the extent to which different employer discourses about the skills/qualities they valued might be associated with different institutional arrangements, standard career trajectories, broader societal attitudes, and other structural factors. For this reason, as well as for reasons of feasibility, I decided

against attempting to incorporate an observational element into the project design.

In this section I have explored the strengths and limitations of a primarily interview-based research design, both generally and specifically for each group of participants. In what follows, I discuss my approach to data reduction and analysis.

4.3.2 Data reduction and analysis

As part of the process of data reduction and analysis, I created summaries of each interview, transcribed interviews verbatim (as much as possible), coded transcripts (in their original language) by content and thematically, and drew up tables summarising data for each participant in relation to key themes. In what follows, I describe these processes in more detail. I explore decisions made in the transcription process and decisions made about how to present excerpts from interviews within the thesis itself. I explain how these decisions influence how participants are understood and the conclusions drawn from the research.

Transcription is frequently presented as a simple, superficial, and mechanistic process, when instead it has been argued to be "a pivotal aspect of qualitative inquiry" (Oliver, Serovich and Mason 2005: 1273). Although transcription is rarely problematised by researchers (Alldred and Gillies 2002: 159), it is a process that "is neither neutral nor value-free" (Arksey and Knight 1999: 141). Decisions about transcription influence our understanding of participants and thus our research conclusions (Oliver, Serovich and Mason 2005: 1273). I transcribed all interviews verbatim (as much as possible) in the language in which they were spoken, although following Arksey and Knight (1999: 146) I did not feel it necessary to transcribe words such as "um" and "like" rigorously for speakers who used these very frequently. Nor did I transcribe every minimal encourager (e.g., mm, yeah, uh-huh) I uttered during the interview, unless I felt that these had interrupted or influenced the flow of the conversation. I did not intend to analyse the data from the standpoint of linguistics but rather to elicit information about participants' perceptions and understandings. For this purpose, the content of what was said in the interview was considered most important for analysis. Interview excerpts presented in the chapters that follow have been further edited, to omit false starts, repetitions, and filler words. Burton (2003: 107) argues that minor edits to ensure that the text of interview excerpts conveys as clearly as possible what participants intended can be a gesture of respect and consideration (for participants and readers).

Further, this helps ensure that participants who are not native English language speakers are not misrepresented. I have sought to achieve a balance here between clarity of presentation and preservation of the flavour and character of the language used by each participant. I have retained minor grammatical errors but occasionally inserted words in square brackets for clarity of expression.

I worked through a variety of steps as part of my process of analysis. I first read through all the transcripts and summaries multiple times, jotting down notes in the margins indicating key "codes" or analytic categories that I wished to consider further. I worked these into a rough "coding framework" that helped me think about the categories of data I wished to explore in more detail. Using thematic analysis loosely following Braun and Clarke (2006), I extracted relevant data from summaries and transcripts, initially copying and pasting text into tables in word documents to group together extracts relating to each relevant code. I conducted much of the analysis of transcribed interview text in its original language so as not to prematurely lose some of the richness of the data.

Codes used for this research came partly from the content of the interviews and partly from familiarity with existing literature. Sometimes this lead to analysis progressing in unexpected directions. For example, I observed upon reading and reflecting upon the interview transcripts a difference in the way participants described their approach to mobilising experiences of work and travel overseas when seeking employment. Originally, I conceived of this as a difference in "self-efficacy" (i.e., whether participants perceived themselves to have the capacity to influence employer perceptions), and/or a difference in whether participants oriented to job hunting in an "active" or "passive" manner. It was only when I looked in detail at the data categorised under these headings that I realised that this data appeared to capture distinctions referred to by Brown and Hesketh (2004) as differences between "players" and "purists". I read back over the transcripts to identify any data I had missed on earlier readings and to explore whether the patterns I thought I had begun to see in the data could be confirmed or disconfirmed by the accounts of other participants. These concepts later contributed significantly to my analysis of differences in how participants in Britain and Japan mobilised experiences of work and travel overseas in the recruitment context, as discussed in Chapter Seven.

In relation to data generation and analysis in this cross-national comparative research project, the characteristics of communication in English and

Japanese also need to be considered. In particular, I wish to address how participants' conscious or unconscious choice(s) of which language to use in the interview (and across different parts of the interview) informed my analysis, and how I have represented these choices within interview excerpts presented within this thesis. In what follows, I use interview excerpts to illustrate how attentiveness to the language in which participants were speaking during interviews significantly enriched analysis.

As reported in Appendices C, D, and E, the majority of interviews conducted in Japan were conducted primarily in Japanese. A smaller number of interviews were conducted primarily in English. A number of interviewees, however, switched between languages at various times during the interview, to varying degrees. This phenomenon is referred to as "code-switching", and is described by linguistic anthropologists as "a conversational strategy used to establish, cross or destroy group boundaries; to create, evoke or change interpersonal relations with their rights and obligations" (e.g., Gal 1988: 247). Reporting on her research with Japanese women who had lived in England for two or more years, Burton (2009) suggests this code-switching is an interesting source of data in its own right. Her arguments resonate with many of the observations I made in this research.

For example, Mr. Ogawa was responsible for new graduate recruitment for a Japanese manufacturing company. I interviewed him predominantly in Japanese, but he switched to English several times during our interview. The most protracted and significant of these switches occurs in the following section of text (statements originally made in Japanese are underlined in this presentation of text and throughout the thesis; statements originally spoken in English are in italics):

> Mr Ogawa: Japanese companies, they don't like it if there is a period of time when people haven't been working.
>
> Lynley: Mm. Why is that?
>
> Mr. Ogawa: Hmm. I wonder why. I'm different. I think, "Oh, that's an interesting person." But people in their 40s ... how should I put this? ... *The old ages who have the power to decide for the companies, they don't like that kind of room period. I'm not on that side, so I think the gap year and working holiday is a good thing. But it's like typical Japanese thinking.*

In this excerpt, Mr. Ogawa presents himself as "different" from older Japanese decision-makers. Later in the interview he states that he

personally thinks that it would be good for Japan's economy if "*prejudice*" against working holidaymakers went away. It is particularly interesting here that Mr. Ogawa switched to English in the middle of this particular discussion, as if to align or express solidarity with his English-speaking interviewer, and distance himself from the conservative Japanese managers whose opinions he is criticising ("*I'm not on that side*"). This illustrates one of the reasons influencing my decision to preserve information about the language(s) in which people spoke during interviews in the excerpts presented throughout this thesis. Through their (conscious and/or unconscious) choices of which language to use at different stages of the interviews, participants may, as suggested by Burton (2009: 152), be indicating "how they wish to be perceived by the listener and how they wish the listener to behave towards them". This may involve expressing certain identities while distancing themselves from others. Consideration of the language used at different times during this interview thus enriches analysis of this excerpt. This discussion alludes also to issues of positionality (i.e., how my own position, as perceived by research participants, influenced the data generated in our interviews and the findings of the research). I elaborate on these issues in a later section of the chapter.

More speculatively, when explaining their aspirations for the future, I was intrigued to find two Japanese women (Maki and Sakiko) switched into English to describe themselves as neither a "*career woman*" nor "*ambitious*". This raises interesting questions about how they perceived me, a single woman of approximately 40 years of age, who had travelled on her own to Japan in order to conduct this research. It is possible that their conscious or unconscious choice of language at this particular point of the interview represented something about ways in which they perceived themselves to differ from me (as contrasted with Mr. Ogawa's use of English in a possible move to align himself with me). This tentative hypothesis receives some support from Sakiko's expression of apology ("I'm sorry") partway through our conversation, as if she felt that this might be a response that for some reason I would find disappointing:

> Lynley: And do you have goals for the future or things like that?
>
> Sakiko: Goals? In relation to work?
>
> Lynley: *Um,* generally, goals in relation to the future, or things you'd like to do, things like that.
>
> Sakiko: Things I'd like to do. Hm. In relation to life?

Lynley: Yes.

Sakiko: Well, I'd like to get married, and I'd like to have children. There is that, but maybe I don't have very many specific things. In relation to my job and things [....] I'm okay if it's enjoyable. I'm sorry. Somehow, wanting to work in a *higher position*, I don't think like that. If I work hard in my current job, I could get a *higher position,* but I've not often thought that I'd like to do that. Rather than that, whether the job is something that's enjoyable for me is really important [....] Whether it's enjoyable, whether it's fulfilling. I don't really have anything *ambitious*.

Burton (2009) also suggests that code-switching may be a source of data about people's perceptions of the languages in which they are speaking. In fact, communication norms in the English and Japanese languages and the impact of overseas experience on how people communicated were topics that arose frequently within the interviews. Consistent with existing literature - as will be discussed in Chapters Six and Seven - participants often positioned Japanese communication as indirect, and emphasised the importance within this context of *kūki yomi* ("reading the atmosphere", "sniffing the air", "reading the mood", or "reading between the lines") (e.g., Kobayashi, Fukuda and Asakura 2014; Yoneyama 2008). This concept of "reading the atmosphere" is defined by Kobayashi, Fukuda and Asakura (2014) as follows: "[i]narticulate understanding of someone's needs and feelings accurately, and communicating with people smoothly". Communication in Japanese was described as constrictive, not only because of these ideas about the need for indirect expression, but also because of the need to vary one's manner of speaking in accordance with one's relative position in hierarchies of age, gender, and seniority. In contrast, learning and speaking English in an English-speaking environment is often positioned in Japan as something that facilitates the development of the ability to express one's own opinions (Burton 2009; Cameron 2002; Kubota 1999). A number of researchers highlight perceptions of the English language as empowering, self-transformative, and liberating (e.g., Bailey 2006, 2007; Burton 2009). They further acknowledge the gendered nature of these perceptions (e.g., women are frequently the target of advertising characterising the English language in this way).

Paying attention to instances of code-switching in this light further illuminates participant perceptions of the Japanese and English languages, issues which have implications for the way in which they communicated within our

interviews. In this light, it seems significant to consider that Akiko - who I interviewed almost exclusively in English - switched into Japanese when describing changes to her communication style that she believed had occurred as a result of her time overseas (e.g., "I can't read the atmosphere [*kūki ga yomenai*]"). Conversely, Makoto, Emiko, and Manami were interviewed predominantly in Japanese, but described their time overseas speaking English as something that had developed their ability to communicate more directly, answering questions with a clear "*yes*" and "*no*".

Emiko offers further insight into these perceptions and experiences by suggesting that she communicated more directly in English while overseas partly because she lacked the language skills necessary to respond to questions in a more nuanced manner. It is thus important to consider also whether participants interviewed in English sometimes expressed opinions more strongly worded than they would have done had they been speaking in their native language. Generally, I perceived Yoshie, for example, as very capable of expressing sophisticated concepts in English. In contrast, Haruko and Kazuko - although capable of completing the interview in English - did not always have the vocabulary or fluency to express fully the nuances that might have been present in their responses had they been expressing themselves in Japanese. This is another reason why I believe it is important to provide an indication of the language within which excerpts were spoken.

In this section, therefore, I have explained decisions about how to present interview excerpts that influence the ways participants are understood and conclusions drawn from the research. The next section of the chapter explores ethical issues arising from the research and the influence of my own characteristics on data generation and interpretation.

4.4 Ethics and positionality

This research was designed and implemented in consultation with the British Sociological Association's Statement of Ethical Practice. Approval was obtained from the ESSL, Environment and LUBS (AREA) Faculty Research Ethics Committee of the University of Leeds. The university where I was based in Japan did not have any formal procedures or requirement that I obtain additional ethical approvals, thus my approval from the University of Leeds covered fieldwork in both study locations. However, ethical considerations informed the design and execution of the research throughout my fieldwork and beyond (into analysis and dissemination). In what follows I discuss ethical issues arising in the research in relation to

autonomy and informed consent, and privacy and anonymity. I then move on to consider my own experiences of fieldwork, and especially how my own positionality (e.g., in terms of age, gender, and nationality) shaped and influenced interactions with participants, the data generated, and thence the findings of the study.

4.4.1 Autonomy and informed consent

Conducting research ethically requires that participation should be voluntary, and potential participants should be provided with the information they need to make a fully informed decision about participation. This involves ensuring potential participants are aware that they have the right not to participate in the research, the right to withdraw if they change their mind, and the right to not answer any questions they prefer not to answer.

It was particularly important to consider how ethical issues such as respect for autonomy and informed consent would play out when conducting research in a different linguistic and social context. One important consideration for me was ensuring the nuances of the language used in approach letters and information sheets emphasised fully the voluntary nature of participation. This was especially important in Japan because of the significance of introductions from third parties when recruiting research participants (e.g., Burton 2003: 73; Creighton Campbell 2003: 231). In cases where a third party initially approached a possible participant, I made sure that the potential participant had information in writing from me about the study as soon as possible, so that they could make an informed and independent decision about participation. Aware of the possibility that they might be considering participating as a favour to our mutual contact, I emphasised that participation was voluntary and I appreciated their consideration of this request regardless of their decision. Because communication in Japan is often perceived to be more indirect, I approached requests for participation more indirectly and over a longer period of time, paying careful attention to non-verbal language (e.g., hesitations), so as to ensure potential participants did not feel coerced into participating (Burton 2003: 100). I did lose a small number of possible participants in both Britain and Japan as a result of this approach. However, I saw this as an important step which contributed to ensuring participation in the research was voluntary.

4.4.2 Privacy and anonymity

Another issue central to the ethical conduct of research involves the protection of participants' privacy and identities. As part of the consent process, individuals were advised that what they had said in the interview might be quoted in presentations and publications, but that their name would not be used. An exception was made for an academic who participated as an expert knowledgeable about graduate career trajectories in Japan and expressed a clear preference that he be identified in research outputs. I explained on the consent form that I would consult with participants about how their organisation would be described, in order to address any concerns that they might have about how they were represented in publications. I included a space on the consent form for the outcomes of this discussion to be recorded, in an attempt to enable analytically significant contextual information to be presented, while avoiding compromising participant identities (Guenther 2009). Even with the promise of anonymity, two employers were willing to participate in the study only on the condition that relevant public relations (or equivalent) personnel could approve interview transcripts and/or summaries. One was approved as written; another was returned with only minor clarifications to factual details (e.g., clarification of the roles/responsibilities of different divisions within the company).

Maintaining anonymity and confidentiality involved paying attention to a range of additional factors. For example, I have deliberately avoided including in the text of this thesis excerpts from interviews referencing the exact wording of specific selection criteria implemented by participating organisations. This is because doing so would likely allow the identification of these organisations. I have avoided presenting participants' official job titles within their organisations for similar reasons (and was specifically asked to do so by one participant).

Decisions about how best to allocate pseudonyms to participants were complicated by the cross-national design of this study. Norms and conventions around communicating in Japanese distinguish between differing levels of politeness and formality that are considered appropriate for use in different types of interactions. When interviewing employers and careers advisers, it would have been inappropriate for me to address these individuals using their first name. This carried over to my assignments of pseudonyms, and I realised partway through my period of fieldwork in Japan that I had been assigning pseudonyms to Japanese careers advisers and employers assuming that I would be referring to them by title and surname.

In contrast, I had given all other participants first names as pseudonyms. While writing up my analyses, I experimented with a variety of alternatives, although I felt comfortable with none of these. I eventually concluded that this represented a good analogy for many similar dilemmas posed over the course of this cross-national comparative research project and the approach that I frequently prioritised in response. This involved seeking solutions informed by an understanding of differences in what is considered appropriate in each context, and attempting to adapt approaches to these conventions and expectations, while maintaining conceptual and functional similarity to the extent possible. The inconsistent use of pseudonyms in this text, therefore, might be considered a deliberate reminder to the reader of the differences between the contexts where the research was carried out, and the complicated balancing act involved in the attempt to identify and address the inequivalence of concepts across contexts.

4.4.3 Positionality

In the following section of the chapter, I discuss the importance of incorporating a reflexive awareness of my own positionality into my analyses. I consider how my position as a white woman of about 40 years old, neither Japanese nor British[13], impacted on interactions with participants, data generated, and thence (to an extent) the findings of the study. In this discussion, I draw on the observations of other researchers about age, gender, and nationality when conducting interviews with Japanese participants (Bailey 2007; Burton 2003: 67-69, 75-76; Kawashima 2012b: 45-48). A broader literature on insider/outsider researcher positioning and the strengths and limitations of each approach is also taken into account (e.g., Hodkinson 2005). This literature highlights how aspects of researcher identity (and their influence on participant expectations and researcher-participant interactions) may influence research data and thence conclusions.

Arguably, my identity as a non-Japanese researcher in Japan - and to a lesser extent, as a non-British researcher in Britain - influenced the research process in a variety of ways. It is likely that this influenced who was willing to talk to me. Haruko, for example, was studying for the Test of English for International Communication (TOEIC) examination at the time of her interview, and welcomed the opportunity for English language conversation

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[13] I self-identify as "Antipodean", or "an Aussie-Kiwi hybrid", having moved with my family from New Zealand to Australia at the age of 15, and spent a significant number of years subsequently living in neither country.

practice. The "novelty" of speaking to a "foreign" researcher may have enticed some participants, while discouraging others. Employers and careers advisers with a particular interest (and personal experiences) in overseas experiences may have been more willing to participate. The use of my own networks to recruit participants may have accentuated such tendencies, as many of my friends have experience living overseas. I sought to minimise this by recruiting participants through a variety of different strategies. Nevertheless, it is possible that my sample consists of those with stronger-than-average feelings about overseas experience. My concern about the impact that this might have on the data generated and findings of the study is mitigated somewhat by the observation that Japanese participants overall (with some exceptions) expressed relatively negative views about the career-related consequences of overseas experiences. It is significant that such negative views were found even amongst this sample who might be expected to be more favourably disposed to such experiences.

Speculatively, I argue that my identity as an "outsider" influenced data generation particularly in terms of the foregrounding of "cultural" explanations in participant accounts. Features of the Japanese context that they considered "distinctive" and "unique" may have been given a salience and prominence they may have lacked had I been Japanese. For example, Mr. Akiyama headed the research division within a company managing an information website for graduates seeking employment in Japan. He explained the prevalence of structured interviews in the recruitment context in America and Europe and how this differed from the Japanese approach to recruitment as follows:

> Structured interviews like they do in America and Europe [....] they're still very rare in Japan. If anything, like I said, it's like a conversation. Like perceiving something in a conversation. Globally, you can't really imagine it, can you? It's a uniquely Japanese manner. A sense that because we're all fellow Japanese, we understand. So it feels like maybe how we conduct interviews is different to how interviews are conducted in other countries.

Such foregrounding was also prevalent - albeit to a smaller extent - in my interviews in Britain. Susan (careers adviser), for example, emphasised the salience of "*a class dimension*" throughout the British education system in particular:

> *In Britain, I don't think you can get away from a class dimension in everything, is all I would say [....] there's something underpinning the whole of this society that goes through all education [....]*

I argue - consistent with a number of researchers who have explored the advantages and disadvantage of insider and outsider researcher positioning - that this is both a strength and a limitation of the current research.

Researchers who have conducted research in the Japanese context have described a variety of ways in which their age, gender, (perceived) sexuality, and nationality (in particular) influenced participant expectations, their interactions with participants, and the data generated in their research (Bailey 2007; Burton 2003: 67-69, 75-76; Kawashima 2012a; 2012b: 45-48). Bailey (2007: 590) observes - as a white male conducting ethnographic research in English language conversation schools in Japan - that the Japanese women he encountered appeared more ready to discuss "ambitions and goals that fell outside the strongly coded feminine sphere with Western men than they were with Japanese men or with Western women". Kawashima (2012b: 46) reports that her status as a Japanese woman living overseas prompted wariness from some interlocutors, who positioned "overseas Japanese as being staunch critics of 'Japanese culture'". Conversely, she suggests some of the returnees she interviewed appeared defensive because she seemed to have succeeded in "defecting" overseas, whereas they felt that they had "failed".

I am wary, however, of oversimplifying questions of positionality, given the multiple and evolving identities available to both ourselves and our participants. It is important to note that researchers may be an insider in terms of one aspect of their identity (e.g., gender) but an outsider in terms of another aspect of their identity (e.g., nationality). Also, I contend it is not always the most obvious or salient features of one's identity that shape these interactions (e.g., I shared experiences of work and travel overseas with all of my interviewees; I shared experiences of PhD research with two of my interviewees etc). In thinking about these issues, the perspective that resonates the most with me conceptualises all researchers as constantly in "a state of betweenness". In relation to our participants, we are never absolute "outsiders" or "insiders":

> because we are positioned simultaneously in a number of fields we are always, at some level, somewhere, in a state of betweenness, negotiating various degrees and kinds of difference - be they based on gender, age, class, ethnicity, "race," sexuality, and so on.

> Betweenness thus implies that we are never "outsiders" or "insiders" in any absolute sense [....]
>
> (Nast 1994: 57)

What was important to me in approaching each interview was to maintain a position of curiosity about the person to whom I was speaking and an attempt to imaginatively enter into their lives. During interviews, I tried to respond to participants neutrally and without judgement, in ways that encouraged them to elaborate on their own experiences. I sought to make them feel comfortable sharing their accounts. Simultaneously, it was important to consider in analyses aspects of my own identity and how I presented myself and my research interests that were likely to have influenced how participants interacted with me.

4.5 Conclusion

As highlighted throughout this chapter, a key concern that repeatedly arose in the course of designing and conducting this research revolved around questions of conceptual equivalence. My approach to dealing with these issues, as highlighted in the preceding discussion, has been as much as possible to identify these differences and to treat them as additional sources of data available to shed light on the similarities and differences between the two settings. My goal in the research is not to compare Britain or Japan - or British or Japanese working holidaymakers - on a single dimension, but rather to present a nuanced account of participant aspirations, orientations, practices, and trajectories, that locates these within - and illuminates - different economic and socio-cultural contexts . While this was an ever-present challenge in the design and conduct of the research, the strengths of such an approach can be found in the ways that the comparative dimension of the research enables practices to be de-naturalised and contextualised. By showing how things are different elsewhere, comparative data reveals how what is simply taken for granted in one context may be contingent upon and shaped by a range of factors. In the chapter that follows, I begin presentation of the analyses I conducted and the findings of this research. I commence this discussion by exploring how participants' aspirations for experiences of work and travel overseas arose within - and were shaped by - specific economic and socio-cultural contexts.

Chapter 5 Economic and socio-cultural context, social position, and the shaping of graduate aspirations for overseas experience

5.1 Introduction

From a certain perspective, transnational youth mobility might be seen as the perfect exemplar of social changes brought about by processes of individualisation and globalisation. As outlined in Chapter Two, a key claim of theories of individualisation is that individuals in contemporary societies have become "disembedded" from social context, and must instead self-consciously, routinely, and continuously create their selves through narratives and lifestyle choices (Beck 1992; Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 2002; Beck, Giddens and Lash 1994; Giddens 1991). Empirical research with populations pursuing such mobility has been described as focusing largely on choice, self-realisation, and freedom (Frändberg 2015: 555; McLeod and Burrows 2014: 369). A growing body of research, however, explores how even in the context of this supposed "apex of freedom" (Haverig and Roberts 2011), "choices" are shaped by structural forces. They are embedded in specific economic and socio-cultural contexts (e.g., Bagnoli 2009; Kawashima 2010) and circumscribed by assumptions, expectations, obligations, and resources associated with social position (e.g., Haverig and Roberts 2011; McLeod and Burrows 2014; Snee 2014b).

Section 5.2 explores differences in the salience, prevalence, timing, and perceived riskiness of experiences of work and travel overseas for students and graduates in Britain and Japan. Sections 5.3 and 5.4 examine more specifically how aspirations for overseas experience are influenced by economic and socio-cultural context and social position respectively. The unique contribution of the chapter is in the utilisation of an explicitly cross-national comparative perspective to explore links between perceptions and aspirations on the one hand and the contexts within which these are embedded on the other. This enables consideration of how different social structural contexts may facilitate options for overseas experience in Britain, while constraining such options in Japan. Of particular significance here are different arrangements for graduate recruitment and employment, standard career routes, and wider societal norms. However, I caution against oversimplified dichotomies, highlighting that different contexts may enable and constrain in different ways, depending on an individual's position within this context.

5.2 The prevalence, timing, and perceived risks of overseas experience in comparative perspective

Recent research investigating transnational youth mobility, as reviewed in Chapter Two, has begun to consider the influence of economic and socio-cultural context in shaping experiences, perceptions, and outcomes in relation to such mobility (e.g., Bagnoli 2009; Brooks, Waters and Pimlott-Wilson 2012; Kawashima 2010). Several writers have explicitly raised questions about how working holidaymaker experiences might differ in "Western" as opposed to Asian contexts (e.g., Kato 2013; Kawashima 2012b; Yoon 2014), although to date such questions have not been explored directly through a cross-national comparative approach. Of particular relevance here are observations by Kato (2013) about how the Japanese working holidaymakers she interviewed in Canada and Australia differed from Canadian working holidaymakers and students (Amit 2010, 2011). Kato (2013: 21) explains that these experiences were associated with an element of risk for the Japanese she spoke to, who tended to be "older and relying on their own savings" and to experience "more drastic cultural gaps". In contrast, the Canadians perceived their experiences to entail "relatively few risks" (Amit 2010: 61).

This section presents data generated through interviews with university students and graduates from Britain and Japan, to explain differences in the framing of experiences of work and travel overseas across contexts. As they navigate transitions from education into employment, participants from both contexts are shown to draw on ideas of what is "*normal*" and "*usual*" for their age and stage of life. However, norms varied significantly with context, reflected in and reinforced by differing institutional (e.g., employment and recruitment) structures. These differing norms are argued to be associated with different perceptions of the risks involved in pursuing experiences of work and travel overseas. Furthermore, differences in context are shown to be associated with differences in the demographic composition of working holidaymaker populations, such that older working holidaymakers are more prevalent in Japan (e.g., Kato 2013; Tan et al. 2009: II, 9-10).

5.2.1 Age-based norms and the gap year as an institutionalised rite of passage in Britain

The gap year or year out is often positioned as a "normal", institutionally recognised part of the life course in Britain, almost a "rite of passage" (Bagnoli 2009; Heath 2007; Simpson 2005b; Snee 2014a), as discussed in

Chapter One. Similar developments have been observed in New Zealand (Haverig 2011), Australia (Lyons et al. 2012), and Canada (Amit 2010, 2011). Furthermore, literature highlights that there are perceived to be few major risks inherent in such activities (Amit 2010: 61; Conradson and Latham 2005: 293; Duncan 2004: 6-7). Researchers sometimes offer important caveats that this is the case only in certain settings and for certain socioeconomic groups (Crawford and Cribb 2012; Haverig and Roberts 2011: 597; Jones 2004; King 2011).

British participants in this research primarily studied for degrees in the social sciences and humanities (6), media and communication (2), or business and marketing (2). Most embarked on a gap year immediately or shortly after graduation, with 8 of 10 aged under 25 at the time of their first eligible period of work and travel overseas. (The focus of this research was upon substantive periods of work and travel overseas while a university student or post-graduation. Thus study abroad programmes, short-term programmes lasting for three months or less, and pre-university gap years were excluded from analysis.) Participants were involved in varying activities while overseas. These included relatively unskilled work in restaurants or tourist accommodation and/or on farms; teaching English in Japan; marketing; a market research internship; and secretarial/administrative work. Three participants subsequently embarked upon further periods of work and travel overseas. (See Appendices B and C for detailed information about participants.)

The framing of the gap year as a normal part of the life course for many young people in Britain is clearly illustrated in an extract from Sarah's account. Sarah studied criminology and philosophy at university and travelled to South Africa to work at a backpacker hostel upon graduating from university aged 22. I asked Sarah when she first heard about things like working holiday visas. Her response highlights many aspects of the institutionalisation of the gap year identified by other researchers (e.g., Bagnoli 2009; Heath 2007; Simpson 2005b). These include the positioning of the gap year as a highly salient option within the UK school setting, the routine provision of opportunities to defer entry to university, and the marketing of various gap year packages by the travel industry. This framing significantly influenced Sarah's desire to travel overseas after graduation:

> Lynley: And when did you hear about working holiday visas to Australia, or that sort of thing generally? Was it something you were always aware of? Or ... ?

Sarah: I think probably when I was doing A levels, and when we were encouraged at school to start thinking about university, and making applications to university, and then you'd have this added question of, "Do you want to apply for deferred entry?", as in, "Do you want to take a gap year?" And then this idea of a gap year, everyone's getting on board with that, because it was very fashionable at the time to take a gap year, you had people going off doing all sorts of weird and wonderful things. So I think that was the time where I really started to engage with this idea and find out all sorts of stuff and I was coming across things like specialist travel agents like STA travel, and the sort of discounts that they do for students, and sort of feeling my way around all this information that they've got out there. And being interested in what other people are up to. And I was a bit of a sponge really, knowing that it wasn't a possibility for me to go on a big adventure for my gap year, because of finances, I was living vicariously through others, and just absorbing all this information, storing it, knowing that, for one day. Later.

Sarah's account highlights that the normalisation of gap years occurs only in some settings, for some socioeconomic groups. She emphasises the institutionalisation of the gap year in Britain, observing "*everyone's getting on board with that*". However, she points out such opportunities are not open to everyone. Sarah spontaneously described herself at the beginning of our interview as coming from a "*very straightforward, white, working-class background*", and being "*the first from my family to go to university*". Her father worked in a factory, and her mother worked in a family business owned by her grandfather. She did, in fact, take a pre-university gap year. However, during this time she "*worked in order to be able to pay for uni*". Sarah explained that her desire to travel to South Africa after graduation was partly motivated by feeling she had been "*cheated out of my gap year*" earlier in her life. Section 5.4 below discusses the uneven distribution of opportunities for overseas experiences. For now, Sarah's account is a reminder that the perceived accessibility and attractiveness of such opportunities varies within contexts with differences in material resources and social background.

Sarah explained that her working holiday was prompted, at least in part, by a feeling that she was not "*ready*" to make decisions about what to do after university and was looking for "*a better idea of what to do next*". She knew that she "*didn't want to take over the family business*", but she was unsure of

what she wanted to do instead. This was a common theme across interviews. Most British participants (6 of 8 recent graduates) explained that their working holidays were prompted to at least some extent by feelings of indecision and uncertainty about career options and trajectories. Significantly, this occurs in a context within which "time out" overseas is positioned as a valid and acceptable response to such feelings (i.e., a socially sanctioned period of exploration). A brochure from the University of Sheffield Careers Service (2012) suggests, for example, that "[s]ome of the most common reasons [for taking time out after graduation] include [....] needing time to decide what you want to do next."

Sometimes these feelings of uncertainty and indecision were compounded by a perception that there were few opportunities available upon graduation. Tom described difficulty finding employment at the time he graduated, aged 21, after studying journalism, as part of his motivation to pursue a working holiday in Canada:

> *Lynley: And looking back to when you were at university, what did you imagine would happen after you'd graduated?*
>
> *Tom: Well, part of the reason why I went on the working visa programme was because at the time, 2009, the economy was sinking very very fast. We were told at that time that the job situation was very tough. Journalism as an industry itself is very competitive anyway, so the addition of the economic situation where there's less jobs made it hard for people to find work. So we were told to get as much experience as we could, but I decided that rather than leave university and ending up doing something that I didn't want to do, because there wasn't enough opportunities, I would spend the year away [....]*

These extracts capture a number of important dimensions of the accounts of many (but not all) participants. There is a sense of uncertainty about what they wanted to do; a sense that they did not like the alternatives that they perceived as available; a sense that they included the option of work and travel overseas within their framing of available opportunities; and a sense that when they weighed up these options, work and travel overseas was considered easier and more "*preferable*" (Gemma, age 21)[14].

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[14] Ages presented in brackets after participant names throughout this chapter represent their ages at the time that they embarked upon experiences of work and travel overseas, not their age at the time of the interview.

More generally, the accounts of British participants highlight the accessibility of the idea of taking a gap year at this stage of the life cycle (especially at times of uncertainty). They suggest a broader societal context within which such activities are seen as "*normal*" and "*fashionable*" (Sarah). Tom, for example, expresses a strong awareness of ideas about what "*people do*", even though he did not personally know anyone who had been overseas on a gap year or working holiday. He elaborated upon his motivations as follows:

> *Lynley: Was there anything else that influenced ...?*
>
> *Tom: [....] also, obviously, the gap year thing. As a year out, thinking, well, I'm not really going to get the chance to do this again. If I come back to the UK and start a career, like a career path, then it's going to be hard to get time off, for example [....]*

The use of the shorthand phrase, "*the gap year thing*", conveys the sense that Tom is referencing a broader societal understanding and assumes I will share this understanding. Sarah and Tom in particular seemed to believe they were varying these norms to an extent, by transposing references to the gap year to their experiences of work and travel overseas post-graduation. This mirrors the extension of such language into the terrain of post-graduation gap years by gap year providers, the media, and university careers centres (e.g., Martin 2007; University of Sheffield Careers Service 2015).

The apparent normalisation of such mobility is consistent with research conducted in New Zealand. A number of Haverig's (2011: 112-114; see also Haverig and Roberts 2011: 597-599) participants positioned the overseas experience ("OE") as a "normal" or "usual" thing that people "just" do, sometimes going so far as to suggest that not doing OE was "abnormal" and required justification. These researchers caution, however, that this normalising has taken place only within certain groups of the population (i.e., the university educated) in New Zealand (Haverig and Roberts 2011: 597).

Given the extent to which experiences of work and travel overseas are normalised in Britain, it is unsurprising that British participants frequently implied that pursuing such opportunities had been relatively "*easy"* (James, age 23). In the words of Emma (age 21), in relation to her decision to teach English in Japan:

[I]t was just almost a natural progression for me. It was almost like a door opened, the idea was planted there, and I think I kind of went to the interview just thinking, "Why the hell not? What have I got to lose?"

These perceptions resonate with other research suggesting that Westerners working abroad perceive there to be few major risks involved in such overseas experiences (Amit 2010: 61; Conradson and Latham 2005: 293; Duncan 2004: 6-7). It is important to note, however, that the normalisation and institutionalisation of forms of mobility such as the gap year does not mean participants are liberated from age-based norms and expectations about their behaviour. Rather, these norms now allow for a *temporary* period of work and travel overseas before "settling down" (Amit 2010, 2011; Haverig 2007: 108-110).

Suzanne, for example, took a gap year before university and worked in restaurants in Australia. Aged 23, after studying geography at university, she embarked upon a working holiday to New Zealand. Upon her return to Britain, however, Suzanne described feeling that she should be progressing through life in a particular way based on her age:

Suzanne: I just felt that at nearly 24 [....] I should be doing something. Do you know what I mean? I feel like in society, you kind of get to your mid-20s, and you should be on your way [....]

Lynley: Yup. And the idea of being on your way ... can you say more about that?

Suzanne: I think it's very much ingrained in our society, but I'm still quite traditional, in that I feel like I should have a job, then I'll get married, then I'll have babies. And I still ... I feel like getting the job is the most important thing.

Participants who travelled later in their 20s (e.g., Fiona, Debbie, Sarah) described an awareness that pursuing such opportunities could be more difficult as one established relationships and became more "*settled*". Fiona, for example, left a position with a work and travel company aged 25 (after graduating with a degree in business) to work for a hotel in a Canadian ski resort. She returned to the UK to work for her previous employer, and later contemplated another working holiday in New Zealand:

> *So that was a thought of mine, but then my age ... I am getting a little older, and my partner had moved down south [....] I guess growing up and settling and having roots was the whole thing. So "getting it out of your system" is I guess implying that before it gets too late ... because the older you get the more responsibilities you've got, and you can't just easily pick up and go.*

These ideas are consistent with arguments that transformations in social life in the late twentieth century have not brought about a "freeing" of agency (Irwin 2005: 177-183). Irwin argues that we need instead to better locate and contextualise aspirations, choices, and behaviours. There may be a growing period of the young adult life cycle in the UK context within which activities such as work and travel overseas are not only socially sanctioned but sometimes even actively encouraged (e.g., Bagnoli 2009). Yet these aspirations are nevertheless embedded within and shaped by specific social structures, and exploring aspirations in context serves to shine a lens onto these often invisible structures. The next section of this chapter builds upon this analysis by exploring contextual factors influencing the differing salience, prevalence, timing, and perceived riskiness of experiences of work and travel overseas in Japan.

5.2.2 Age-based norms of linear progression in Japan

Gap years such as those described in the previous section - and especially pre-university gap years - are uncommon in Japan (Kobayashi 2007; Yoda 2010). Indeed, negative consequences may instead be associated with deviating from age-based expectations of linear career progression in the context of Japanese labour market processes and practices (Kawashima 2010: 280-282; Maksay 2007: 40-41). Of particular significance, as outlined in Chapter Three, is the periodical blanket recruitment of graduates. This involves new graduates being recruited for entry-level positions once a year as a cohort, in accordance with a fixed and lengthy recruitment schedule (e.g., see Firkola 2011: 64-65). There are fewer opportunities to change companies in mid-career in Japan - and doing so appears more costly - because of the combination of periodical blanket recruitment, company-specific on-the-job training for regular employees, and seniority-based remuneration systems (Brinton 1993: as cited in Kawashima 2012: 58; Komikawa 2011: 121-122; Kosugi 2014; Mühlau 2007: 168).

Japanese participants studied for a range of degrees, predominantly in the social sciences and humanities (9), but also education (2), economics (2), and various other disciplines. In contrast to their British counterparts, most

Japanese participants pursued experiences of work and travel overseas after having graduated university and worked for a number of years. Most (13 of 18) were aged over 25 at the time of their first eligible period of work and travel overseas. The suggestion that these differences in the demographic characteristics of participants were merely an artefact of sampling is considered in the next section of the chapter. It argues instead that these differences are consistent with known differences in the composition of working holidaymaker populations in each context.

Prior to their working holidays, eight Japanese participants worked in lower managerial, administrative, and professional positions (e.g., web design, sales, teaching), based roughly on National Statistics Socio-Economic Classification (NS-SEC; Rose, Pevalin and O'Reilly 2005). Four worked in intermediate positions (e.g., administrative/secretarial), and two in lower supervisory and technical positions (e.g., chef). The remaining four were students. Participants were involved in varying activities overseas, including paid work, volunteering, language study, and travel. Some drew on previous experience to obtain skilled employment overseas (e.g., accounting, web design, chef); others volunteered as Japanese language teaching assistants. The majority worked as kitchen hands, waiters, and/or farm hands. Six subsequently embarked upon further periods of work and travel overseas. (See Appendices B and C for detailed information about participants.)

In contrast with the British working holidaymakers I interviewed, Japanese participants described assuming they would progress from high school into university and then from university into employment. In explaining their focus on finding a job at this time, they referenced (like British participants) what people "*normally*" do (Kazuko, age 29), what they had "been told [....] by my parents" (Makoto, age 25), or what "*other friends do*" (Yoshie, age 25). However, they described quite different patterns of behaviour. Makoto, for example, was born and grew up in a small city in northern Japan. He studied agriculture at a local junior college, transferring to a university away from his hometown for his third and fourth years of study. Makoto commenced a regular position in fish wholesale upon graduation, quitting this job after two years to undertake a working holiday to Australia aged 25. When asked how he imagined his life would unfold after graduation, Makoto described anticipating that he would get a job straight away and that this would be a job for life:

> Lynley: When you look back on your time at university, what did you imagine would happen after you graduated?

> Makoto: After I had graduated, well, I would get a job. Because I'm a pretty normal person, I thought I'd work for one company, and continue like that for 40 or 50 years, until I reached retirement age. I'd been told so by my parents, and I thought that I too would probably live that sort of a life.

Kazuko studied Japanese culture and Japanese studies at a women's college in Tokyo. She experienced difficulties finding employment in her final year of university but eventually found a regular position in retail a few months after graduation. She subsequently quit this job due to a difficult relationship with her boss and worked as a *shokutakuin* (i.e., in a non-regular part-time position) for a city council. She travelled to Australia on a working holiday visa at the age of 29. Looking back upon her days as a university student, Kazuko emphasised that she approached job hunting differently from many of her peers. She was not greatly troubled by her inability to find a position to start immediately upon graduation. Yet even to a relative nonconformist like Kazuko, the possibility of travelling abroad after graduation was not readily accessible:

> *It depends on people, but after high school and after uni, so normally Japanese people go work, go uni, straight away. Because our culture like that. But I think another culture, German, and other European people, going away, studying or travelling. But I didn't know this style so I didn't think about that. But now I know. I need this style. So if I were more young, I probably do like that.*

It is noteworthy that a number of Japanese participants recalling this stage of their lives described feelings of indecision and uncertainty about the future and concerns about the difficulty of finding employment similar to those expressed by British participants. Michiko, for example, studied comparative politics and graduated from a university in western Japan in 2004. She describes feeling a lack of clarity about the future at this time, referencing the so-called "employment ice age", a period when finding jobs was particularly difficult:

> Lynley: When you look back on your time at university, what did you imagine would happen after you graduated?

> Michiko: Mmmm. It was very *unclear*. Right when I graduated from university was the employment ice age, and finding jobs had become very difficult [....]

Katsuo, who studied linguistics at university, expressed similar concerns in advance of his own graduation:

> When we graduated university, in 2010, 2011, the economy was bad, so it was a time when finding employment was difficult. And I knew that it would be difficult to find employment, so I didn't want to search for a job.

The cross-national comparative framing of this study is of particular value because it allows for explicit comparison of the perceptions, feelings, and aspirations participants reported experiencing at similar times in their lives. Arguably, because of institutional arrangements and expectations presuming a linear progression from university into employment, such feelings were inflected and acted upon differently in the Japanese context. The option of travelling overseas immediately after graduation appeared more accessible to British than Japanese participants, while a sense of urgency to find work was more prevalent in the accounts of Japanese participants. In Katsuo's case, he jokingly suggested to his employer at his part-time job at a cram school that he continue on after graduation. He was offered a position there as a regular employee. Michiko described giving up on her preference to be employed as a regular employee and accepting what was initially a non-regular position (*arubaito* or "part-time") in web design, although she was later made a regular employee.

The broader literature exploring youth transitions to employment highlights that uncertainty about the future, lack of readiness to make choices, and fear of the long-term consequences of making the wrong choice are not uncommon amongst young people in both Europe (e.g., Du Bois-Reymond 1998; Mary 2014) and Japan (e.g., Honda 2010: 49-50; Kagawa 2010; Komikawa 2011: 181-186; 2012b: 44). The findings of this research resonate, however, with arguments expressed by Bagnoli (2009), that feelings of indecision and uncertainty may be expressed differently in different contexts.

It is perhaps not surprising, given the context reviewed above, that the Japanese students and graduates participating in this research expressed considerable concern about the consequences of delaying entry to the labour market or quitting a job to travel overseas. Kyoko was the youngest participant in this research and travelled to Australia on a working holiday visa aged 21, while on a leave of absence from university. Kyoko had been studying physical education, intending to become a teacher. However, she was bored and unhappy at university. This impacted her health, prompting

her leave of absence. Kyoko suggested that just being perceived as someone who might quit a job (as a result of having taken a gap year) could potentially restrict subsequent career opportunities:

> I think that people like those who take gap years, the paths they [can] take may become limited.

At the other end of the age spectrum, Ayumu travelled to the UK on a working holiday visa aged 30. Ayumu dropped out of high school and subsequently qualified for university entry through an alternate route. He majored in economics and worked in tax accounting support for four years after graduation. Ayumu explained that deviating from age-based expectations of career progression and/or quitting a job to travel overseas in Japan involved "*a lot of risks*":

> In a Japanese company, I feel that if you're going off on a working holiday, it won't be very advantageous when you're looking for a job. The best thing to do is to enter a company as a new graduate immediately after graduation, without anything like a gap year, and to work for that company without making any gaps in your resume. If you deviate from this just once, it's like it's very difficult to return to where you were. I think that's probably the system. In Japan. Uniquely. I thought that quitting my job and going on a working holiday, at the age of 30, was something akin to social suicide.

Other participants expressed similar perceptions of the riskiness of activities such as gap years and working holidays. Nariko (age 29) studied food science and nutrition at university and left her first job after a few months because of the long hours involved. After a short period working in retail, she obtained a position in quality control, where she worked for four years. Nariko travelled abroad to study English and work in Australia, and extended her stay on a working holiday visa. She described her decision to quit her job to travel overseas as equivalent to "throwing out my career". One might argue that Japanese participants like Nariko tended to perceive the risks differently because they tended to be older and thus to have invested more in their careers at the time of their working holidays. However, as shown above, Kyoko (age 21) shared these concerns. Additionally, age was not necessarily related to investment in careers. Ayumu (age 30), for example, described quitting his job as "*social suicide*", but he also said that it "wasn't much of a career anyway".

Furthermore, older British participants did not share this perception of risk to the same degree. British working holidaymakers acknowledged, to an extent, that these forms of mobility could be risky (see also Amit 2011: 84). Sarah explained that before embarking upon her third working holiday aged 28, she was somewhat concerned that potential employers would perceive her as "*flighty*" and "*unreliable*" because of the time she had spent "*moving around"*. At the same time, however, she described hoping that she would instead be perceived as "*worldly*", "*flexible*", and "*adaptable*". Suzanne (age 23) similarly observed that *"it can be a slight blip on the old CV"*. She worried, to an extent, that prospective employers might doubt her seriousness. Both, however, simultaneously expressed confidence in their ability to convince an employer of the value of their experiences that Japanese participants did not generally share. Overall, such risks tended to be cited less frequently by British participants and described in language that was much less extreme.

This section thus argues that country contexts influence the prevalence, timing, and perceived riskiness of student and graduate experiences of work and travel overseas in Britain and Japan. While the gap year has been institutionalised for some in Britain as almost a rite of passage, Japanese participants positioned such activities as atypical and risky, given institutional arrangements such as periodical blanket recruitment of new graduates, expectations of long-term employment, and concerns about the consequences of deviating from age-based norms of linear progression. The next section illustrates how context shapes the demographic composition of populations pursuing opportunities to work and travel overseas in ways that must be taken into account when investigating their aspirations, experiences, and outcomes.

5.2.3 Age differences in working holidaymaker and related populations

Age-based norms described in the previous sections are likely to contribute to shaping variation in the age distributions of working holidaymaker populations that has been observed across contexts. Researchers such as Haverig (2011: 105) have noted the preponderance of young Britons embarking upon gap years overseas (e.g., in contrast with New Zealanders undertaking periods of OE, who may be older). Simpson (2005b) observes that people participating in volunteer tourism programmes in the USA, Canada, and Australia tend to be doing so at different stages in the life course than British participants undertaking these as part of their gap year.

Others comment that working holidaymakers from Japan tend to be older, with a majority aged 25 and above (Kato 2013; Tan et al. 2009: II, 9-10).

Interviews with university careers advisers conducted as part of this research support arguments made in the previous section that travelling and working overseas immediately after graduation was relatively common in Britain and very infrequent in Japan (see Appendix D for detailed information about careers advisers participating in this research). Susan, for example, indicated that 20-25% of students she saw in one-on-one drop-in advice sessions or guidance interviews were considering taking time out overseas, around 12-15 students a month. Overall, five of six careers advisers interviewed in the UK indicated that this was something that they saw relatively frequently. In contrast, Japanese careers advisers typically indicated that they had little or no experience with students or graduates who were considering or had taken opportunities to work overseas. (All did, however, describe consultations with students who were contemplating or had undertaken study abroad programmes.)

Mr. Murakami, a careers adviser at a private university in Tokyo, suggested that Japanese students "don't really have any familiarity or affinity with the idea of taking detours [in life] [....] like the gap year or working holiday". He reported that he had "never heard a Japanese student utter the words gap year or working holiday" and observed that "there are more students who don't know about these things". Mr. Tanaka, a careers adviser at another Tokyo university, indicated that figures about students or graduates who undertook working holidays overseas were not something he or the university could grasp. He said this was because in Japan, it was more common for people to graduate and find a job, and then quit their jobs to go. The burden on many Japanese families to privately finance their children's university education, as explained in Chapter Three, was cited as a partial explanation for these trends by Mr. Akiyama, the head of the research division within a company managing an information website for graduates seeking employment.

There were some exceptions. Students who had taken a leave of absence from university to undertake working holidays had been encountered by Ms. Kobayashi and Ms. Mino, who worked at a national university in central Japan, and Mr. Higuchi, who worked at a private university in Tokyo. This might be seen as an indicator of a changing climate. However, these careers advisers characterised such encounters as rare, indicating that this referred to only "a few" students.

Consistent with Mr. Tanaka's observations, as discussed earlier in this chapter, and summarised in Appendices B and C, most Japanese participants travelled abroad after initially finding employment and working for a period of time, while most British participants travelled abroad shortly after graduation. Exceptions amongst Japanese participants include two individuals who travelled overseas while on a leave of absence from university and two individuals who travelled overseas after securing employment and before their start date. Both of these alternatives allow participants to experience opportunities to work and travel overseas without jeopardising their chances to secure employment as a new graduate, thus reinforcing arguments made in this chapter. I argue that these differences do not represent an artefact of sampling. Rather, they are differences that one might anticipate finding in the population of working holidaymakers from each context. This is certainly consistent with existing empirical literature and career adviser observations presented here.

The proportion of Japanese participants who had deviated from linear career trajectories prior to their working holiday is noteworthy. In total, I interviewed five *rōnin* (i.e., individuals who delayed entry to university for at least one year while studying to resit entrance examinations). One further interviewee, Ayumu, had dropped out of high school and entered university through an alternative route. Such individuals often described themselves as "*not typical Japanese*" (Ayumu), having departed from what was expected and "suitable" (Kyoko). It is interesting to speculate that perhaps these individuals were more prepared to deviate from age-based norms and undertake working holidays because they had in fact already deviated from these norms. Such non-linear biographies might, in fact, be more prevalent in working holidaymaker populations.

The next section of this chapter explores participant motivations for pursuing experiences of work and travel overseas.

5.3 Aspirations for overseas experience in comparative perspective

As introduced in Chapter Two, previous research has identified a diverse range of possible motivations for temporary forms of transnational youth mobility. This section describes the motivations of university students and graduates from Britain and Japan for pursuing experiences of work and travel overseas. Across country contexts, a high level of agency is asserted throughout participant accounts, consistent with much existing research

(e.g., Clarke 2004a; Frändberg 2015; Kawashima 2010). Participants, regardless of context, positioned themselves as actively making choices and decisions in pursuit of their preferences and desires. This is consistent with Dawson's (2012: 314) characterisation - drawing on Mills (1940: 906-907) - of "disembedded individualization" as "the common vocabulary of motives for late modern society".

Yoon (2014: 589) argues that research with Western working holidaymaker populations emphasises agency, while there is a need to interpret the experiences of working holidaymakers from Asian contexts in relation to structural constraints. I suggest in response that the structural context may be less visible (i.e., easier to overlook) in research conducted in Britain, because it often serves to facilitate or enable the temporary mobility that is the focus of such research (at least for individuals participating in such activities). In contrast, the structural context may appear more salient in research conducted in Japan, as participants more frequently report seeking escape from structural constraints (e.g., harsh working conditions).

The discussion that follows is guided by Kawashima's (2012b: 100, 117-118) suggestion that working holidaymakers from "Western" contexts may be pursing "youthful, temporary escape from their ordinary lives". In contrast, Japanese working holidaymakers, prompted by constraints and discontent relating to their status in the labour market, may be more "open to [....] the possibility that their experiences abroad might take them in a completely new direction". The explicitly cross-national comparative design of this research allows for more rigorous exploration of this suggestion, and results both support and extend this hypothesis. In what follows, building on the work of Kawashima (2012b), participant aspirations are grouped into two broad categories, as seeking either *temporary escape* on the one hand, or *to transform their lives* on the other. Mark and Nariko are excluded from these groupings, as the motivations of both were better characterised as *career development*. These are, of course, rudimentary categories, and mask considerable diversity within each group. Neither pattern is claimed to be exclusive to its context. Rather, through detailed analysis of participant accounts of their motivations, further light is shed on the context of graduate employment in Britain and Japan. Analysis focuses particularly on how this context structures the choices available to individuals of different social positions at different life stages.

5.3.1 In search of "youthful, temporary escapes": A dominant pattern amongst British working holidaymakers

The idea that periods of work and travel overseas might constitute "youthful, temporary escapes" for Western populations is not unique to Kawashima (2012b: 117-118). Waters, Brooks and Pimlott-Wilson (2011) use the language of "youthful escapes" to describe the experiences of young Britons pursuing opportunities to study abroad. Many construe such opportunities as *temporary* periods of work and travel overseas before "settling down" (Amit 2010, 2011; Haverig 2007: 108-110). There is often an expectation that young people pursuing these opportunities will return and continue from where they left off (Amit 2010: 65). In the context of this literature, it is unsurprising that 9 of 10 British participants (all but Mark) fell within this grouping.

This section argues that for the predominantly younger British participants in this research, the structural context conferred a measure of "freedom to" pursue these youthful, temporary escapes, which were legitimated and positioned as normal or usual. The accounts of these participants had several distinguishing characteristics. Although the pursuit of fun and interesting experiences was a commonly articulated motivation across groupings, participants within this grouping could frequently be distinguished because they positioned this as a relatively simple and straightforward motivation. They described "just" wanting to see different places and experience life abroad. Sarah, for example, suggested that her third working holiday to Australia aged 28 was prompted partly by *"the very straightforward motivation of liking going on holiday"*. James, who travelled to Japan to teach English aged 23, described his motivation as "*just sort of seeing as much as possible*" and "*having a different experience abroad".* He emphasised there was "*no grand scheme beyond that, I just wanted to experience Japan*". Gemma, his partner, who was aged 21 when they departed for Japan, was similarly motivated by a desire to "*get away*" and "*just do something different*". The pursuit of fun and interesting experiences is highlighted as a common element of motivation in much previous research exploring transnational youth mobility (e.g., Clarke 2004c: 120-124; Collins 2013; Kawashima 2010; Waters, Brooks and Pimlott-Wilson 2011). Not infrequently, this may be prompted by times of personal uncertainty, dissatisfaction, or transition (e.g., Collins 2013; Desforges 2000; Rice 2010; Riley 1988).

Furthermore, although participants sometimes anticipated or sought development in certain ways as a consequence of their experiences, they were not seeking radical change or transformation. Rarely were aspirations to develop skills or abilities alone a strong motivating factor. In fact, participants predominantly expected to continue where they left off upon their return. They anticipated resuming lives similar to those they had prior to the working holiday and/or making decisions that had been postponed. Sophie explained that "*it crossed my mind that it would broaden my horizons a bit, and stuff like that*" but emphasised that she "*just wanted to see the places*". Sophie differed from other participants in that she had already secured a graduate position before embarking upon her working holiday to Australia aged 21. Additionally, she predominantly spent her time abroad travelling, with only negligible work experience. Nevertheless, similar ideas were expressed by other participants. Fiona described her working holiday to Canada aged 25 as attractive precisely because it was a "*break from reality*" and a "*bit of a bubble*". When I asked her if she was hoping to get anything out of this, she replied that it "*wasn't so much of a skill thing*" but "*just the experience of travelling*".

As illustrated in this excerpt from my interview with Fiona, the development of specific skills and abilities was frequently of secondary importance. Consistent with existing literature, participants alluded to ways they hoped they would develop as a result of their experiences (e.g., Frändberg 2015; Kawashima 2010; Snee 2014b). Frequently referenced in this context were personality traits such as independence. Consistent with the work of Snee (2014b), however, and contrary to theories of individualisation and reflexive modernisation, participants rarely appeared to embark upon such experiences reflexively and strategically in order to gain these particular benefits. Rather, their narratives tend to "stick to standard scripts" and rely on "collective ideas of what gap years should be about" (Snee 2014b: 843, 851). This excerpt from my interview with Tom, for example, shows the consistency between the benefits Tom anticipated gaining from his experience and those depicted in the literature and in the established scripts and collective ideas described by Snee (2014b):

> *Lynley: Was there anything in particular that you wanted to get out of the experience, before you went?*

Tom: I think the independence thing, I mean, as soon as you arrive there and you're in a hostel, it's sort of like, well, go and do whatever you want now, you can do anything [....] and also the fact, maybe, that it was short term. I always knew I was going to come back. So there wasn't particularly any pressure there. I could have come home at any time, essentially. I wasn't tied into anything. But I think the phrase working holiday is a good summary of it. Rather than working visa. Because, they market it as, yeah, you can do a bit of work, but there's a big part of it of having fun on a holiday, and experiencing different people, different sort of cultures, things like that. So that was a big thing as well, the fact that it was going to be an experience, socially, and personally, rather than just the work aspect of it.

These ideas resonate with the findings of Waters, Brooks and Pimlott-Wilson (2011: 455) about Britons who studied abroad, and their conclusion that participant accounts emphasised "fun, enjoyment and the pursuit of happiness" rather than "overt strategising around educational decision making". O'Reilly (2005: 160-161) points out that the context within which references to personal development are made is important in their interpretation. She suggests references to personal development may be used strategically by those wishing to embark on longer periods of travel in attempts to justify these plans to others, whether or not this motivated the journey in the first place (see also O'Reilly 2006: 1004).

It is worth noting the contrast between these findings and the way overseas experience is positioned in public discourses, and particularly recent marketing materials produced by working holiday providers. With few exceptions, British participants did not articulate their aspirations in the language of CV building found in provider advertisements. Their accounts were inconsistent with pronouncements that such opportunities would "give your CV something to shout about", "hoist you high above the same-old-same-old crowd", and "help you to attract job offers for years to come" (STA Travel 2015a, 2015b). This is, in fact, consistent with much existing literature. Research by Inkson and Myers (2003) suggests New Zealanders travelling abroad tended to report social and cultural motivations rather than ambitions for career development per se, although such development might occur serendipitously. Amit's (2010: 60-61) research suggests Canadians participating in working holidays and/or university exchanges abroad were primarily motivated by a desire for "'time out' from [....] the usual routines and pathways of school and career". In the words of a Canadian who had studied

abroad, Donald: "*[I]t just seemed like something to do, almost*" (Amit 2010: 60). Ideas that overseas experiences could be advantageous to their subsequent career development were emphasised less frequently (see also Frändberg 2015: 562). Amit (2010: 60) further observes the "wry" admissions of organisers of overseas sojourns that the view that such overseas experiences are "an integral aspect of the training of modern young adults [....] is not widely shared among the intended student and youth clientele."

Tom's account further emphasises the "*short-term*" nature of his experience, and the absence of any "*pressure*" perceived by participants within this grouping. The accounts of these British working holidaymakers, therefore, highlight how they perceived themselves as able to "take time out" to work and travel overseas for a period of time after graduation and return to where they were without fear of significant negative consequences. In contrast, as outlined in the previous section of the chapter, Japanese students and graduates were less likely to pursue experiences of work and travel overseas in response to feelings of uncertainty about career trajectories immediately after graduation. Participants linked this to expectations of a linear progression from university into employment and concerns about the consequences of deviating from such norms.

Only a minority of Japanese participants (5 of 18) could be categorised as pursuing youthful, temporary escapes with the expectation that they would simply resume their lives as before upon their return. The fact that they did so from distinctive circumstances only serves to highlight the core arguments of this section about the significance of economic and socio-cultural context and social position in shaping aspirations. Four of these five participants embarked on the working holiday from a position of relative security. One took a leave of absence from university in order to undertake a working holiday (Michio, age 22); two secured a graduate position prior to their departure and delayed their start date (Sakiko, age 25; Yukiko, age 24). For these participants, it was not surprising that the working holiday was perceived as a temporary escape, given that they already knew what they would do upon their return. In these circumstances, Sakiko (age 25) could describe her working holiday as like "<u>a summer holiday, or a winter holiday [....] a bit of a breather, like I wanted to enjoy a different life for just one year</u>". Kano (male, age 23) had trained as a chef while studying at university, wanted eventually to open his own restaurant or bar, and appeared relatively confident of his ability to secure a job with these skills upon his return.

In contrast, Emiko (age 28) left a non-regular secretarial/administrative position (as a *haken shain* or dispatch worker) to pursue a working holiday in Australia. She was motivated in part by a desire to perform (music) live overseas. She had not obtained regular employment upon graduation, because she had hoped to pursue a career as a musician. Already located in a relatively marginal (i.e., more insecure) position, she assumed that she would simply find some sort of employment upon her return. Emiko's gender also appears significant here. Women tend to be over-represented in Japanese working holidaymaker populations (Kato 2013: 21; Kawashima 2012b: 114-115; Tan et al. 2009: 10). Indeed, researchers who have explored the gendered experiences of Japanese working holidaymakers have suggested that women may paradoxically be more free to pursue such opportunities because of their more marginal status in Japan (Kato 2010: 55-56; Kawashima 2010: 281-282; Maksay 2007: 40-41) - as reviewed in Chapter Three. This is discussed further in Chapter Seven.

Both social context and social position therefore need to be considered in understanding aspirations for work and travel overseas. It is significant that none of the Japanese individuals in this group left a career position to embark upon their working holiday or embarked upon the working holiday straight after graduation without first securing employment. Such temporary escapes were more easily accessible by some than others, given the constraints around deviating from idealised norms of linear progression in Japan described earlier in this chapter.

5.3.2 Seeking to transform one's life: A dominant pattern amongst Japanese working holidaymakers

Research with Japanese working holidaymakers highlights that they often sought to "change what they considered their unsatisfactory situation, largely in order to seek a more desirable life course" (Kawashima 2010: 271). Similar accounts can be found in research conducted by Kato (2013: 25-26), who describes her participants as seeking a "radical break" and a "fresh start". Others have highlighted escaping a "rigid" society as a motivation for the transnational mobility of Japanese populations (Ashton 2006; Ono 2009). I argue, following Kawashima (2010: 280), that contextualising the aspirations and experiences of Japanese participants highlights the difficulties experienced by those who deviate from age-based norms of linear progression in the context of contemporary Japanese recruitment and employment practices.

The motivations of 12 of 18 Japanese participants in this research related to dissatisfaction with their current circumstances (frequently working conditions) and the desire for transformation of these circumstances and their lives more broadly. Michiko studied comparative politics at university, and worked in web design for eight years after graduation. She embarked upon a working holiday to London aged 30, where she worked in web design for a Japanese company. Michiko's account illustrates a number of common themes in these interviews, representative of this broader pattern of motivations. She is "*tired*" of working long hours (50-55 hours a week), is actively seeking ideas about "<u>different ways of working and different lifestyles</u>", and aspires "*to change my life*":

> *Lynley: So tell me about your working holiday. It was 2012?*
>
> *Michiko: Yeah. 2012 [....] Actually, before 2012 I was almost forgetting about my ex-dream. Like, I want to go to foreign country, and because I was really busy and working, I was almost forgetting that dream. But then I realised working holiday is only until 30 years old, then I realised, oh, my limit is coming soon, and maybe I have to do that now because I really wanted to change my life. You know, I was really tired of working and then ... I don't know. I thought ... maybe now is the time to dream come true* [....] <u>I thought, why don't I try working in England. And somehow, I thought maybe I could find different ways of working and different lifestyles.</u>

Participants described employment conditions in Japan as stressful, pressured, and psychologically difficult. Katsuo (age 25), who taught at a cram school, and Haruko (age 27), a kindergarten teacher, cited heavy responsibility as a particular difficulty of their jobs. Manami (age 29), who worked in a travel company, described pressure to meet difficult sales targets as a source of stress. Hierarchical structures and interpersonal relationships at work were also cited as sources of dissatisfaction (e.g., Ayumu, Maki, Yoshie, Makoto, Kazuko). One woman (Akiko, age 26) explicitly described restrictive gender norms - and a search for alternative "*role models*" - as one reason she travelled abroad. Akiko differed from other participants in that she quit her job in order to complete a master's qualification in England and embarked upon a working holiday in Germany after completing her studies. She travelled to Germany primarily to spend time with her boyfriend (who was completing his own master's there).

Data from comparative studies reviewed in Chapter Three places these problems of overwork and dissatisfaction within a broader context. For

example, 28.1% of Japanese workers (cf. 15.5% of UK workers) are reported to work over 50 hours a week (Messenger 2004: 42). Data from the Employment Status Survey indicates that between 15-20% of male regular employees in their 20s and 30s in Japan work at least 60 hours a week (Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications 2012). Furthermore, data from the CHEERS Project (Careers after Higher Education - a European Research Study) indicates that a greater proportion of Japanese graduates (28%) than British graduates (18%) were dissatisfied with their current employment, five years after graduation (Schomburg and Teichler 2006: 111).

Working hours were the most frequent source of dissatisfaction described by Japanese participants. They often worked long hours, including evenings and weekends, and found it hard to take holidays. Eleven reported working an average of over 50 hours a week, and some up to 70 hours, in their first jobs after graduation. Their descriptions implied that often there was little room in their lives for much other than work. Yoshie explained that she and her husband went on a working holiday to Australia after he quit his job due to stress and overwork, which had led some of his colleagues to commit suicide. She was 29 at the time and this was her second period of work and travel in Australia. Ayumu (age 30) also explicitly connected working conditions, overwork, and unpaid overtime to high rates of suicide in Japan, explaining:

> When I worked every day from the morning to the middle of the night, and used my days off just to ease that fatigue, and had no energy to do anything fun, I didn't know what I was living for.

Ultimately he concluded "*I have to quit my job, for my life or something*". Ayumu's account suggests some of these working holidaymakers felt as if they simply had no choice but to quit their jobs due to stressful conditions and the impact this was having on their physical and mental health. In many cases, as suggested by Michiko above, the upper age limit of 30 for working holiday visa eligibility prompted participants to leave their jobs at this particular time. In some cases, participants expressed a desire to gain permanent residence overseas (e.g., Makoto, age 25; Maki, age 26). Akiko (age 26) "*never imagined*" she would come back to Japan, saying "*if I could live [in the UK] forever, that would be the best*".

Japanese participants saw quitting jobs to embark upon a working holiday as atypical or unusual. This, by its very nature, constituted a radical change in direction. The sense of urgency with which Kawashima (2012b: 117-118)

described her participants as speaking of their desire for reinvention - resonating with the accounts of participants in this research - appears related to the intensity of their dissatisfaction. Labour market processes and practices in Japan tended to preclude the possibility of this being just a "temporary interlude". Ayumu (age 30) described his perceptions as follows:

> [I]t's like it's very difficult to return to where you were. I think that's probably the system.

Participants in this grouping varied in the extent to which they described wishing to develop particular skills in order to facilitate such reinvention. Some specifically sought to improve their English language skills in the hopes that this would help them when they looked for work (e.g., Makoto, Kazuko). Others were more interested in developing these skills so that travel would be more enjoyable and/or they could better understand English songs and TV programmes (e.g., Haruko, Maki). Manami (age 29) trained as a barista while overseas and wanted to pursue a career in coffee upon her return. Michiko (age 30) hoped to gain experience in web design in a British company in London. Seeing other ways of doing things and other possibilities appeared equally important to - and valued by - many participants, as described in Michiko's quote above.

Within existing literature, dissatisfaction with employment and the desire for career change have been identified as motivations for some long-term (predominantly Western) travellers (Riley 1988: 317) and Canadian working holidaymakers (Amit 2011). However, the circumstances of these individuals do not appear to parallel those of Japanese participants. Amit (2011: 84-87), for example, describes participants leaving "good" jobs for what they saw as "temporary" "interludes" overseas and assuming that they would easily be able to find another job upon their return. Given the risks Japanese participants associated with changing jobs, it is perhaps unsurprising that they were often motivated by intense dissatisfaction that had built up over a considerable period of time. The prevalence and consistency of these accounts of dissatisfaction with employment appears highly significant. In contrast, none of the British participants described comparable levels of dissatisfaction.

Sarah's description of the circumstances that lead to her embarking upon her third working holiday aged 28 constitutes the closest parallel to these Japanese accounts amongst British participants. She describes this as having been prompted by having to take a job that she "*hated*" due to the economic climate in early 2009:

> *Sarah: [A]nd again, it's not a job that I would normally accept, given other options, but I didn't have any other options.*
>
> *Lynley: Okay. And how long did you work there for?*
>
> *Sarah: Only another year. I hated it. I didn't ... immediately upon accepting the permanent position, I started saving to go to Australia. I knew that this wasn't for me [....]*

Like the Japanese working holidaymakers described above, Sarah considered staying abroad after her working holiday. Sarah's story differs from the accounts of the Japanese working holidaymakers described in this section, in part because she is willing to consider overseas options "*immediately*". Having embarked upon two previous working holidays, she did not see this as a radical solution, nor was she necessarily seeking transformation. Neither can she, however, be characterised as seeking merely a "temporary interlude" and assuming that she will be able to return to where she left off. In this and her openness to the possibility that this opportunity might transform her life (i.e., that she might stay abroad), she shares a number of commonalities with the Japanese working holidaymakers in this grouping.

Comparative analysis of the motivations of British and Japanese working holidaymakers thus suggests that - consistent with differences hypothesised by Kawashima (2012b: 100, 117-118) - a dominant pattern amongst British working holidaymakers was a desire for *temporary escape*, whereas a desire to *transform their lives* was a dominant pattern amongst Japanese working holidaymakers. Analysis further suggests, however, that different contexts may enable and constrain in different ways, depending on an individual's position within this context. Furthermore, Sarah's account highlights the need to consider socioeconomic constraints as an influence on motivations across contexts, consistent with Collins (2013) and Kennedy (2009). It serves as a reminder to be alert to diversity not only across country contexts but also within each setting. This theme is further developed in the discussion of social position that follows.

5.4　Social position and the uneven distribution of aspirations for overseas experience

Arnett (2007: 132) claims that opportunities to engage in self-focused activities such as travel in emerging adulthood are now "available to a much broader range of young people". The concept of "emerging adulthood" and

this emphasis on individual choice, however, has been critiqued by a number of scholars. These include Côté and Bynner (2008), who emphasise the importance of social and economic conditions that continue to shape people's expectations and trajectories. This section of the chapter explores how social position (i.e., economic, social, and cultural resources associated with class background) influences the distribution of aspirations for overseas experience, in terms of their accessibility and the extent to which they are perceived as possibilities.

Graduates in a financial position to pursue opportunities to work and/or travel abroad and meet the necessary visa conditions are undeniably advantaged over those who are not in such a position (Clarke 2004c: 134). Many researchers allude to the "middling" or "middle-class" status of participants, offering evidence of varying quality in support of this, including relatively high levels of education, capacity to draw upon parental resources, and/or the nature of the jobs they were doing before embarking upon their travels (e.g., Amit 2011: 87; Clarke 2004b: 196, 200-201, 222; Haverig 2011: 113-114; Rice 2010: 33). Kato (2013: 25) characterises Japanese participants in her own research - as well as those interviewed by Kawashima (2010) - as having "decent education", although "non-elite". Although there was variation in self-reported class background amongst those participating in this research (as summarised in Appendices B and C), they nevertheless represent a comparatively privileged group of young people, relative to those unable to access such experiences. The careers advisers participating in this research offered a broader perspective that reinforces observations about the relatively advantaged position of British participants in this research, in particular.

British careers advisers clearly perceived opportunities to work and/or travel overseas to be pursued more frequently by students from more advantaged backgrounds. In five of six interviews with careers advisers in Britain, social class was spontaneously and explicitly mentioned as a concern. Participants perceived gap years to be more prevalent amongst more advantaged students and at universities with higher proportions of such students. David, for example, had worked at both a Russell Group university and a newer university. He said that at the latter, "*not one student ever talked to me about a gap year*". William, who worked for a new university, expressed concerns that overseas gap years were an "*equality issue*". They are "*great for students' employability*", "*no doubt*". However, they can cost a lot, and are

not accessible to everyone. Liz, who worked at the same university, elaborated:

> *It helps if students have financial backing from parents, middle class or above students may have money and contacts abroad, that working class students do not have. Making access harder.*

Careers advisers highlighted the significance of family orientation to travel and having social contacts who had done similar things in shaping aspirations for overseas experience. Daniel, for example, described some groups of students and families where gap year travel and/or working overseas is seen as "*just part of what you do*". He suggested "*their parental background is perhaps a little bit more supportive, understanding of that, as something of value, perhaps because their parents have actually done it themselves.*" Veronica suggested that having friends who have done such things makes them seem more "*realistic*" and "*accessible*".

The range of resources required to fundraise towards and participate in gap year activities (e.g., financial resources, social networks supportive of such endeavours and able to contribute, and a sense of confidence and entitlement) led Susan to suggest that a mention of gap years on a CV might simply be "*shorthand for, "What class are you?", actually*":

> *[W]hen [a relative] was 15, some people came to her school, she's just at an ordinary old comprehensive in [City], and they came from a private company that sold three-week-long gap year things for 15- and 16-year-olds. And we went to it [....] and she said, "I want to go, I want to go." And I put my hand up and I said, "It's 2,000 pounds, how do you think people here can afford that?" And they said, "Oh, well, you'll fundraise." [....] "You can get people to sponsor you, you can clean cars." The place that she lives, nobody's even got a car unless it's stolen.*

Working holidaymaker accounts reinforced career adviser suggestions that in Britain, particularly, the perceived accessibility and timing of overseas experiences, as well as the types of overseas experiences that they chose to pursue, were shaped by economic, social, and cultural resources associated with class background. This included growing up in a family environment which positioned travel as something interesting and accessible, having opportunities to meet people who had pursued similar opportunities, having the confidence and self-efficacy to consider such options, and being in a financial position to consider overseas travel.

In contrast, socioeconomic differences in opportunities to participate in such activities were almost never raised in careers adviser interviews in Japan. There are a range of possible explanations for this. This might simply be because careers advisers in Japan did not frequently encounter students or graduates participating in such activities. It might also be because opportunities to work and travel overseas were not perceived as something that conferred advantages upon individuals. There may also be more of a perception of homogeneity in Japan, with Japan considered a "general middle-class society" for much of recent history (e.g. Chiavacci 2008).

This is not to say, however, that social class is not considered important in Japan. It is significant that one of the objections to the University of Tokyo's proposed introduction of a "gap term" during consultations in 2012 was the onus that this would place on students to resource whatever activities they chose to pursue during this time (e.g., Aoki 2012; Kakuchi 2012). Concerns were raised that this would disadvantage students from less advantaged backgrounds. Indeed, critics of these proposals suggested most students would lack resources to spend a compulsory six-month break "productively" (The Daily Yomiuri 2012). As observed earlier in the chapter, Mr. Akiyama (careers expert) suggested gap years pre- or immediately post-university might be less common in Japan partly because of financial constraints, especially given the extent to which families contribute to tuition fees in the Japanese context.

Taken together, this data suggests that there are limits to the claims of Arnett (2007: 132). While opportunities to engage in self-focused activities such as travel in emerging adulthood may now be "available to a much broader range of young people", the gap year and working holiday are still a classed phenomenon. Interviews with careers advisers and participants in Britain, in particular, highlighted financial resources, family orientation to travel, knowing people who had pursued similar opportunities, and confidence and self-efficacy as key factors limiting access to such opportunities.

5.5 Conclusion

This chapter highlights how participant aspirations for experiences of work and travel overseas were clearly embedded within - and shed further light upon - different contexts, and further shaped by social position within each context. In Britain, the gap year is positioned as a "normal", institutionally recognised part of the life course (Bagnoli 2009; Heath 2007; Simpson

2005b; Snee 2014a). Of particular significance in Japan is the practice of periodical blanket recruitment of new graduates, and a history of seniority-based systems of payment and progression and lifelong employment (Honda 2004: 105; Komikawa 2011: 121-122). Deviations from "straight" trajectories and age-appropriate career progression were positioned as atypical and risky in the context of Japanese labour market processes and practices. The data presented in this chapter illustrate that these factors result in radically different framings across contexts, such that opportunities to work and travel overseas could be pursued with relative ease in Britain but were associated with a high level of risk in Japan. Furthermore, although aspirations varied across country contexts, in neither context were working holidaymakers primarily motivated by strategic and reflexive considerations about enhancing employability.

The British structural context appeared to confer upon participants a measure of "freedom to" pursue *temporary escapes*, especially for recent graduates with the resources to take advantage of this. For most Japanese participants, structural constraints (e.g., dissatisfaction with harsh working conditions and a lack of alternatives) appeared significant in shaping a desire to *transform their lives*. However, this chapter further illustrates how different structural contexts may confer both freedom and constraint, depending on where individuals are positioned within this context. The significance of country context and social position in shaping aspirations and orientations challenges conceptualisations of social action as "disembedded".

This chapter highlights important and hitherto under-theorised links between young people's perceptions and aspirations in relation to experiences of work and travel overseas, and aspects of country contexts influencing these (e.g., including recruitment and employment practices, standard career trajectories, and broader societal norms). The following chapter shifts the focus of discussion to the perceptions and values of employers.

Chapter 6 Overseas experience and employer perceptions and values in comparative perspective

6.1 Introduction

Experiences of work and travel overseas are often represented in Britain as ways of boosting employability in increasingly competitive and globalised business environments (e.g., Cremin 2007; Heath 2007; Simpson 2005b). They are increasingly, albeit to a lesser extent, similarly positioned in Japan (e.g., Education Rebuilding Council 2007: 30-31; Education Rebuilding Implementation Council 2013: 5; Ito 2011; Japan Business Federation 2013a, 2013b). As outlined in Chapter Two, these discourses arise within a broader context where extra-credential activities (e.g., work and study abroad; extracurricular activities; internships, placements, and volunteering) are increasingly identified as important influences on graduate employment outcomes in Britain (Bathmaker, Ingram and Waller 2013; Brown and Hesketh 2004: 36, 155, 220; Stuart et al. 2009; Tomlinson 2008) and Japan (McDonald and Hallinan 2005; McDonald 2009; Miller 2013; van Ommen 2015).

The unique contribution of this chapter is in the utilisation of an explicitly cross-national comparative perspective to explore links between employer perceptions and values on the one hand and the contexts within which these are embedded on the other. Qualities perceived to be developed through gap year travel in Britain are frequently conceptualised in the literature as forms of cultural and symbolic capital that may be valued by employers (e.g., Heath 2007; O'Reilly 2006; Simpson 2005b; Snee 2014a). Attributes frequently cited in this context include initiative, maturity and independence, flexibility, intercultural sensitivity, and the ability to take responsibility for one's own development. In contrast, returned working holidaymakers in Japan perceive employers not to value qualities such as confidence, initiative, and assertiveness to the same extent (e.g., Kawashima 2010: 279). Instead, they are suggested to value cooperativeness and a pleasant personality. This suggests that such experiences might instead function as "negative symbolic capital" (Bourdieu 1990: 140; 2000: 241-242). Comparative investigation of such claims highlights the importance of institutional arrangements - in combination with broader societal understandings - in influencing employer perceptions and values (e.g., in relation to the ideal employable graduate) within specific fields.

Section 6.2 introduces the employers who participated in this research, describing and contextualising their recruitment practices. Section 6.3 explores how recruitment and employment practices and cultural values within different fields interacted to structure differing perceptions of the value of experiences of work and travel overseas. While in Britain the gap year was often positioned as something akin to preparation for adulthood, in Japan delaying entry to the labour market or quitting a job to pursue a working holiday was frequently perceived as "<u>running away</u>" from adult responsibilities. These different structural positionings are argued to be reinforced by processes of "looking-glass merit", where evaluators assess merit in ways that validate strengths and experiences similar to their own (Rivera 2012, 2015). Section 6.4 extends analysis of data using a Bourdieusian framework to consider the significance of not only field but also capital and habitus. This allows more rigorous consideration of the circumstances within which taking an overseas gap year might allow participants to accumulate and subsequently deploy social and cultural resources so as to gain an edge over their peers in the competition for educational and employment opportunities (e.g., Heath 2007).

6.2 Setting the scene: Introducing and contextualising participating employers and their recruitment processes

This section introduces the employers participating in the research and describes their hiring practices, to contextualise the discussion that follows. Participants were involved in (graduate) recruitment (e.g., graduate recruitment managers and similar) for a variety of employers (5 from the UK and 8 from Japan). Analysis of data generated through these interviews is supplemented with analysis of data generated through interviews with careers advisers and informants knowledgeable about graduate careers. (A full list of participants can be found in Appendices D and E.)

The characteristics of participating employers are summarised in Table 6.1. The companies they represented varied in terms of sector and size. Most recruited for structured graduate programmes, although these tended to have a more explicitly long-term orientation in Japan, as might be expected from the literature reviewed in Chapter Three. No explicit age requirements were imposed by British employers. In contrast, all but one Japanese employer required applicants be either current students or within a few years of graduation. The final employer specifically recruited graduates with work experience (i.e., *daini-shinsotsu*; see Chapter Three and Nakamura (1992)).

Table 6.1 Characteristics of participating employers

	Britain (*n* = 5)	Japan (*n* = 5) [15]
Sectors	Recruitment, professional services, technology, public sector, and retail	Finance, restaurants, broadcasting, manufacturing, and transport
Size	Two employers recruiting <100 graduates annually, three recruiting >100 annually	Three employers recruiting <100 graduates annually, two recruiting >100 annually
Structured graduate programme?	Four employers recruited predominantly for structured rotational programmes with varying levels of specificity. One recruited for trainee (recruitment consultant) positions and provided ongoing training and development.	Two employers recruited predominantly for structured rotational programmes, aiming to develop future managers. One recruited candidates to be trained/developed within specific areas of broadcasting. One posted successful applicants to positions upon appointment, according to company needs and individual skills/preferences. One recruited for specific roles in finance.
Eligibility	Advertised as "graduate" jobs, but no age limits or requirement for participants to be within a certain number of years from graduation.	Mostly "graduate" jobs requiring applicants to be current students or within a few years of graduation. One employer targeted only *daini-shinsotsu* (i.e., graduates with work experience).

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[15] I interviewed three employers not included in this table. Mr. Suzuki was a director of a company providing crowd sourcing and direct recruiting solutions for employers. His company did not directly recruit new or recent graduates, however this interview yielded valuable information about changing perspectives on recruitment in Japan. Mr. Sato participated in this research as a private individual with experience of recruitment in Japanese and international companies in Japan. Ms. Matsumoto and Ms. Shimizu worked for a recruitment company, the former in their global division. I include comments from these interviewees where appropriate.

Recruitment processes at the companies involved in this research typically resembled those depicted in Figure 6.1, consistent with existing descriptions of graduate recruitment in Britain (Ashley et al. 2015; Pollard et al. 2015) and Japan (Firkola 2011; Koyama 2010; Uenishi 2011).

Britain (*n* = 5)	Japan (*n* = 5)
Screening of applications (generally via an online application form, although one employer used CVs instead). Minimum academic criteria generally applied in terms of University and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS) points and/or class of degree.	Screening of applications (generally via handwritten "entry sheet"/resume). Two employers screened little or not at all, preferring to meet with all applicants face-to-face. Minimum academic criteria not generally applied.
Psychometric and other tests	Psychometric and other tests
Initial interview (often via telephone or video; not used by one employer)	Group interview or discussion (often, but not always, as first interview; not used by one employer)
Assessment centre activities (frequently including group discussion)	
Face-to-face interview(s) with senior staff, sometimes as part of the assessment centre	Generally 3-4 interviews including a final interview with high-ranking company executives

Figure 6.1 Recruitment processes in companies participating in the research in the UK and Japan

6.2.1 Recruitment processes and evaluation criteria in Britain: The rhetoric of competence

Recruitment processes at the British companies involved in this research were consistent with those depicted in existing literature (Ashley et al. 2015; Pollard et al. 2015). Applicants are generally required to meet minimum entry criteria for academic performance, in terms of University and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS) tariff points and/or class of degree. Initial applications are generally made online (although smaller employers might instead request applications in the form of a CV and covering letter) and are screened to varying degrees. Some employers ask only for basic details at this time and use the results of psychometric tests to determine which candidates progress to the next round of selection. Others consider responses to questions about specific skills or competencies and/or how well candidates articulate their reasons for applying. Preliminary interviews are often conducted remotely via telephone or video. Successful candidates progress to assessment centres and/or a face-to-face interview with senior staff. Assessment centres, typically part of the selection process for larger companies, involve participation in activities such as work simulation tasks (e.g., written exercises or roleplays), group exercises, presentations, and/or interviews).

British employers most commonly used competency-based frameworks for evaluation, in which "demonstrable" skills required for the position were identified, and evidence of exhibiting these sought from candidates (Ashley et al. 2015: 64, 86; Pollard et al. 2015: 137-138, 142-143)[16]. Consistent with existing evidence, larger employers appeared more likely to use structured and standardised frameworks than smaller employers (Hogarth et al. 2007; Pollard et al. 2015; Stewart and Knowles 2000). The following excerpt from my interview with David (careers adviser) gives a flavour of how participants described overseas experiences featuring in evaluation. David refers in particular to larger employers using competency-based recruitment frameworks (i.e., the majority of British employers participating in this research):

> [T]he larger blue-chip sort of employers [....] would look at a skill that they require [....] and then they would expect candidates to prove

---

[16] Consistent with recent trends in graduate recruitment more generally, one participating employer had moved to a strengths-based framework, focused more on interests and future potential than currently demonstrable skills (Pollard *et al.*, 2015: 142-143).

> *those skills through their experience. Now, some of those would be from work [....] but some of them would be from things like travel. So the employer wouldn't think of the travel, per se, or the gap year, per se, as a good thing, but if the person was able to prove one of their skills [....] through that experience, that's what they would like. So it's not a straight A to B ... there's a cul-de-sac in the middle, where the student has to translate their gap year experience [....] they have to prove that that experience gave them that skill.*

Consistent with literature describing the "rhetoric of competence" (Brown and Hesketh 2004: 148), British employers emphasised that during the interview and assessment centre process, their focus was on the assessment of specific "*examples*" which could be used to "*evidence*" or "*prove*" defined competencies. Recruitment processes were characterised as objective and scientific. For example, Heather (recruitment manager, global technology company) emphasised the "*specific marking criteria*" used in recruitment. She explained these had been developed in conjunction with a "*scientific*" framework in which a lot of time and money had been invested. How an interviewee responded to questions during an interview was considered part of the assessment of communication skills, but specific examples (of communication and other skills) were also sought and evaluated as part of the interview process:

> *Lynley: And could you tell me a bit about the sorts of things that you'd take as good evidence of people meeting some of these competencies?*

> *Jodie (recruitment manager, professional services firm): Communication skills is both observed and reported, obviously. So the communication that would come across well in an interview would just be the general interview technique and giving structured, considered answers, things like that. But then within their examples, as well, they might provide an example of when they've had to adapt their communication style to work with different groups, or when they've had to persuade a group of people round to their opinion or their viewpoint. So that would be good examples [....]*

As outlined in Chapter Three, attributes and skills frequently identified as important in (graduate) recruitment within the European and American contexts include communication skills, pro-activity, independence, flexibility, intercultural sensitivity, creativity/problem-solving skills, and the ability to take responsibility for one's own development (e.g., Brown, Hesketh and

Williams 2003; du Gay 1996b: 154; Expert Group on Future Skills Needs and Forfás 2006: 3; Gee, Hull and Lankshear 1996: 18-19; Humburg and van der Velden 2013). The accounts of British careers advisers and employers frequently referenced these skills and attributes, consistent with existing research and "employability frameworks" in Britain (Confederation of British Industry 2009: 21; UK Commission for Employment and Skills 2009). Research further suggests there is variation in the skills described as valuable by employers in different sectors. For example, skills and attributes perceived to be developed through overseas experiences, such as cosmopolitanism and independence, may be valued more highly in sectors such as travel (Munt 1994: 109, 112; O'Reilly 2006: 1012-1013); sectors where "flair" is considered important, such as film or advertising (Desforges 1998: 185-188); and academia or the international arena (Brooks, Waters and Pimlott-Wilson 2012: 289). In contrast, they may be perceived as less valuable in sectors such as law or accountancy (Desforges 1998: 188, see also Brooks, Waters and Pimlott-Wilson 2012: 290, Frändberg 2015: 562).

The next section of this chapter describes the recruitment practices of Japanese employers participating in this research. It concludes by outlining what is known about the qualities valued by graduate employers in Japan.

6.2.2 Recruitment processes and evaluation criteria in Japan: "Confirming their personality"

Recruitment processes at the Japanese companies involved in this research differed from those at British companies in a number of ways, consistent with existing descriptions of graduate recruitment in Japan (Firkola 2011; Koyama 2010; Uenishi 2011). First, there is no comparable eligibility requirement based on academic performance at university (Honda 2010: 51-53; Yoshimoto et al. 2005: 35). Applications may, however, be screened on the basis of the names of the universities candidates attended. This has been interpreted as a form of filtering for academic ability based on the difficulty of university entry examinations (Komikawa 2012b: 44-45; Uenishi 2011: 91; Yoshimoto et al. 2005). Traditionally, having passed the most difficult examinations was often interpreted as a signal of the right sort of personality (i.e., character and commitment) (e.g., Borovoy 2010; Takeuchi 1997).

Applicants register interest online and are mailed information and invitations to company information seminars. Then, if they wish, they apply formally via an "entry sheet" and resume, typically handwritten (Burrows 2014; Firkola 2011: 64-66; Uenishi 2011: 90-93). Entry sheets tend to include questions

about "'things you worked hard at while a student', 'your strengths and weaknesses', 'the reason you are applying to this company'" (Uenishi 2011: 92). They are generally screened on style and content (although one smaller employer met with all applicants and another invited almost all to an initial group interview). Successful applicants progress through psychometric and/or written tests (including aptitude and ability tests, and sometimes an English language test) and a series of interviews. In these interviews, they are generally asked about their motivations for applying and activities they were involved in as students (Uenishi 2011: 92). A group interview or group work task is generally conducted early in this process, and final interviews are usually attended by high-ranking company executives.

Research and descriptions of recruitment in the Japanese context (Iwawaki 2007; Koyama 2010; Uenishi 2011), as well as a cross-national study of graduate recruitment in Britain and Japan (Yoshimoto et al. 2005), suggest that there are differences in the prevalence with which competency-based, structured, and standardised methods are used across country contexts. Mr. Akiyama, the head of the research division within a company managing an information website for graduates seeking employment, described such interviews as "still very rare in Japan". Consistent with existing literature (Koyama 2010), he observed that competency frameworks for recruitment were now being incorporated by some larger corporations in Japan. In smaller firms, in particular, however, he observed that "there is definitely a trend for more weight to be placed on what you might call a match of feelings". Amongst the Japanese employers participating in this study, neither interview questions nor selection criteria tended to be standardised. Ms. Yamada (section chief, personnel, financial institution) described how "the way we ask questions changes in various ways depending on what they've written in their resume". Mr. Hashimoto (division head, broadcasting) explained that within his organisation, there were no standardised criteria used when screening entry sheets.

Furthermore, Japanese participants described the evaluation process in language that was more impressionistic than scientific. Participants suggested that they would "surmise" or "imagine" how an interviewee would perform on the job. This would be based on their descriptions of the activities they had been involved in as a student and how they communicated about these on their entry sheets and within the interview. Mr. Higuchi (careers adviser), drawing on his own previous experience working in graduate recruitment for a bank, described this process as follows:

I think the people in charge of personnel interview students, and choose on the basis of their impressions. In relation to the student's own experiences, or the details of how they sell [PR] themselves, they keep asking questions. Why, why ... they keep probing for reasons. And depending on whether the student can explain logically and clearly, I think they judge by imagining that if a student has experienced this much, maybe, in this company as well, they'll try their hardest and do their best in the same sort of way [....]

Mr. Akiyama (careers expert) explained that employers sought to extrapolate information about a candidate's personality and abilities from the way they communicated: "[c]onfirming their personality is the central work of the interview". His colleague, Ms. Hamasaki, emphasised the importance placed on indirect communication in Japan. She explained that given this environment, it was important in job interviews for applicants to show that they could "speak in a way that grasps the intentions" of the person they were speaking to. She emphasised the importance of "harmony within the company", and explained the style of communication that was valued within Japanese companies as follows:

Things that are described as "reading the atmosphere" [*kūki o yomu*] and "the harmonising of two parties engaged in an activity" [*aun no kokyū*] ... your boss doesn't explain everything clearly, but you can perceive from there that it's probably this sort of thing, and proceed without asking about every detail. Rather than making sure and asking "What do you mean?" and saying "I don't understand", there are overwhelmingly more people in Japan who approach their work thinking, "Well, this person always speaks in this manner, so surely it's this sort of thing [they mean]".

Consistent with existing literature, participants often reported difficulties distinguishing between candidates because they responded similarly to questions (e.g., see Japan Association of Corporate Executives 2014; Koyama 2010; Uenishi 2011). Thus, they described attempting during interviews to assess whether a candidate was "really" the sort of person they claimed to be, based on subtle differences in posture, body language, and tone:

Mr. Ogawa (recruiting, HR group, manufacturing company): What we look for is whether what they are saying is true or not. Students nowadays prepare [responses] for the purpose of job hunting. They may be lies. You don't know, just from the first interview [....] But if you

> probe further in the second interview, you'll know whether it's true or not. Whether it's logical, for example.
>
> Lynley: Mm. And whether the explanation is logical or not is one ingredient you use to judge whether it's true or not?
>
> Mr. Ogawa: Yes. An ingredient. Also, another one is *non-verbal delivery.* Things like *facial expression. Posture, gesture, that kind of thing.*

As outlined in Chapter Three, attributes and skills deemed important in (graduate) recruitment in Japan include the ability to work cooperatively and harmoniously, perseverance, and "trainability" (Japan Association of Corporate Executives 2014: 19; Rear 2013: 178-179; Rear and Jones 2013: 382). Careers advisers and employers interviewed for this research expressed views that were generally consistent with this literature. In Japan, research also indicates that what employers are looking for varies by sector. Overseas experiences are considered particularly valuable within the manufacturing sector (Japan Association of Corporate Executives 2014: 21; see also Nagano 2014).

This section of the chapter, therefore, has introduced the employers who participated in this research, outlined their recruitment processes, and given a flavour of how these were described in each context. Differences associated with country context, company size, and sector of employment have been highlighted. The next section of the chapter discusses how employers in each context perceived and valued experiences of work and travel overseas specifically. It further explores how differing institutional practices and cultural values were associated with differences across contexts.

6.3 Institutional practices, cultural values, and employer perceptions in comparative perspective

As outlined in Chapter Two, Snee (2009: 133) argues that the work of Bourdieu - and the concept of cultural capital, specifically - is particularly useful for investigating how cultural practices (e.g., gap years) may be invested with values that are perceived as legitimate in certain fields and contexts. Careers advisers and employers in Britain - as in Japan - emphasised that in practice candidates would always be evaluated on a case-by-case basis. Nevertheless, cross-national comparative exploration suggests British careers advisers and employers more readily assumed that

experiences of work and travel overseas could be valuable, whereas Japanese respondents were more sceptical about the value of such activities. This section discusses how institutional practices and cultural values influenced the positioning of graduate working holidaymakers by employers in each country context and across different sectors of employment.

6.3.1 "A different level of maturity": The gap year as preparation for adult responsibilities in Britain

This section of the chapter argues that institutional arrangements and cultural values in Britain interact to shape generally neutral to positive employer understandings of the value of the overseas gap year or working holiday. British employers emphasised that their evaluations would always depend on how candidates performed against their competencies, and their attitudes appeared relaxed rather than overwhelmingly positive. Nevertheless, they frequently associated taking a gap year or working holiday with preparation or progress towards assuming adult responsibilities, with self-development an almost inevitable consequence. These perceptions and values are embedded within institutional structures which allow - even compel - a measure of flexibility and fluidity for new graduates, as outlined in Chapter Three. These include structures providing a greater diversity of routes into the labour market (Williams, Tassinari and Ball 2015: 63) and employers who did not necessarily anticipate the same level of long-term commitment as in Japan (Yoshimoto et al. 2005). Upgrading skills is increasingly perceived as the responsibility of individual workers (e.g., Brown, Hesketh and Williams 2003: 123) in an institutional context unsupportive of long-term relationships warranting company investment in on-the-job training (Soskice 1993). This confluence of factors is argued to shape an environment within which skills and attributes perceived to be developed through overseas experiences may function as forms of capital with "future currency in the education and employment markets" (Snee 2009: 31).

Consistent with ideas about the "Grand Tour" as a kind of "*finishing*" school (alluded to in my interview with Susan, careers adviser; see also Amit 2010; Bagnoli 2009; Simpson 2005b), British employers and careers advisers frequently appeared to assume that gap year experiences would educate, improve, and develop young people. In this context, consistent with existing literature, overseas experiences were often interpreted as indicative of attributes such as independence/initiative, maturity, flexibility, confidence,

intercultural sensitivity, and the ability to take responsibility for one's own development (e.g., Brown, Archer and Barnes 2008: 8; Crossman and Clarke 2010; Humburg and van der Velden 2014: 12; Simpson 2005a; Snee 2014a). These functioned as forms of cultural and symbolic capital (Bourdieu 1990: 140) to the extent that they were legitimated and deemed valuable by employers within specific fields. Representative examples of such assumptions include:

> *Daniel (careers adviser): [T]here was a different level of maturity that had actually resulted from that experience. Because they had genuinely been far more self-reliant, far more independent, and far more aware of how, actually, being outside of an environment where there were natural support mechanisms in place, be that the institution or parents [....]*

> *Terry (senior HR person, public sector graduate recruiter): [A]nd generally you are more isolated, you're not with your family or your friends on the whole, so you are going to have to be more independent [....]*

> *Paige (careers adviser): [A]nd I think also, the fact of going abroad, whether it's for work or for travel, and doing that by yourself, as well as really increasing your independence, and you have to be very confident and brave to be able to do that [....]*

The excerpts shown above specifically suggest that there is perceived to be a value to living away from families and friends, and such experiences of separation are assumed to be almost inevitably associated with independence and growth. This is consistent with observations about the taken-for-granted and "ubiquitous" association in the UK between moving away to go to university and gaining independence, and the notion that a key part of this independence is being free from parental interference (Holdsworth 2009: 1858). In the context of higher education, as in the context of the pre-university gap year (Heath 2007), Holdsworth (2009: 1862) argues that "whether or not students actually benefit from moving away in the ways that are popularly portrayed, the fact that these assumptions are so credible means that students who move away can rely on promoting personal qualities that are assumed to derive from their particular mobility experiences".

Heath (2007: 100) suggests, in the context of the pre-university gap year, that "the gap year is shored up by commonsense assumptions that taking

time out must self-evidently be 'a good thing'". This research shows that these ideas also apply more broadly, in the context of experiences of "time out" overseas after graduation. Kylie (graduate resourcing advisor, large retail company), for example, had not personally taken an overseas gap year. She suggested that she could not really articulate reasons for her perception that such experiences were "*a positive thing*", attributing this to socialisation in the family and at university:

> *Lynley: Okay, so I've asked a little bit already I think about some of the things that you think people might get out of an overseas experience. You talked about personal development, that it's beneficial to see other cultures, things like that. Why can that be a good thing for people?*
>
> *Kylie: I don't know, to be honest. I probably couldn't put it into words, why it's a good thing. You are kind of drilled that into you sometimes, aren't you, by your families, or university when you're a student, so maybe that's why people go abroad sometimes. But I just think it's a positive thing, because the more experience that you get the better.*

Furthermore, travelling overseas primarily to have fun appeared to be perceived relatively indulgently in contemporary Britain, at least in contrast with attitudes in Japan. British participants acknowledged and accepted that overseas experiences might have been motivated to a large extent by a desire for fun and enjoyment. However, as suggested by Paige (careers adviser), they were not overly concerned about this, so long as candidates spoke about their experiences appropriately:

> *But the student/graduate needs to demonstrate it in the right way on their application. Because it could be misconstrued into [....] just being away for two years partying and not doing anything, which of course may have happened, but it's all about how you present that on your application.*

Snee (2014b: 851) argues that "[t]he idea of having a good time is not antithetical to official understandings of what gap years should be about". She suggests, however, that narratives incorporating hedonism *and* a focus on doing something worthwhile are likely to be perceived more favourably. For Cremin (2007), there is no incompatibility between the two; advocating that individuals should pursue "enjoyable" activities in fact furthers the agendas of employers:

It is *really* living: it is fun, expressive, happy and spontaneous. It is the choice of reflexive agents making the most of their opportunities and having fun, so that once the chrysalis has ruptured the butterfly can leave its gap year cocoon and work for people friendly, interpersonal, flexible, team-based organizations.

(Cremin 2007: 532).

Given the relative flexibility of the British context, delaying entry to the labour market to pursue overseas experiences was not positioned by careers advisers or employers as particularly risky. Missing out on places in competitive graduate schemes with large employers was acknowledged as a potential consequence, given that such companies recruited cyclically, once a year. However, some companies went so far as to make provisions for graduates who were abroad during recruitment cycles. Jodie (recruitment manager, professional services firm) explained that her company would schedule assessment centres and interviews close together if requested, to accommodate candidates applying from abroad. Furthermore, postponing entry to graduate training schemes was sometimes construed as a potential advantage:

> *Lynley: And do you think that if they applied the next year that that would be seen as a disadvantage, or ...?*
>
> *Paige (careers adviser): No. Personally, I don't. When I worked in graduate recruitment, some of the best graduate trainees that I had in my area, that I managed, were ones who were a couple of years from university, or even five or six years from university, so they'd already got some work experience, they may have worked abroad, or in the UK, or may have travelled, but they had more life and work experience under their belt [....] So I actually think it's an advantage to have that experience [....] I think it is really important, and that's what a lot of graduate schemes are saying. They won't employ anyone who hasn't got any experience.*

Recent research suggests that work experience enabling graduates to "hit the ground running" (Humburg and van der Velden 2014: 11) may be increasingly valued by some graduate employers in the British and European context (see also Hinchliffe and Jolly 2011; Pollard et al. 2015). Findings were consistent with literature suggesting that the responsibility for upgrading skills is increasingly perceived to belong to individual workers in an environment shaped by increased competition in a global market and

technological changes (e.g., Brown, Hesketh and Williams 2003: 123). Taking individual responsibility for one's development in this way was described as particularly important by a number of interviewees. Daniel (careers adviser) suggested, for example, that employers valued candidates who had prioritised "*developing and stretching themselves*". Terry (senior HR person, public sector graduate recruiter) stated this explicitly, in his comment that "*we would expect people to be pro-active to get development*". He emphasised that candidates further needed to be reflecting on their experiences, "*and learning and getting feedback and working in a way that develops their understanding and experience of themselves*". This emphasis is consistent with literature suggesting there has been a shift of risks and responsibilities (e.g., for training) from employers onto employees (e.g., Humburg and van der Velden 2013).

Although delaying entry to the labour market was not generally viewed negatively in Britain, there were limits to the timing considered appropriate for pursuing experiences of work and travel abroad. Kate (talent acquisition specialist, recruitment company) suggested taking time out overseas later in one's career could be perceived negatively:

> *I think it depends on where they are in their career. I think it's best to do it before you actually get started in your career, rather than midway through. I think it can be perceived negatively. If you're doing so well, why would you give that up to go travelling?*

Kate further suggested that there might be variability in employer perceptions across different employment sectors:

> *Lynley: And would it depend do you think on what sort of work they wanted to get into when they came back?*

> *Kate: Absolutely. Because I think, for example, if you wanted to get into something that's very, very, very competitive to get into, for example, law, investment banking, anything along those lines, that may be looked upon as being, "Well, why did you go travelling when your peer group were working 70-hour weeks on the magic roundabout, trying to get a foot into the door?" So that may be looked [at] quite negatively.*

Kate's comments are consistent with existing research suggesting that it may be more difficult to draw upon overseas experiences for career gain in sectors such as law, "where institutional expertise is important" (Desforges 1998: 188; see also Brooks, Waters and Pimlott-Wilson 2012: 290;

Frändberg 2015: 562). The flexibility identified in the UK context was not necessarily equally prevalent across all employment sectors. Furthermore, this flexibility was primarily oriented towards a "window" of opportunity post-graduation. Susan (careers adviser) suggested that travelling for "*more than two years*" might be associated with perceptions "*that you were getting a bit too independent and actually showing that you're not ready to settle down*". These comments highlight possible tensions between employer preferences that applicants be independent but not "*too independent*". Similar ambivalence has been detected in survey research, where seemingly contradictory qualities (e.g., initiative and being able to take orders) are identified simultaneously as employer preferences (Ranzijn, Carson and Winefield 2004). The next section of the chapter illustrates that such tensions appeared more prominent in Japan. Nevertheless, it is important to acknowledge that they were not distinct to the Japanese context. More generally, these excerpts from interviews with Kate and Susan suggest that life course norms contribute to shaping employer evaluations in Britain. In particular, neutral or favourable evaluations of gap year experiences appeared to be associated with participants' relative youth.

This section thus illustrates how the generally neutral to positive positioning of time out overseas by British employers is influenced by institutional arrangements and cultural values shaping a context of relative flexibility. Consistent with much existing literature, British employers valued maturity, self-reliance, flexibility, intercultural sensitivity, and the ability to take responsibility for one's own development. This shaped a context within which young adults' experiences of work and travel overseas could be perceived to signal various forms of cultural and symbolic capital. This highlights the importance of historical, social, and cultural factors in shaping taken-for-granted norms and values surrounding particular forms of mobility and conceptions of what it means to be "employable". The following section explores how differing institutional arrangements and cultural values interact to shape quite different perceptions and values in Japan.

6.3.2 "Becoming an adult without running away": Scepticism about the value of the working holiday in Japan

This section argues that institutional practices and cultural values interact in Japan to shape a scepticism about the value of the overseas gap year or working holiday. Overall, the perceptions and values of Japanese respondents were more sceptical because of the extent to which, and concern with which, most (although not all) identified potential negative

consequences of such activities. There is a strong theme in the Japanese accounts that taking a gap year, and especially a working holiday, signals a lack of willingness to take on - or, indeed, a fleeing from - adult responsibilities. These perceptions and values are embedded within - and shaped by - institutional structures and career pathways which are strongly age-based (Kawashima 2010: 280-282; Kelsky 2001: 94-96, 205). These shape a context of relative rigidity for new graduates, as described in Chapter Three. Employer perceptions and values are also consistent with a broader societal emphasis on the importance of diligence and perseverance (e.g., Borovoy 2010: 179-180; Gilbert and Terrata 2001: 75). Furthermore, tensions have been identified in the Japanese context between recent calls for creativity, problem-solving skills, autonomy, and flexibility (e.g., Fu 2016; Matanle 2006: 64-65; Miller 2013) and "traditional" emphases on working harmoniously and cooperatively (Kawashima 2010; Miller 2013; Mori 2004; Rear and Jones 2013). This confluence of factors shapes an environment within which qualities signalled by overseas working holidays, such as a lack of perseverance and a potential excess of independence/individuality, may function as "negative symbolic capital" (Bourdieu 1990: 140; 2000: 241-242).

Consistent with literature reviewed in Chapter Three, Japanese careers advisers and employers positioned delaying entry to the labour market or quitting a job to pursue overseas experiences as a risky undertaking. I asked Ms. Hamasaki, who heads the global section of a company managing an information website for graduates seeking employment, what advice she would give someone contemplating going overseas during a leave of absence from university or after graduating. She responded that if they were wanting employment as a regular employee afterwards, "they should know that there are also risks, so I would probably tell them [that]".

The risk of being overseas when fellow students were engaged in the lengthy process of looking for jobs and missing the narrow window for periodical blanket recruitment of new graduates featured prominently in accounts. Ms. Hamasaki observed that for Japanese employers "[t]here is very much a preference for new graduates, a strong feeling to an extent that would be unimaginable in other countries". She linked employer preferences for new graduates to seniority-based systems of payment and evaluation, referencing "a culture unique to Japan" where "it's convenient, or easy to run things, if age ranges [within a group of employees] don't vary too much". Mr. Murakami (careers adviser) similarly explained, "I think age is something that they [Japanese companies] care about especially". He suggested Japanese

employers tended to prefer candidates with a "*straight*" life trajectory. Ms. Hamasaki and others suggested that these preferences varied by context; small businesses were less likely to have these concerns. Linked to the preference for new graduates was the tendency of Japanese employers to recruit for generalist positions and provide company-specific on-the-job training for employees who they anticipated would stay with the company long term (Firkola 2011; Hatvany and Pucik 1981; Nakamura 1992). Consistent with this literature, Mr. Murakami (careers adviser) related the preference of Japanese companies for "people who have completed university in four years, without repeating a year" to "the view that the younger they are, the easier they are to train". Training was considered a long-term investment. Thus he explained that employees who took a year off or quit when after training for two to three years, "for the first time, they're able to contribute to company profits", were viewed negatively.

Mr. Akiyama (careers expert) explained that legally, it was more difficult to fire employees in Japan, and there was an expectation that if one part of a company shut down, positions would be found for employees in other sections. In practice, "as well as the idea that employers prefer someone who will work for them long term if possible, at the same time, if you take someone on, there's no alternative to having them work for you for a long time" (see also Holbrow 2015: 165). Ms. Hamasaki (careers expert) explained that because employers planned to rotate employees into various positions over time, as required, employers particularly valued the ability to work harmoniously with others:

> It's different from Europe and America, in that it's not recruitment for a [specific] position [....] That being the case, things like teamwork and respecting harmony within the company are prized.

Although employers perceived lifelong employment to be less of a certainty than it once was, for many, there was still an expectation that employees would ideally work for them long term. Ms. Yamada (section chief, personnel, financial institution) commented as follows:

> And in Japan [....] now, the idea of lifelong employment is declining, but we still don't have much of a culture of positively valuing changes of job or interrupting one's career [....]

> We'd like them to work with us for as long as possible. It might be a Japanese thing, but there's a sense in which the company is like a family [....]

In this context, Japanese employers and careers advisers suggested graduates who had delayed entry to the labour market or quit a job in order to go overseas would be perceived most negatively. For example, this might be seen as "escaping reality" (Ms. Yamada, section chief, personnel, financial institution) or "taking detours" (Mr. Murakami, careers adviser). Mr. Akiyama (careers expert) suggested this might be perceived as "running away" or exhibiting "a sort of Peter Pan syndrome" (i.e., refusing to grow up):

> Maybe, as an organisation [....] they're worrying quite a lot that the type of people who would run away from the very first entry stage, maybe, won't last very long [....] I think that, if you're not the type of person who properly has a strong consciousness that after four years at university, as expected, you want to find a job and earn money for yourself, they'll have something like misgivings that you might quit after joining the company, or that you won't last long. They're definitely not thinking that everyone who's been on a gap year or a working holiday is that type of person [....] but from the perspective of the company, becoming an adult without running away is important, and if someone's been avoiding standing at the start line, they worry that maybe that person won't last long after joining this company.

There is an emphasis in the literature on (graduate) recruitment and training in Japan on concepts such as perseverance (*nebari tsuyosa*), stamina (*tairyoku*), and cooperativeness (*kyōchōsei*) (Japan Association of Corporate Executives 2014: 19; Rear 2013: 178-179; Rear and Jones 2013: 382). Indeed, participation in extracurricular clubs, particularly sports clubs, has been described as valuable in the recruitment context in Japan precisely because this is perceived to cultivate such attributes (Borovoy 2010: 179-180; Cave 2004; Kasai 2012; McDonald and Hallinan 2005; McDonald 2009; van Ommen 2015). Significant here - as highlighted by Kawashima (2010: 275) - are perceived associations between hardship, maturity, and self-improvement, as found in discourses of traditional Japanese artisanship (Kondo 1990: 234-241). In this context, persevering at something that is difficult, without quitting, is assumed in and of itself to be associated with growth and development. Conversely, consistent with a broader literature, delaying entry to the labour force and/or quitting a job to pursue activities overseas, in and of itself, might be construed by Japanese employers as a signal of a lack of patience/perseverance (e.g., Fujii, Shiraishi and Takayama 2013; Yano 2013) or unreliability (Holbrow 2015, see also Rohlen 1974: 86), and viewed with caution (Nagano 2014).

In relation to working holidays specifically, these negative perceptions may be compounded by an "emphasis on diligence in Japanese culture" that "makes it less acceptable for younger people to take holidays" (Gilbert and Terrata 2001: 75). Comparative data supporting this suggestion show a tendency for Japanese to work longer hours (Einarsdottir 2007: 187; Messenger 2004: 42; Schomburg and Teichler 2006: 83), have smaller leave entitlements (Ray and Schmitt 2007), and use only around half of the leave to which they are entitled (Cole 1992; JILPT 2015: 58). Consistent with these observations, Mr. Ogawa (recruiting, HR group, manufacturing company) suggested that it was because the working holiday was perceived as a "break" or a "holiday" that it was viewed negatively. Employers, he said, "*don't recognise it's working*" and dislike seeing "a period where you haven't been working" in an applicant's career history:

> In relation to the working holiday, still, in terms of Japanese culture [....] it's widely viewed as being a "break". For example, it's okay to go overseas to study, *to obtain [an] MBA* [....] But [….] the name "holiday" isn't good [....] It's perceived negatively. If the companies offering working holidays [....] changed their name to something with a good image, this might change.

Mr. Murakami (careers adviser) indicated that there would not be many companies who would employ a graduate who reached the age of 25 with no experience of regular employment within a Japanese company. In fact, an applicant in this position would be perceived as having "avoided working". These representations are consistent with suggestions in the literature that employers might view gap years or working holidays negatively as simply "play" (*asobi*), "a waste of time" (*jikan no muda*), or "empty space" (*kūhaku jikan*) (Etō 2012; Gap Year Platform 2013: 3; Hada 2009: 80-81, 169). They echo negative stereotypes about working holidaymakers that appear to have permeated into some academic literature (e.g., Befu 2000; Satō 1993, 2001). One might argue that working holidays are not valued in Japan because they lack human capital value (i.e., employers do not perceive value in the specific activities undertaken by working holidaymakers). However, the cross-national comparative perspective adopted by this research suggests that the contrasting assumptions made about similar activities across national contexts reveal more about the contexts than the intrinsic merit (or lack of merit) of such activities.

It may seem surprising, given their generally negative comments about the likely career consequences of working holidays, that Japanese careers

advisers and employers often described gap years or working holidays as signalling independence and/or pro-activity. Indeed, they often spoke about such qualities in favourable terms that appeared consistent with how they were discussed in Britain. Further analysis, however, suggested that these qualities were perceived with greater ambivalence in Japan. Respondents expressed concerns that developing excessive independence/individuality through overseas experiences might undermine the "harmony" and "cooperativeness" sought by Japanese employers (e.g., Kawashima 2010; Miller 2013). Professor Komikawa (careers expert) linked descriptions of the way work was structured in some Japanese companies with employer preferences, explaining that some employers might be concerned that individuals who had spent time overseas might not "fit in" with the "traditional way of working":

> Professor Komikawa: The workplace in Japanese companies, it's very group oriented. It's not that an individual does only what's given to them as their job, rather, because you don't have a job description, you'll get given and do different sorts of work every time, you work in teams, and if a superior, your boss, is doing overtime, you also have to do overtime [....] They think that a student who won't fit within that sort of Japanese company's traditional way of working will be trouble.

> Lynley: And if they'd been overseas too long ... that worry ... ?

> Professor Komikawa: [....] Yes [....] if they were interviewing and thought that a student was too individualistic, or that they wouldn't fit into that aspect of the company, I think such a student would be disliked.

Respondents suggested that employers would only value individuality if it was perceived to coexist with qualities traditionally valued in the recruitment context. Specifically, as explained by Mr. Murakami (careers adviser), employers were first seeking "communication skills, teamwork, and cooperativeness", and only then considering individuality and creativity:

> On top of that, people who can display individuality. It's very difficult, but what companies are wanting is exactly that. [People with] individuality only, or uniqueness only, are difficult for a Japanese company, as an organisation, to use. So they're looking for very high-level human resources, people who have communication skills, teamwork skills to work hard with everyone in a group, and cooperativeness so they can work with other people, and on top of

> that can display their individuality, display their uniqueness, and come up with ideas [....]

Participants further suggested that perceptions might vary across different employment sectors and different companies. Mr. Suzuki (director, crowd sourcing and direct recruiting company) suggested that in traditional companies with seniority-based systems of payment and progression, managers might fear that adding someone who had been overseas, with too strong a sense of individuality, would be a hindrance and disrupt teamwork. Conversely, younger companies in the IT, media, and game industries tended to be developing rapidly and sought employees who could create change. The existence of his company - and the market for alternative hiring solutions - in and of itself seems indicative of an appetite for change within some sectors.

In particular, employers with a need to expand overseas (or relate to an increasingly diverse population within Japan) appeared to more strongly value overseas experience and qualities such as a "*diverse mind*" (i.e., the ability to understand and work with people from a variety of different cultures; Mr. Sato, Japanese and international companies). Mr. Ogawa recruited new graduates for a manufacturing company. As part of the selection process, his company included an English language test, and checked with all applicants that they were willing to be posted overseas. He emphasised that employers increasingly valued people who could "work with people with different cultures and different languages", "*negotiate* with foreigners, meeting with them, creating markets, collaborating". He suggested that, in fact, "the only way of developing these skills is through study abroad experiences". This is consistent with literature reviewed in Chapter Three suggesting overseas experiences may be particularly valued within the Japanese manufacturing sector (Japan Association of Corporate Executives 2014: 21; Nagano 2014). Such "cross-cultural communication skills" were sometimes also considered useful by employers in the domestic context. For Mr. Nagaoka (assistant manager, HR, transport company), this was because managers needed to be able to understand the way of thinking, living environment, and culture of an increasingly international workforce. A large proportion of the workers who sorted items for distribution overnight for this company were foreign workers. Mr. Hashimoto (division head, broadcasting) explained that being familiar with different values was an important attribute in the context of broadcasting in order to better

anticipate how different audiences within Japan might respond to their programmes.

Ms. Hamasaki managed the "global" section within a company running an information website for graduates seeking employment. Her role involved liaising with companies who perceived themselves as needing graduates with skills and attributes that would help them compete globally (i.e., the ability to negotiate with foreigners and work in their overseas offices). Within our interview, Ms. Hamasaki indicated that recently some companies perceived that "in order to compete internationally, as companies become more global", they needed to recruit people who "were different to [those we had recruited] so far", and "would be a stimulus to the people around them [....] and revitalise the organisation". She described companies who were introducing initiatives to employ more non-Japanese and/or to attempt to recruit perhaps one or two in ten of their Japanese recruits in a different way. Later in the interview, Ms. Hamasaki acknowledged that Japanese companies had traditionally used "communication skills" to refer to an ability that had a lot to do with fitting in and preserving harmony (as described earlier in the chapter). With these changes, she suggested, some companies were looking for people who "can damage this harmony, in a good way", or "break up a little this insularity".

It is telling, however, that despite her position and these experiences, Ms. Hamasaki remained sceptical about the potential for Japanese employers to value experience gained in the form of a gap year or working holiday, in particular. Consistent with the observations of Rear (2013: 192) about the "stickiness" of institutional practices and cultural values in Japan, respondents emphasised structural factors and competing cultural values as explanations for predominantly negative assumptions about the value of working holidays in particular. Given the value placed on qualities such as cooperativeness and perseverance, working holidays potentially functioned as negative symbolic capital. Respondents perceived these as factors that were relatively resistant to change, although changes might be occurring within particular sectors - especially manufacturing - and individuals might make a compelling case to convince employers of the value of their experiences. The next section extends these arguments, explaining how the individual backgrounds of evaluators may interact with economic and socio-cultural context to further reinforce this structuring of opportunities.

6.3.3 Hiring as cultural matching: Processes of looking-glass merit

This section of the chapter discusses how the different structural positioning of graduate working holidaymakers explained above could be reinforced at the individual level. Reference is specifically made to processes of "looking-glass merit", which describe how recruiter perceptions of candidates are coloured by their own backgrounds, experiences, and characteristics (Rivera 2012, 2015). Following Rivera (2012: 1016), the intent of this section is not to theorise about hiring generally or speak universally. Rather, the aim is to explore in detail relatively understudied processes that may contribute to employer evaluations of candidates with overseas experience. An important caveat is that this section draws upon employer descriptions of their perceptions and recruitment processes, rather than observation of such processes. Thus much of what can be said about recruitment is speculative at best (cf. Brown and Hesketh 2004: 147-148). The evidence presented is, however, consistent with data generated through observational studies (Rivera 2012, 2015).

Rivera (2012, 2015) argues that part of what happens in the recruitment processes she observed within elite professional firms in the USA is a search for cultural fit (see also Ashley et al. 2015: 38-39). Recruiters assessed this cultural fit through "a process of cultural capital matching", "using themselves as proxies" (Rivera 2015: 140, 145). Rivera (2012: 1012) specifically introduces the notion of cognitive processes of looking-glass merit to explain how "[e]valuators used their personal experiences as frames through which they interpreted candidates' intellectual, social, and moral worth". She observes that this was partly because they felt that they could better assess someone who had done something similar to what they had done, because they knew what was involved. It was also, Rivera argues, because they had themselves been successful, and they felt that candidates with similar experiences would be more likely to be successful: "[e]ssentially, they constructed merit in a manner that validated their own strengths and experiences and perceived similar candidates as better applicants" (Rivera 2012: 1012). Similar patterns have been recognised in other research exploring perceptions of individuals with overseas experience (e.g., Crossman and Clarke 2010: 605; Waters 2007: 493).

Consistent with this literature, respondents' descriptions about the potential impact of overseas experiences often bore a striking resemblance to what they said about their own experiences. A British employer, for example,

identified increased confidence, broader networks, and knowledge and awareness of different cultures as potential impacts of overseas experience. When asked about the impact of her own experiences working and studying abroad, she specifically referenced and repeated these earlier responses:

> *Lynley: Do you think that that's shaped your opinions in any way?*
>
> *Heather (recruitment manager, global technology company): Absolutely. I guess a lot of the stuff that I've talked about. I think it made me get on with people from different backgrounds and cultures better, it broadened my horizons, broadened my confidence, broadened my skill set, communication skills [....]*

Daniel (careers adviser) observed that British hiring managers were generally "*more sympathetic*" towards applicants with experiences of work and travel overseas in recent years as they have "*either travelled themselves, know people who have travelled, are wishing that they had travelled, or are planning to travel".* Employer perceptions of the work that students undertook while overseas could also be influenced by their own experiences. Kate (talent acquisition specialist, recruitment consultancy), for example, explained: "*working behind a bar, and dealing with difficult customers especially, I've done that, so I can appreciate that, maybe a little bit more*". Arguably, this was associated with her perception of bar work as associated with "*resilience*", "*adaptability*", and "*confidence*".

Patterns similar to these were found across both contexts, such that employers' individual experiences and backgrounds appeared to influence their evaluations of candidates with similar experiences. However, these could operate in opposing directions both across and within contexts. Ms. Hamasaki (careers expert) made this observation about how senior managers in Japanese companies evaluated candidates in ways that validated their own strengths and experiences:

> The senior people in companies have always walked along the rails. Things are changing, but the really senior people, they've lived their lives thinking that's correct, and they believe that their generation was correct. So I think it's difficult for them to accept that diversity.

Mr. Ogawa (recruiting, HR group, manufacturing company) similarly emphasised the importance in the recruitment context in Japan of the evaluations of those in more senior positions. Describing these individuals as "*the old ages who have the power to decide for the companies*", he

suggests their negative attitudes towards overseas experiences were directly linked to their own experiences:

> *So the general managers [....], who have power in the company, until now, they only choose working. They didn't have the alternative to go abroad, so their criteria [....] people who continue working in their whole life is the best and they will be good in my company, they think.*

Mr. Ogawa himself had very favourable views about study abroad, in part because of his own recent study abroad experience. It is significant, however, that even in a sector within which overseas experiences are thought to be perceived increasingly favourably, Mr. Ogawa suggests that the attitudes of senior management - and their influence on final selection decisions - remain relatively resistant to change. He further attributes this, in part, to these processes of looking-glass merit.

This section of the chapter argues that the attributes employers valued - and how they thought these might be developed and demonstrated by overseas experience - were coloured by their own backgrounds and experiences. Along with several participants, and Rivera (2012, 2015), I hypothesise this might operate in the recruitment context such that candidates who shared experiences and strengths with their evaluators tended to be assessed more favourably. This is consistent with arguments that evaluation criteria drawn upon by employers are not neutral and objective. Instead, they are shaped by the characteristics of evaluators, such that applicants who share similar backgrounds to recruiters may be unfairly advantaged in the recruitment process. More broadly, this section of the chapter has demonstrated the significance of one of the most overlooked elements of the Bourdieusian triad - the field - in influencing whether overseas experiences represent cultural and symbolic capital that may advantage or disadvantage its bearers The next section considers the relevance of capital and habitus.

6.4 A Bourdieusian interpretation: Field, capital, and habitus

As outlined in Chapter Two, scholars exploring the maintenance and reinforcement of social inequalities using a Bourdieusian framework highlight the necessity of considering - in explaining differential outcomes - both capital and habitus (e.g., Bathmaker, Ingram and Waller 2013: 740; Brown and Hesketh 2004: 36, 156; Rivera 2015: 99-100). Capital constitutes available resources influencing the activities students and graduates may pursue. Habitus constitutes internalised and subconscious orientations and

dispositions inculcated within individuals as they pass through different fields. Bathmaker, Ingram and Waller (2013: 740) extend Bourdieusian metaphors about the rules of "the game" to illustrate this point, suggesting "that the middle classes are not only dealt the better cards in a high-stakes game, but they have internalised the knowledge, through economic and cultural advantages, of when and how best to play them". The preceding sections of this chapter have emphasised the need to consider also the importance of field, highlighting how similar forms of capital may be valued differently in different contexts. In this section of the chapter, I build on existing literature to highlight additional contributions a Bourdieusian framework can make to understanding the relationship between mobility and the (re)production of social inequalities.

6.4.1 Hierarchies of gap year experiences, their implications, and potential for evolution

Interwoven through the accounts presented in this chapter are suggestions that employers may value certain types of experiences more than others, consistent with the identification in previous literature of hierarchies of gap year experiences (Heath 2007: 91, 95; Simpson 2005a: 141; 2005b: 453). This is of particular concern because pursuing the activities that appear to be particularly valued by employers demands time, energy, money, and/or social capital not equally available to all (Ashley et al. 2015: 39; Lehmann 2012; Rivera 2012: 1017). A Bourdieusian perspective thus suggests such hierarchies may function as a means of stratifying young people (Simpson 2005b: 453). Hierarchies in the activities valued by employers were apparent across contexts, although the nature of these hierarchies differed in each.

When considering the relative merit of different types of overseas experience, British respondents suggested that experiences that were unique and interesting might be regarded particularly favourably[17]. Daniel (careers adviser), for example, explained how "*interesting*" experiences might help students "*stand out*" in applications:

> [O]ne recruiter I spoke to was saying, "So I've got two students, and one of them has spent three years doing a media degree, and the other has spent their time swimming in the Amazon". He said, "The person that sounds interesting to me, and makes them stand out, and

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[17] It should be noted that ideas that gap year activities undertaken in exotic places for noble causes might be particularly valued have been critiqued as part of the legacy of colonialism (e.g., Simpson 2005a).

> *is going to potentially be differentiating themselves, is ... what else*
> *have you done?" And if you've spent your time doing something*
> *which actually makes you interesting, then you will potentially attract*
> *attention.*

This is consistent with existing research, which highlights that activities that are "adventurous or unusual" (e.g., Stuart et al. 2009: 127) and "extraordinary" achievements (Rivera 2015: 97) are especially valued. In Britain, however, some participants felt that the pendulum may have swung too far the other way. Susan (careers adviser) observed that overseas experiences might now have become so prevalent that they were no longer as useful for applicants seeking to differentiate themselves:

> *Because employers read so much of the same kind of thing over and*
> *over and over again [....] it's said too often, there's nothing remarkable*
> *in it at all when so many people travel.*

A further example of this trend can be found in a recent news article in which a lead HSBC lawyer is quoted as lamenting that "[g]ap years have become the norm", mourning the loss of the "mundane and ordinary", and expressing a desire for candidates with experiences that are "different" and "real", such as working a Saturday job at a sports store (Espinoza 2015). These ideas - although speculative - are consistent with the findings of a recent European Region Action Scheme for the Mobility of University Students (ERASMUS) evaluation. This report suggested that as participation rates increased, the percentage of participants believing that their participation helped them gain their first job declined (Bracht et al. 2006).

In the Japanese context, study abroad experiences and foreign internships - activities generally perceived to be more expensive to pursue - tended to be regarded more highly than working holiday experiences. Mr. Higuchi (careers adviser) described the experiences of two returned working holidaymakers who had been asked by employers why they had chosen to go on working holidays and not study abroad. Mr. Tanaka (careers adviser) observed that there were risks involved with pursuing a working holiday. He said he would ask anyone interested in pursuing one why they were not considering study abroad. He would question how hard working holidaymakers would work without the externally imposed incentives of a study abroad programme. Furthermore, he described overseas internships in terms that suggested employers would acknowledge these - but not necessarily working holidays - as a part of someone's work history (*shokureki*). Crucially, careers advisers and employers advised that in order

not to have a detrimental effect overseas experiences were best undertaken within certain time frames. Ideally, they should be pursued while a university student, or within a short period after graduation. This, however, required greater financial resources than were available to many participants.

These findings are consistent with results from a survey of 1,583 individuals with overseas experience conducted by the Japan Association of Overseas Studies (JAOS 2014a: 5, 48-53). Just 37.9% of working holidaymakers, but 63.4% of those who had undertaken overseas internships, said that their experiences "were advantageous" when job hunting upon their return to Japan. When compared with respondents who had undertaken internships, working holidaymakers had poorer outcomes in terms of level of employment and monthly income, and perceived their experiences to have been less beneficial.

This section thus highlights evidence suggesting that the resources that individuals have at their disposal may influence the maintenance and reinforcement of social inequalities in the context of graduate employment. To the extent that employers perceive activities that are more resource intensive to be more valuable, and to the extent that this influences their selection decisions, there is the potential for evaluations to be stratified based on access to resources. Evidence from the UK context further suggests that such hierarchies are not necessarily static, and there is potential for evolution over time. However, further research would be required to more rigorously explore this possibility.

6.4.2 "Knowing how to package it": Playing one's cards in accordance with the rules of the game

Existing literature suggests employers consider how an applicant talks about their experiences in applications and interviews to be an important part of their evaluation. Scholars have drawn attention to the emphasis employers place on vague and ambiguous criteria such as "fit" and "polish", suggesting that these attributes "can be mapped on to middle-class status and socialisation" (Ashley et al. 2015: 6, 38-40; see also Brown and Hesketh 2004: 156-161). Consistent with existing literature, careers advisers suggested that the ability to "package" experiences in ways that were highly regarded by employers was influenced by students' (social class) backgrounds. Social class was referenced spontaneously and explicitly by most UK careers advisers as a reason why different groups of students tended to experience different outcomes. Class was not explicitly referenced by Japanese interviewees, however a number of careers advisers suggested

students would do better in interviews if they could draw upon experiences talking with a diverse range of people. These concepts (i.e., "class" and "experiences talking with a diverse range of people") arguably overlapped to an extent, as will be shown in the following analysis.

Most participants emphasised that *how* students and graduates spoke about their experiences would make a difference to how they were perceived by employers. Daniel (careers adviser), for example, explained as follows:

> [T]ravel and it can get you noticed. As long as you know how to package it. If all you've done is said, "I went and sat on a beach for a year, it was great, I did nothing", well, that's not going to necessarily win you any brownie points. But if what you can actually demonstrate is how you've used the time to really develop as a person, then I think that can actually stand you in good stead.

David (careers adviser), indicated that for students to be successful in an interview context they needed to describe how they had "*taken control of your [the student's] life in a direction that actually meets up with my [the employer's] objectives*". When I asked him how well he thought graduates could do that, he spontaneously couched his reply in terms of social class, indicating that "*the more middle-class graduates with good social capital have a chance*":

> [I]t was pathetic, sad, and heartrending when I would see students from [newer university] try to impress employers [....] And that was simply because they had no experience of talking to these sorts of people in this sort of way [....] They had nothing in common and no understanding of how to build a conversation and build a relationship.

> Many [Russell Group University] students were more advanced than that, because they'd grown up in the sort of families where Uncle Eric was an accountant, where the friends that came over were doctors [....] so they had the natural life advantages that the [newer university] students didn't [....]

Daniel (careers adviser), in contrast, did not explicitly reference social class. However, when I asked him how well he thought graduates could "*package*" their experiences for employers, he spontaneously explained that comparing students at the new university and the research-intensive university where he had worked was "*like chalk and cheese*". Students from the research-intensive university tended to present "*a forward-looking, future narrative*" relating their experiences to the employer, while students at the new

university presented a "*chronological narrative of what I've been doing*". Daniel attributed these differences to social and cultural resources:

> *They've first of all got, as I say, much more self-confidence, so there is a belief in what they can achieve. I think the second thing is that there is a recognition of the sorts of things that they probably need to do to compete. So they will engage more with opportunities that are made available, they will engage more with employer contacts, they will engage more in society activities, they will engage more with the sporting side, it's a more immersive experience. But I think the key thing, also, is the extent to which they have got family networks that are knowledgeable and supportive. So they can probably actually get a lot of their advice and guidance and this is what you need to be thinking about, from family. And they don't need to rely on a third party [....] At [research-intensive university] there is a more natural orientation towards career, and graduate level career.*

In the Japanese context, respondents did not explicitly refer to social class background, although some suggested, like their British counterparts, that it was experiences of mixing with certain types of people that was associated with more successful interview performance. For example, Professor Komikawa (careers expert) suggested that to succeed in job interviews, it was important to "understand properly what the other person is asking of you, and to respond to that properly". He emphasised that it was difficult for students to "grasp from within the conversation", on a first meeting with an unfamiliar adult in an interview context, "what sort of personality the other person had, and what sorts of things they were thinking", in order to respond appropriately. When I asked how those people who could do this well differed from those who could not, Professor Komikawa attributed it to "the way they spent their time after becoming a university student". He indicated that those who had worked merely in part-time jobs at convenience stores, bars, and restaurants and "hung out only with other students" would be unable to interact well with an unfamiliar adult. In contrast, someone who had worked alongside other adults by becoming involved with the activities of a not-for-profit organisation, for example, would differ greatly in this respect.

On a related note, researchers have highlighted access to coaching to improve application forms and interview techniques as something that might further advantage individuals attending more prestigious universities and/or those with parents of a higher socioeconomic status (Ashley et al. 2015: 33-

34, 87). Furthermore, candidates with wider experiences and networks are likely to do better on questions about their motivations and understanding and awareness of the firm (Ashley et al. 2015: 85). In Japan, differential access to information and resources about companies and how to prepare for the job hunting process has been highlighted as an equity concern for students who are looking for jobs (Yōhei 2009: 58-63).

This section thus highlights evidence suggesting that it is not merely the resources that individuals have at their disposal but also their understanding of how to play the game that may influence the maintenance and reinforcement of social inequalities in the context of graduate employment. Specifically, it is argued that to benefit from overseas experiences it is necessary for individuals to possess both the resources required to pursue the activities that are most highly valued by employers and the understanding of how best to accumulate and deploy resources in the employment context.

6.5 Conclusion

This chapter has illustrated how different recruitment and employment practices and cultural norms and values prevalent within different country contexts interact to structure differing perceptions of the value of experiences of work and travel overseas in the UK and Japan. While in Britain the gap year was often positioned as akin to preparation for adulthood, in Japan delaying entry to the labour market or quitting a job to pursue a working holiday was frequently perceived as "running away" from adult responsibilities. Employer perceptions of overseas experiences are influenced by different institutional structures, recruitment practices, standard career routes, and wider societal norms about mobility and/or development in each context. While drawing conclusions about the "direct" impact that these different perceptions had on selection decisions is difficult, the contrast between contexts suggests that certain claims may be considered more or less credible in different contexts.

More specifically, in Britain, employers displayed an apparently greater willingness to perceive experiences of work and travel overseas as signals of forms of cultural and symbolic capital such as maturity, self-reliance, flexibility, intercultural sensitivity, and the ability to take responsibility for one's own development. In Japan, in contrast, institutional practices and broader societal norms and values interact to shape an environment within which qualities such as the ability to work harmoniously with others, fitting in,

diligence, and perseverance are especially valued. In this context, delaying entry to the labour market or quitting a job to pursue overseas experiences - and especially working holidays - might be perceived to signal a lack of perseverance, or an excess of ambivalently perceived independence/individuality, and might thus function as negative symbolic capital. Evaluations may also be coloured by the strengths, backgrounds, and experiences of evaluators themselves (Rivera 2012, 2015).

This chapter thus demonstrates the significance not only of field, but also of capital and habitus, in shaping whether activities such as overseas gap years might constitute the accumulation of cultural and symbolic resources or capital that might be valued by employers. The next chapter discusses the career trajectories of the working holidaymakers who participated in this research, and the perceptions they themselves had of the consequences of their experiences.

Chapter 7 Overseas experience and graduate career aspirations, orientations, and trajectories in comparative perspective

7.1 Introduction

This chapter investigates the employment-related aspirations, orientations, and trajectories of students and graduates participating in this research. It explores how they accumulated and mobilised various experiences, including those of work and travel overseas, in advancing employment options. The cross-national comparative approach links orientations to the contexts within which they are embedded. The chapter thus illustrates the significance of institutional arrangements, sector of employment, and cultural values in shaping the "vocabulary" (Mills 1940) drawn on by graduates to "warrant" (Gergen 1989) claims to being worthy of graduate level employment in different times and places (Holmes 2013b; 2015: 232-233). Further, findings contribute to filling a gap in the literature identified by Snee (2009: 229). Specifically, she suggests research should investigate how capital accumulated via gap years is deployed, given observations that some are more able than others to tell the "right story" to draw upon gap year experiences to their advantage (Snee 2009: 202, 229; see also O'Reilly 2005: 163-164).

The analysis draws in part on distinctions made by Brown and Hesketh (2004: 9, 124-146) between two "ideal types" of approaches to the labour market, the "player" and the "purist". As described in Chapter Two, Brown and Hesketh (2004: 35-36) argue that success in the competition for graduate employment requires "packaging" *personal capital* (e.g., "experiences, character, and accomplishments") into a "*narrative* of employability". Players tailor their presentation of their selves and experiences in accordance with job requirements; purists prioritise finding a job that is a good fit and strive to honestly communicate who they are and why they are suitable for the job. Brown and Hesketh (2004: 126) suggest players have a positional advantage, to the extent that they have been coached in and understand "the rules of the game". Importantly, Brown (2005) argues that a focus on graduate orientations does not need to supersede, but can be compatible with, a Bourdieusian approach. The following analysis draws on these concepts - alongside notions of cultural and symbolic capital - in order to examine the significance of economic and socio-cultural context and social position in shaping student and graduate

orientations to the accumulation and mobilisation of various experiences in the search for desired employment.

Section 7.2 explores similarities and differences in participant orientations to the task of advancing employment options across contexts. Section 7.3 focuses specifically on the mobilisation of overseas experiences, investigating variation in the extent to which such experiences functioned as cultural or symbolic capital in different fields, both across and within contexts. Section 7.4 investigates the significance of social position in influencing how experiences are accumulated and mobilised, and thence how mechanisms of social stratification and the (re)production of social inequalities in the context of graduate career trajectories differ between Britain and Japan.

7.2 Orientations to the accumulation and mobilisation of experiences in comparative perspective

As described in Chapter Two, researchers have questioned the extent to which the career and life decisions made by young people are necessarily strategic and reflexive (e.g., in relation to gap years specifically, see Snee 2009, 2014a), and whether reflexivity is necessarily associated with the trajectories of more advantaged individuals (e.g., Ball, Maguire and Macrae 2000; Brooks and Everett 2008; Walkerdine, Lucey and Melody 2001). Furthermore, existing literature highlights a variety of possible responses to discourses emphasising the need for people to develop "enterprising selves" and take individual responsibility for investing in their own development and employability (Brooks and Everett 2008: 335; Holford 2007). In what follows, I explore similarities and differences across contexts in participant orientations to the task of advancing employment options in relation to this literature. Discussion further investigates how orientations in each context were congruent with aspects of the economic and socio-cultural contexts within which they were embedded.

7.2.1 Tailoring the "most relevant piece of experience" to job requirements in Britain

This section of the chapter first outlines how British graduates participating in this research generally displayed a pragmatic and reactive rather than a long-term strategic and reflexive orientation towards their transitions through education and into employment. British graduates tended to orient to the task of attaining desired employment through the language of competencies.

They predominantly displayed player (cf. purist) type orientations, and perceived the context within which they were developing their careers as one of relative flexibility. While internalising responsibility for their own development to some extent, they also acknowledged structural constraints impacting their ability to attain desired career outcomes. Further, they at times exhibited a tendency to exploit to their own advantage - from a strategic distance - discourses about the need to assume individual responsibility for the development of their own employability.

British participants primarily embarked on gap years immediately or shortly after graduation, with eight of ten aged under 25 at the time of their first eligible period of work and travel overseas. Seven were students before their departure; the remainder worked in lower managerial, administrative, and professional (marketing, event management) or intermediate (administrative) occupations, based roughly on National Statistics Socio-Economic Classification (NS-SEC; Rose, Pevalin and O'Reilly 2005). Participants were involved in varying activities while overseas. These included relatively unskilled work in restaurants or tourist accommodation and/or on farms; teaching English in Japan; marketing; a market research internship; and secretarial/administrative work. At the time of their interviews, one participant worked in a higher professional position (auditing). Three worked in lower managerial, administrative, and professional occupations (careers advice, marketing, advertising), one in an intermediate position (administration), and one in a semi-routine position (telesales). Three were pursuing further studies, and one remained overseas. (See Appendices B and C for more information about participants.)

Importantly, the majority of these graduates did not plan their trajectories through education and into employment strategically and reflexively, as claimed by theories of individualisation. Instead, consistent with other literature (e.g., Ball et al. 2002; Hodkinson and Sparkes 1997), they often exhibited a short-term orientation, reacting to opportunities as they arose. Gemma (PhD student), for example, described "*not really knowing what I wanted to do*" after graduating with a degree in politics. She taught English in Japan for two years, then returned to Britain to study for an MA. Gemma said the idea of being a researcher "*only really occurred to me at the end of our stay there*":

> *It wasn't the plan to come back and get back into research. I don't think I really had a plan either. I think going to Japan was as far as I had seen [....] I watched the West Wing [....] So I saw Joey [Lucas]*

and I was like, that's the thing that I want to do, actually, that looks really interesting, and I think I'd be good at that, so that's what made me want to be a researcher.

British participants almost universally adopted the "rhetoric of competence" (Brown and Hesketh 2004: 148) in explaining their orientation to job hunting. In other words, they perceived their task to be one of providing "*examples*" to "*prove*" possession of specific competencies sought by employers. These orientations are congruent with competency-based recruitment practices described in the previous chapter. Specifically, these approaches should be understood within the context of labour market practices such as recruitment for specific rather than generalist positions (e.g., Yoshimoto et al. 2005); greater labour mobility (e.g., Dore 1990/1973); and a shifting of risks and responsibilities (e.g., for training) from employers onto employees and lesser willingness/capacity for employers to offer on-the-job training (e.g., Brown, Hesketh and Williams 2003; Humburg and van der Velden 2013; Soskice 1993). This is consistent with a labour market within which experience and the capacity to "hit the ground running" are prioritised by a number of employers (Hinchliffe and Jolly 2011; Humburg and van der Velden 2014; Pollard et al. 2015).

Furthermore, the approach of British graduates often resembled that of players (Brown and Hesketh 2004: 126-130). They understood the search for employment as a positional competition and sought to stand out from other applicants, selectively mobilising experiences (e.g., work experience, educational background, and extracurricular activities) as ways of "sending the appropriate message to employers" (Brown and Hesketh 2004: 130). Suzanne, for example, took gap years before and after studying geography at university and was completing a master's degree in human rights law when I interviewed her. She applied unsuccessfully for a number of graduate schemes as an undergraduate, successfully reapplying for one after returning from a working holiday in New Zealand (where she predominantly worked as a floor manager at a restaurant). When completing application forms and responding to interview questions, Suzanne sought to identify "*the most relevant piece of experience, or the most relevant moment in your life*" in order to demonstrate that she possessed the competencies sought by an employer. From amongst her educational experiences, extracurricular activities, and employment history, Suzanne considered her experience with the University Officers' Training Corps as particularly "*good to talk about in job interviews*":

> *[I]t's good because I've not met many other people that have done it.*
> *So I think it helps you stand out in interviews [....]*

Suzanne's account of reapplying for a graduate scheme after taking a year out overseas and undertaking a master's qualification also highlights the relative flexibility afforded new graduates by institutional arrangements in Britain, as described in Chapter Three. Participants' perceptions of this flexibility can be seen in the relatively short-term orientations they assumed towards their first jobs. This is further illustrated by their continued investment in accumulating and mobilising various experiences (e.g., work experience and/or further education and training) in their search for desired employment, as their aspirations evolved over time. (This was contingent on their having the resources to do so, as discussed in section 7.4.1.) For many British participants, consistent with existing literature, further education and training were considered a means to specialise and prepare for more specific vocations and/or enhance competitiveness (Brooks and Everett 2009: 338, 342). In total, further study was undertaken by four participants (one completed a National Vocational Qualification, and three enrolled in postgraduate courses), and considered by an additional three.

The relative flexibility afforded new graduates in Britain is further illustrated by participants' perceptions that employers did not generally evaluate working and travelling overseas "before settling down" negatively. They were sometimes concerned that they might be perceived as "*flighty*" or lacking seriousness. However, employer concerns were frequently interpreted as being about whether graduates were *now* ready to commit. Sarah, for example, interpreted an employer question, "*Is there more change on the horizon for you?*", as being about whether she was "*done with that*". Debbie replied to a question about "*would I up and leave any time soon to go back?"* with reassurances that "*I'm here to settle down and make a life here*".

At the narrative level, participant accounts often emphasised individual responsibility for outcomes. Suzanne, for example, attributed her eventual success in obtaining a place on a competitive graduate scheme in part to the effort she put into her second application:

> *And then I thought, I'll give it another go, and I'll really be careful*
> *about how I answer the questions. It took me two weeks to do the*
> *application form [....] And I think this time, it was obvious that I cared.*
> *Which is what I hadn't got across. So this time I got it.*

In contrast, Gemma attributed her lack of success in an initial application for teaching jobs at university at least in part to an inability to "*frame*" experiences in a way that employers "*would understand and appreciate*".

Not only did participants internalise responsibility for the outcomes of applications, they sometimes also appeared to internalise ideas that they should use their time productively to develop their employability. Tom, a journalism graduate who worked in data processing and telesales after returning from a working holiday in Canada, spent three months teaching English and learning Spanish on a subsequent trip overseas. Although primarily wanting to spend time with his girlfriend, Tom perceived there to be a "*need to do something [....] to better myself whilst I'm there".* This was related at least in part to feelings of regret at not having tried harder to "*do something career related*" during his time in Canada. This resonates with the orientation to doing something "worthwhile" found in the accounts of Snee's (2014a, 2014b) participants. Arguably, this is also consistent with Rose's (1990, 1996) notion of governance through freedom, where students and graduates are encouraged to prioritise self-development and employability, taking individual responsibility for choices and their outcomes (Edwards 2002; Moreau and Leathwood 2006).

However, at other times, participants - even within the same accounts - acknowledged the poor economic climate, highly competitive nature of certain employment sectors, lack of vacancies, and regional segmentation of employment opportunities as explanations for difficulties finding employment (e.g., Debbie, Tom, Sarah, Fiona, Emma). Sarah, for example, describes returning from a working holiday in 2009 and experiencing "*a real crisis of confidence*", wondering, "*God, am I really that unemployable*". Elsewhere in the same interview, however, she attributes this four to five months of unemployment to the economic climate and there being "*just no jobs*". In contrast to observations from Brannen and Nilsen (2005: 423) about the potential invisibility of structural influences, the findings of this research suggest participants - especially after the global financial crisis - "cannot be caricatured as naïvely individualistic and, therefore, blind to the role of social structures in shaping their lives" (Devadason 2007: 205; see also Devadason 2006).

Indeed, participants sometimes expressed a considerable degree of scepticism and strategic distance from ideas that they were personally responsible for developing their employability. Sarah sceptically observes that employers value "*willingness to learn and ability to learn*" because they

are concerned with "*getting their money's worth out of you*". Her account of embarking upon a third working holiday in her late 20s shows a strategic awareness of the "*buzzwords*" that employers are looking for (e.g., being "*worldly* [....] *flexible and adaptable*"). She wonders "*how much more [travel] I could get away with*", while exploiting these discourses to "*justify*" her decisions to employers. Her account resonates with O'Reilly's (2005: 160-161) description of "the process of justification" of long-term travel plans and how "a reference to personal development is enough to gain acceptance from significant others". Examples such as these suggest that theories of governance through freedom (Rose 1990, 1996) at best offer only partial explanations for how aspirations and orientations are shaped by social context. They do not account for the diversity of observed responses to the emphasis in contemporary neoliberal societies on employability as an individual responsibility.

The next section of this chapter explores similarities and differences in how Japanese students and graduates approached the task of advancing employment options.

7.2.2 "Making yourself known" to employers who "extrapolate from the atmosphere" in Japan

Japanese students and graduates participating in this research - like their British counterparts - generally tended to adopt a pragmatic and reactive approach to navigating transitions through education and into employment. They differed from British graduates in several ways. First, they tended to orient to the task of attaining desired employment through the language of personality. Second, they showed a greater prevalence of purist (cf. player) type orientations. Third, they perceived the context within which they were developing their careers to be one of relative rigidity. Like their British counterparts, Japanese participants internalised responsibility for outcomes to some extent, while also acknowledging structural constraints impacting their employment prospects.

Japanese participants primarily embarked upon experiences of work and travel overseas after having graduated university and worked for a number of years. Most (13 of 18) were aged over 25 at the time of their first eligible period of work and travel overseas. Eight worked in lower managerial, administrative, and professional positions before their departure (e.g., web design, sales, teaching), based roughly on National Statistics Socio-Economic Classification (NS-SEC; Rose, Pevalin and O'Reilly 2005). Four worked in intermediate positions (e.g., administrative/secretarial), and two in

lower supervisory and technical positions (e.g., chef). The remaining four were students. Participants engaged in varying activities while overseas, including paid work, volunteering, language study, and travel. The majority worked in relatively unskilled employment (e.g., kitchen and farm hands, waiters), while some used previous experience to gain relatively skilled employment (e.g., accounting, web design). At the time of their interviews, three worked in lower managerial, administrative, and professional occupations (web design, IT consultant, human resources), two in intermediate positions (administrative/secretarial), two in lower supervisory and technical positions (e.g., chef), and two in semi-routine positions (as kitchen and catering assistants). Two were self-employed (education agent, freelance directing), two remained overseas, four were working part-time and/or in transition, and one had returned to undergraduate study. (See Appendices B and C for more information about participants.)

Like British participants, Japanese participants often exhibited a pragmatic, short-term, and reactive - rather than a strategic and reflexive - approach to planning their trajectories through education and into employment. Akiko (IT), for example, described herself as having studied social relations at university because she thought it would leave her options open. She applied for the job she did because a talk offered at her university piqued her interest:

> *When I was doing newspaper job, in university, I found creating something is very interesting for me. So I wanted to do something like that. But I am not sure what I could do. So starting the job hunting, I attended some seminars, and I was advised the system engineer can make a program [....] and even if you don't have any experience or knowledge, you can become a system engineer [....] There was seminars held in university in my campus, and I saw the programme and found, oh, that company seems interesting. So I attended.*

The "rhetoric of competence" (Brown and Hesketh 2004: 148) was almost completely absent from Japanese participants' accounts. Rather, they oriented to job hunting through the language of personality and communication skills. This is consistent with existing literature (Honda 2010: 52; Japan Business Federation 2016; Uenishi 2011). Employers were overwhelmingly believed to be evaluating "human nature" (*ningensei*), "the person" (*hito o*), and/or "personality" (*hitogara, seikaku, personality, character*). Alternatively, they were perceived to be looking for a particular "type" of person, who displayed specific attributes. Frequently referenced in

this context were *sunao-sa* (translated variously, per Crossman and Noma (2013), as obedience, cooperativeness, meekness, frankness, and honesty); *yaruki* (passion or enthusiasm); *kōdōryoku/sekkyokusei* (pro-activity); and *akarusa* (brightness/positivity).

Manami, for example, completed a degree in media studies and worked in travel sales for almost five years before her working holiday to Australia. She described herself as seeking change and a career in coffee, and hoping one day to open a cafe in her hometown. After returning to Japan she found employment at a cafe in Tokyo. Her comments emphasising personality are fairly representative:

> Lynley: So, speaking generally, what sorts of things do you think Japanese companies are looking for, when they're recruiting? [....]
>
> Manami: Passion. *Sunao-sa*[18], things like *honest* [....] Even if you go to a good university, there are [....] people who have a bad character. So I have the feeling that rather than looking at the name of the university [attended] and things like that, they're looking at the person.

Participants frequently suggested employers evaluated their personality and communication skills based on their appearance and how they spoke in the interview. Ayumu (job hunting), who had worked in tax accounting support before his working holiday in England, suggested employers evaluating communication skills "can only extrapolate from the atmosphere at that time, from actually interviewing you and talking to you". His emphasis here echoes ideas about the importance of indirect communication in the Japanese context discussed in the previous chapter. It should be noted that participants seeking mid-career rather than new graduate positions believed that employers would also be taking into account their experience and accomplishments in previous positions. Nevertheless, they drew simultaneously on the language of personality and communication skills, in stark contrast to the emphasis of British graduates on competencies.

This emphasis on personality is consistent with the discussion of Japanese recruitment practices in the previous chapter. Specifically, the approaches of Japanese students and graduates should be understood within the context of a labour market within which employers have tended to recruit new graduates for generalist positions, and provide company-specific on-the-job

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[18] Manami explained that by *sunao*, she meant: "[Y]ou don't answer back [....], you don't say 'I can't' but that you'll try anyway. Having the courage to properly acknowledge your errors and be able to say *sorry*".

training, assuming that employees would stay with the company long term (Firkola 2011; Hatvany and Pucik 1981; Nakamura 1992).

Furthermore, the approach of Japanese students and graduates often fit the purist type (Brown and Hesketh 2004: 137-145). The purist emphasis on conveying a "true sense" of who you are (Brown and Hesketh 2004: 142) is highlighted, for example, in Kazuko's (job hunting) suggestion that to succeed in job interviews it was important to "*show natural myself*". Kano had been a chef prior to his working holiday, and subsequently found employment (menu development and barista training) for a foreign cafe chain in Tokyo. He similarly emphasised the importance of communicating "all about you", in response to my question about what was necessary in order to succeed in job interviews:

> I think it's making yourself known. I think, perhaps, if they know all about you, and on the basis of that, it doesn't work out, that's okay. That's because your feelings don't match [....] Working for them, when you haven't been able to make yourself 100% known to them, and then failing when you express yourself, that's more of a waste of time [....]

A purist orientation was shown by a number of participants specifically in relation to their working holiday experiences. Emiko (office work), for example, considered it important to be honest about her experiences and saw rejection as a sign an opportunity was not a good fit. This was her reply when I asked how she wrote about her working holiday in job applications:

> I say honestly that I wanted to pursue cultural exchange through music [....] I don't say that it was for business or anything like that. But this reason, in a sense, is reflective of who I am [lit: is like me], so there are people who will listen with interest [....] I wouldn't want to work for a company that had a negative image of working holidays [....] I tell them honestly what I've been able to do, and how they react to that is up to the interviewer. So I'm thinking that's not something I can control [....]

Brown and Hesketh (2004: 137-145) further characterise purists as perceiving recruitment as a meritocratic rather than a positional competition. One of the key departures from the purist ideal type when this concept is applied in the Japanese context comes from the perceptions of some Japanese participants that the recruitment process could be unclear, subjective, and unfair. Maki had worked in classroom management for a

music school for three years prior to her working holiday and sought employment with a fast food franchise upon her return. She described herself as very unclear on the criteria employers were using to evaluate candidates in interviews:

> So I think they want you to have those skills [communication skills and cooperativeness]. But actually, if you ask whether you can see through to that in an interview, you probably can't, so I don't really know on what basis they're judging.

Maki's perceptions echo reports in existing literature that many Japanese students perceive selection criteria used by employers to be unclear (Koyama 2010; Recruit 2015; Uenishi 2011). When interpreting findings related to the purist ideal type in the Japanese context, this key difference needs to be acknowledged.

Further research may be required to draw any conclusions about the relative prevalence of player and purist orientations in Britain and Japan overall. Commenting on graduate recruitment in Japan more generally, Uenishi (2011: 92) and Senoo (2014) characterise students as attempting to play a role in applications and strategically tailor their accounts for each company to which they apply. Participants in the present research alluded to the prevalence of job hunting "manuals", complete with model answers. Player orientations are not entirely absent in Japan. It is possible that the prevalence of purist orientations amongst Japanese participants in this research - and perceptions that selection criteria are neither straightforward nor objective - may relate to participants' already marginal status and disillusionment with the labour market, and/or to the type of work they were seeking. Kano, however, appeared neither in a marginal position nor disillusioned with regards to his career prospects. The hypothesis that purist orientations may be more prevalent in Japan than in Britain resonates in particular with literature highlighting and critiquing the central importance of self-analysis and invocations to show "the self" within career adviser discourses and practices in Japan (Kagawa 2010: 184, 189; Komikawa 2011: 180-186). Uenishi (2011: 93) argues that these discourses leave students who are unsuccessful at risk of feeling that "their personality has been rejected in a process that focuses mainly on personality". Others express concerns at individualising tendencies placing the responsibility for "failure" solely on the shoulders of the individual (Honda 2005b: 159-160; 2008: 58-59; Komikawa 2011: 165, 230).

The accounts of Japanese participants also highlight the relative rigidity created by institutional arrangements and standard career trajectories in the Japanese context (as described in Chapter Three). This arguably limited opportunities for graduates to accumulate and mobilise experiences in advancing employment options. This rigidity has been associated with a lesser uptake of postgraduate qualifications and suggestions that additional investment in postgraduate education generally yields fewer advantages in Japan (e.g., Fong and Tsutsui 2015; Ohmori 2008). Participants perceived institutional arrangements to discourage changing jobs and/or pursuing non-linear career trajectories. Postgraduate study was pursued by only one Japanese participant, Akiko (IT), who did so abroad rather than in Japan, and considered by no additional participants. Upon hearing about my own (non-linear) route into postgraduate study, Michio (self-employment) observed:

> I feel that people who keep looking until they find what they want to do, people like that are more frequent. Amongst foreigners.

Furthermore, many Japanese participants expressed concern at how they would be evaluated by employers for having quit a previous position to embark upon their working holidays, as discussed in section 7.3.2.

Overall, Japanese participants appeared to perceive their context as one of greater rigidity than their British counterparts. However, some participants did perceive the accumulation and mobilisation of English language and vocational qualifications as potentially beneficial in developing their careers. Makoto (job hunting) saw studying for a qualification as the only way to develop the skills he needed to gain desired employment (as a casino dealer) and a way to potentially make connections to facilitate this. Maki (fast food franchise) gained a qualification in paper art, hoping that one day she would be able to open her own classroom and be self-employed. Scepticism has been expressed in Japan about the potential career benefit of English language qualifications specifically (e.g., Kawashima 2010: 278-280; Kubota 2011) and vocational qualifications more broadly (e.g., Borovoy 2010). Nevertheless, it should be acknowledged that these were seen as opportunities by some participants.

Japanese participants showed a variety of responses to ideas of individual responsibility for self-development and employability. At the narrative level, accounts emphasised choice and individual responsibility. When recounting experiences, participants sometimes described having been rejected for new graduate positions because their "reason for applying was weak" (e.g.,

Nariko). Like British participants, these Japanese graduates often approached job interviews with a sense that employers wanted to see that they had made the most of opportunities to develop themselves. Michiko (web design), for example, described feeling pressured to show her former employer that she had changed to the company's benefit as a result of her working holiday:

> We had some serious conversation, like, "What can you do for our company?", "Can you do something different thing after working holiday?" or whatever [....] Maybe they are expecting something changed [....] So now I'm feeling a bit pressured by that. Yeah, because, if nothing's changed they will be disappointed for me.

Arguably, this is consistent with Rose's (1990, 1996) notion of governance through freedom, where students and graduates are encouraged to take individual responsibility for choices and their outcomes, and invest in their own development and employability (Kariya 2010a). However, neither British nor Japanese participants appeared to internalise such demands without question. Nariko (quality control), for example, reacted particularly strongly to a question of mine about how employers might evaluate her working holiday experiences, insisting "I don't want my life to be influenced by companies' [preferences]".

Furthermore, it would be incorrect to assume that because participants sometimes internalised responsibility they did not also perceive structural impediments. Like British participants, Japanese participants frequently acknowledged the economic climate and lack of vacancies, high levels of competition in certain sectors of employment, and regional segmentation of opportunities as explanations for difficulties finding employment. Japanese participants, in addition, alluded to the structuring of the labour market into regular and non-regular positions. Participants perceived there to be an increased variety of ways of working in contemporary Japan (e.g., self-employment) and sometimes described "choosing" non-regular employment because this suited them better. However, they also acknowledged the risks and trade-offs this entailed, and the disadvantages of such positions in terms of material circumstances and job security. Makoto, for example, was offered an opportunity to become a regular worker at his place of employment (in customs clearance) after returning from his working holiday. He acknowledged that this "would be better", because as a regular worker he would be paid bonuses twice a year and receive allowances towards his commute and accommodation. However, he wished to pursue the

opportunity to work in a casino in future and felt that it would be more difficult to leave this company if he were made a regular worker. He thus turned this opportunity down. Nevertheless, his recognition that this choice was costing him because of how employment opportunities were structured in Japan shows that for Japanese participants, as for their British counterparts, asserting agency was not incompatible with a recognition of structural constraints.

In neither the British nor the Japanese context, therefore, did students or graduates overwhelmingly navigate transitions from education into employment and beyond with strategic and reflexive orientations, as posited by theories of individualisation. Nor did they consistently internalise without question employer imperatives to assume individual responsibility for their own employability, as posited by theories of governance through freedom. Rather, as discussed in this section of the chapter, participant orientations appeared congruent with - and likely shaped by - distinct features of each economic and socio-cultural context. The discussion that follows focuses specifically on whether and how participants mobilised experiences of work and travel overseas in the recruitment context.

7.3 Mobilisation of experiences of work and travel overseas across country contexts

This section of the chapter explores whether and how experiences of work and travel overseas were mobilised by British and Japanese participants within job applications and interviews. Its purpose is to explore contextual variation in the extent to which such experiences "function as symbolic capital, securing a positive or negative profit of distinction" (Bourdieu 1990: 140). Following Snee (2009: 133, my emphasis), the purpose of analyses is to use data generated through interviews with students and graduates to explore "how cultural practices such as gap years are invested with values that are institutionalised and recognised as legitimate *in specific fields and contexts*".

7.3.1 Overseas experiences as potential "stepping stones" in Britain

This section of the chapter specifically explores whether and how British participants spoke about their overseas experiences within job applications and interviews. On the one hand, given the importance in the British context of the rhetoric of competence, they often stated that they perceived their

experiences to impact employment outcomes only to the extent they were related to relevant competencies. They often prioritised other more relevant examples. Fiona (careers adviser), for example, acknowledges that overseas experience can be a "*big selling point*" and demonstrate "*dealing with a wide variety of people*" and "*adaptability*". However, she suggests in a recent interview "*a lot of my experience from my past jobs has been more relevant than my travelling".* On the other hand, consistent with discussion in the previous chapter about the perceived association in the British context between mobility, independence, and growth, participants overwhelmingly suggested these experiences *could* signal to employers that they possessed valuable soft skills or personality traits. These include cross-cultural understanding/cosmopolitanism, independence, confidence, and being sociable and "interesting", and are frequently conceptualised as forms of cultural and symbolic capital. In Britain, variation in the perceived outcomes of mobilising experiences of work and travel overseas appeared to be associated with variation in the type of work participants engaged in overseas, the sector within which they sought employment, and their orientations to the labour market (i.e., as player or purist).

For most British participants, finding employment after returning from overseas was relatively quick and easy. Emma (advertising) described her experiences after teaching English abroad as follows:

> *Once I got to London, it was very very easy [....] my very first interview for a media agency, doing the exact job that I'd gone to London looking for, I got the job.*

As described above, those who did experience difficulty finding employment upon their return (e.g., Sarah in 2009 and Tom in 2010) attributed this - at least in part - to the economic situation at that time.

Overseas experiences were sometimes described as examples of specific "*generic*" or "*transferable*" skills sought by employers (e.g., communication skills, working independently, teamwork, intercultural communication). Sarah (university admissions administrator) had been on working holidays to South Africa aged 22, Canada aged 26, and Australia and New Zealand aged 28 and 29 respectively. She worked in a number of roles (e.g., hospitality and tourism, for a state government department, and in university admissions). Sarah believes that she can draw on her overseas experiences to demonstrate that she possesses certain qualities desired by employers. She refers specifically to "*strong communication skills, and autonomy, and the ability to use initiative*". Sarah explicitly suggests that her experiences are

valued by employers at least partly because of the sectors within which she has sought employment (i.e., travel and education):

> *For me, with the work I was applying for in the travel industry, it's absolutely a plus. And possibly, for the roles that I aspire to currently, like my current role in universities dealing with overseas students, is also a plus [....] In other types of work, I wouldn't know [....] But for me, I can point to something in a job description and say, "I'm good at that." Or, "I possess that quality because of a personal experience", normally an overseas one.*

This echoes findings reported in Chapter Six, and is consistent with literature suggesting employer preferences vary across sectors (Brooks, Waters and Pimlott-Wilson 2012: 289-290; Desforges 1998: 188; Frändberg 2015: 562; Munt 1994: 109, 112; O'Reilly 2006: 1012-1013). British participants in this research tended to find employment in sectors where overseas experiences are reported to be regarded favourably (e.g., travel; academia and/or university administration; and what Alvesson (2001) refers to as knowledge-intensive companies where "rhetoric, image and social processes" are "crucial" (e.g., audit, advertising). This suggests results should not be generalised to all sectors. Nevertheless, the consistency between findings reported in the previous and current chapters - and the parallels between careers adviser and working holidaymaker accounts - suggests some confidence is warranted in the broad differences between country contexts identified in this research.

Not only does Sarah suggest employers in certain sectors value her experiences more highly, she also suggests the nature of the work she undertook overseas influenced evaluations. For this reason, she emphasises her "*professional experience*" on her CV:

> *[W]hat I do on my CV is prioritise the job, and then, not in bold, or not prominently at all, I put the location of that job. So I would put I worked as X, in Auckland, NZ, from this time to that time, and did so with my other jobs. So I don't prioritise it, and I don't flag it on my CV, I prioritise the professional experience, or work experience, over the country. It's always picked up, though. And I do get asked about it.*

Because she undertook "*meatier*" and "*quite significant job roles compared to your average working holidaymaker*", Sarah suggests interviewers often focused specifically on asking about her role and responsibilities. Furthermore, Sarah approached applications as a player. She alluded to a

"*bit of spin that I can put on [my account]*", describing how she mobilised having "*actively chosen to live and work in a number of different organisations in a number of parts of the world*" as an indicator that she was "*unafraid of change [....] and was flexible*".

Tom's contrasting account further illustrates how the nature of work undertaken overseas, sector of employment, and orientations to the search for employment influence the mobilisation of experiences of work and travel overseas. Upon his return from Canada, Tom reluctantly took up a data processing job and subsequently found employment in telesales. He was seeking employment in PR or market research at the time of our interview. In contrast with Sarah, Tom suggested that his working holiday experience "*wasn't a big part*" of subsequent interviews (for office jobs):

> *And they asked me about it, but when you do quite a menial job like working in a cinema [....] if you're looking for an office-based job after that, it's quite hard to transfer that, because you haven't technically got any office experience, you've got experience in a role at a cinema [....] I maybe even didn't try and mention that I worked at a cinema [....] Because I was perhaps slightly, as I said, not ashamed, but I didn't think it was very important for the role I was going for.*

As a purist, Tom strove to present employers with honest accounts of his trajectory and motivations, and examples of "*what I've actually been doing*". He described "*hoping*" employers would "*see that you have lived independently in Canada, and you've taken this time to go away on your own*". He positioned this, however, as not necessarily under his control and did not describe mobilising his gap year experiences to this end during interviews.

Overwhelmingly, participants suggested that experiences of work and travel abroad signalled positive qualities such as independence, self-direction, and "*gumption*" (e.g., Sarah, James); made people "*interesting*" (e.g., Debbie) and/or "*personable*" and "*well-rounded*" (e.g., Sophie); and were looked upon favourably by employers. This is consistent with a large body of literature positioning cross-cultural understanding/cosmopolitanism, independence, confidence, and being sociable and "interesting" as forms of cultural and symbolic capital accumulated through overseas experiences (e.g., Heath 2007; Simpson 2005a; Snee 2014a). As described by King (2011), participants sometimes mobilised experiences in order to distinguish or differentiate themselves from others and/or alternate selves. Mark (international sales), for example, suggests that an employer would perceive

candidates with such experience positively because "*you're a bit different to most people*":

> *And they're going to know they're not just hiring anyone else, who's just got similar experience, but that it's somebody a bit different, they've challenged themselves, and been to a different country and tried to make ends meet, and what not.*

Furthermore, participants often said that their confidence had increased as a result of their experiences, consistent with existing literature (Bagnoli 2009; Clarke 2004a; King 2011). This was sometimes perceived to have fed into employment outcomes. Debbie (travel marketing) described returning from her working holiday in Australia and "*starting to get offered all these job interviews*". She suggests "*maybe I just had more confidence in my registrations, going and meeting people in the recruitment agencies and stuff, that I could do the positions*". (It is important to note that Debbie perceived this as only a short-term consequence.) Mark (international sales) described his internship - undertaken on a working holiday in Japan - as a "*stepping stone*" into a new graduate position with a Japanese company. This was partly because it helped him "*get more confidence in myself* "*.*

Finally, it is important to examine these findings in parallel with those of Chapter Five. This earlier chapter concluded that most participants' working holidays were not motivated by strategic and calculated attempts to gain advantage in the labour market. These findings are consistent with existing literature, including research with Britons who have studied abroad (Brooks, Waters and Pimlott-Wilson 2012: 289). However, participants did at times actively and strategically attempt to mobilise overseas experiences *after their return*. The next section of this chapter presents a contrasting account of how Japanese working holidaymakers mobilised (or did not mobilise) experiences of work and travel overseas in the recruitment context.

7.3.2 Overseas experiences as "delays" or "going astray" in Japan

This section of the chapter specifically explores Japanese participants' accounts of whether and how they spoke about their overseas experiences within job applications and interviews. The relative rigidity of the context was strongly associated with participants' perceptions that their overseas experiences - although they themselves generally viewed them positively - would be evaluated negatively by employers and be disadvantageous from a career perspective. More specifically, participants expressed concerns that

working holidays would be perceived by employers as signalling a lack of perseverance or an ambivalently perceived independence/individuality. As argued in the previous chapter, overseas experience might operate within this context as "negative symbolic capital" (Bourdieu 1990: 140; 2000: 241-242). Overall, Japanese participants generally described talking about - and being asked about - such experiences relatively infrequently within job applications and interviews. As in the British context, there was variation across participants in the perceived outcomes of mobilising overseas experiences. The minority who described successfully mobilising these experiences tended to have undertaken more substantive employment overseas and/or to have sought employment in sectors where overseas experiences were perceived as more valuable. There was no clear pattern for purists or players to be more successful in Japan.

Japanese participants generally described their experiences positively, and would (with some caveats) recommend working holidays to others. Nevertheless, consistent with existing literature, they acknowledged that their experiences might be viewed negatively by employers and be disadvantageous to their subsequent careers (Etō 2012; Hada 2009: 169; Kato 2013: 21; Kawashima 2010: 279). Overseas experiences were described from a career perspective as "delays", "damage", "a hole in my resume", "empty space", or having "gone astray". The contrast between Japanese and British accounts extends a growing body of literature suggesting that the value of specific forms of capital is not interchangeable across different cultures and contexts (e.g., Brooks, Waters and Pimlott-Wilson 2012: 291; Favell, Feldman and Smith 2006: 7, 17; Igarashi and Saito 2014: 225; Ong 1999: 89-90).

Japanese participants typically described their experiences of job hunting after returning from abroad as lengthy and difficult. Emiko sought office work upon her return, having previously worked as a dispatch (i.e., agency) worker in office environments and achieved a qualification in childcare. She described her experiences as follows:

> Looking for jobs after I came back was really difficult, actually. I didn't get anything for about four months, so I worked just a little bit part-time at a nursery while looking for jobs.

As shown in Appendices B and C (and specifically Table C.6), three recent Japanese returnees were working part-time and looking for employment at the time of their interviews (Ayumu, Haruko, Kazuko), while another (Makoto) had recently completed a qualification and was applying for jobs in

casinos overseas. Japanese participants who described finding employment relatively easily upon their return were the exception and typically did so through existing contacts and networks (e.g., Akiko, Kano, Michiko).

After graduation, Kazuko first worked in retail and then in a non-regular part-time position at a city council. She undertook working holidays in Australia and New Zealand, during which time she studied English and worked at cafes and on a farm. Kazuko registered with temporary staffing agencies upon her return to Japan, seeking work in retail, reception, or hospitality. Like many participants, however, she perceived employers to lack interest in what she had done overseas and perceive working holidays negatively:

> *Everybody check my CV, but they don't interested in about working holiday skill, so it's really hard, I couldn't find even part-time job [....] But about work, working holiday is not so good reputation so it's really annoying. I just find weekend, retail, hospitality job, but regular job, it's really difficult.*

Of particular concern to many Japanese participants was being perceived - because they had left one job to embark upon a working holiday - as the sort of person who "would probably quit soon" (Nariko). They feared that employers would consider people who too readily quit positions to be "useless" (Michio, Makoto), "weak" (Makoto), and "a person who cannot be trusted", "*not patient or [....] reliable*" (Kazuko). This contrasts starkly with the perceptions of British participants that after their working holidays employers merely sought confirmation that they were now ready to settle down. However, these accounts resonate with suggestions that in Japan quitting a job is seen as a signal of a lack of patience (Fujii, Shiraishi and Takayama 2013; Yano 2013) and unreliability (Holbrow 2015, see also Rohlen 1974: 86) and viewed with caution (Nagano 2014). Given the importance of personality to Japanese employers (e.g., Uenishi 2011) - and particularly the value placed on perseverance (e.g., Borovoy 2010: 177-180; Ogino and Watanabe 2013: 25; Rohlen 1974: 54) - overseas experience might operate within this context as negative symbolic capital.

Like British participants, Japanese participants often saw their working holidays as something that might develop and signal to employers qualities such as independence and self-direction. Indeed, they often spoke about such qualities in favourable terms. This may seem surprising, given their generally negative comments about the likely career consequences of working holidays. Further analysis, however, suggested that - as reported in

the previous chapter in relation to employer perceptions - these qualities were perceived with greater ambivalence in Japan.

Participants sometimes perceived Japanese employers to value independence and pro-activity. Michio (self-employed), when seeking employment in broadcasting, mobilised his overseas experiences in an attempt to demonstrate such qualities: "I presented myself as someone who could think, decide, and take action for myself". Emiko (office work) interpreted questions about her experiences performing music live in Australia as being attempts to find out "how much pro-activity [*kōdōryoku*] I have [....] whether I can go and find out for myself without prompting things that I don't understand at work, rather than doing things after I'm told to do them".

When talking about the impact of the working holiday on their lives more broadly, participants frequently described having become more independent and self-directed, positioning this as a positive thing. However, they suggested this was not always seen positively by people around them, nor Japanese employers. Makoto (job hunting), for example, said that as a result of his working holiday, he has "become stronger, or able to say what I want to say to an extent". This is a good thing from his perspective, yet, "from the point of view of a usual, typical Japanese person, I would maybe be thought of as lacking cooperativeness or selfish". Drawing on her own experiences in recruitment, Michiko explained that individuality was very important, but that graduates are "difficult to handle if their assertion of individuality is too strong". Her advice to new graduates would be to "*hide it at the beginning*", and "*show their selves*" only "*after they master the manual*" (i.e., the company's specific ways of doing things). Similar ambivalence around ideas of independence/individuality - and potential contradictions between valuing both cooperativeness and independence/individuality - can be seen in the views of employers expressed in the previous chapter, resonating with existing literature (Kawashima 2010; Miller 2013; Mori 2004; Rear and Jones 2013). This reinforces arguments that in Japan overseas experiences may function as negative symbolic capital, as a signal of excessive independence and individuality.

Japanese participants not only suggested that employers did not seem interested in their overseas experiences but also reported at times that they had not anticipated being asked about them. Makoto, for example, reported of his working holiday that he "didn't touch on it much" in job applications and interviews. Not having been asked about it, he feared the person

interviewing him would get angry should he bring up "something unnecessary". To his surprise, however, he was asked, "What did you learn in your three years in Australia?". He said that he "hadn't anticipated" the question and "couldn't reply at that time". In his interview for this research project, however, Makoto narrated what he gained from the working holiday, and what he would now say in a job interview, partly in terms of perseverance. This is consistent with anecdotal evidence from careers counsellors in Japan suggesting that individuals with overseas experience sometimes do not realise what they have gained and/or know how to articulate this in the employment context (Tokyo International Communication Committee 2014). On the other hand, given the possibility that employers might view such experiences negatively, as discussed in the previous chapter, not bringing up such experiences might be a strategic decision appropriate to the Japanese context.

There were commonalities across the accounts of Japanese working holidaymakers, suggesting that forms of capital accumulated through overseas experience might be less favourably regarded in Japan than in Britain. However, there was also variation between accounts, associated in part with variation in the type of work participants engaged in overseas and the sector within which they subsequently sought employment. Unusually, Michiko perceived her career trajectory to have been favourably impacted by her experience overseas. Michiko worked in web design before and during her working holiday, when she worked for a Japanese company in London. Upon returning to Japan, she was approached by her previous employer about taking on a supervisory role: "*Actually, I had almost two years off from company, but my career is somehow a little bit up".* In contrast to Michiko, most Japanese working holidaymakers worked in less highly skilled occupations overseas. Many suggested that the nature of this work meant employers would not value their experiences. Maki (fast food franchise) explained that because she did not have much skill in English, she worked in a Japanese restaurant in Australia[19]. She did not believe this would be viewed favourably by potential employers:

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[19] Many participants were aware of negative stereotypes of working holidaymakers and expended considerable effort to avoid working and socialising only with other Japanese. Accounts were consistent with literature suggesting WHMs from Asian countries may experience greater difficulty seeking employment abroad due to (perceived) language difficulties and discrimination/racism (e.g., Fan and Hebbani 2014; Kawashima 2010; Yoon 2014). They also appear at greater risk of finding employment in poor/exploitative conditions, including cash-in-hand positions paying less than the minimum wage.

> If you can explain properly what you gained, I think it might not be a disadvantage. But in my case, because I wasn't doing anything special, if I attended an interview for a position as a regular employee, they'd probably just say that I'd been playing around.

This is consistent with results from a survey of 1,583 individuals with overseas experience (i.e., working holidays or internships), conducted by the Japan Association of Overseas Studies (JAOS 2014a). The authors of this report explain overall differences in how advantageous participants perceived their experiences to be (for developing skills) in relation to clarity of motivations; work undertaken overseas (i.e., job requirements in terms of language skills and academic level, remuneration, duration); and the extent of contact with "local" rather than Japanese people.

Consistent with the emphasis on personality in recruitment in Japan, participants sometimes described Japanese companies in different sectors as seeking different "types" of people. Michio (self-employed), for example, explained that he thought some companies valued "people who have creative ways of thinking and pro-activity [*kōdōryoku*]", while others sought "[p]eople who are diligent, who will reliably do whatever they're told by their superiors". Employers in "young" and/or international companies and in sectors such as IT and foreign trade were perceived to be more likely to appreciate working holiday experience and skills developed through such activities. Akiko (IT), for example, was approached in advance of her return to Japan by a contact she had worked with previously, who invited her to apply for a position with an international company. In this context, she suggests her overseas experience was "*kind of [an] advantage*", because the role involved communication with teams abroad. In her interview, she mobilised her experiences by explaining that she was "*very used to communicate with other people in other different countries*".

Nariko (quality control) said employers tended to lack interest in her experiences because she sought employment in smaller, traditional Japanese companies, where interviewers had little experience or interest in English. At the time of our second interview, she had secured employment with an import/export company, which would involve communicating with people overseas. Her eventual success in securing such employment may be attributed partly to employment sector, and perhaps partly also to her orientation to the mobilisation of her experiences overseas. Nariko worked in relatively unskilled positions overseas (e.g., retail, kitchen hand/waitress). To some extent, she showed a purist orientation during her interview,

emphasising that it was "goodbye" if an employer did not value an experience that she perceived to be valuable. However, her approach more closely resembled that of a player in her willingness to tailor her account to send the appropriate messages to employers:

> The part-time jobs I worked at that time [....] I didn't include them when there was no need, but I'd include them as a selling point when I thought they could benefit me [....] If there was something that I could connect, even a little, I would force it, and emphasise it as one of my selling points [....] For example, washing dishes isn't just washing dishes [....] if there's lots of plates and lots of frying pans, if the frying pans aren't [washed] first, they can't cook [....] What you develop there can be quick judgement, or English, you can change the way you talk about it in various ways.

Nariko's account suggests that mobilising overseas experience with a player type orientation might be associated with successful outcomes. Kano, however, although his orientation more clearly resembled that of a purist, did not report any difficulty obtaining a position for a foreign cafe chain in Tokyo, in menu development and barista training. Future research might explore more rigorously questions of the relative merits of these different orientations in the Japanese context.

A minority of Japanese participants did present overseas experiences in terms consistent with conceptualisations of travel as a form of cultural capital. Emiko (office work), for example, suggested that while some companies would view working holiday experiences negatively, others (e.g., companies involved in overseas trade) might perceive you as "interesting". Sakiko (HR) explained, drawing on her own experiences in recruitment, that "interviewers are interviewing tens or hundreds of people" and "*cannot remember everyone*". Sakiko explained if she were to have a job interview now, she would mobilise her working holiday experiences to demonstrate her ability to solve problems and to be interesting/memorable, by telling a story about how she coped after a car accident when travelling in New Zealand:

> I think they'd think of me as the person who hitchhiked [....] I think it's *easy to remember*. That's why I'd tell that story.

Others emphasised, like many British participants, how their experiences had boosted their confidence (e.g., Maki, Makoto). These considerations,

however, were not as prevalent, nor emphasised as strongly, in relation to participants' career trajectories in Japan.

Interviews thus generated data suggesting that overseas experiences were more likely to function as forms of cultural and symbolic capital in Britain than in Japan. Both across and within contexts, however, variation in the outcomes of mobilising such experiences appeared to be associated with variation in the nature of work undertaken and the sector within which participants subsequently sought employment. Further research appears necessary to identify the impact of player or purist orientations in the Japanese context in particular.

7.4 Social position and graduate aspirations and orientations

This section of the chapter explores how social position (e.g., access to economic, social, and cultural resources and gender) impacts on aspirations, orientations, and trajectories post-graduation, and how mechanisms of social stratification in the context of graduate career trajectories differ between Britain and Japan. In Britain, in an era of credential inflation and social congestion, activities undertaken at university and immediately post-graduation (e.g., extracurricular activities; placements and internships; postgraduate study; and experiences of work, travel, and study abroad) are seen as increasingly important and frequently overlooked sites within which social inequalities may be (re)produced (Allen et al. 2013; Bathmaker, Ingram and Waller 2013; Bradley et al. 2013; Brooks and Everett 2009; Furlong and Cartmel 2005; Heath 2007). In Japan, in contrast, there is much concern about increasing polarisation of opportunities between a shrinking "core" of regular employees and an expanding "periphery" of non-regular workers (Fong and Tsutsui 2015; Honda 2008: 34; Ishiguro 2008; Kariya 2010a: 98; Kosugi 2015). Given the relative decisiveness of new graduate recruitment outcomes in shaping subsequent career trajectories, the resource-intensive nature of the job hunting process is increasingly recognised as a site of (re)production of social inequalities in Japan (Borovoy 2010; Honda 2010: 45-51; Yōhei 2009: 3). The relative rigidity of the context makes pursuing activities other than full-time regular employment after graduation less than ideal (Komikawa 2012b: 38-39). Rather than advantages, disadvantages may instead accrue to individuals who "deviate from the idealised norm of linear progression" (Kawashima 2010: 280; see also Kosugi 2010).

7.4.1 Opportunities for whom? (Re)production of social inequalities post-graduation in Britain

Several authors have highlighted how social position may impact on aspirations, orientations, and career trajectories immediately following graduation in Britain. They suggest graduates with greater access to economic, social, and cultural resources may be better positioned to "hang on" and/or relocate in pursuit of desired opportunities, persist with lengthy application processes for elite graduate schemes, and shift into "graduate" employment (and/or pursue postgraduate study) (Bradley et al. 2013; Brooks and Everett 2009; Burke 2016; Furlong and Cartmel 2005). In contrast, those with fewer resources may be locked into jobs with less progression. Pre-university gap years have been cited as one route by which relatively advantaged young people might accumulate and subsequently deploy social and cultural resources or capital so as to gain an edge over their peers in the competition for educational and employment opportunities (e.g., Heath 2007). Heath (2007: 101) further acknowledges that her arguments may equally apply to gap years taken post-graduation. Detailed analysis of Suzanne's account, in combination with those of a number of other participants, offers some support for key claims in this literature. The evidence presented here is speculative, but consistent with patterns highlighted in existing literature.

Suzanne describes herself as "*middle class*". Both of her parents completed university, her father was a manager, and her mother had worked as a teacher and in a travel company. Suzanne took overseas gap years before commencing university and after graduation. She pursued a range of extracurricular activities at university, motivated by interest and enjoyment. Speaking of her love of travel, she credits her mother with having "*just kind of instilled it in me*", recalling frequent family holidays to unusual places. It is arguably distance from economic necessity (Bourdieu 1984/1979: 48-49) that enables her and her boyfriend to pursue a variety of activities during their time away, anticipating she will move back home upon her return:

> *I think we also had the discussion that we didn't want to come home and have money left, because, what's the point? Because we knew when we were coming home we were probably going to have to move back with our parents.*

Suzanne mobilises experiences undertaken on her gap year as indicators of personality traits such as pro-activity, and using time productively, in pursuit of "worthwhile" ends such as self-development (Allen et al. 2013; Snee

2014a). On her CV, she describes her time backpacking as "*a combination of cultural experiences, scuba diving and [....] adventurous pursuits*", striving to convey the message that "*we didn't just sit still*" like other travellers. There is potential here for distance from economic necessity to be misperceived as innate personality traits and "function as symbolic capital, i.e., to be unrecognized as capital and recognized as legitimate competence" (Bourdieu 1997/1983: 49).

Suzanne and her boyfriend move in with her parents upon their return to the UK. She studies towards a master's (funded by her grandfather), and - with time - they both succeed in applications for competitive graduate schemes:

> *And I mean it took [my boyfriend] three months, but the interview process for grad schemes is ridiculous. It took him two months from application to getting a job offer for [graduate scheme]. And you're just saying, that's a long time to wait.*

The accounts of other graduates offer further support for claims made in this literature. Emma described job hunting upon her return to the UK as "*a tale of two halves, really*", with significantly more opportunities available in London than in the north of England. She considers herself "*lucky*" to have been able to move down to London and to live there on a salary that was "*very low for London*", because of money available to her through an inheritance:

> *And [I] moved down to London without a job. I was in a lucky position where I had money from family, from one of my grandparents, available to me, so I just found a flat in London and came down on the train with some suitcases. And looked for a job, and it took me about a month to get a job once I'd moved down [....]*

Gemma and James returned from two years of teaching English in Japan with what Gemma described as "*enough money we could have come back and been unemployed for a couple of months and looked for jobs*". They instead both pursued opportunities to study at postgraduate level. Although Gemma self-identified as middle class, it should be noted that James self-identified as working class, and his account thus highlights the importance of considering also variation *within* class groupings (Bathmaker, Ingram and Waller 2013; Devine 2004).

In contrast, the orientations of graduates with access to fewer resources appeared to be shaped to a far greater extent by necessity. Once again, it is important to consider when interpreting these accounts variation *within* class

groupings and access to resources in addition to self-identified class background and parental educational and occupational histories. Themes of urgency, constraint, and more limited horizons resonate throughout Debbie's (travel marketing) account, for example. In terms of self-identified class background and indicators thereof, Debbie appears relatively advantaged. Her mother was educated to master's level and had been a university lecturer, and her father was self-employed. She considers herself "*middle class*". Speculatively, however, the illness and death of Debbie's father during her time at university is likely to have impacted upon resources available within her family context. When I asked why she didn't embark upon a working holiday immediately after graduation, given her long-standing interest in pursuing such opportunities, Debbie replied starkly: "*Money, I didn't have it.*". Debbie studied travel and marketing at university, and aspired to a position in destination management (i.e., promoting travel to particular destinations). She positions her circumstances as part of the reason why she has experienced difficulty attaining desired employment:

> *I wanted to do destination management [....] But unfortunately, I haven't quite got to that far yet, ten years on, nearly [....] it's a really competitive industry, and if you haven't got industry experience it's really hard to get into [....] Unless you go in straight out of uni it's really hard. But when you graduate university, money's your primary objective, because you want to be independent and you're unemployed for two months, you sort of have to take the first job that presents to you [....]*

Tom (telesales) studied journalism at university and identified as "*lower middle to middle middle class*". Both parents were teachers, and, he presumes, degree qualified. Despite this relatively advantaged background, notions of constraint also permeate his account. Upon his return from Canada in 2010, Tom describes an urgency to find work and move out of home that prompts him to contact his former employer and take up a "*poorly paid*" and "*dull*" data processing job. Tom is dissatisfied with his current telesales job and exploring other options. However, the "*need to work to have a decent standard of life*" and a reluctance to return to living with his parents make the options of undertaking work experience and/or further study to advance his employment options less desirable:

> *So I've thought about doing some work experience, but it's just not easy, when you want to live independently and you need to work to have a decent standard of life. I don't want to live with my parents and*

study again, really, I don't think I could go back to doing that. So it's difficult. To persuade the employer that you're the right person for the job.

In combination, these accounts are supportive of literature highlighting the importance of differential access to resources post-graduation in shaping differences in the career trajectories of graduates (e.g., Bradley et al. 2013; Brooks and Everett 2009; Burke 2016; Furlong and Cartmel 2005). The contrast between Suzanne's and Tom's accounts also poses questions about whether stable relationships with supportive parents/family might similarly constitute resources that might influence early career trajectories. It should be noted that participants in this research, as reported in Chapter Five, were all comparatively advantaged, relative to those not in a position to pursue experiences of work and travel overseas. This context must be taken into account in interpreting results. Access to resources appeared to be associated with differential outcomes even within this relatively advantaged group of young people. Consistent with existing literature, much greater variation would be expected when taking into consideration the trajectories and outcomes of a broader range of young people.

Research has also highlighted the association between gender and graduate aspirations, orientations, and career trajectories. Across a number of studies, researchers have highlighted an awareness, amongst some women, of difficulties that might arise when attempting to balance work and the practical realities of childcare (e.g., Brown and Hesketh 2004: 122; Burke 2016: 128). Evidence from one longitudinal study highlights a "cooling out" of women's aspirations during their time at university, notably in terms of a move towards teaching careers, "anticipating the need to manage employment and childcare" (Bradley et al. 2013; The Paired Peers Project no date). The concept of "cooling out" was adopted from the work of Goffman (1952) by Clark (1960: 569), in order to reconcile "inconsistency between encouragement to achieve and the realities of limited opportunity". Walther (2006: 122) emphasises how cooling out mechanisms deflect attention from systemic injustice onto individual factors such as "unrealistic aspirations".

Suzanne's (MA student) account offered insights - resonating with this literature - into how her gender influenced her perceptions of her future career:

I've got a bit of a divergent path, really. I think I'm either going to be very heavily career driven, depending on where I get ... or I'm going to

end up going down the family route, and maybe my career being a bit of a back foot. And obviously it'll depend where I am in four or five years as to which route I take.

Suzanne, who would "*want to be a hands-on mum*", perceives herself to be facing a decision between being "*heavily career driven*" or sacrificing her career, to an extent, in order to have a family. Gemma (PhD student) - who already had one child - expressed similar doubts. She stated that her "*ultimate dream*" was to *"work as a researcher [....] have more children, buy a house, maybe work part-time*". However, she expressed concern that this would not be "*practical*". These accounts resonate with literature suggesting that as women consider the realities of parenthood and a "lack of change in the gendered allocation of household tasks" (Crompton, Brockmann and Lyonette 2005: 227), the influence of gender on career trajectories may become increasingly apparent (Burke 2016: 129).

In this section of the chapter, I have speculated - in conjunction with existing literature - about several ways in which social position impacts on the trajectories of British graduates. The following discussion explores the impact of social position in the Japanese context.

7.4.2 "A bus that comes but once?": Regular employment and (re)production of social inequalities in Japan

This section of the chapter explores how social position may influence student and graduate aspirations, orientations, and mobilisation of resources, as well as the mechanisms of (re)production of social inequalities, in Japan. Particularly important, as outlined in Chapter Three, is the significance of one's first job after graduation as a mechanism of social stratification (e.g., Fong and Tsutsui 2015). Furthermore, deviations from idealised norms of linear progression may result in negative career consequences within the relative rigidity of the Japanese context.

A number of authors highlight the increasingly time-consuming, inefficient, and resource-intensive nature of the job hunting process for new graduates in Japan (Firkola 2011; Honda 2010: 46-47; Ishiwatari and Osawa 2008; Komikawa 2012b). Concern has been expressed about the burdens this places on students in terms of time, energy, finances, and psychological well-being, and the impact differential resources may have on outcomes (Honda 2010: 47-51; Komikawa 2012b: 44; Uenishi 2011; Yōhei 2009: 58-63). The decisive impact of outcomes at this single point in time on subsequent career trajectories and socioeconomic status arguably only

accentuates these pressures (Honda 2008: 23, as cited in Hommerich 2012; Komikawa 2012b:46).

My data is consistent with suggestions that some were better positioned to withstand these pressures than others. Michio, for example, embarked upon a working holiday during a leave of absence after his third year of a politics degree, then returned to Japan to complete his studies and seek employment. His father commenced but did not complete university education and was employed in administration by a hospital; his mother was educated to junior college level and was a primary school teacher. He considered his standard of living to be "upper middle" (i.e., "*upper middle class*"). Michio graduated in the 1990s, before the crash of the Japanese economy. His confidence about his future may be attributed in part to his relatively advantaged background but is also reflective of the economic climate at this time:

> When I was a university student, I think for some reason or another, I had confidence in myself. Because of that, I had this self-confidence, that had no basis, that when I joined a company, I would do well there, I would work hard and be able to contribute [....] Because the first company I joined was that television studio, I had this hope that it would be really enjoyable, and a sense of confidence that I could do well.

A number of other participants reported instead a gradual erosion of confidence that influenced their aspirations in ways that might be characterised as "cooling out" processes (e.g., Senoo 2014; drawing on Goffman 1952). Manami, for example, initially wanted to work for a publishing company or television studio. Neither of her parents had attended university; her father worked at a railway station and her mother made school meals. She considered her standard of living to be "middle middle" (i.e., *lower middle class*). Manami came to Tokyo to attend university from a regional area, enrolled in a lower-ranked university, and transferred to a higher-ranked university partway through her course. This was specifically because of its reputation in media. When it came time to look for jobs, however, she began to feel that she lacked the passion of her peers, and ultimately sought employment in travel:

> Manami: For a job, I wanted to go to something like a publisher, or a television studio. But while I was looking for jobs, somehow, I thought, this is wrong. I couldn't concretely say what was wrong, but to go as far as that ... the people around me were pretty amazing, and it was

> like they were absolutely going to do it, and there was this difference in consciousness or enthusiasm. And I felt like it would maybe be rude to work alongside those people ...

> Lynley: When you say rude ... ?

> Manami: Would you say rude? Or apologetic? I understood that I couldn't get as absorbed. In television, or media. So because I like customer service and people, I thought I'd go in that direction instead, and found employment at a travel company.

Because of the relative rigidity of the Japanese context, it is not just obtaining a regular position upon graduation that operates as a mechanism of stratification (Fong and Tsutsui 2015), but also maintaining such employment. Concern has been expressed about the increasing numbers of graduates who quit their jobs within the first three years of employment (Cabinet Office of Japan 2010: 28). This is considered especially worrying in a context within which disadvantages may accrue to individuals who "deviate from the idealised norm of linear progression" (Kawashima 2010: 280; see also Kosugi 2010).

Relevant here is social position, as individuals with existing contacts within particular sectors appeared able to draw on such social capital to avoid disadvantages they might otherwise experience for changing jobs (e.g., Akiko, Kano, Michiko). Also relevant is the observation, discussed in Chapters Three and Five, that the trajectories of Japanese participants are highly gendered. Many commentators have highlighted the persistence of gendered expectations and ideals of male breadwinners in relation to non-regular employment (Cook 2013, 2014; Fu 2016) and working holidaymaker populations (Kato 2010; Kawashima 2010; Maksay 2007). Researchers have suggested that, paradoxically, it is because of women's more marginal status in the labour market in Japan that they are more free to embark upon experiences of work and travel overseas (Kato 2010: 55-56; Kawashima 2010: 281-282; Maksay 2007: 40-41).

Ayumu, for example, was anxious before his working holiday because he knew that few Japanese men went on working holidays. In England, he perceived the gender ratio of Japanese working holidaymakers to be nine women to one man. He attributed this to "traces of history that still exist" in Japan such that "men's careers take precedence over women's", and men are expected to continue to work and build their careers without partaking in such activities. His account resonates with existing literature in its

implications that men in particular may face disapproval for contravening these norms. Kawashima (2010: 281) suggests perceptions of marriage prospects amongst the male working holidaymakers she interviewed were influenced by non-regular employment and financial insecurity, with such concerns also acknowledged in research with non-regular workers (Cook 2013, 2014; Fu 2016). Katsuo expressed similar concerns. He worked as a teacher in a cram school before embarking on a working holiday at the age of 25, and subsequently remained in Australia on a student visa. When I asked him how he imagined his future, he said that he did not imagine he would ever marry if he returned to Japan.

Overall, the Japanese women I interviewed described themselves as less ambitious than the British women I interviewed. Many emphasised marriage and family as important aspirations, perhaps more so than careers. To an extent, they perceived themselves as "choosing" to pursue interests other than career progression upon returning to Japan, given the high levels of dissatisfaction with working conditions they had experienced before embarking upon their working holidays. I argue, consistent with Kawashima (2010: 281-282), that different gendered societal pressures and expectations influenced perceptions of the accessibility and riskiness of such choices.

To conclude, in this section, I have argued that in the Japanese context of relative rigidity, the capacity to obtain - and remain within - regular employment following graduation operated as an important mechanism of social stratification. I present evidence consistent with speculations that this capacity is mediated by the (sometimes unconscious) influence of social position on aspirations, orientations, and mobilisation of resources.

7.5 Conclusion

This chapter investigates participant orientations to the accumulation and mobilisation of different experiences, including those of work and travel overseas, to advance employment options. It highlights how these were embedded within - and shaped by - different contexts, across which recruitment and employment practices and broader societal norms and values varied significantly. It illustrates how British participants more commonly oriented to the task of securing desired employment through the rhetoric of competencies in a context they perceived as relatively flexible. Further, they typically tailored their presentation of their selves and experiences as necessary in accordance with job requirements. In contrast, Japanese participants drew upon the language of personality in a context

they often perceived as relatively rigid. Further, they typically considered it important to find a job that was a good fit and honestly make themselves known to employers in job applications and interviews.

Taken together, the results of Chapters Five and Seven suggest that rather than strategically and reflexively pursuing and mobilising experiences because they would be beneficial in building their careers, participants across contexts more commonly exhibited an approach that was pragmatic, short term, and reactive. At times, experiences were pursued purely on the basis of "internalised" and taken-for-granted dispositions (Bathmaker, Ingram and Waller 2013) oriented to the pursuit of fun. After the fact, these experiences could be mobilised in a more "active" and strategic fashion (Bathmaker, Ingram and Waller 2013). Yet considerations of employability were not paramount in participants' aspirations for experiences of work and travel overseas. Nor were participants internalising without question employer imperatives to assume individual responsibility for their own employability.

Overall, British participants were more likely to perceive employers to value their experiences than Japanese participants. Experiences of work and travel abroad were more often perceived to function as cultural and symbolic capital in Britain, whereas in Japan they sometimes functioned in ways more aptly conceptualised as "negative symbolic capital" (Bourdieu 1990: 140; 2000: 241-242). However, across contexts, those who worked in more highly skilled employment overseas and/or those who sought employment in sectors where overseas experiences were considered more valuable tended to be more successful in mobilising their experiences. Future research might further explore the impact of orientations to the labour market in Japan in particular.

The explicit cross-national comparative dimension of the research highlights the significance of economic and socio-cultural context in shaping the choices of students and graduates navigating transitions from education to employment. Analysis of participant accounts in relation to existing literature further suggests the importance of social position within each context in shaping orientations and trajectories. While participant accounts are highly individualised at the narrative level, claims that individuals have become disembedded from context in contemporary societies cannot be wholly supported.

Chapter 8 Conclusion

8.1　Introduction

This research employed qualitative interviews with former working holidaymakers, careers advisers, and employers to explore the influence of economic and socio-cultural context(s) and social position on aspirations, values, orientations, and perceived outcomes in relation to transnational youth mobility and graduate employment in Britain and Japan.

The research was focused upon three key empirical questions, as follows:

1. What are the motivations of university students and graduates from Britain and Japan for pursuing experiences of work and travel overseas? How do these vary within and across country contexts?
2. How do employers and careers advisers/experts perceive temporary forms of transnational mobility such as the working holiday? What do they identify as the consequences of such mobility? How do such views vary by employment sector and by country context?
3. What do university students and graduates from Britain and Japan perceive as the consequences of experiences of work and travel overseas (with a particular focus on career-related consequences)? How do these vary within and across country contexts?

This concluding chapter summarises the main findings and theoretical contribution of the research, reflecting on the significance and limitations of the project. It explores the implications of findings for debates about supporting students and graduates in their transitions from education into employment and early careers. The chapter concludes with recommendations for future research.

8.2　Overview of findings and theoretical contributions

The main findings of the empirical chapters of the thesis are summarised in this section of the conclusion, alongside arguments highlighting how this thesis contributes to the relevant theoretical literatures introduced in Chapter Two. These include theories of individualisation (Bauman 2000; Beck 1992; Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 2002; Giddens 1991), governance through freedom (Rose 1990, 1996), and Bourdieu's (1990) theory of practice.

One of the unique contributions of this research is in the explicit attention focused on how different institutional arrangements and cultural values

associated with different country contexts might enable and constrain different aspirations, orientations, and early career trajectories for graduates transitioning from education into employment in each context. Chapter Five describes how working holidaymaker aspirations are inflected differently in different country contexts, illuminating important structural features of each context. Chapter Six illustrates how employer perceptions and values are embedded within - and shaped by - differing recruitment and employment structures and practices and broader societal norms and values. Chapter Seven presents more speculative evidence suggesting that different institutional arrangements and norms and values associated with different country contexts might shape different student and graduate orientations to the accumulation and mobilisation of experiences in the search for desired employment. Taken together, these ideas directly challenge the claims of individualisation theories that in contemporary societies, individuals are increasingly "disembedded" from social context (Bauman 2000; Beck 1992; Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 2002; Giddens 1991). The value and significance of the cross-national comparative analyses that were central to this research can be seen in the links that the research draws between aspirations, norms and values, and orientations on the one hand and the contexts within which they are shaped and embedded on the other.

Not only do the findings of this research challenge conceptualisations of gap year mobility and graduate transitions into employment premised upon theories of individualisation, they also offer only qualified support for conceptualisations interpreting such activities primarily through the lens of governance through freedom (Rose 1990, 1996). Rarely did these graduates aspire to experiences of work and travel overseas and plan careers strategically and reflexively, as claimed by theories of individualisation. Rather, their aspirations were frequently shaped by more pragmatic considerations, and they exhibited more of a short-term orientation, reacting to opportunities as they arose. Nor did they consistently internalise without question employer imperatives to assume individual responsibility for their own employability. At times, across contexts, participants appeared to accept and act in accordance with ideas that they should use their time productively to develop their selves and employability, taking individual responsibility for choices and their consequences. However, I argue that it is too simplistic to see students and graduates merely as passive, naïvely acquiescing recipients of such messages. At other times, they engaged with notions of individual responsibility for boosting employability with a degree of scepticism and distance, exploiting these to their own advantage.

Furthermore, participants acknowledged a range of structural factors that impacted their ability to find secure, stable, and satisfying employment. These included the poor economic climate, the highly competitive nature of certain employment sectors (e.g., journalism and travel marketing), regional segmentation of employment opportunities, and the polarisation of the labour market in Japan into regular and non-regular positions. Asserting agency was not incompatible with a recognition of structural constraints.

The research also extends literature exploring the applicability of Bourdieu's (1990) theory of practice in the contexts of transnational youth mobility and graduate recruitment. Results illuminate how the successful deployment of experiences of work and travel overseas as cultural and symbolic capital is highly contingent on economic and socio-cultural context. Chapters Six and Seven specifically link differences in institutional arrangements and broader societal norms and values across country contexts to differences in the extent to which qualities perceived to be associated with gap year travel functioned as cultural and symbolic capital (Bourdieu 1990: 140; 1997/1983). Processes of looking-glass merit - whereby recruiter perceptions of candidates are coloured by their own backgrounds, experiences, and characteristics (Rivera 2012, 2015) - are argued to reinforce these different general positionings across contexts. Variation according to labour market sector is also identified. Both within and across contexts, therefore, the research highlights the usefulness of the work of Bourdieu - and the concept of cultural capital, specifically - in exploring how gap years and similar practices may be invested with values that are considered legitimate in certain fields and contexts (Snee 2009: 133).

This research further highlights variability in aspirations, perceptions, trajectories, and outcomes *within* country contexts, associated with social position. I illustrate how economic, social, and cultural resources associated with class background and gender shape variation in the accessibility of opportunities to work and travel overseas (Chapters Five and Seven), student and graduate capacities to "package" experiences in ways that are highly regarded by employers (Chapter Six), and - more speculatively - capacity to accumulate and mobilise various experiences in the quest for desired employment (Chapter Seven). A claim that is often made in the literature is that taking an overseas gap year allows participants to accumulate and subsequently deploy social and cultural resources so as to gain an edge over their peers in the competition for educational and employment opportunities (e.g., Heath 2007). This research thus contributes

to and extends ongoing discussions about the relationship between mobility and privilege (e.g., Bauman 1998; Florida 2008). It builds on Snee's (2009: 229) suggestion that research on the gap year should explore how capital accumulated via gap years is deployed, observing some are more able than others to tell the "right story" to gain such advantages. Findings suggest that the relationship between mobility and privilege varies with economic and socio-cultural context, and that what constitutes the "right story" about experiences of work and travel overseas - and how such activities may be linked to the (re)production of social inequalities - is highly contingent on context.

8.3   Strengths and limitations of the research

Several caveats need to be borne in mind when interpreting the findings of this research. First, it is important that findings are not presented as overly simplistic comparisons across country contexts. Second, the possibility that apparent differences between country contexts are merely a function of the differing composition of the samples in each context needs to be considered. Third, the nature of the data generated through interviews with employers needs to be kept firmly in mind when drawing conclusions. This section of the conclusion highlights these limitations - as well as the strengths of the research - in preparation for a discussion of its implications.

Chapter Four outlined the challenges and rewards associated with cross-national comparative research. The question of "conceptual equivalence" was of central concern, given the challenges inherent in attempting to ask the "same" questions of "equivalent" populations in different countries, cultures, traditions, and languages. I sought in this research to present a nuanced account of working holidaymaker aspirations, orientations, and trajectories, explaining how these were shaped by - and illuminated - the contexts within which they were embedded. My approach throughout was to view such differences as additional sources of data. Thus, differences identified between the two country contexts need to be interpreted holistically.

There are a number of distinguishing features of the sample participating in this research that should be taken into account in interpreting results. First, the majority studied for degrees in the social sciences, humanities, and related disciplines. This was a commonality of participants across country contexts, so this does not call into question the comparative conclusions of this research. It does, however, emphasise that results may not necessarily

hold for students from different disciplines. Results may also be influenced by the sector and level of employment of the working holidaymakers I spoke to, and the industries represented in the employer sample. Nevertheless, participants represented a broad range of sectors in the UK and Japan. Employers represented ranged from manufacturing and technology companies to broadcasting, finance, and the public sector. Furthermore, consistency in findings across different participant groups (e.g., working holidaymakers, careers advisers, and employers) lends some confidence to these results. The accounts of careers advisers were considered particularly valuable in designing the research because they could contribute a broader perspective, less specific to any particular sector. Similarly, although there was variation in participants' self-reported socio-economic status, it needs to be remembered that the working holidaymakers participating in this research were all relatively advantaged in comparison with young people lacking the resources to pursue opportunities to work and travel overseas. Once again, the perspectives of careers advisers were valuable here, because of the light they could shine on ways in which opportunities for overseas experiences were unevenly distributed amongst the students with which they worked.

Caution must be exercised when interpreting data generated through interviews with employers, as employer statements about their attitudes and perceptions do not necessarily explain their behaviour *when making selection decisions* (e.g., Brown and Hesketh 2004: 147-148; Holmes 2013b: 1048-1049). However, my intent in this research was not to explain the selection decisions of employers. Rather, I suggest that in different contexts, differing institutional arrangements and norms and values interact such that certain types of claims are more likely to be perceived as credible by employers. The orientations of students and graduates to mobilising experiences similarly vary in association with these factors. Furthermore, evidence presented here is consistent with the conclusions of other literature where an observational approach was used. For example, suggestions that recruiters may use their own experiences as a frame through which to interpret and evaluate the experiences of others find empirical support in the work of Rivera (2012, 2015).

The following section moves on to consider the implications of these findings, with particular consideration to questions about changes that might be made to provision and practice to better support young people's transitions (e.g., into employment).

8.4   Implications

One of the unique contributions of this research is the explicit attention focused on the factors that interact to shape significant differences in the contexts within which graduates transition into employment in the UK and Japan. This highlights distinct patterns of advantages and disadvantages accompanying particular structural systems and cautions against simplistic attempts to change merely one part of a system, or import practices from a different context, without considering how these systems are interrelated. Komikawa (2012a: 11; see also Komikawa 2011: 90-91), for example, perceives problems in graduate transitions to employment in contemporary Japan to be indicative of a breakdown in functioning that is occurring across a number of systems and the connections between them (e.g., educational institutions, the labour market, recruitment and employment structures and practices, mechanisms of social security, and broader lifestyle structures and values). This section of the chapter first discusses implications and recommendations that appear broadly relevant across settings, before proceeding to a discussion of implications and recommendations specific to the contexts within which they arise.

Central to the implications of this research are questions about how we ought to support transitions from education into employment in contexts where "decent work" may be hard to come by (Athanasou 2010). Expectations of finding fulfilment through work appear to be rising (e.g., Inglehart and Baker 2000; Japan Productivity Center 2013), even as opportunities for work as self-fulfilment and *vocation* are observed to have "become the privilege of a few" (Bauman 1998: 35). Brown and Hesketh (2004: 6) highlight that in the context of a changing occupational structure and an "over-supply of qualified candidates" - as discussed in Chapter Three - questions of graduate employability must be interpreted as a "public issue" rather than "private troubles" of individuals (Mills 2000/1959).

The findings of this research highlight the significance of the period at university and post-graduation in shaping career outcomes for graduates in Britain and Japan. This suggests access to ongoing careers advice before, during, and after attendance at university is crucial (e.g., Bradley et al. 2013). Burke (2016: 145) advocates pragmatic advice to students outlining both the benefits of university education and the difficulties that may be experienced entering the labour market. In the Japanese context, increasing numbers of graduates quitting their first job within three years - and the negative consequences that this appears to have for their careers - also

signal that ongoing careers advice could be highly beneficial. Graduates might benefit from opportunities to evaluate working conditions, determine whether or not to quit exploitative and excessively demanding positions, and identify and evaluate other opportunities to develop their skills. Indeed, the careers advisers I spoke to were sometimes already engaged with the ongoing provision of support. Daniel, for example, highlighted the need for university careers services to serve alumni without regard to time post-graduation. Mr. Higuchi described receiving a number of consultations from graduates seeking advice on whether to quit their current positions.

The careers advisers who participated in this research, however, also acknowledged structural issues and inequalities that impacted graduate aspirations and trajectories, implying that simply intervening with advice and support would be insufficient. I argue - following Honda (2009) - that alongside the provision of tools students and graduates can use in "applying themselves", there is a need for provision of tools for "resistance" (and/or "resilience"). There are parallels here with calls for "emancipatory career guidance" and concern with social justice (Arthur 2014; Bassot 2012; Bergmo-Prvulovic 2012). Komikawa (2011: 47-50, 152-170, 187-195), for example, argues that careers education ought not to be premised upon the assumption that young people should conform to the labour market, focusing solely on employability, and encouraging competition for an increasingly narrow set of opportunities. He points out that the structure of the contemporary Japanese labour market makes it inevitable that not everyone who seeks regular employment will be able to attain such employment. Furthermore, even those who do attain such a position may find themselves working long hours in poor conditions. In this context, he argues that careers advice needs to focus on familiarising students with the state of labour market and knowledge and techniques for protecting themselves, building their skills, and developing careers regardless of whether they find themselves in regular or non-regular employment (Komikawa 2011: 164-165).

One of the important contributions made by this research, therefore, is in the identification - and amplification - of counter-narratives framing inequalities as the outcome of systemic structural factors rather than individual failings (Allen et al. 2013; Ashley et al. 2015: 20). Indeed, such narratives serve as an important challenge to individualising discourses of employability, which both mask structural issues and exacerbate social exclusion, marginalisation, and inequality (Chertkovskaya et al. 2013). Both British and

Japanese participants at times placed the responsibility for finding "what I want to do" squarely on their own shoulders, attributing to themselves both credit for successes and blame for "failure". Although economic and socio-cultural context and social position structured the opportunities they perceived as available, participants did not always perceive these structures as reasons for successful or unsuccessful outcomes in their attempts to find employment. However, there were also times when participants acknowledged structural factors impacting their ability to find satisfying employment. These included the poor economic climate, highly competitive nature of certain employment sectors, regional segmentation of employment opportunities, and harsh and unreasonable working conditions (especially in the Japanese context). Indeed, within our interview Ayumu expressed a very clear desire that his participation in this research would draw attention to the "*hopeless situation*" many Japanese found themselves in, working long hours without pay for "*black companies*" that positioned unpaid overtime working as "*a time of learning or education*" for "inexperienced" workers.

This section has therefore highlighted implications of this research that are applicable across contexts. Specifically, it highlights how this research contributes to literature challenging accounts of student and graduate career trajectories proffered solely in the language of "choice", "responsibility", and "employability". Provision of counter-narratives framing inequalities as the outcome of structural factors rather than individual failings is an important contribution of this research (Allen et al. 2013; Ashley et al. 2015: 20). I extend existing research by offering a detailed analysis of the contribution of economic and socio-cultural context (i.e., institutional practices, cultural values) and social position to the shaping of such inequalities. I advocate interventions that provide tools and support to students and graduates to navigate such contexts, while also seeking structural changes. In what follows, I discuss context-specific implications and recommendations.

The findings of this research are relevant to the evaluation of a range of interventions proposed to improve the processes by which graduates are recruited and their career outcomes and/or ameliorate social inequalities in the recruitment context in the UK. Proposed interventions often target student and graduate orientations to extra-credential activities and the labour market, and may be accompanied by the provision of funding for such activities. Alternatively, they may target recruiters and employers. In what follows, each of these avenues for intervention is discussed in turn. Ethical

and normative questions raised by the research and proposed interventions are also addressed.

I first critique interventions advocated in the literature as means of boosting graduate employability. Researchers have suggested a need for interventions that develop the ability of graduates to warrant their identity claims in ways that resonate with employers, rather than targeting purported deficits in "skills" and "attributes" (Holmes 2015: 234). Others propose interventions targeting graduate orientations to extra-credential activities and understandings of the labour market (e.g., Burke 2016: 145-147; Greenbank 2011). The results of this research suggest both capital (i.e., resources available to students and graduates) and habitus (i.e., understandings of how to use these resources to best advantage) are involved in influencing graduate career outcomes (see also Bathmaker, Ingram and Waller 2013: 740; Brown and Hesketh 2004: 36, 131, 156; Rivera 2015: 99). This suggests that interventions targeting graduate orientations to extra-credential activities and understandings of the labour market (e.g., Burke 2016: 145-147; Greenbank 2011) may be ineffective when implemented in isolation. At minimum, therefore, interventions targeting orientations should be accompanied by financial support to facilitate the participation in such activities of students from disadvantaged backgrounds (Bradley et al. 2013).

This research, however, suggests that there are additional reasons to be sceptical about the potential benefits of such interventions. Arguably, encouraging participation in extra-credential activities risks merely creating a spiral wherein increasing numbers of students participate in such activities, employer perceptions change to reflect this new standard, and competition continues. This may simply mean that students are encouraged to participate in activities that are even more demanding of resources and sell them even more convincingly, rather than contributing to a levelling of the playing field. As suggested by Brown (2003: 142), this represents an "opportunity trap" where keeping up with what everyone else is doing is essential to keep oneself in the game, but "if all adopt the same tactics nobody gets ahead". Similar arguments have been made about the encouragement of volunteering opportunities in the university context, acknowledging that supposed advantages to participation will not be conferred if all students take part (Holdsworth and Brewis 2014: 207). Furthermore, it is unclear whether promoting participation in extra-credential activities for instrumental reasons would result in students gaining the supposed advantages of participation. Additionally, such discourses

emphasise the need for individuals to shoulder sole responsibility for managing their career aspirations, plans, and trajectories. It is also a potential concern that such initiatives might merely exacerbate the cultural capital divide, where participants with greater understanding and guidance about the "rules of the game" end up further advantaged than those without.

Finally, evaluation of such proposals raises questions that are more normative and ethical. Concerns might be raised here about the implications of advocating instrumental approaches to activities students might wish to engage in for intrinsic reasons (e.g., interest, altruism, and/or relaxation). Do we lose something by positioning activities undertaken by students and graduates for a variety of reasons simply as instrumental ways of boosting employability? Should universities be dictating how students ought to spend their leisure time, and should leisure activities be considered a legitimate target for employer evaluations (e.g., Heath 2007: 95)? What are the ethical implications and social consequences of encouraging the adoption of a more "player" type approach to job searching and self-promotion (e.g., Brown 2005: 10; Brown and Hesketh 2004; Greenbank 2011: 263)?

A second potential avenue of intervention for improving equity of access to graduate career outcomes involves targeting employers. One possible response involves the implementation of school-leaver or apprenticeship programmes (e.g., see Ashley et al. 2015: 19). This may be one way by which some of the consequences of the "opportunity trap" can be circumvented. However, within the context of the elite firms surveyed by Ashley et al. (2015), such programmes tend to be relatively small in scale. While they may offer opportunities to some, they are no panacea for all. The government's recent announcement of three million new apprentice starts in England by 2020 (Department for Business Innovation & Skills 2015a) may be a promising move in this direction. Another approach advocated in the literature involves ongoing analysis of how conceptualisations of "talent" in graduate recruitment and selection processes map onto middle-class socialisation and consideration of ways of addressing this (e.g., see Ashley et al. 2015: 20). This research joins a growing body of work in this area (Allen et al. 2013; Ashley et al. 2015; Rivera 2015; Smart et al. 2009). Attempts to facilitate more equitable selection processes however, should be implemented in concert with protection and improvement of conditions and training opportunities for employees in the most vulnerable positions.

The findings of this research are relevant to the evaluation of a range of interventions proposed in the Japanese context to improve the processes by

which graduates are recruited and their career outcomes. In Japan, there is a particular emphasis on the need to combat the relative rigidity of the employment context, within which opportunities to flexibly (re)start a career are lacking (Kawashima 2010). At the policy level, there is recognition that lifetime employment "is a thing of the past", and a desire to create a "society that provides people with the opportunity to try again as many times as they want" (Cabinet Office of Japan 2013: 6, 12). This research highlights institutional practices and cultural values that interact to form barriers that will need to be addressed for such transformation to occur.

The contrast between the orientations of the British and Japanese participants in this research suggests that the "rhetoric of competence" (Brown and Hesketh 2004: 148) was more prevalent in the UK context, while "personality" was emphasised more in Japan. The Japanese government - and careers counsellors employed as part of the Global Ace initiative to offer career consulting to returned students and working holidaymakers (JAOS 2014b) - have sought to provide mechanisms (e.g., "job cards") encouraging individuals to identify and record "duties, achievements, experience and skills" gained through various experiences (Cabinet Office of Japan 2014: 47). This is intended to facilitate skills development and career mobility. In the context of experiences of work and travel overseas, evidence from this research suggests participants were sometimes unwilling and/or unable to mobilise these experiences within the context of an employment interview. I argue that this was partly due to perceptions that these experiences would not be valued by employers. Furthermore, this perception does not seem unreasonable given the results of interviews with careers advisers and employers. Nevertheless, Japanese employers might react more favourably to descriptions participants shared with me - but did not raise in job interviews - characterising their experiences as the source of enhanced perseverance and a greater ability to interact harmoniously with a diverse range of people. The contrasting approaches of Japanese and British participants in my research suggests that there may be a role in Japan for initiatives that foster identification, development, and articulation of career-relevant skills and abilities developed through various experiences. As in the British context, however, the emphasis in these discourses on individual responsibility for career management and employability is concerning. Further, the risk of exacerbating the cultural capital divide needs to be considered.

A number of changes to recruitment and hiring practices and processes have been advocated in order to try to improve the chances of Japanese graduates finding suitable employment and broaden the range of opportunities available for individuals who - for whatever reason - do not find such employment upon graduation or subsequently wish to pursue other opportunities (Honda 2008: 60; 2010: 55-56; Komikawa 2011: 168; 2012b: 53-54). These include changes to the timing and intensity of recruitment processes; lessening the focus on periodical blanket recruitment of new graduates; recruiting separately by occupation and specifying relevant selection criteria, rather than seeking "generalists"; abolishing discrimination based on age and university attended; considering graduates for "new graduate" opportunities for at least three to five years after graduation; and making available opportunities for aiming for "regular" positions some years after graduation.

Komikawa (2012b: 53-54) advocates - following Hamaguchi (2010) - for job-based regular employment, with workers employed to work in particular areas for as long as they are needed, and - with the development of a more robust external labour market - having the possibility of moving to other companies. At the policy level, discussion about job-based regular employment is being pursued, under the umbrella of "realizing various ways of working" (Cabinet Office of Japan 2015; North 2014). However, critics are concerned that these plans will instead increase insecure and precarious employment and open the door for wage decreases and easier terminations (North 2014). The present research suggests that without also targeting a range of other factors, implementation of new employment categories alone is likely to be insufficient to achieve substantial changes. Employer perceptions, cultural values, and student/graduate job hunting strategies may need to be targeted simultaneously, for these structural changes to be widely and effectively implemented.

Looking at the Japanese labour market more broadly, Komikawa (2011: 153-154, 168, 212-213) highlights the need for labour market reform under the slogan of "equal pay for equal work". Non-regular workers should receive the same pay and treatment as regular workers, and systems should be revamped so that they are not disadvantaged when it comes to unemployment insurance and social security. He argues that this would allow people to "choose" to pursue options that suit them better, while not being disadvantaged for doing so (Komikawa 2012b: 53-54). Furthermore, working conditions (and especially working hours) for regular employees

appear in urgent need of address, although they have historically been resistant to reform (e.g., see Toivonen 2011).

Finally, in relation to the gap year specifically, Japan's Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT) has recently budgeted 240 million yen[20] in financial support (20 million annually per institution, for up to five years) to be allocated between 12 universities newly establishing gap year programmes (The Mainichi 2015). The emphasis placed on ensuring the gap year is positioned within the overall curriculum of the university and the onus on the university to provide oversight and guidance before and after the gap year suggests that formal attempts to encourage gap years in the Japanese context will remain relatively small-scale and specific. The gap year experiences and outcomes of individuals participating in such programmes are likely to be of a different character to the experiences of British students. This model of implementation is described in a report by the Committee on the Diversification of Academic Trajectories and the Gap Term (2014) as the American rather than the British model. Given the potential negative consequences of gap years - and especially working holidays - pursued on one's own initiative in Japan, it seems that this model of implementation may be more suited for the Japanese context. Further, it is possible, as suggested by some participants in this research, that a rebranding of the working holiday into something emphasising work experience over the idea of a holiday might help to address some of the negative perceptions or stereotypes about working holidaymakers that appear to exist in the Japanese context. It remains to be seen whether these initiatives will encourage a broader pursuit of gap years more generally - and change of societal attitudes - in the Japanese context.

I thus outline in this section a number of interventions targeting problems identified in this research. I highlight that these need to be implemented in combination to ensure their effectiveness and caution against the individualising rhetoric of policies targeting graduate employability. I call attention to the need to be mindful of the structural context and not seek to intervene solely in ways that accentuate individualising trends.

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[20] Approximately £1.8 million pounds at current exchange rates (13 November 2016), or £148,800 annually per institution.

8.5   Reflections

This research complements and extends previous research into gap years and working holidays by addressing several gaps in the existing literature. In particular, through cross-national comparative analyses, it brings a new dimension to research exploring the significance of the specificities of economic and socio-cultural context(s) in shaping aspirations, experiences, and (perceived) outcomes in relation to transnational youth mobility and graduate employment. By grounding these in the specific contexts within which they are generated, this sheds new light on both the experience and outcomes of such mobility, and the contexts within which these are embedded. Furthermore, the cross-national comparative perspective facilitates a nuanced exploration of how experiences of work and travel overseas may be successfully mobilised as cultural and symbolic capital in some contexts but not others. Within country contexts, variation in the orientations participants showed to the task of obtaining desired employment were also identified.

Future research would benefit from an approach that captured variations in orientations to job seeking in more detail, exploring factors associated with differences in the prevalence of player and purist orientations to the labour market across and within country contexts. Such research might provide more conclusive evidence linking the focus on personality and self-analysis in the Japanese recruitment context with the greater prevalence of purist orientations identified in this research. Furthermore, future research might consider questions that were beyond the scope of this research, such as whether there might be differences in orientations associated with class background (Thomas and Jones 2007: 32).

Another profitable angle of investigation for future research in the Japanese context would be to explore the perceived effectiveness of interventions such as the Global Ace initiative to offer career consulting to returned students and working holidaymakers (JAOS 2014b). Participants in recent gap year initiatives funded by Japan's Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT) and run by Japanese universities (The Mainichi 2015) might also be followed up as they approach graduation and seek employment, to explore whether institutional support militates against some of the barriers to positive evaluations of gap year experiences identified in this research. A more robust exploration of potential differences in the way that study abroad experiences and internships are evaluated, in

contrast with working holidays, may also be a fruitful avenue for future research.

A particular strength of this cross-national comparative research design was in its capacity to present a nuanced account of participant aspirations, orientations, practices, and trajectories, that locates these within - and illuminates - different economic and socio-cultural contexts. The benefits of such an approach can be found in the ways that the comparative dimension of the research enables practices to be de-naturalised and contextualised. By showing how things are different in different times and places, comparative data reveals how what is simply taken for granted in one context may be contingent upon and shaped by a range of factors. The research vividly demonstrates the significant role economic and socio-cultural context - and the personal backgrounds of evaluators - play in shaping norms and values about the ideal employable graduate. The findings of this research therefore have important implications for interventions purported to improve graduate recruitment processes and career outcomes and/or ameliorate social inequalities in the recruitment context.

Appendix A Approaching potential participants

A.1   Example Facebook message recruiting WHMs

Working Holiday Research

Are you a British or Japanese graduate who has been overseas on a working holiday visa within the last 10 years? Would you like to take part in a research study exploring the experiences of working holidaymakers? If so, please contact Lynley Aldridge by e-mailing xx@leeds.ac.uk.

For more information, please see: www.facebook.com/WorkingHolidayResearch.

Please share or pass this message on if you know anyone who might be interested in participating in this project. Many thanks!

A.2 Example approach letter/e-mail for careers advisers/employers (Britain)

E-mails addressed to key informants (e.g., careers advisers and employers) were tailored to each organisation, but were based on the following template:

Dear xx,

I am currently studying for a PhD in sociology at the University of Leeds. My specific area of interest is the gap year or overseas working holiday, particularly in the context of graduate transitions into employment (e.g., within the first few years after graduation). I've attached some information about the research I'm conducting.

If you would be willing, I would really appreciate the opportunity to interview you as part of this research. I am particularly interested in your experiences working with and advising students and/or graduates who are considering gap year/working holiday opportunities, and the graduate recruitment process more generally.

I'd really appreciate any assistance you might be able to provide, and will be following this e-mail up with a phone call to discuss further in the next few days.

Best wishes,

Lynley

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Lynley Aldridge

PhD student, School of Sociology and Social Policy, University of Leeds

A.3 Example approach letter/e-mail for careers advisers/employers (Japan, English translation)

Greetings,

Apologies for the sudden e-mail. My name is Lynley Aldridge and I am a foreign visiting researcher in the Faculty of Social Sciences at Hosei University and a PhD student in sociology at the University of Leeds. Currently I am in Japan in order to conduct research for my dissertation.

The theme of my dissertation is "Short-term international sojourns (e.g., gap years and working holidays) and graduate careers in the UK and Japan". I have attached some further information about this research.

In this respect, I am writing to ask if it might be possible to interview someone appropriate in your centre.

I apologise for bothering you with this request when you are busy, but I request your kind cooperation after careful consideration of this request.

Best wishes,

Lynley

**

Lynley Aldridge

PhD Student, School of Sociology and Social Policy, Faculty of Education, Social Sciences, and Law, University of Leeds

Foreign Visiting Researcher, Faculty of Social Sciences, Hosei University

Tel: xxx xxxx xxxx   E-mail: xxxxxxxxxxxxx

Web: https://www.facebook.com/WorkingHolidayResearchJapan

A.4   Information sheet and consent form - WHM (UK)

**Overseas working holidays and employment trajectories:
A cross-cultural comparison**

This research explores the motivations, experiences, perceptions and outcomes of the working holiday for British and Japanese working holiday makers.

As part of this research, I would like to speak with you about your experiences during your working holiday and afterwards. This would be an informal conversation, for approximately an hour and a half, at a time and a place that is convenient for you. I would like to record our conversation, to help me to remember what you tell me.

It is your choice whether or not you take part. If you say yes, you can change your mind and stop at any time without having to give a reason. You can choose not to answer any questions that you do not wish to answer. You can also withdraw from the study at any time before data analysis [date].

If you agree to take part in the study, your words may be quoted in presentations and publications but your name will not be used.

Thank you for considering participation in this project. If you have any queries please contact Lynley Aldridge, on xxxxxxxxxxx or xx@leeds.ac.uk.

This research has received approval from the University of Leeds Research Ethics Committee (AREA#12-132).

I agree to take part in this project.

☐ Yes   Signature: _____   Date: _____

I agree that an anonymised transcript of our conversation can be made available for future research or teaching purposes[21].

☐ Yes   Signature: _____   Date: _____

☐ No

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[21] This is your choice, and you can still take part in this project if you tick no in response to this question. If you agree, the anonymised transcript may be deposited in a secure data archive for other researchers to access.

A.5 Information sheet and consent form - WHM (Japan, English translation)

Overseas working holidays and graduate employment trajectories: A comparison of Japan and the UK

Through this research, I am interested in exploring British and Japanese people's reasons and motivations for undertaking working holidays, and the impact that such working holidays can have on participants' lives subsequently.

As part of this research, I would like to speak with you about your experiences during your working holiday and afterwards. The interview could be conducted on the telephone or via Skype or face-to-face, at a time and place that is convenient for you. The length of the interview is typically an hour and half, although this does vary from person to person. I would like to record our conversation, to help me to remember what you tell me.

It is your choice whether or not you take part in this research. If you change your mind, you can withdraw your cooperation at any time without having to give a reason. You can also withdraw from the study at any time before data analysis [date]. You can also choose not to answer any questions that you do not wish to answer.

If you agree to take part in the study, your words may be quoted in presentations and publications but your name will not be used.

If you have any questions, or would like to take part in the study, please contact Lynley Aldridge on xxx xxxx xxxx or xx@leeds.ac.uk.

This research has received approval from the University of Leeds Research Ethics Committee (AREA#12-132).

I agree to take part in this project.
☐ I agree   Signature: _____   Date: _____

I agree that an anonymised transcript of our conversation can be made available for future research or teaching purposes[22].
☐ Yes   Signature: _____   Date: _____
☐ No

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[22] This is your choice, and you can still take part in this project if you tick no in response to this question. If you agree, the anonymised transcript may be deposited in a secure data archive for other researchers to access.

A.6 Information sheet and consent form - careers adviser/employer (UK)

Overseas working holidays and employment trajectories:
A cross-cultural comparison

This research explores employer perceptions about young people's international mobility and its impact on employment trajectories.

As part of this research, I would like to speak with you about your knowledge of graduate employment trajectories. I would also like to explore your perceptions of - and/or experiences with - graduates who have taken gap years and/or working holidays[23]. This would be an informal conversation, for approximately 45 minutes, at a time and a place that is convenient for you. I would like to record the interview, to help me to remember what you tell me.

It is your choice whether or not you take part. If you say yes, you can change your mind and stop at any time without having to give a reason. You can choose not to answer any questions that you do not wish to answer. You can withdraw from the study at any time before data analysis [date].

If you do agree to take part in the study, your words may be quoted in presentations and publications but your name will never be used. I will consult with you and any relevant people within your organisation about the best way in which to refer to your workplace, so as to address any concerns you may have about how you are represented in publications.

Thank you for considering participation in this project. If you have any queries about it, please do not hesitate to contact Lynley Aldridge, on tel. xxxxx xxx xxx or xx@leeds.ac.uk.

This research has received approval from the University of Leeds Research Ethics Committee (AREA#12-132).

I agree to take part in this project.

Signature: _____   Date: _____

I/we would like you to refer to our organisation as follows:

_____

Signature: _____   Date: _____

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[23] This section was tailored slightly depending on the nature of the informant and the information they were able to provide.

A.7　　Information sheet and consent form - careers adviser/employer (Japan, English translation)

Overseas working holidays and graduate employment trajectories: A comparison of Japan and the UK

In this research, I am interested in exploring short-term overseas sojourns (e.g., gap years and working holidays) and their impact on graduate employment trajectories in Britain and Japan etc.

As part of this research, I would like to ask you about the job hunting process for graduates, the methods and standards used by companies to evaluate applicants, and your perceptions of - and/or experiences with - graduates who take gap years and/or working holidays. The interview could be conducted on the telephone or via Skype or face-to-face, at a time and place that is convenient for you. The length of the interview is typically 45 minutes, although this does vary from person to person. I would like to record the conversation, to help me to remember what you tell me.

It is your choice whether or not you take part in this research. If you change your mind, you can withdraw your cooperation at any time without having to give a reason. You can also withdraw from the study at any time before data analysis [date]. You can also choose not to answer any questions that you do not wish to answer.

If you do agree to take part in the study, your words may be quoted in presentations and publications but your name will never be used. I will consult with you and any relevant people within your organisation about the best way in which to refer to your workplace, so as to address any concerns you may have about how you are represented in publications.

If you have any questions, or would like to take part in the study, please contact Lynley Aldridge on xxx xxxx xxxx or xx@leeds.ac.uk.

This research has received approval from the University of Leeds Research Ethics Committee (AREA#12-132).

I agree to take part in this project.

Signature: _____　　　Date: _____

I/we would like you to refer to our organisation as follows:

_____

Signature: _____　　　Date: _____

Appendix B Pen portraits

B.1   Pen portraits - British WHMs

Debbie

Debbie was born overseas, to an English mother and a father from elsewhere in Europe. They moved to the north of England shortly after she was born. She described her class background as "*middle class*". Debbie's father commenced - but did not complete - university education; her mother was educated to master's level. When she was aged 14, her father ran his own import/export business and her mother was a housewife (she had previously worked outside of England as a university lecturer).

Debbie studied travel and marketing at university (2004-2007) and subsequently found employment in events marketing in London. In early 2010, she travelled to South Africa where she volunteered at a campsite for approximately six months. She subsequently returned to London and worked in temporary jobs while saving up the money to embark upon a working holiday to Australia. Debbie worked in various roles in different parts of Australia during her working holiday (2011-2013), including a number of marketing positions, farm work, and a position as a supervisor in a hostel. She travelled with her boyfriend, and reluctantly returned to the UK in 2013 after their visas expired. She is currently employed in travel marketing.

Emma

Emma was born in the north of England and had "*a relatively rural childhood*", attending secondary school in a larger market town from the age of 16. Emma described herself as being from an "*upper working to lower middle class*" background. Emma's father completed the equivalent of GCSEs and a specialist trade qualification; her mother completed A levels plus a teaching degree at a polytechnic. Her father worked as a specialist tradesman and her mother was a youth worker. They both own businesses.

Emma studied media at university (2003-2006) and travelled to Japan to teach English after graduation (2006-2007). Emma lived in Japan with her then boyfriend. Upon her return to the UK, Emma moved to London and secured a position in advertising (as a media account executive), starting in January 2008. She still works in the same field, for the same company, having risen in seniority over time (she is now an account director).

Fiona

Fiona was born overseas, to British parents, returning to Scotland as a young child. She described herself as having a "*middle class*" background. Fiona's parents left school early, possibly with no formal qualifications (her father later completed a Higher National Diploma.) They both worked for the same organisations for 33 years (her father) and for 25 years (her mother), working their way up from apprenticeships. When Fiona was 14 her father worked as a buyer for a manufacturing company. Her mother was a cashier manager.

Fiona studied business studies at university (2000-2005), although she first enrolled in a computing degree. She undertook a one-year work placement as part of her course and spent two summers working in the USA. After graduating from university, Fiona worked in marketing for a work and travel provider, before embarking on a working holiday to Canada (2007-2008). While in Canada, Fiona worked for a hotel and at a summer camp. After returning to the UK in 2008, Fiona returned to work for her former employer. In 2010 she decided to join her boyfriend in the north of England, where she was able to find a position that allowed her to train on-the-job to become a careers adviser. In early 2013 the two of them relocated to Scotland, where Fiona took up a position as a careers adviser.

Gemma

Gemma was born in Scotland, but lived overseas with her parents between the ages of one and four. Gemma described her background as "*lower middle class*". Her parents had some higher education and were both nurses.

Gemma studied politics at university (2002-2006). Upon graduation, she travelled to Japan with her partner, James, where they spent two years teaching English (2006-2008). (I interviewed Gemma and James together.) Upon her return to the UK, Gemma completed a master's degree (2008-2009), and worked for a year as a graduate trainee for a research organisation (2009-2010). She left this position in search of work located closer to the university where James was studying, and worked as a research assistant between 2010 and 2011. Since 2011, Gemma has been studying for a PhD. Gemma and James have one child.

James

James was born and grew up in Scotland. He described himself as coming from a "*working class*" background. James' father had completed secondary education (O level equivalent) and his mother had no qualifications. When he was aged 14, his father worked in a factory and his mother was a housewife.

James studied English at university (2001-2005). He worked in administration for a year after graduating (2005-2006) and travelled to Japan to teach English with his partner, Gemma, after her graduation. (I interviewed Gemma and James together.) After two years teaching English in Japan (2006-2008), James returned to the UK to complete a master's (2008-2009) and subsequently a PhD (2009-2014). James was looking for jobs at the time of our interview. (As indicated above, James and Gemma have one child.)

Mark

Mark was born and grew up in "*a little town*", "*a rough place*" in the north of England. He described his class background as "*middle class*". Mark's father completed secondary education to GCSE level; his mother attended night classes (to A/AS level) in her 30s. When Mark was aged 14, his father worked in a professional role in distribution and his mother was a teaching assistant.

As a teenager, Mark developed a fascination with Japan, and studied Japanese at university (2008-2012). His course involved a year studying abroad in Tokyo, and he was keen to return to Japan upon graduation. Mark travelled to Japan on a working holiday visa (2012-2013), securing a six-month market research internship with a well-known international company in Japan just days before he was due to depart. While completing this internship, Mark applied for several "new graduate" positions in Japan. Mark commenced employment with a Japanese manufacturing company in April 2013, with this company having sponsored him for a work visa. He was working in their international sales section at the time of our interview.

Sarah

Sarah was born and grew up in a small town in the south of England. She described herself as "*from a very straightforward, white, working-class background*". Sarah's father left school with no formal qualifications; her mother completed the equivalent of O levels. When she was 14, her father worked in a factory and her mother worked as a customer service manager in the family business (domestic appliance servicing).

Sarah took a gap year between high school and university, during which time she worked for the family business in order to pay for university. She studied philosophy and criminology at university (2001-2004). Upon graduation, Sarah travelled to South Africa on a working holiday visa, where she worked for a backpacker hostel (2004-2005). After her return to the UK, Sarah found employment with a work and travel provider (2005-2008). She left this job to undertake a working holiday in Canada (2008-2009), where she worked for a travel company. Finding a job upon her return to the UK was difficult, and after a period of unemployment Sarah reluctantly took up a position in commercial finance (2009-2010). Working holidays to Australia (2010-2011) and New Zealand (2011-2012) followed. In Australia, Sarah worked for a travel company and then in the office of a state government education department. In New Zealand she worked in the admissions department of a university. Upon her return to the UK in 2012, Sarah secured a job in admissions for a university college. She was working in this position at the time of our interview.

Sophie

Sophie was born and grew up in "*a little town*" in the east of England. She described her class background as "*working class*" or maybe "*lower middle class*". Sophie's parents left school after completing the equivalent of GCSEs, and her parents ran their own business when she was 14.

Sophie studied linguistics at university (2008-2011). During her time at university, Sophie secured an internship at a professional services firm, with the promise of a full-time job awaiting her upon graduation. Sophie deferred the start date of this job to undertake a working holiday in Australia (2011-2012). Sophie spent the bulk of her working holiday travelling, although she worked in door-to-door sales for a couple of days. She took up the promised position in auditing with the professional services firm in 2012 and has risen in seniority within the company since that time.

Suzanne

Suzanne was born and grew up mostly in a city in the north of England. She described herself as coming from a "*middle class*" background. Suzanne's father was educated to undergraduate level and worked as a managing director (IT) when she was aged 14. Her mother completed postgraduate education (PGCE). She worked as a housewife when Suzanne was 14, but had worked in travel and teaching.

Suzanne took a gap year between high school and university, during which time she undertook a working holiday in Australia, working in restaurants (2008-2009). Suzanne studied geography at university (2009-2012), and travelled to New Zealand with her boyfriend on a working holiday visa after graduation (2012-2013). She worked in various jobs during this time, predominantly as a floor manager in a restaurant. Upon her return to the UK, Suzanne enrolled in a master's degree in human rights law (2013-). At the time of our interview, Suzanne had just been successful in her application for a competitive graduate scheme.

Tom

Tom was born and grew up in a city in northern England. He described himself as from a "*lower middle to middle middle class*" background. Both of Tom's parents had qualified as teachers, his mother via a teaching degree. Tom's father and mother both worked as teachers when he was aged 14.

Tom studied journalism at university (2006-2009). As graduation approached in 2009, during the global financial crisis, Tom perceived the job market to be very tough, and decided that he would instead embark upon a working holiday to Canada (2009-2010). During his time overseas, Tom worked in a cinema. He perceived the job market to be equally difficult upon his return to the UK and after a period of unemployment took up a data processing position with a former employer (2010-2011). Tom subsequently found a position in telesales (2011-2013), leaving this job to spend three months in Argentina. This was predominantly to spend time with his girlfriend (who he had met while in Canada), although Tom also took up employment teaching English during this time. Upon returning to the UK, Tom resumed his telesales position (2014-), this time on a short-term (rolling) contract.

B.2 Pen portraits - Japanese WHMs

Akemi

Akemi was born and grew up in Kyoto. She described her standard of living prior to entering university as "upper middle"[24]. Both of her parents were university educated. Her father worked as a "company employee" and her mother as a housewife when she was aged 14.

Akemi studied at a foreign language university (2000-2004). Upon graduation, she worked in bridal sales in a hotel (2004-2005). She then embarked upon a working holiday in New Zealand (2005-2006), where she met the man she would eventually marry. In New Zealand, Akemi trained to teach English to children, worked in a hotel, and did volunteer work. She subsequently undertook working holidays to Australia (2006-2007) and Canada (2007-2008). At the time of our interview Akemi was living with her husband in France, and working temporarily in a vineyard/winery.

Akiko

Akiko was born and grew up in a "*very small*" city north of Tokyo, in the Kantō region. She described her standard of living prior to entering university as "lower middle". (When asked in English, she said her class background was "*working class*".) Her father had been educated to technical college level; her mother had completed high school. Her father was an office worker and her mother worked part-time in a factory when Akiko was 14.

Akiko studied social relations at university (2003-2007). Upon graduation, she took up employment in systems engineering (2007-2010). She quit her job to pursue a master's overseas (2010-2011). At this time, Akiko's boyfriend was pursuing a master's in Germany, so Akiko moved to Germany on a working holiday visa after completing her course, to spend some time with her boyfriend (2011-2012). Akiko studied German and did a small amount of English language translation work (sourced over the internet) during this time. Upon her return to Japan (2012-), Akiko obtained employment (in systems engineering) with an international company known to her through her previous employment.

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[24] For responses to the question in the World Values Survey about one's "standard of living from a general perspective", the option "high" in Japanese is matched to "*upper class*" in English; "upper middle" to "*upper middle class*"; "middle middle" to "*lower middle class*"; "lower middle" to "*working class*" and "low" to "*lower class*".

Ayumu

Ayumu was born and grew up in a city in the *Chūō* (central) region of Japan. He described his standard of living prior to entering university as "upper middle". Ayumu's parents were educated to university level; when he was aged 14, his father was a veterinarian and his mother taught Japanese.

Ayumu dropped out of high school as a teenager and entered university aged 22 via an alternative route. He studied economics at university (2003-2008). After graduation, Ayumu worked in tax accounting support (2008-2011). He subsequently quit this job and travelled to the UK on a working holiday visa (2012-2014). Ayumu spent the first year of his working holiday in a variety of volunteer positions sourced via websites such as www.helpx.net and www.workaway.info. These included working on a sheep farm and helping out with gardening etc. After travelling in Europe and northern Africa, he then returned to the UK to work in accounting for a Japanese firm in London. I interviewed Ayumu approximately two months after his return to Japan. He was working part-time in accounting for an NPO his father was involved with, while looking for full-time employment.

Emiko

Emiko was born and grew up in Yokohama. She described her standard of living prior to entering university as "middle middle". Both of Emiko's parents had graduated from high school. When she was aged 14, her father worked as an architect and her mother worked part-time in an office. Emiko described her father's income as having been unstable at times.

Emiko studied media and sociology at university (2002-2006). Wanting to pursue her interest in music and ideally to pursue a career in this area, Emiko took up part-time work in retail upon graduation (2006-2007), subsequently registering with a temporary employment agency and working in secretarial/administrative jobs (2007-2011). During this time Emiko also completed a qualification in childcare. Emiko travelled to Australia on a working holiday visa (2011-2012). She wanted to know what it was like to perform music live in Australia. While in Australia she studied English for two or three months, performed at open mike nights and busked, and worked infrequently as a babysitter. Shortly after returning to Japan, Emiko had the opportunity to travel to Singapore (2012-2013), where she worked for a YMCA coordinating activities for children. Upon her return to Japan, Emiko found secretarial/administrative employment at an oil company through an agency (2013-).

Haruko

Haruko was born and grew up in Tokyo. She described her standard of living prior to entering university as "upper middle". Haruko's father had graduated from university and worked as an "*office worker*" when she was 14 years old; her mother had been educated to high school level and worked in a call centre.

Haruko studied education (kindergarten) at university (2005-2009) and obtained work as a kindergarten teacher after graduation (2009-2013). She married in 2013. After her marriage, she travelled alone to Australia on a working holiday visa (2013-2014). Haruko studied English at a language school in the Philippines for three months and for two months in Australia. She also worked as a dishwasher and a housekeeper, taught Japanese to Japanese children living in Australia, and did hair extensions at a local market. Haruko returned to Japan in 2014 and was working part-time in a nursery school at the time of our interview.

Kano

Kano was born and grew up in Yokohama. He described his standard of living prior to entering university as "middle middle". Kano's mother graduated from university and was working as a care helper when he was aged 14. His parents divorced when he was young.

Kano studied Japanese literature at university (2007-2011). Alongside his studies Kano worked at a Mexican restaurant. He started as a dishwasher and subsequently trained in cooking and worked as a chef. After graduation, he continued working at this restaurant, also taking on work in a cafe opened by a friend (2011). Kano then travelled to Australia on a working holiday visa (2011-2012). During his time in Australia he studied English, worked in a restaurant and a cafe, and also worked as a courier delivering fish to restaurants. Upon his return to Japan, Kano worked in an Australian-style cafe opened by a friend (2012-2013). He was subsequently approached by a foreign-owned company in Japan and asked to apply for a role as a chef/menu developer/barista trainer. This application was successful, and Kano began working for this company a few months before our interview (2014-).

Katsuo

Katsuo was born in the *Hokuriku* (lit: northlands) region of Japan but lived overseas for approximately 14 years because of his father's employment. He returned to Japan as a teenager, attending senior high school in a small city in the region of his birth. He described his standard of living prior to entering university as "upper middle". Katsuo's mother was university educated and a housewife when he was aged 14; his father graduated from high school and worked as a "company employee" in a manufacturing company.

Katsuo studied linguistics at university (2006-2011). At the time of graduation, he perceived there to be few jobs around because of the economic situation. He therefore asked at the cram school where he was working if he could continue to work there after graduation (2011-2012). Katsuo then left this job and went on a working holiday to Australia (2012-2013). He spent his time in Australia studying English at a language school and working as a kitchen hand in a Japanese restaurant. After his working holiday, Katsuo remained in Australia on a student visa, studying towards a qualification in interpreting and translation (2013-) and continuing to work in the Japanese restaurant. This was his situation at the time of our interview.

Kazuko

Kazuko was born and grew up in Tokyo. She described her standard of living prior to entering university as "middle middle". Kazuko's parents were university educated; when she was aged 14 her father was an accountant and her mother a housewife.

Kazuko studied Japanese culture and Japanese studies at university (2000-2004). After a period of unemployment upon graduation, she found a position in retail (2004-2005). She left this job (due to difficulties in interpersonal relationships) and after a period of unemployment found work as a receptionist at a city council, which lead to a part-time position within the city council (2006-2010). Kazuko said that this suited her, because it allowed her to pursue her interests in tea ceremony and calligraphy. Kazuko subsequently embarked upon working holidays in Australia (2010-2012) and New Zealand (2012-2013). She studied English, attended a cafe school, and worked in Japanese restaurants, cafes, as a Willing Workers on Organic Farms (WWOOF) volunteer, and on a tomato farm. On her way back to Japan, Kazuko completed a five-week yoga teaching course in Australia. She returned to Japan in 2014, and has subsequently been working part-time in retail (while seeking full-time employment).

Kyoko

Kyoko was born and grew up within the greater Tokyo area. She described her standard of living prior to entering university as "upper middle". Kyoko's parents had been educated to high school level. When she was 14, her father worked in the Japan Self-Defense Forces and her mother worked part-time in a supermarket.

Kyoko spent an additional year as a *rōnin* (i.e., preparing to resit university entrance examinations) after graduating high school. She enrolled in physical education at university (2012-), wanting to become a teacher. University did not live up to Kyoko's expectations; she had hoped to be able to work more independently, but felt bored and unhappy. She describes this as having had a negative impact on her health and took a leave of absence to pursue a working holiday in Australia (2013-2014). Kyoko studied English at a language school in Fiji for one month en route to Australia. In Australia she worked in various farm jobs. Upon her return to Japan, Kyoko resumed her studies at university.

Maki

Maki was born and grew up in Tokyo. She described her standard of living prior to entering university as "upper middle". Both of Maki's parents were educated to university level. Her father worked in hotel management and her mother was a housewife when she was aged 14.

Maki studied education (kindergarten/nursery) at university (2005-2009). This included a one-month period of study abroad in Australia. Maki decided while undertaking the practical component of this course that she did not wish to become a teacher. She therefore sought work in classroom management at a music school (2009-2012). After quitting this job, Maki travelled to Australia on a working holiday (2012-2013). During her time in Australia, Maki studied English for four months at a language school, worked on a tomato farm and an egg farm, and worked in a sushi restaurant. Upon her return to Japan, Maki sought employment with regular hours that would allow her to pursue her other interests. She found a position in a fast food franchise (2013-), where she is currently working, and studied for a qualification in paper art.

Makoto

Makoto was born and grew up in a small city in northern Japan. He described his standard of living prior to entering university as "middle middle". Both his parents had been educated to junior/technical college level. When Makoto was 14, his father worked as an x-ray engineer in a hospital and his mother was a pharmacy assistant.

Makoto studied agriculture at a local junior college (2002-2004), transferring to a university away from his hometown for his third and fourth years (2004-2006). Upon graduation, Makoto commenced employment at a fish wholesale company in Tokyo (2006-2008). After quitting this job, Makoto travelled to Australia on a working holiday visa (2008-2010). During this time, Makoto studied English for four months at a language school, and worked in a variety of jobs, including on farms, as a dishwasher/kitchen hand, and as a fish wholesaler. Once his working holiday visa had expired, Makoto remained in Australia on a student visa (2010-2011), continuing to work as a fish wholesaler and studying first a general English course and then a business course (uncompleted). Upon returning to Japan, Makoto secured a position in customs clearance (2012-2013). He began a casino dealing course while still employed but found it difficult to balance work and study. He subsequently completed the course after quitting his job, and was applying for jobs in casinos overseas at the time of our interview.

Manami

Manami was born and grew up in a small city in northern Japan. She described her standard of living prior to entering university as "middle middle". Manami's father had been educated to high school level; her mother completed technical college. Her father worked at a train station and her mother made school meals when she was 14 years old.

Manami completed a *rōnin* year (i.e., a year preparing to resit university entrance examinations) after graduating high school. She studied media at university in Tokyo, spending two years at a women's college (2004-2006) before successfully applying to transfer to a more highly ranked institution to complete her studies (2006-2008). Upon graduation, Manami commenced work for a travel company (2008-2013). She quit this job to undertake a working holiday in Australia (2013-2014). During her working holiday, Manami studied English at a language school, trained as a barista, and worked in a coffee shop and on two different farms. Upon her return to Japan, Manami began working in a coffee shop (2014-).

Michiko

Michiko was born and grew up in western Japan. She described her standard of living prior to entering university as "lower middle". Both of her parents were university educated. When Michiko was aged 14, her father worked as a high school English teacher and her mother gave private English lessons and worked as a shopkeeper.

Michiko studied comparative politics at university in her home prefecture (2000-2004). Upon graduation, Michiko found non-regular employment as a web designer in Tokyo, subsequently working for the same company in a regular position (2004-2012). Michiko left this job to pursue a working holiday in London (2012-2014). She worked as a web designer for a Japanese company, although she had originally hoped to work for a local (i.e., British) employer. Upon her return to Japan, Michiko was approached by her previous employer and invited to apply for a supervisory role. She was about to commence this job at the time of our interview (2014-).

Michio

Michio was born and grew up in a small city in the *Chūō Kōchi* (lit: central highland) region of Japan. He described his standard of living prior to entering university as "upper middle". His father commenced (but did not complete) a university degree; his mother was educated to junior college level. When Michio was 14, his father worked in administration in a hospital and his mother was a primary school teacher.

Michio studied politics at university in Tokyo (1990-1995). After his third year, he took a leave of absence from his studies to undertake a working holiday in New Zealand (1993-1994). Michio worked in a Japanese-owned souvenir shop during this time overseas. After his working holiday, he returned to Tokyo to complete his studies, breaking up with his girlfriend (who did not travel overseas with him) not long after his return. After graduation, Michio commenced employment for a television studio in his home prefecture, where he worked in television direction (1995-2007). Michio quit this job and travelled to Thailand to study Thai cooking (2008-2009), with the aim of opening a Thai restaurant upon his return to Japan (2009-2013). This did not generate a stable enough income, so Michio took up work instead as a freelance director (2013-).

Nariko

Nariko was born and grew up in Tokyo. She described her standard of living prior to entering university as "middle middle". Her father graduated university and was working as a train engineer when she was 14 years old; her mother graduated from technical college and was a housewife.

Nariko completed a *rōnin* year (i.e., a year preparing to resit university entrance examinations) after graduating high school. She studied food science and nutrition at university, spending two years at a junior college in Tokyo (2004-2006). She successfully applied to transfer to a more highly ranked institution in the north of Japan to complete her studies (2006-2008). After graduation, Nariko secured a position in a food production company (2006). She quit this job after three months, due to the long working hours. She subsequently worked in retail (2006-2007), then secured a job in quality control and as a store manager for a company that produced sweets (2007-2011). Nariko quit this job to undertake English language study in Australia, first on a student visa (2011-2012). She worked during this time in retail and at a Japanese restaurant. After temporarily returning to Japan for three months, Nariko studied English at a language school in the Philippines for three months, then spent seven months in Australia on a working holiday visa (2012-2013). During this time she completed a five-week barista course and worked in a Japanese cafe and a local cafe, as well as on a farm (briefly). Upon her return to Japan, Nariko originally sought coffee-related employment. However, she was unhappy with the poor income and job security she experienced working in a non-regular position as a coffee sales assistant (2013-2014). After some difficulty, Nariko found a position in quality control, with a meat trading company. She learned that this application had been successful between our first and second interviews.

Sakiko

Sakiko was born and grew up in a relatively large city in northern Japan. She described her standard of living prior to entering university as "<u>middle middle</u>". Her parents were educated to high school level; when she was 14, her father was an office worker and her mother a part-time office worker.

Sakiko spent a period as a *rōnin* (i.e., preparing to resit university entrance examinations) after graduating high school, however, rather than progress immediately to university, she worked part-time (e.g., cleaning, in retail; 2000-2002). She studied English literature/cross-cultural communication at university in her hometown (2002-2006). Sakiko secured a position in sales with a language school upon graduation, but delayed the start date so she could spend six months on a working holiday in New Zealand (2006). In addition to her position as a Japanese language teaching assistant, Sakiko worked in a Japanese restaurant. Upon her return, Sakiko took up the position at the language school (2007). This company went bankrupt, and Sakiko registered with a dispatch agency who found her a position at an optics and imaging company. This was initially a non-regular position, but she was subsequently offered a permanent position in HR (2008-).

Yoshie

Yoshie was born and grew up within the greater Tokyo area. She described her standard of living prior to entering university as "<u>upper middle</u>". Her father had graduated from university and worked as a "*business man (kind of an engineer)*". Her mother was a housewife.

Yoshie studied economics at university (1990-1994). She worked as a manager's assistant (market research) for a restaurant company (1994-1997). She left this position to work as a Japanese language teaching assistant in Australia (1997). Yoshie then returned to Japan, married, and moved with her husband to the *Chūō Kōchi* (lit: central highland) region. She approached a local English language school to take up classes, and was offered an interview for a job at the school (1997-2001). Yoshie described the conditions in which her husband was working as exceptionally stressful. When he wanted to quit his job, she suggested they travel to Australia on a working holiday (2001-2002). Yoshie worked for an education agency, and she and her husband remained in Australia after their working holiday visas had expired (2002-2004), he on a student visa (studying massage therapy) and she on a spousal visa. Upon returning to Japan, Yoshie set up her own education agency (2004-). Yoshie and her husband have two children.

Yukiko

Yukiko was born in the Kantō region, and grew up in the greater Tokyo area. She described her standard of living prior to entering university as "<u>middle middle to upper middle</u>". Her parents were both university educated, and when she was aged 14, her father worked in HR and her mother worked part-time as a waitress.

Yukiko spent a year as a *rōnin* (i.e., preparing to resit university entrance examinations) after graduating high school. She studied law at university (2002-2006). Yukiko secured a position in sales with a language school upon graduation, but delayed the start date so she could travel to Canada on a working holiday visa (2006). In Canada, Yukiko studied English at a language school and worked in a Japanese restaurant. Upon her return, Yukiko took up the position at the language school (2007). This company went bankrupt, and after a period of unemployment Yukiko found employment at a telephone company (2008-2013). She subsequently quit this job to undertake a working holiday in France (2013-2014), where she worked in a hotel. Upon her return, Yukiko secured an entry-level position in public relations in a foreign firm (2014-). This was a non-regular short-term position.

Appendix C Participant characteristics (WHMs)

Table C.1 Participant and interview characteristics (WHMs) - UK

Interview number	Pseudonym (Age at (each) working holiday; gender)	Interview type	Interview duration
W21	Debbie (Ages 25 and 26; female)	Face-to-face	1 hr 20 mins
W17	Emma (Age 21; female)	Phone	1 hr 56 mins
W16	Fiona (Age 25; female)	Phone	Two interviews: 59 mins and 28 mins (1 hr 27 mins total)
W19 & W20	Gemma and James (Age 21, female; age 23, male)	Face-to-face (interviewed together)	2 hrs 11 mins
W05	Mark (Age 23; male)	Skype	Two interviews: 1 hr 32 mins and 1 hr 22 mins (2 hrs 54 mins total)
W09	Sarah (Ages 22, 26, 28 and 29; female)	Phone	Two interviews: 1 hr 35 mins and 54 mins (2 hrs 29 mins total)
W08	Sophie (Age 21; female)	Phone	1 hr 46 mins
W22	Suzanne (Age 23; female)	Face-to-face	1 hr 51 mins
W12	Tom (Ages 21 and 25; male)	Face-to-face	1 hr 37 mins

Table C.2 Participant and interview characteristics (WHMs) - Japan

Interview number	Pseudonym (Age at (each) working holiday; gender)	Interview type (language)	Interview duration
W34	Akemi (Ages 23, 24, and 25; female)	Written responses (Japanese)	-
W02	Akiko (Age 26; female) [Student visa first]	Face-to-face (English)	3 hrs 15 mins
W03	Ayumu (Age 30; male)	Skype (Japanese; some English)	3 hrs 5 mins
W13	Emiko (Ages 28 and 29; female)	Face-to-face (Japanese)	2 hrs 12 mins
W11	Haruko (Age 27; female)	Face-to-face (English)	1 hr 55 mins
W17	Kano (Age 23; male)	Face-to-face (Japanese; some English)	1 hr 30 mins
W05	Katsuo (Age 25; male)	Skype (Japanese; some English)	1 hr 50 mins
W18	Kazuko (Ages 29 and 31; female)	Face-to-face (English; some Japanese)	2 hrs 17 mins
W01	Kyoko (Age 21; female)	Face-to-face (Japanese)	1 hr 22 mins

Interview number	Pseudonym (Age at (each) working holiday; gender)	Interview type (language)	Interview duration
W08	Maki (Age 26; female)	Face-to-face (Japanese)	2 hrs 5 mins
W10	Makoto (Age 25; male)	Face-to-face (Japanese)	2 hrs 46 mins
W14	Manami (Age 29; female)	Face-to-face (Japanese)	1 hr 43 mins
W31	Michiko (Age 30; female)	Face-to-face (Japanese/ English)	2 hrs 21 mins
W04	Michio (Ages 22 and 37; male)	Phone (Japanese)	2 hrs 25 mins
W15	Nariko (Age 30; female) [Student visa first]	Face-to-face (Japanese)	Two interviews: 1 hr 54 mins and 1 hr 10 mins (3 hrs 4 mins total)
W24	Sakiko (Age 25; female)	Face-to-face (Japanese; some English)	2 hrs 43 mins
W09	Yoshie (Ages 25 and 31; female)	Face-to-face (English; some Japanese)	Two interviews: 1 hr 47 mins and 1 hr 10 mins (2 hrs 57 mins total)
W26	Yukiko (Ages 24 and 31; female)	Face-to-face (Japanese; some English)	2 hrs 6 mins

Table C.3 Participant characteristics (WHMs) - gender, age, and career stage

Characteristic	British	Japanese
Gender		
Male	3	5
Female	7	13
Age group (first period of work and travel overseas >3 months)[25]		
20-24	8	5
25+	2	13
Situation at time of first eligible period of employment overseas		
University student	0	2
Post-graduation (secured employment)	1	2
Post-graduation (0-6 months)	6	0
After working for a period (> 6 months)	3	14
Age at entry to university		
+0 (i.e., progressed immediately)	8	12
+1 or more years	2	6
Total	**10**	**18**

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[25] Excluding three-month Camp America programmes (Fiona, Debbie), pre-university gap years spent overseas (Suzanne), short periods of volunteering overseas (Manami), and periods of study abroad during undergraduate education (e.g., Sarah, Mark, Akiko, Maki, Nariko). Note also that university undergraduate degrees typically take three years to complete in England, but four years in Japan and Scotland.

Table C.4 Participant characteristics (WHMs) - class background

Characteristic	British	Japanese
Self-reported class background[26]		
Middle class	4	
Lower middle class	2	
Working to lower middle class	2	
Working class	2	
"Upper middle" standard of living/ upper middle class		8
"Middle middle" standard of living/ lower middle class		8
"Lower middle" standard of living/ working class		2
Parental education		
At least one parent with uni education	4	12
Neither parent with uni education	6	6
Total	**10**	**18**

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[26] Social class is a less salient factor in self-definition in Japan, and rather than ask about "*class background*" I used a question more commonly used in Japan (with slight modifications: addition in italics), asking participants to "describe their standard of living *before they entered university* from a general perspective". See discussion in Chapter Four and World Values Survey (2015a, 2015b).

**Table C.5 Participant characteristics (WHMs) - characteristics of
overseas experience (OE)**

Characteristic	British	Japanese
Decade in which first period of OE commenced		
1990s	0	2
2000s	6	4
2010s	4	12
Number of eligible periods of OE		
1	7	12
2	2	5
3+	1	1
Total	**10**	**18**

Table C.6 Profile of participant trajectories (roughly based on NS-SEC)

	Category of employment and primary occupation before OE	**Category of employment and primary occupation at interview** *(former occupation in brackets)*
Japanese participants (18)	**Lower managerial, administrative, and professional (8)** Web design IT consultant Market research Sales (3) Teaching Accounting	**=> Lower managerial, administrative, and professional (2)** - Web design, IT consultant **=> Self-employment (1)** - Education agent (*market research*) **=>Semi-routine & routine (1)** - Kitchen and catering assistant (*sales)* **=> Other (4)** Overseas (*sales)* Part-time/in transition (*sales, teaching, accounting,)*
	Intermediate (4) Admin/secretarial (3) Cram school teacher	**=> Intermediate (1)** - Admin/ secretarial (1) **=> Other (2)** Overseas *(cram school teacher)* Part-time/in transition (*admin/ secretarial)* **=>Semi-routine & routine (1)** - Kitchen and catering assistant (*admin/secretarial)*
	Lower supervisory and technical (2) Chef Quality control	**=> Lower supervisory and technical (2)** - Chef, quality control
	Student (4)	**=> Lower managerial, administrative, and professional (1)** - Human resources **=> Self-employment (1)** - Freelance directing **=> Intermediate (1)** - Entry-level PR **=> Student (1)**

	Category of employment and primary occupation before OE	Category of employment and primary occupation at interview *(former occupation in brackets)*
British participants (10)	**Lower managerial, administrative, and professional (2)** Marketing Event management	**=> Lower managerial, administrative, and professional (2)** - Careers adviser (*marketing*), marketing (*event management*)
	Intermediate (1) Admin/secretarial	**=> Other (1)** - PhD
	Student (7)	**=> Higher professional (1)** - Audit **=> Lower managerial, administrative, and professional (1)** - Advertising **=> Intermediate (1)** - University admissions administrator **=> Semi-routine (1)** - Telesales **=> Other (3)** - PhD, MA, overseas

Note 1: Categories in this table - roughly based on National Statistics Socio-Economic Classification (NS-SEC; Rose, Pevalin and O'Reilly 2005) - should be interpreted as a rough guide only, as there are limitations inherent in using a classification system intended for use in the UK to categorise employment in Japan, as discussed in Chapter Four.

Note 2: It should be acknowledged that this table oversimplifies career trajectories, as some participants worked in more than one position after their return and the table shows only their position at the time of the interview.

Appendix D Participant characteristics (Careers advisers)

Table D.1 Participant and interview characteristics (careers advisers) - UK

I/view no.	Pseudonym	Employer/experience	Interview type	Interview duration
C15	Daniel	Daniel has approximately 6-7 years' experience managing higher education careers services and personal experience of volunteering overseas. He has previously worked in the commercial sector.	Phone	1 hr 19 mins
C13	David	David has 10+ years' experience in careers advice at university level, and has personal experiences of working abroad.	Skype	1 hr 13 mins
C11	Liz	See William/ Liz below.		
C18	Paige	Paige runs an independent careers consultancy. She has worked freelance as a careers adviser for 4 years. Her background is in graduate recruitment/HR. Paige had taken an overseas gap year, worked on projects abroad, and lived in a variety of different countries while growing up.	Skype	57 mins

I/view no.	Pseudonym	Employer/experience	Interview type	Interview duration
C01	Susan	Susan has almost 20 years' experience in careers advice at university level, and has personal experiences of working abroad.	Face-to-face	Two interviews: 51 mins and 50 mins (1 hr 41 mins total)
C14	Veronica	Veronica has almost 2 years' experience in university careers advice in a large Higher Education careers service and prior experience as a teacher. She took a gap year involving work in the UK and a small amount of travel overseas.	Phone	52 mins
C11	William/Liz	William has 10+ years' and Liz has 20+ years' experience in careers advice at a new university. Liz has no personal experience of taking a gap year.	Informal phone call; written responses	-

**Table D.2 Participant and interview characteristics (careers advisers) -
Japan**

I/view no.	Name/ pseudonym	Employer/experience	Interview type (language)	Interview duration
C12	Mr. Akiyama and Ms. Hamasaki	Mr. Akiyama and Ms. Hamasaki are employed by the public company that manages Japan's largest new graduate job hunting information site. He heads their research division, she their global section. Ms. Hamasaki spent a year abroad on a student exchange.	Face-to-face (Japanese)	1 hr 38 mins
C20	Mr. Higuchi	Mr. Higuchi works for the careers centre of a private university in Tokyo. He has previously worked in other departments in the university, and in HR/recruitment in the commercial sector. Mr. Higuchi has no personal experience with the gap year or working holiday, but worked overseas for a period of three months in his former employment.	Face-to-face (Japanese)	58 mins

I/view no.	Name/ pseudonym	Employer/experience	Interview type (language)	Interview duration
C19	Ms. Kobayashi and Ms. Mino	Ms. Kobayashi and Ms. Mino work for the careers centre of a national university in the *Chubu* (Central) region of Japan. Both had worked for a number of years in various departments of this and other universities. Ms. Mino had experience of studying abroad.	Face-to-face (Japanese)	1 hr 10 mins
C06	Prof. Komikawa[27]	Prof. Komikawa is based in Hosei University's Faculty of Lifelong Learning and Career Studies. He has spent a year working abroad (on a sabbatical).	Face-to-face (Japanese)	57 mins
C19	Ms. Mino	See Ms. Kobayashi/ Ms. Mino above.		
C23	Mr. Murakami	Mr. Murakami has worked for the careers centre of a private university in Tokyo for 2 years, and for the university for 11 years. He originally worked for an advertising company, and suggested that his lack of overseas experience meant that he was passed over for jobs with foreign clients.	Face-to-face (Japanese)	60 mins

[27] Real name used by request.

I/view no.	Name/ pseudonym	Employer/experience	Interview type (language)	Interview duration
C16	Mr. Tanaka	Mr. Tanaka had worked in the careers centre of a university in Tokyo for 5 years, and was previously an employee of a different university for 13 years. He had studied abroad as a mature student.	Face-to-face (Japanese)	1 hr 21 mins

Appendix E Participant characteristics (Employers)

Table E.1 Participant and interview characteristics (employers) - UK

I/view no.	Pseudonym	Position and industry	Interview type	Interview duration
E06	Heather	Recruitment manager, global technology company with UK headquarters	Phone	28 mins
E03	Jodie	Recruitment manager, professional services firm	Face-to-face	33 mins
E02	Kate	Talent acquisition specialist, recruitment consultancy	Face-to-face	52 mins
E10	Kylie	Graduate resourcing advisor, large retail company	Phone	33 mins
E07	Terry	Senior HR person, public sector graduate recruiter	Face-to-face	48 mins

Table E.2 Participant and interview characteristics (employers) - Japan

I/view no.	Pseudonym	Position and industry	Interview type (language)	Interview duration
E27	Mr. Hashimoto	Division Head, broadcasting studio	Face-to-face (Japanese)	53 mins
E33	Ms. Matsumoto (and Ms. Shimizu)	Manger, global team, large general recruitment/HR services company (Manager, PR department)	Face-to-face (Japanese)	50 mins
E30	Mr. Nagaoka	Assistant Manager, HR, transport company	Face-to-face (Japanese)	46 mins
E29	Mr. Ogawa	Recruiting, HR group, manufacturing company	Face-to-face (Japanese, some English)	54 mins
E22	Mr. Sato	Participated as an individual with familiarity with recruitment within Japanese and international companies in Japan	Phone (Japanese, some English)	1 hr 13 mins
E21	Mr. Suzuki	Director, crowd sourcing and direct recruiting company	Face-to-face (Japanese)	1 hr 14 mins
E25	Mr. Takahashi	Section manager, HR, restaurants	Face-to-face (Japanese)	43 mins
E07	Ms. Yamada	Section chief, personnel, financial institution (housing loans)	Face-to-face (Japanese)	51 mins

Appendix F Interview schedules

F.1   Interview schedule - WHM

1. Background

2. Can you tell me a little bit more about your experience at university?

   Looking back to when you were at university, can you tell me what you imagined would happen after you graduated?

3. Can you tell me a bit more about any work experience you had before the working holiday?

4. Had you been overseas prior to your working holiday?

5. Can you tell me about your working holiday?

6. And can you tell me what happened after the working holiday?

7. Can you tell me a bit more about why you went on the working holiday?

8. Would you say that your working holiday had much of an impact on your life afterwards? If so, in what way?

9. What would you say if someone asked you about whether or not they should take "time out" or an overseas "gap year" or "working holiday" after graduation?

10. Looking back, how would you say things were in your life generally before the WH (e.g., work, relationship(s), living arrangements etc)?

11. How were things after you returned?

12. How are things in your life now?

13. How do you see your life unfolding in the future?

14. How was it looking for jobs after the working holiday?

15. Did you refer to your working holiday in job applications?

16. How, in your experience, did employers respond when you discussed your working holiday experiences?

17. Broadly speaking, in your experience, what sorts of things would you say that (graduate) employers are looking for when they are recruiting?

18. You said you thought employers were looking for [xx], [yy] and [zz]. From your perspective, did your working holiday experience help you to develop and/or to demonstrate any of these?

19. Are there other things you would like to say about the working holiday and what, if anything, it meant to you?

20. Is there anything you would like to add that you think is important that I haven't mentioned?

21. Before we finish, I'd like to collect a little bit of background information about you and your family. Would you mind completing this brief demographic survey for me?

22. And could I just collect a little more information about some of the jobs that you've had?

F.2 Interview schedule - careers adviser

1) Can you tell me a bit about your current role at [organisation]?

2) What did you do before this?

3a) Do you come into contact with many people who are thinking about taking "time out" or an overseas "gap year" after graduating?[28]

3b) What about people who have taken "time out" or an overseas "gap year" after graduating?

4) [If so] What motivate[s]/[ed] them, do you think?

5) What do you think might be the impact for recent graduates of taking "time out" after graduation, in the form of an overseas "gap year" or working holiday?

6) If a recent graduate who was thinking about taking "time out" overseas was to ask your advice, what would you tell them?

7) What - in your experience - do employers think about people who have taken "time out", in the form of an overseas gap year?

8) What advice would you give someone who asked you how they should refer to their "time out" or "gap year" in job applications and/or interviews?

> Can you give me some examples of good/bad ways you have heard "time out" described in job applications and/or interviews?

> How well do you think the graduates you encounter can do this?

> Are some candidates/groups more able to do this than others?

9) Broadly speaking, what things would you say (graduate) employers are looking for when recruiting recent graduates?

10) Can you describe the ideal candidate (for a typical graduate position)?

11) You said employers were typically looking for [xx], [yy] and [zz] when recruiting recent graduates. From your perspective, might overseas experience help applicants to develop and/or to demonstrate any of these things?

12a) Have you been on a working holiday or gap year yourself?

12b) Has anyone close to you been on a working holiday or gap year?

12c) Do you think this has shaped your opinions in any way?

13) Is there anything you would like to add that you think is important that I haven't mentioned?

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[28] In Japan, I did not use terminology referring to taking "time out" after graduating, but rather referred to "taking an overseas 'gap year' or working holiday (after graduation, or during a leave of absence from university)". In Britain, after asking about overseas gap years generally, I asked about working holidays specifically.

F.3   Interview schedule - employer

1) Can you tell me a bit about your current role at [organisation]?

2) What did you do before this?

3) Could you describe to me briefly the sorts of positions you have been involved in recruiting for?

4) What would be the typical steps in your recruitment process for these positions?

5) Can you describe the ideal candidate (for one of these positions)?

6) Thinking firstly about the people who applied for the positions we've just been talking about, would you say that many of these applicants had taken "time out" or an overseas "gap year" after graduating?[29]

7) As a recruiter/as an employer, how did you perceive these applicants?

8) What advice would you give an applicant who asked you how they should refer to "time out" or an overseas "gap year" in job applications and/or interviews?

> Can you give me some examples of good/bad ways you have heard "time out" described in job applications and/or interviews?
>
> How well do you think the graduates you encounter can do this?
>
> Are some candidates/groups more able to do this than others?

9) You said you were looking for [xx], [yy] and [zz] as part of your recruitment process. From your perspective, did overseas experience help any of these applicants to develop and/or to demonstrate any of these things that you were looking for?

10) What do you think might be the impact for recent graduates of taking "time out" after graduation, in the form of an overseas "gap year" or working holiday?

11) If a recent graduate who was thinking about taking "time out" overseas was to ask your advice, what would you tell them?

12a) Have you been on a working holiday or gap year yourself?

12b) Has anyone close to you been on a working holiday or gap year?

12c) Do you think this has shaped your opinions in any way?

13) Is there anything you would like to add that you think is important that I haven't mentioned?

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[29] In Japan, I did not use terminology referring to taking "time out" after graduating, but rather referred to "taking an overseas 'gap year' or working holiday (after graduation, or during a leave of absence from university)". In Britain, after asking about overseas gap years generally, I asked about working holidays specifically.

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