

**Making the Self:
Narrative Constructions of Self and Identity among
'Working-Class' Women in the Caring Professions.**

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ABSTRACT

Qualitative research on class is undergoing something of a renaissance in contemporary British sociology, producing new cultural analyses of ‘classed’ subjectivity that represent a fundamental shift away from traditional approaches to class consciousness. Focusing instead on the ways in which ‘classed’ subjects are produced, new class analyses argue for the continued salience of class despite what they see as people’s reluctance to place themselves in class categories – which has left them open to the criticism that they: ‘impose class categories into the teeth of respondents’ denials’ (Bottero, 2004: 992). This criticism could be avoided, I argue, through a better understanding of the reflexive nature of selfhood and identity, which does not assume that self-conscious class identities are inextricably linked to people’s recognition of their class positioning. From the narrative perspective informing this thesis, the meanings of class in individuals’ lives cannot be simply ‘read off’ from their categorical identities. I, therefore, call for a return to the study of people’s self-conscious and reflexive engagements with class, using a ‘narrative-interactionist’ framework to explore the ways in which class identities and actions emerge in the telling of life-stories. Guided by the insights of G. H. Mead’s pragmatism, interactionist sociology and the theoretical perspectives of narrative researchers, I develop a framework for making sense of the mutually constitutive relationship between the ‘storytelling’ and ‘storied’ self, and the salience of gender and class in this process. The ‘narrative-interactionist’ framework underpinning the research emphasises the inter-relationships between the processual, relational, multi-perspectival and reflexive nature of the storytelling self; and the temporal, contextual, inter-subjective and ‘emplotted’ characteristics of both storied selves and narrative identities. Drawing on interviews with 14 women from ‘working-class’ backgrounds ‘upwardly mobile’ into the caring professions, I explore the ways in which experiences of gender and class are reflexively constructed into self accounts through the ‘latticework’ of narrative that informs (though by no means determines) their structure and contents. I focus on the reflexive fashioning of a coherent self (Ch. 3), the relationship between self and other (Ch. 4) and how the present re-shapes the past (Ch. 5). I aim to show how a fuller understanding of the nuances and complexities of both class and gender identities can be produced by analysing women’s life-histories as classed and gendered narratives of self.

Table of Contents

Abstract	2
Acknowledgments	7
Chapter 1: Background to the project	9
Class and the ‘cultural turn’ in contemporary sociology	14
Developing my research strategy: A ‘narrative turn’ in cultural class research	19
‘Narrative interactionism’: A way out of the class identity impasse?	21
Notes on the research process: ‘Getting and Doing Life Stories’	23
The Women of the Study	27
Chapter 2: Stories of class: A ‘narrative interactionist’ analytical perspective	30
The narrative turn in life history research	34
Theorizing narratives	36
Narrative, agency and selfhood	39
Narratives as ‘topics’ and ‘resources’	40
What makes ‘narrative sociology’ sociological?	44
Narratives of self: The significance of the Meadean self for a narrative-interactionist framework	47
Mead’s theory of the self: further elaboration	48
Multiplicity in Mead’s account of the self	52
Relationships between the self and experience	53
Reflexivity: an ‘everyday’ characteristic of social selves	54

Mead's reflexive self: filling in the gaps in Bourdieu's theoretical scheme	57
Making sense of narratives of self: outlining the analytical method	62
Narratives and the creation of coherence	63
Inter-subjectivity and 'storytypes'	65
Exploring the temporal features of narrative	66
The influence of setting on the reconstruction of personal pasts	70
The 'tellability' of narratives	76
Multiplicity in narrative self-constructions: A new framework for the study of 'hyphenated' or 'fractured' identities	81
Approaches to multiplicity of selfhood in the established literature on narratives	86
Intersections between debates on class and research on multiplicity in narrative	89
Reassessing 'ambivalent' class identities from a narrative perspective	95
A narrative-interactionist critique of current debates on class, culture and identity	97
The case study of Margaret: constructing class into 'storied' accounts of personal identity	100
Overview of analysis chapters	105
Chapter 3: Narrative cohesion and multiplicity	108
Cohesion and Multiplicity in narrative	110
'Pulling myself up by the Bootstraps'	118
'Making good through education'	127
Conclusion	140

Chapter 4: Self and Others	143
The prototypical life story plot: obscuring relationality	145
Relationality and narrative adequacy	149
Mead's theory of the relational self	151
Analysing relationality in biographical narratives	152
Relationality and the narrative construction of class and gender identities	153
Issues of 'memory' and 'retrospective reconstruction'	157
Constructing inter-personal relationships into narratives of self	158
Self and other in personal narratives of class and gender	165
Emplotment and the representation of 'Others'	169
The Bootstraps plot: Combining 'male' and 'female' forms of narrative	179
Inter-subjective 'family narratives' of class mobility	188
Incorporating the life stories of others into self-narrative	189
The 'co-production' of self-narratives	192
Conclusion	199
Chapter 5: Narrative, time and self-identity	202
Mead's theory of time and social order: A brief overview	202
The symbolically reconstructed past	210
The social structural past	223
The implied objective past	225
Conclusion	227

Chapter 6: Conclusion	230
Narrative-Interactionism: A novel framework for rethinking class identity	231
Sticking points in contemporary debates on cultural class identity	233
Narratives of self: The creation of coherence	239
Self and Other: Inter-subjectivity and narrative	241
Mead's theory of the past: Temporality and narrative.	244
Bibliography	248

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CHAPTER ONE

Background to the project

This research was originally conceived as a qualitative study of women's experiences of upward class mobility into the 'caring professions'. The focus of the research was, undoubtedly, influenced by the resurgence of interest in qualitative studies of class, linked to the broader 'cultural turn' in British sociology (see Devine and Savage, 2004). During the 1980s and 1990s, class research in Britain had been dominated by mainly quantitative, macro-structural analyses of class and social mobility (most notably in the work of John Goldthorpe, 1980; and Gordon Marshall *et al.*, 1988)¹. However, more recently, the increasing popularity of newer forms of social theory (e.g. post-structuralism and post-modernism), as well as the emergence of theoretical frameworks that emphasise the cultural and subjective dimensions of class relations (e.g. Bourdieuvian perspectives), has heralded a return to some of the older concerns of 1940s-1970s stratification research (e.g. class consciousness, identity, imagery, values, lifestyles, and culture). Studies of the relationships between class, culture, and identity can now be updated and radically reformulated from new class-cultural perspectives (see Devine and Savage, 2004).

My own introduction to qualitative research on class came through feminist writings, which focused on the experiential or subjective dimensions of class oppression (e.g. Steedman, 1986; Walkerdine, 1990; Kuhn 1995; Mahoney and Zmroczek, 1997a, 1997b; Skeggs, 1997; Reay, 1997, 1998, 2001; Lawler, 1995, 1999, 2000a, 2000b). These studies can be seen as a response to both the invisibility of women, in mainstream studies of class (see Reay, 1998), and the marginalisation of class in feminist research (see Mahoney and Zmroczek (eds), 1997). The shared concern of this body of literature was to explore the linkages between the broader historical, social-structural and political contexts of class and gender, and the private, local or

¹ While the latter authors did not neglect issues of culture and identity altogether, their work arguably fell short of offering the 'radical re-conceptualisation' of identity required to move debates beyond the impasse in 1970s cultural class analysis (see Devine and Savage, 2004).

‘everyday’ settings in which women’s subjectivities, identities and biographies are constructed, enacted, negotiated and contested.

Using auto/biographical, narrative and in-depth interview methods, these studies broke new ground by investigating the impact of class on the affective and personal realms of experience. For example, feminist research exposed the ‘hidden injuries’ of class (Sennett and Cobb, 1977), bringing to public attention the insidious effects of class inequality and oppression on working-class women’s selves, subjectivities and inter-personal relationships. Feminist researchers were, therefore, instrumental in reconfiguring class as central to the meanings and symbolic representations through which selves, identities and social relationships are formulated and apprehended. This body of work offered a powerful reminder, to the wider academic community, that class does not exist merely in the ‘objective’ plane, for example, as a curious set of customs and traditions, or as an economic or occupational structure. Class, according to these studies, is not only relevant to the world ‘out there’, but also permeates the most intimate and ‘subjective’ dimensions of experience, and social being.

Class is not just about the way you talk, or dress, or furnish your home; it is not just about the job you do or how much money you make doing it; nor is it merely about whether or not you went to university, nor which university you went to. Class is something beneath your clothes, under your skin, in your psyche, at the very core of your being. In the all-encompassing English class system, if you know you are in the ‘wrong’ class, you know you are a valueless person (Kuhn, 1995: 98).

A key issue in the ‘experiential’ literature on gender and class is the perceived link between working-class women’s personal and often painful expressions of shame and cultural inadequacy and wider social and cultural mechanisms of class (see for example Skeggs, 1997 and Lawler, 1999). According to these authors, working-class women’s feelings of marginalisation and inferiority should not be considered, merely in terms of individual psychology. Instead, they need to be situated in the context of a culture which constructs working-class women as pathological ‘Others’.

Eulogized in the figure of 'Our Mam' (Steedman, 1982, 1986), or pathologized as bad and insensitive mothers (Walkerdine and Lucey, 1989; Walkerdine, 1990), or laden with sexuality and dirt (Skeggs, 1997), or displaying the wrong amount and type of femininity (Walkerdine, 1997), these women are constituted as exotic and repulsive Others when observed from a middle-class perspective. They are also positioned as particularly disappointing from the standpoint of Left politics: again and again, they are represented as obstacles to the achievement of the revolutionary potential of the working-class. They are the cultural dupes who want the trappings of capitalism at the expense of real class struggle. They become objects in a plot in which the only position for them to occupy is one of pathology (Lawler, 1999: 11-12).

Working-class women are continually constructed, within dominant cultural rhetoric and representations, as lacking the 'right' volume and composition of (social, cultural, economic and educational) capitals, and possessing the 'wrong' 'habitus' (or embodied 'know-how' and dispositions) (see Lawler 1999, and Skeggs, 1997, 2004a, 2004b, 2005).² According to Lawler (1999), working-class women's apprehension, of themselves, in terms of the negative class judgements contained in dominant cultural rhetoric often induces powerful feelings of shame and inadequacy. Once working-class women begin to recognise themselves as cultural 'Others', feelings of shame and inferiority can be aroused within the self which can be incredibly difficult to slough off.³

Authors such as Skeggs (1997) and Lawler (1999) have used ideas about the internalisation of negative class judgements as a means of explaining working-class women's reactions to their class situations and positioning. For example, working-class women's reluctance to identify with class categories (see Skeggs, 1997), and their desire to 'escape' working-class positions (Lawler, 1999), have been interpreted as typical 'subjective' responses to the pathologisation of working-class femininity. Importantly, neither of these strategies is seen to offer an easy solution

² Concepts such as class capitals and habitus are taken from Bourdieu's theoretical scheme (see for example, Bourdieu 1977; 1984) which will be discussed in more detail in Ch. 2.

³ Here, Lawler draws explicitly on the work of Bartky (1990), although clearly there is a debt to Mead's ideas of self in this analysis. The importance of Mead's writings for my own research on class, self and identity will be made apparent in Ch. 2.

to the problem of ‘getting it right’, or staking a credible claim on a legitimate identity. For example, the desire to be recognised as ‘respectable’ may easily lead to accusations of pretension: ‘women’s desires for, and envy of, respectability and material goods are marked as apolitical, trivial, pretentious’ (Lawler, 1999: 12). Moreover, as Lawler (1999) argues, even though working-class women may be successful in ‘escaping’ their ‘objective’ class positions (either through education or marriage), it is much more difficult for them to leave behind ‘subjective’ class histories and positions marked in pathological terms.

[W]omen might be able to ‘pass’ as middle-class, but there remains within the self a continual reminder that the habitus claimed is not one which can be fully inhabited; that the dispositions implied (by the habitus) are not fully possessed. Further, there is always the danger that you might *not* pass; that someone might ‘see through’ you (Lawler 1999: 17, author’s own emphasis).

Powerful and enduring feelings of shame, embarrassment and inadequacy are not the only ‘injuries’ of class oppression reported by feminist class researchers. For example, other authors have written about the way, the ‘provided subjectivities’ of classed and gendered cultures, steal working-class women’s agency and creativity (e.g. Walkerdine, 1990). Feminist auto/biographers (e.g. Steedman, 1986) have also written about the costs to the working-class female self of bruised ambitions, and of reluctantly resigning oneself to a life of underprivileged exclusion (both material and cultural). Here, working-class women’s envy and longing for a different life is made all the more painful by the awareness, that the opportunities, lifestyles and recognition they seek, will always be withheld by the dominant culture. Writing from a different perspective, ‘working-class’ academics have described the ‘pain and sense of estrangement’ (Lawler 1999: 3) associated with movements across class ‘divides’ (see also Mahoney and Zmorczek (eds), 1997). For example, tensions can arise within families if upward class mobility is perceived as pretentious, disloyal or a threat to family members’ precarious sense of self-worth (expressed in concerns that they will be ‘looked down upon’, or seen as ‘not good enough’). These writers also discuss their ambivalent relationships to middle-class privilege, and in

particular the tangle of contradictory feelings (e.g. guilt and anger), which they ascribe to their interstitial class positioning (see for example Reay, 1997). While working-class academics may have an acute sense of the impossible unfairness of middle-class privilege, they may also be painfully aware of their 'implicatedness' in cultures and practices which perpetuate class inequality.

While the focus of feminist studies has been placed on the affective and personal dimensions of class experience, authors have been careful not to produce overly individualistic accounts of personal psychology. Even though the 'hidden injuries' of class affect women's lives in profoundly personal and deeply-felt ways, they are, nevertheless, viewed as inseparable from: 'women's structural relationship to the societies in which they become actors' (Steedman, 1990: 249, quoted in Smith, 1993: 396). As Lawler succinctly puts it: 'the apparently personal, private pain which... [class] relations engender is a manifestation of *political* inequalities' (1999: 5, author's own emphasis).⁴ Feminist researchers' emphasis, on class's 'hidden injuries', may well have been necessary to the aim of reinstating issues of class and gender onto the agendas of sociology, feminism and 'identity' politics. Explorations of the experiential levels of class oppression have certainly produced powerful evidence that 'class matters', something which is vital in a political and academic climate, that down-plays the significance of class, as both an explanation for inequality, and as a meaningful aspect of personal identity. Nevertheless, this

⁴ Clearly there is a high degree of convergence between 'subjective' or experiential class analyses and feminist consciousness-raising traditions, which emphasise the social, historical and political dimensions of personal experience. For example, the groundbreaking work of the 'subjective' class analysts bears the hallmarks of a feminist ontology and epistemology, which centres the 'everyday' worlds of women (see Smith, 1987). Smith's approach refuses to conform to 'malestream' sociological accounts which claim to speak from abstract, detached and universal positions, and which hide the inevitable biases of their perspectives behind a 'cloak of science'. In their place, she proposes an alternative sociology, which takes 'everyday' or 'immediate' experiences, contexts and settings as the starting point of its investigations. This 'rebel' sociology builds its analyses out of the going concerns and organization of its immediate locales, refusing to ignore these worlds in favour of highly technical and specialised modes of abstract theorising. The aim of this strategy is to construct conceptual and substantive linkages between 'everyday' worlds of experience and the broader cultural, historical, political and economic contexts, within which they take shape. This enables the pursuit of a sociological project, which explains the ongoing 'structuration' or ordering of society, whilst keeping living, breathing, active human subjects firmly in the picture.

strategy has perhaps produced an overly bleak or negative portrait of the way class is configured into subjectivity and personal identity.

This issue has not gone unrecognised by some feminist researchers on class. For example, Mahoney and Zmroczek (1997b) challenge the assumption that all upwardly mobile women strive to 'escape' from their working-class beginnings. For these authors, working-class pasts are not simply a 'stain' on their personal biographies. Instead, they focus on the positive dimensions of their intimate experience and knowledge of working-class worlds (for example emphasising the critical insights and perspectives that women can develop from working-class positions). Bearing this in mind, researchers, perhaps, need to be more attentive to the multiple and creative ways in which class can be constructed into the self and personal identity. More attention might also be given to the influence of different contexts, and settings, on the way in which class is configured into subjectivity.

Indeed, one of my main motivations for interviewing women, upwardly mobile into the caring professions, was to explore the complex links between the subjective and affective relationships to class, and the wider contexts in which subjectivities are constructed. Could it be possible, for example, that a working-class history is more problematic for women in the 'elite' world of the academy, as opposed to the less prestigious, 'feminised' worlds of social work and education? Do women, who continue to engage with working-class communities, feel less compelled to narrate their class histories as something they have 'left behind, (or below)' (Mahoney and Zmroczek, 1997b: 4)? What kinds of linkages do these women construct between their complex and ambiguous social positions (as 'working-class' women and 'caring professionals') and their sense of self?

Class and the 'cultural turn' in contemporary sociology

Feminist research on class has been influential in the resurgence of mainstream sociological interest in the relationships between class, culture and identity. In

particular, the interest in Bourdieuvian frameworks has been taken up by the sociological mainstream, with a greater amount of interest being placed on how class mechanisms, cultures and processes are lived 'on the pulse' (Kuhn 1995: 101), for example, in terms of people's classed practices, identities, lifestyles. More and more researchers are now recognising the continuing salience of class as both an economic and cultural phenomenon. As a result, there has been an increasing amount of methodological discussion about how class should be theorised and empirically investigated (see for example Travers, 1999; Savage *et al.*, 2001; Sayer, 2002; Bottero, 2004; Anthias, 2004; Devine and Savage, 2004; Payne and Grew, 2005). Also of concern is the issue of diversity and difference in current research on class (e.g. differences between 'qualitative' and 'quantitative' approaches to class analysis), and whether this should be considered as a strength or weakness in contemporary class analysis (Devine and Savage, 2004). Is it the case that diversity in research, on class, helps to illuminate the significance of class in a wide variety of social settings, and at a number of societal 'levels' (e.g. subjective, inter-personal, and social-structural levels)? Alternatively, does diversity merely encourage fragmentation, as well as 'conceptual confusion' about the nature and significance of class in British society? Might this explain the 'dethroning' of class from its previously prominent position in general debates in sociology?

Class is framed very differently within the methodological schemes of the 'class traditionalists' (Bottero, 2004: 985) vis-à-vis the 'new generation of class theorists' (ibid). 'Class traditionalists' (e.g. John Goldthorpe and Gordon Marshall) have rejected the idea that class relations give rise to distinct cultural identities and have jettisoned (to a greater or lesser extent) the issue of culture from their increasingly minimalist analyses of the consequences of class structure and location on life chances, opportunities and risk (see Bottero, 2004). On the other hand, 'new' class theorists (e.g. Mike Savage, Fiona Devine, Beverley Skeggs, Diane Reay) place issues of culture, identity and lifestyles at the heart of their analytic frameworks of class, although they, too, recognise that a person's location, within the class

structure, does not automatically give rise to distinct forms of class consciousness (see Savage *et al.*, 2001).

Rather than restrict their analyses of class to single dimensions of the social world, 'new' class theorists expand their analytic frameworks to include an assessment of the way social, economic and cultural processes combine and interact with one another in ways that tend to reproduce class hierarchies and inequalities, and limit class mobility (see for example Skeggs, 2004a, 2004b). Recognising the danger that their complex theoretical frameworks could spawn abstract, remote and overly systemic analyses of class; 'new' class theorists often ground their analyses through empirical investigations of the way mechanisms of class shape (and, in turn, are shaped by) the 'classed' selves, identities, practices, etc., of differently located groups and individuals (see for example Hey, 2005).

This is a very different approach to the study of class from 'older' Marxist inspired conceptual frameworks. 'Marxist' approaches tended to view class hierarchies as giving rise to clear cut, distinct class groupings, which were seen to be engaged in an overt 'class struggle' or conflict over issues of power, domination and social control (see Bottero, 2004). According to Bottero, the major conceptual breakthrough, made by the 'new' class theorists, is the idea that class is produced and reproduced through processes associated with 'individualized hierarchical differentiation' (2004: 985). Strongly influenced by Bourdieu's work on taste and distinction, 'individualized' approaches place the classed nature of dispositions, identities and practices at the centre of their analyses. For example, classed practices, understandings and dispositions (e.g. taste, leisure pursuits, talents and aptitudes) are often treated as inherent or essential qualities or expressions of the self. However, as 'new' cultural analysts argue, dispositions and identities are often reflections of social location, products of the internalisation of class cultural frameworks, which are often 'misrecognised' as the expressions of an innate or inborn self (a process captured most fully in Bourdieu's concept of 'habitus') (see Lawler 1999; Crossley, 2001). According to the 'new' class analysts, the

internalisation of class culture at the level of identity and praxis leads to the reproduction of class hierarchy and difference, even in the absence of overt class oppression, domination and conflict. By simply doing what comes ‘naturally’ to them and, by living their lives in ways that accord with their ‘authentic identities’ (see Maines 2001), individuals unwittingly contribute to the reproduction of class hierarchies. According to Bottero:

This is a radical shift in how class is seen to operate. Rather than the polar terms of ‘class in itself’ giving rise to ‘class for itself’ in which inequality triggered consciousness and action, this new model sets out a reverse process, where explicit class identification and awareness dissolve, leaving behind a hierarchical version of ‘class’, implicitly encoded in identity though practice (2004: 991).

This is not to say that there is a complete absence of hostility, antagonism and suspicion between individuals, located at different levels, within the class hierarchy. The ‘authentic’ identities of middle-class individuals, for example, may be based on a belief in the intrinsic superiority of their tastes, values and social practices (e.g. parenting practices and approaches towards education), vis-à-vis the perceived inadequacy of the tastes, etc., of their social ‘subordinates’ (see Bottero, 2004). On the other hand, the classed identities of members of the ‘working-class’ may be built around beliefs that social ‘superiors’ lack ‘common-sense’, or that they are pretentious and snobbish (ibid). A key issue for ‘new’ class theorists is that middle-class tastes, outlooks and dispositions are treated as inherently superior, within dominant frameworks of meaning. Working-class dispositions, attitudes and practices are widely interpreted as inherently ‘wrong’, pathological, less worthy. As such, ‘individualized’ mechanisms of class still retain the power to perpetuate not only class differences but also class inequality, oppression and ‘injustice’ (see Lawler, 1999; Crossley, 2001; Skeggs, 2004a, 2004b).⁵

⁵ Arguably, it is important to recognise the active role, played by individuals in the reproduction of class hierarchy and inequality (e.g. the complicity of individuals in the perpetuation of widespread class ‘racism’ and prejudice (see Haylett, 2001). Too much emphasis on the way ‘mechanisms of class’ create the subject positions, dispositions and identities of individuals can arguably give the wrong impression that class has an agency all of its own, thus conferring upon class a ‘misplaced concreteness’ (see Maines 2001:xii) which belies the fact that class, like other social structures, only

However, Bottero (2004) argues that there remains some conceptual confusion within 'new' class analyses, because some theorists tend to slip back into the older 'Marxist' frameworks of class analysis. This happens when researchers interpret hostility and suspicion, between members located at different levels in the class hierarchy, as evidence of explicit and collective 'class conflict' (rather than 'individualized differentiation'), or when they interpret continued class inequalities as the result of the active and explicit domination of 'the working-class' by 'the middle-class' (see Bottero (2004) for examples of this 'slippage' in current research). Bottero does not discount, per se, the idea that collective 'class' groupings have the potential to arise, but argues that 'such mobilizations are contextual and often fleeting' (2004: 999), and must not be thought of as inevitably occurring in those contexts where class inequalities are present. She also argues that class hierarchies are so finely graded (e.g. class identifications and disidentifications occur at a number of levels, within as well as between, 'traditional' class groups and categories) that traditional categories of class (i.e. working, middle and upper) are no longer salient to 'individualized' analyses. Stemming from this, Bottero suggests that the term 'class' should be replaced by the term 'stratification', when used in the 'individualized' sense, and that it should only be used when referring: 'to those 'explicitly 'classed' discourses which emerge when organizational cultures, social networks, or politicized representations combine to create perceptions of social identity and social division, in specifically 'economic' terms' (2004:1000).

Bottero's argument that the term 'class' should be used to refer to those occasions, when 'economic' forms of shared class-consciousness arise among groups, is highly restrictive, especially in a period when the organised labour movement has all but retreated (see also Devine and Savage, 2004). Her argument is also highly dismissive of those authors who wish to claim 'class' as an aspect of their personal identity, and who argue that 'class' has a profound resonance with their personal

exists insofar as it is actively constructed and reconstructed in the course of ongoing social interaction.

experiences or sense of self (see above). Moreover, even those authors, who argue that people do not 'see' themselves in terms of explicit class categories or collectivities, acknowledge that both direct and indirect expressions of class are often used as 'devices' or 'resources' in the narrative construction of identity (see Savage *et al.*, 2001). Even though 'an untidy complexity of self-identity is unlikely to give rise to coherent class action' (Payne and Grew 2005: 909); this does not mean that class is not recognised, by actors, as a meaningful aspect of their self-identifications and outlooks. Researchers are, therefore, in danger of ignoring social actors' self-conscious engagements with the 'classed' dimensions of their social worlds, if they restrict references to class to collective organisations and their specifically 'economic' class identities.

Developing my research strategy: A 'narrative turn' in cultural class research

As I already explained, the initial impetus of my research was to use women's narratives, of class mobility, as a means of exploring the linkages they construct between their complex social positions, experiences and sense of self. Whilst the existing literature on class offered a number of useful conceptual tools for undertaking this project, I nevertheless, could not find, within it, a satisfactory methodological framework for conducting my analysis. For example, new class-cultural analyses often conceptualise 'classed' dispositions, and identities, as reflections of social position, and offer fewer insights into the self-conscious, or 'reflexive', construction of class and gender into the self and personal identity. New approaches to class analysis often do not work with explicit theories of self and subjectivity (see Crossley, 2001), and even those that do (e.g. Walkerdine *et al.*, 2002; Lawler, 2000b; and to a certain extent Steedman, 1986) tend to fall back on the ontologically fractured self of psychoanalytic perspectives (see Ch. 2 for further discussion). As the research progressed, I became more and more interested in developing an explicit framework for theorising and analysing the relationships between class, gender, selfhood and personal identity. From the existing research on gender and class, I was able to follow a number of leads, which would help to construct a coherent framework for the research. For example, through the work of

Byrne (2003), I became interested in exploring literature, which addressed the relationships between self and narrative (e.g. Gergen and Gergen, 1988; Polkinghorne, 1988; Smith, 1993; Stanley, 1993; Somers and Gibson, 1994; Holstein and Gubrium, 2000; Plummer, 2001).

From a narrative perspective, it is not simply the case that the 'true' self (understood as more or less unified, fixed or stable) becomes accessible to researchers through personal narrative. Instead, the self can be seen to be creatively and strategically constructed through ongoing and open-ended processes of personal storytelling. This approach, therefore, places a much greater emphasis on the active, creative and self-conscious role of agent in interpreting and assembling personal experience into a coherent narrative of self (see Jackson 1998). At the same time, the narrative focus, on the production of self-stories, also enables insight into interpretive contexts and conditions, which mediate the process of self-storytelling. Once the relationships between self and narrative are brought into view, relationships between class, the self and personal identity can be re-conceptualised from fresh perspectives. For example, Byrne (2003) argues that the self narratives of upwardly mobile working-class women may be structured around socially available accounts of classed transformation. On the other hand, Lawler (1999) argues that the usual conventions of life-narratives make it difficult for upwardly mobile working-class women to convey the complexity of their fragmented or fractured experiences of class. Lawler's interview respondents tried to construct coherent narratives, which explained their upward mobility, as a natural realization of a self, which was 'always-already middle-class' (1999: 9). However, the women's admission of their lingering feelings of fraudulency and inadequacy, in their middle-class worlds, disrupted the smooth trajectory of their narratives and exposed a more fractured or complex class self than the one contained in their conventional 'meta-narratives' of self. Traditional conventions of narrative coherence, it seems, cannot fully capture the complexity of women's experiences and understanding of self.

Through my readings, I also acquired an interest in exploring ‘the self’, as both the product and producer of personal narratives. In order to develop clearer insight into the reflexive storytelling self, I turned to the work of Mead (1934) and interactionist researchers, such as Maines (1993, 2001). From these perspectives, I developed a greater understanding of the social, relational, temporal and reflexive dimensions of selfhood. I learned, for example, of the unique qualities of the self (how it comes to know and apprehend itself through social interaction and taking the perspective of ‘the other’ toward itself). I also gained a better sense of the ongoing, processual and creative nature of self (for example through understandings of the complex relationship between the ‘I’ and the ‘me’). From Mead’s theory of the past (Mead, 1929, 1932; see also, Maines *et al.*, 1983; Maines, 2001; Järvinen, 2004), I also acquired a sense of the significance of ‘symbolically reconstructed’ personal pasts, in giving shape and substance to the self and its ongoing projects. By integrating my understanding of the ‘storytelling’ and storied’ self, I have been able to develop both a robust conceptual framework, and useful set of analytical tools, for researching women’s narratives of upward class mobility. I set out the ‘narrative-interactionist’ framework, and explain how I implement this framework in making sense of the interview respondents’ accounts in Ch. 2.

‘Narrative-interactionism’: A way out of the class identity impasse?

Over time, I began to recognise the potential of narrative approaches in addressing some of the limitations, impasses and gaps identified in new cultural analyses of class. For example, as I stated earlier, ‘new’ cultural analyses rarely work with explicit theories of self and subjectivity. Issues of agency and self-conscious identity are often bypassed in favour of the discussion of ‘classed’ habits, dispositions and identities as reflections of social positioning. A narrative-interactionist⁶ strategy, on the other hand, helps to clarify *how* historical, social and

⁶ I use the term ‘narrative-interactionism’ (Maines, 2000: 580) to highlight the influence of pragmatist and interactionist thinking on the development of my analytical framework. While narrative research is influenced by many different theoretical approaches and substantive concerns, it often reproduces many interactionist sounding statements and understandings (often without explicit mention of either

cultural 'structures' of class are internalised by social agents 'so that the self, itself, is class marked' (Lawler 1999:3).⁷ For example, narrative perspectives illuminate how individuals actively insert themselves into dominant social and narrative structures, meaning frames and relationships by constructing coherent narrative identities, that make the social positions and roles they occupy, appear as 'natural' expressions of a 'real' or 'authentic' self (see Maines, 2001). Moreover, the significance narrative-interactionist analyses place on Mead's view, of the reflexive self, also helps to explain how individuals can become critically self-conscious of their class-position and 'value' (that is, by adopting the perspectives of differently classed 'generalized others'). Whilst narrative renderings of the self often accede to the classed and gendered 'fates' that enduring cultural, social and economic formations lay in store for us; narrators can also be seen to struggle against the 'fixing' of the self by dominant 'narratives' and structures of class and gender (see Maines, 2001).

A narrative-interactionist framework also helps to address some of the limitations of research, which does attempt to explore class as a self-conscious aspect of identity (e.g. Savage *et al.*, 2001). Here, work has focused on people's willingness to identify with categories of class, and, finding mainly ambivalent, hesitant or 'defensive' responses, suggests that class is 'not an identity that is internalized' (Savage *et al.*, 2001: 883). However, a narrative-interactionist perspective does not assume that people's identities reside in identifications with 'fixed' categories of class. Instead, meaningful class identities can be narratively constructed and reconstructed in different contexts, although these may defy rigid, stable or unambiguous forms of classification. From a narrative-interactionist perspective, we can also recognise that a narrow focus on people's identifications, with categories of class, misses a crucial aspect of identity, namely that identity is often built upon the

Mead or symbolic interactionism). The term 'narrative-interactionism' makes clear that I am interested in developing a sociological narrative framework, which is indebted to both the ideas of Mead and interactionist concerns with the 'structures and transactions of meaning' (Maines, 2000:581), (see also Maines, 1993; 2001).

⁷ For example, while Bourdieu's popular concept of the habitus helps to explain how class is internalized within people's sub-conscious dispositions and habits, it arguably has little to say about how class enters into their reflective self-consciousness and personal identities (see Crossley, 2001).

‘symbolic reconstruction’ of the personal past. At various points in the research, I deploy narrative-interactionist perspectives and analyses, in order intervene into current research on class, culture and identity and to suggest new directions for future research on class, self and personal identity.

Notes on the research process: ‘Getting and Doing Life stories’⁸

The research is based on interviews with 14 women, based in the caring professions (e.g. as social workers and educational psychologists). Interviewees were ‘recruited’ on the basis of ‘snowball’ sampling from personal contacts, and, by strategically disseminating information about the research to agencies and individuals, who could put me in touch with women who fit my ‘theoretical sample’ (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). As a result of the sampling strategy, all of the women interviewed lived and worked in the Yorkshire region. The main requirement, for participating in the research, was that the women identified themselves as coming from working-class backgrounds. The decision to seek women, who self-identified as coming from working-class backgrounds, was a principled one, based on the problematic nature of the conventional sociological view of women’s social class position. Writers, such as Reay (1998), have written about the problems associated with the treatment of women in ‘objective’ models of class. According to Reay, traditional classificatory systems of class either render women invisible, or do not capture the complexity of women’s relationships to social class. For example, traditional class research (e.g. Goldthorpe, 1980) has taken the family, as its unit of analysis, with the class position of women and children seen to be determined by the male ‘Head’ of the household. This strategy treats women as peripheral to the labour market, and denies women both an independent class position and an active role in the ‘class formation, class fate and even the class action of family members’ (Hayes and Jones, 1992: 464, quoted in Reay, 1998: 15). In many traditional classificatory systems, the class situations of single women, single parent families, the unemployed and full-time carers remain obscured or unexplained (see Reay, 1998). It is perhaps

⁸ Quote from Plummer (2001)

unsurprising, therefore, that many individuals have difficulty locating themselves in terms of conventional class categories (see Savage *et al.*, 2001).

Drawing on research on women's relationships to social class, (e.g. Charles, 1990), Reay argues that expanded notions of 'class' are required to make sense of both women's class situations and their subjective responses to their class worlds . Once class is viewed as an untidy, multi-dimensional concept, women's understandings of, and relationships to class can be re-conceptualised in more complex and illuminating ways. Developing Reay's argument, women's relationships to class include, yet extend far beyond, inequalities in the labour market. Women's subjective understandings of class depend upon the particular elements, or expressions of class, that they perceive as relevant to their class experiences, positioning and identity (both past and present). These might include references to occupational status, parents' occupational statuses, income, housing tenure, consumption patterns, educational qualifications, and so on (see Reay, 1998). Intertwined with these 'objective' elements, women's awareness of the 'classed' nature of cultures, lifestyles and aspirations also provides them with a potential means of formulating their subjective class identity and position.

By seeking participants who 'self-identified' as coming from a working-class background, I avoided the problem of 'imposing' problematical classificatory schemes on to their experience (which might rule out many women whose experiences do not fit neatly into conventional stratifications systems such as Goldthorpe's). This strategy, therefore, allowed the women space to convey their own understanding of their relationships to complex and multifaceted concepts of class. Moreover, by seeking women *from* working-class background (rather than 'working-class women in the caring professions'), I was also sensitive to the diverse and creative ways in which experiences of class (both past and present) are discursively constructed into accounts of personal identity and positioning.⁹ Rather

⁹ I am aware that I sometimes refer to the women interviewed as 'working-class' women. My use of quotation marks should alert the reader to the fact that this usage is not unproblematic. For example,

than try to 'fix' the women's class positions and identities, I encouraged the participants to construct their own 'subjective' linkages or (or, alternatively, express any sense of dis rupture) between their class background, current circumstances and identity.

Nevertheless, by foregrounding issues of class, and by structuring the interview in such a way that the interviewees were encouraged to make linkages between their class background, current situations and identities, I clearly played a crucial role in shaping the local interpretive context in which the women constructed their identities.¹⁰ This is not to say that the narrative identities, constructed by the women, were any less 'real' or meaningful because of this. The women were clearly not 'puppets' of the interview process. Instead, the rich, imaginative, and evocative nature of their personal accounts suggests that the framework of the interview resonated powerfully with the women's own meanings and sense of self.

At the same time, I am conscious that I interviewed a 'self-selected' group of women, who were particularly open to the idea of exploring the relationships between their class background, current situations and identities. Many other women, with similar life experiences and trajectories, may have opted not to take

not all the women interviewed continue to self-identify as working-class. However, at times it has felt necessary to refer to the interviewees in this way, if only to avoid clumsy or long-winded sentences.

¹⁰ I conducted two interviews with each participant, with each interview lasting between approximately one to two hours. The first interview explored the women's early class experiences (experiences of education, family life, community, etc.), whilst the second interview explored the women's transitions to adulthood, their professional trajectories and experiences, and, finally, their 'subjective' class identity. I made it clear that I was less interested in chronological accounts of the women's experiences, and that I wanted to learn about the meanings of these experience for the women's identities and sense of self. While I encouraged the women to construct their own interpretations, explanations and meanings of their experiences and identities, I nevertheless influenced the formulation of 'coherent' narratives, which created meaningful relationships between past and present (e.g. early class experiences, personal and professional trajectories and ongoing projects). The narrative identities, produced out of this process, were not the products of solitary or isolated intro/retrospection; instead, they were 'co-constructed' through the interview process. However, I do not see this as a problem of the researcher introducing 'bias' into the interview encounter. This is because I work from an interpretive perspective, which regards *all* interview data as interactively generated (see Mischler, 1986). The issue of the 'social', 'inter-subjective' and 'interactive' construction of identities is a key theme of the research and will be returned to at various points throughout the thesis.

part in the study, perhaps because they ‘disidentify’ with the term class (Skeggs, 1997), have a less clearly defined sense of their class identity, or because they felt that the complexity of their class history ruled them out of the study. Some women may also self-consciously ascribe key aspects, of their personal experience, to issues of ‘race’, ‘disability’, ‘sexuality’ and so on and, for these women, issues of class may have less immediate personal resonance. This is not to say that class is irrelevant to these women (indeed, some women may have a very strong sense of being both ‘Black’ and working-class, or working-class and lesbian, and so on). However, it could be that my single focus on class did not ‘hail’ or ‘interpellate’ women for whom class is one element of their complexly ‘hyphenated’ (class-gender-race, and so on) identities. For example, it is possible that my emphasis on class may have generated the false impression that the interview would exclude talk of other ‘key’ dimensions of experience and identity (e.g. race, sexuality etc.). With hindsight, I could have made it clearer that I recognised the ‘intersections’ of class, race, sexuality, etc., and that I was interested in speaking to women from diverse or ‘heterogeneous’, ‘working-class’ backgrounds. I could also have emphasised that I was happy to speak to women about their experiences, regardless of whether they were confused, ambivalent or uncertain about the different definitions and meanings of class.

On the other hand, I recognise that the small scale, in-depth nature of the research means that the research ‘findings’ can never be representative, or generalisable, regardless of how diverse or heterogeneous the sample. ‘Humanistic’ research which takes as its foci the ‘unique and idiographic’, ‘the inner: subjective, meaning, feeling experience’ (Plummer, 2001: 9), and which is based on small samples, can only ever be exploratory in its approach and tentative in its conclusions. Therefore, the research does not aim to make grand claims about the centrality of class to women’s personal identities at all times and places, but instead uses empirical examples to shed light on the processes and practices implicated in construction of narrative identities of class, gender and so on. My use of a ‘narrative’ approach means that I explore the tensions between the social shaping of self and identity, and

their ongoing, creative and contextualised construction. On the one hand, I investigate the way that narratives are mediated by available social discourses, categories, narrative conventions and contexts. On the other hand, I draw attention to actors' creative, judicious and selective assemblage of experience into coherent narratives of self. I try to unpack what makes self-stories broadly recognisable and understandable, whilst recognising their inherent variability and diversity (see Holstein and Gubrium, 2000). My analytical framework will be discussed in depth in the next Chapter.

The Women of the Study¹¹

Alison. Age: Mid forties, Educational Psychologist.

Alison is one of four children. Her father worked as a manual worker in a Yorkshire factory town, while her mother worked as a full-time parent before retraining as a teacher when Alison was at secondary school. Alison attended grammar school and studied for 'A' levels before going to college to train as a teacher. She worked for several years in various teaching roles and in the social work sector before retraining as an Educational Psychologist. She is educated to Master's level and has one child (to her second husband).

Amy. Age: Late thirties, Social Worker.

Amy is the youngest of six children. She moved from Northern Ireland to Yorkshire with two of her sisters after her English mother (a shop worker) separated from her Irish birth father (a factory worker). She attended several comprehensive schools before leaving at 16 to work as a secretary. After having two children, Amy later retrained as a social worker, gaining her professional social work qualifications while working for the local authority. She currently works as a children and family social worker.

Carole. Age: Early fifties, Family Centre Worker.

Carole is an only child and was brought up in a purpose-built Yorkshire mining community. She attended secondary modern school before leaving to train as a nurse at age seventeen, a job she continued for many years before moving into community-based family centre work. She is married with two older children.

Christine. Age: Early fifties, Social Worker.

Christine and her three brothers were raised single-handedly by their Austrian mother (a factory worker) after she divorced her Ukrainian husband (also a factory worker). Christine attended comprehensive school in Yorkshire before marrying and having a child at 16. She then went on to have three more children before returning to education as a mature student during her thirties and early forties

¹¹ All names used are pseudonyms.

(around which time she also divorced her then husband). She is educated to degree level and has a post-graduate diploma in social work. She currently works as a children and family social worker for a local authority.

Jill. Age: Early fifties, Educational Psychologist.

Jill and her two sisters were raised in Yorkshire by their Austrian mother (a cleaner) after their English father (a factory worker) died while she was a young child. Jill left school after 'A' levels to attend teacher training college. She then worked for many years as a primary school teacher before retraining as an Educational Psychologist. She is educated to Master's level and is married with three adult children.

Joan, Age: Early fifties, Social Worker.

Joan and her sister were raised in Yorkshire by their father (a steel worker) and mother (a full-time parent). She attended comprehensive school before leaving school at fifteen to become a hairdresser. She later left hairdressing to become a full-time parent to her two children before returning to paid work, initially as a care worker. She retrained as a social worker in the 1980s gaining her professional qualifications while working for the local authority. During the 1980s and 1990s, Joan also returned to education as a mature student and is now educated to Master's level. She currently works for a local authority as a mental health social worker.

Judith, Age: Early fifties, Mental Health Social Worker.

Judith and her two brothers were raised in Yorkshire by their father (a locomotive engineer) and their mother (a factory worker). She attended grammar school before leaving after 'A' levels to take up receptionist work. She returned to education as a mature student after splitting with her husband when her daughter was a young child. Judith has a degree in social sciences and a post-graduate diploma in social work and works for her local authority as a mental health social worker. She has one grown-up daughter.

Julie, Age: Early forties, Social Worker.

Julie and her sister were raised in Lincolnshire by their mother (a farm worker) and father (a lorry driver). She attended grammar school before leaving at 16 to take up a clerical post before joining the armed forces at 21. After several years in clerical positions within the army, she moved into the care home sector before retraining as a social worker. She has a Diploma in Social Work. She currently works as a children and family social worker.

Margaret, Age: Early fifties, Educational Psychologist.

Margaret was an only child and was raised in the Midlands by her German mother and Ukrainian father (both factory workers). She attended grammar school and studied for 'A' levels before entering teacher training college. After several years working as a teacher she returned to higher education in order to retrain as an Educational Psychologist. She is educated to Master's level and has two grown-up children.

Madeline, Age: Early sixties, Senior Social Worker.

Madeline grew up in a devout catholic family alongside her two brothers. Her father worked in an engineering foundry while her mother was a full-time parent.

Madeline attended grammar school in Lancashire before heading to university to study for a degree in the social sciences. After taking a career break to become a full-time mum to her two children, she tried her hand at several jobs before returning to higher education to gain a post-graduate diploma in social work. She currently works as a children and family social worker for a local authority.

Stacey, Age: Mid forties, Social Worker.

Stacey and her sister grew up by the sea where their mother and father ran a fish-and-chip shop business. She left her comprehensive school at 16 to take up a youth training scheme place in the catering business. During her late teens and early twenties, Stacey attended evening classes to retake her 'O' levels. She later trained as a nursery nurse before being seconded to social services where she gained her professional social work qualifications. She currently works as a team leader for 'Sure Start'.

Pat, Age: Late fifties, Educational Psychologist.

Pat was one of nine children and was raised by catholic parents. Her father worked for the water board and her mother was a full-time parent. She attended grammar school before training as a nurse. After ten years in nursing she returned to university to study psychology before retraining as an Educational Psychologist. She is educated to Master's level.

CHAPTER TWO

Stories of class: A 'narrative-interactionist' analytical perspective

In the account that follows, I outline the 'narrative-interactionist' methodology underpinning the research. I map out the theoretical framework underpinning a 'narrative-interactionist' approach, and explain the narrative analytical method, which aims to synthesise the framework's theoretical perspectives with the issues and themes arising out of the empirical data.¹ I explain why I believe a 'narrative-interactionist' approach is particularly applicable to the study of the intersections of class, culture, self, and identity.

I begin by outlining the development of narrative perspectives in life-history research. The narrative 'turn' in life-history research represents a radical shift away from traditional 'realist' approaches, which tend to treat accounts as raw data which offer unmediated access to individuals' social experiences and realities. Narrative researchers have become increasingly interested in the interpretive aspects of life-history accounts, and have questioned the traditional treatment of personal accounts as data which offer a transparent 'window' on the social world 'out there' (i.e. beyond the text). Instead, they argue that researchers can develop more sophisticated understandings of the interpretive nature of 'experience' by treating life-histories as 'texts' and 'stories', for example by focusing on the artifice of biographical storytelling, (see Stanley, 1993; Plummer, 2001). At the same time, several writers (e.g. Plummer, 2001; Järvinen, 2004) have expressed a concern that treating narratives merely as 'texts' and 'stories' risks losing sight of the human agent and lived social realities 'behind' or 'beyond' the text. As a result, narrative sociologists (e.g. Maines, 2001) are increasingly interested in developing

¹ The development of the analytical method was not a 'one way' process; it was constructed as much in relation to issues and themes, arising out of the interview data, as it was the theories of the self and social world that resonated with my analytical concerns (e.g. Mead, 1934; Maines, 2001). Therefore, the analytical method is not a 'fixed' or 'deductive' tool used to apply the theory to the data. Instead, I hope it provides a flexible way of approaching and making sense of the interview data; one which encourages a dialogical, mutually constitutive or 'recursive' relationship between 'theory' and 'data' (see Bryman, 2001).

methodological frameworks, which avoid the extremes of both ‘realist’ perspectives (which treat accounts as ‘raw’ data which simply ‘tell it like it is’), and ‘post-modern’ perspectives (which focus solely on the artifice of biographical storytelling). These researchers are increasingly looking to develop approaches which synthesise the traditional use of narratives as ‘resources’ with more recent engagements with narratives as ‘topics’ in and of themselves (Plummer, 2001). In the first substantive sections of this Chapter, I explore the turn to narrative in life-history research, and discuss the use of narratives as both ‘resources’ and ‘topics’. I also provide an overview of Maines’ (2001) argument for a ‘sociological narrative sociology’. Maines favours this approach, as an alternative to both naïve empiricist approaches to narrative, and the textual deconstruction strategies of post-modern narrative researchers.

Because of my particular interest in ‘narratives of self’, I use the following section to outline the significance of Mead’s (1934) theory of the self for a narrative-interactionist methodology. Put simply, Mead envisions the self as the capacity of the individual to become ‘other’ to him/herself. Mead’s self is also an intrinsically social self, since it can only become an object to itself from the point of view of both personally significant and ‘generalized’ others. Individuals, therefore, insert themselves into group structures, boundaries and hierarchies by internalising and reproducing the roles, relationships, identities and practices ‘called out’ by ‘generalized others’. At the same time, Mead envisions the self as an ongoing, reflexive relationship between the ‘I’: ‘the “home” of novel responses’ (Aboulafia, 1993:151), and the ‘me’: the established self-concept, which calls forth a particular response from the ‘I’. For Mead, changes taking place in the wider environment can prompt novel responses in the self. Similarly, the way in which the multiple perspectives of ‘others’ are actively handled, within self-reflection processes, can induce the self to respond to social situations in creative and unanticipated ways. By highlighting the reflexive and open-ended nature of self, Mead avoids taking on an overly deterministic view of the relationship between the self and society. Mead’s emphasis on the processual nature of self corresponds with his general interests in

continuity and discontinuity, as well as change, uncertainty and ‘emergence’ in social life. I return to these issues when I explore the links between Mead’s theory of self and his lesser known theory of time and social order (Mead, 1929; 1932) (for a more detailed analysis of Mead’s theory of the past see Ch.5).

Mead’s conceptualisations of the relationships between the self, and its social environments, have had a great deal of influence (both explicit and implicit) on the development of ‘narrative’ perspectives. On the one hand, Mead’s view of the self informs the narrative understanding of self-construction practices, as deriving both their forms and contents from cultural traditions of self-storytelling, as well as other organised ‘attitudes’ of social groups. On the other hand, Mead’s view of the self, as an ongoing and uncertain interaction between the “I” and the “me”, also informs the narrative perspective that self-construction is an agentic, creative and open-ended process. From this point of view, narrative self-construction is not ‘fixed’ or ‘determined’ by established social structures, boundaries and hierarchies (see, Holstein and Gubrium, 2000). Narrative approaches informed by Mead’s social self arguably have greater analytical purchase on the *interactive* and *social* constitution of self and identity than those informed by either the ‘ontologically fractured self’ of psychoanalysis, or the ‘fragmented’, ‘decentred’ self of post-structuralism/post-modernism (a self that is at the mercy of the ebb and flow of discourse (see Smith, 1999)). I conclude my discussion of Mead’s theory, by highlighting its relevance to contemporary debates in class analysis. In particular, I argue that Mead’s work on the self can help to fill some of the gaps in Bourdieuvian approaches to class, culture and identity (see Crossley, 2001).

Following on from my discussion of the Meadean self, I explore the idea that the self, that is ‘knowable’ and available to us through self-reflexive practice, is a temporary construct of the personal narratives or stories that we assemble at particular junctions in both time and space. Here, I focus on the issues raised by highlighting the distinctly ‘narrative’ qualities of personal constructions of self and identity. Narrative researchers view self-awareness as inextricably tied to the

process of interpreting and assembling personal experiences into meaningful 'stories' (e.g. Gergen and Gergen, 1988; Polkinghorne, 1988; Somers and Gibson, 1994; Holstein and Gubrium, 2000; Plummer, 2001). As such, a key task of narrative research is to understand how self-construction practices are mediated by the structures, conventions and contexts of narrative. I use this section to explore the frameworks and artifice of biographical storytelling (e.g. the study of emplotment, 'storytypes', and so on). I also emphasise the temporal features of narratives self-construction (which are illuminated by Mead's (1929, 1932) theory of the past), and discuss the role of context and setting in the production and reception of personal stories.

The next sections highlight the resonances between developments in the field of narrative studies and the issues and concerns of 'subjective' class analysts. In particular, I look at the way the theme of 'multiplicity' has become central to debates around the relationships between self and narrative. I argue that ideas surrounding the multiplicity of selfhood, in narrative, are particularly relevant to research, which looks at the fracturing or fragmentation of identity amongst upwardly mobile working-class women (see Mahoney and Zmrozek, 1997b; Reay, 1997; Lawler, 1999). Of specific interest here is the way in which experiences of fragmentation are handled in women's accounts of self. On the one hand, by paying attention to issues of multiplicity, in narrative, researchers can become alert to the ways in which women attempt to reconcile their multiple class positionings, experiences and perspectives into coherent accounts of self. On the other hand, researchers can explore the way in which attempts to construct coherent accounts of self may be disrupted by women's recognition that there are different, perhaps even irreconcilable 'sides' to their class self (see Lawler, 1999). In this case, 'meta-narratives' of self might be disrupted by 'nested narratives' (or 'narratives within narratives', see Gergen and Gergen (1988: 34)) which convey different, perhaps even contradictory, understanding of class biography, experience and selfhood.

In the subsequent section, I reassess debates about the ambivalence of contemporary class identities from a narrative perspective. I argue that debates about 'class ambivalence' have been limited by assumptions that class identities reside in individuals' identifications with particular categories of class. People's hesitancy about locating themselves, in class terms, has led some authors to conclude that class is not a significant aspect of personal identity: 'class is definitely not a term that is central to a sense of self identity...it is not an identity that is internalised' (Savage *et al.*, 2001:882). However, narrative perspectives draw attention to the fact that people's identifications (or disidentifications), with external identity categories, actually tell us little about the substantive identities they construct through self-storytelling (see Lawler, 2002). Narrative researchers, therefore, question the validity of inferring the salience of class (or lack thereof) as an aspect of personal identity on the basis of people's identifications or 'disidentifications' with class categories. Using a case study from my interview data, I argue that debates on class, culture and identity can be reinvigorated through in-depth explorations of the way in which class is configured within narratives of self and identity. I end the Chapter by explaining how I use 'narrative-interactionist' perspectives as a means of organizing the research analysis contained in Chapters 3, 4, and 5.

The narrative turn in life-history research

The narrative turn in life-history research is based on the growing acceptance among qualitative researchers of two basic propositions. The first is that accounts of the life need to be examined as 'stories' or 'narratives', rather than as 'true' reflections of past events. The second, and perhaps more fundamental proposition, is that personal stories and life-narratives should be viewed as 'vehicles for rendering selves intelligible' (Gergen and Gergen, 1988: 17). Here, researchers are re-conceptualising narratives in more 'substantive' ways (Somers and Gibson, 1994), for example by stressing the practical importance of narratives in giving shape and texture to actors' experiences, lives, and sense of self.

Narrative may be seen as a most basic way humans have of apprehending the world: ‘we grasp our lives in a *narrative*’ (Taylor, 1989: 47), and sense that ‘narrative is the fundamental scheme for linking individual human actions and events into interrelated aspects of an understandable composite’ (Polikinghorne, 1988:13). Indeed, without it we might just be left with the amorphous jumble of inchoate experience that knows no rhyme or reason, no coherence and patterns (Plummer, 2001: 185).

Traditionally, life-story researchers have treated accounts as relatively unproblematic or straightforward descriptions of experience, events or the self. Narrative researchers turn this traditional view on its head, emphasising the way in which events, experiences and selfhood are, at least in part, constituted through narrative. Individuals, they argue, do not passively recite their experiences; instead ‘storytellers’ actively construct explanations of their lives, selves and conduct, through their personal narratives. Therefore, narratives do not merely describe reality. In attempting to *explain* social reality, narratives help to *constitute* the very realms of experience they set out to illuminate. Once viewed in this way, narratives can be accorded a much more substantive role in social life.

[S]ocial life is itself *storied* and...narrative is an *ontological condition of social life*...[R]esearch is showing us that stories guide action; that people construct identities (however multiple and changing) by locating themselves or being located within a repertoire of emplotted stories; that “experience” is constituted through narratives; that people make sense of what has happened to them by attempting to assemble or in some way to integrate what has happened and is happening to them within one or more narratives; and that people are guided to act in certain ways, and not others, on the basis of the projections, expectations and memories derived from a multiplicity but ultimately linked repertoire of available social, public, and cultural narratives (Somers and Gibson, 1994: 38-39, authors’ own emphasis).

Narrative approaches to life-history research treat people’s accounts as playful, interpretive and creative examples of ‘self-storytelling’. At the same time, they recognise that storytelling practices are governed to a certain extent by established narrative structures conventions, contents and contexts. Narrative cultures clearly do not encourage a relativistic or ‘anything goes’ attitude towards storytelling. On the

contrary, 'dominant stories' play a crucial role in shaping social reality and accounts of self.

[Dominant] narratives are frameworks of meaning within which lives are configured; they are frameworks of meaning that can be told but mostly are simply tacitly believed and routinely enacted; they set limits to ordinary imaginations of the possible; and they define the boundaries of normalcy and acceptability. They are powerful, they can be met with sanction if violated, and they carry moral authority which is persuasive and legitimizes action. In short, narratives are a cultural resource that in significant measure gives substance and texture to human lives (Maines, 2001:177).

Theorising narratives

Researchers, who recognise the interpretive, storied and retrospective nature of accounts draw upon a range of theoretical frameworks for conceptualising and analysing narratives. For example, narrative researchers, working from a broadly post-modern and post-structuralist perspective, have stressed the importance of 'deconstructing' narratives in order to expose the artifice of personal storytelling (see Plummer, 2001). From this perspective, narratives do not represent the objective truth about the self and social reality; instead, they often reproduce and reinforce cultural assumptions such as the western myth of the 'true self' (see Smith, 1993). Indeed, the persuasiveness of conventional life-narratives - 'in which the self remains the same entity from birth to death and later events are a culmination of earlier ones' (Lawler, 1999: 3) - often relies upon the audience's uncritical acceptance of the 'myth' of a singular, unique and stable self. Narrators and audiences often collude in the myth that stories of self really do reflect 'a coherent, unified, stable presence behind the story and its text' (Plummer, 2001: 197). From a post-modern perspective, the artifice of self-storytelling supports powerful social myths such as the 'true' self, and it is only by 'deconstructing' and challenging traditional conventions of narrative adequacy that the foundational status of such

beliefs can be challenged.² Rejecting the external authority claims of traditional narratives, post-modern researchers celebrate examples of fragmentation, multiplicity, incoherence, subjectiveness and non-linearity in accounts of self (see Plummer, 2001).

However, some writers have expressed a concern that, by focusing on the need to ‘deconstruct’ narratives, researchers have lost sight of earlier life-history preoccupations with ‘the concrete joys and sufferings of active, breathing, bodily human beings’ (Plummer, 2001: 5). Similarly, Järvinen suggests that too much focus on the ‘textual structures’ of stories exposes researchers to the criticism ‘that they forget the lived experience and the human agents behind the stories’ (2004: 46). Plummer (2001), in particular, argues that narrative researchers need to be careful not to be seduced by abstract and playful theoretical debates surrounding the textual artifice of storytelling, and the indeterminate or relative nature of ‘experience’, knowledge and accounts.

Similarly to post-modern thinkers, narrative researchers, working from a broadly interactionist perspective, also challenge taken-for-granted assumptions that textual accounts directly reflect the ‘true’ nature of the self and lived reality.³ However, rather than merely ‘deconstruct’ texts, an interactionist approach to narrative aims to keep social agents and their lived realities firmly in the picture, for example by exploring the practical functions and usages of narrative in the ongoing inter-personal construction of social order. From this perspective, narratives are not merely ‘textual structures’, or representational forms, imposed on the chaos of lived

² Traditional (Western) assessments of narrative adequacy and credibility favour accounts which assume the cloak of ‘objectivity’ and authoritativeness. For example, ‘credible’ and ‘coherent’ narratives will display linear sequence; use a clear, unified or singular ‘voice’; try to minimize ‘bias’; and have a logical ‘end point’ (see Somers and Gibson, 1994; Plummer, 2001; Järvinen, 2004).

³ Here I use the term ‘interactionism’ in a general or shorthand way, i.e. to refer to those researchers who squarely situate narratives or accounts in concrete social and relational contexts. The authors mentioned do not necessarily define their work in this way, nor can their work be seen as part of a distinctive school of narrative research. Moreover, relevant sociological work on ‘situated vocabularies’ (C.W. Mills, 1940) and ‘accounts’ (Scott and Lyman, 1968) precedes the emergence of explicit ‘narrative’ analyses. However, the natural affinities between this body of work, and some of the more recent developments in narrative research, are arguably strong enough to justify the inclusion of their research in discussions of an interactionist narrative perspective.

reality. Instead, narratives are vital instruments used by agents in the interactive or social construction of experiences, events, relationships and so on. From this perspective, individuals and groups do not merely 'tell stories', they also 'live by' them.

[To] say that we use stories to make ourselves comprehensible does not go far enough. Not only do we tell our stories, but there is a significant sense in which our relationships with each other are lived out in a narrative form...The present analysis stops short of saying that lives are narrative events...Stories are, after all, forms of accounting, and it seems misleading to equate the account with its putative object. However, narrative accounts are embedded within social action. Events are rendered socially visible through narratives, and they are typically used to establish expectations of future events. Because of the immersion of narrative in the events of daily life, these events will become laden with a storied sense. Events will acquire the reality of "a beginning," "a climax," "a low point," "an ending," and so on. People will live out events in such a way that they and others will index them in just this way. This is not to say, then, that life copies art, but rather, that art becomes the vehicle through which the reality of life is generated. In a significant sense, then, we live by stories – both in the telling and the doing of self (Gergen and Gergen, 1988: 18).

From an interactionist perspective, personal narratives and self-accounts are central to the ongoing business and activities of social group life. For example, particular social groups elicit accounts from their members when they need to account for deviance from anticipated forms of conduct (see Scott and Lyman, 1968), or communicate their ongoing commitment to the aims, concerns and priorities of the group (see C.W. Mills, 1940; Holstein and Gubrium, 2000). Individuals who disrupt group norms and expectations may use self-narratives to reconstruct 'credible' self identities which 'shore up the timbers of fractured sociation...repair the broken and restore the estranged' (Scott and Lyman 1968: 46). This is not to say that narratives will always be used in order to uphold taken-for-granted or agreed-upon meanings. On the contrary, the meanings conveyed in members' narratives may conflict with group norms and expectations, challenging the very foundations of unity, harmony and consensus among the group.

In a more constructive way, reflexive engagements with taken-for-granted meanings, assumptions and values, held by the group, may also be essential to the group's capacity to respond to challenges and events that disrupt the smooth continuation of its everyday activities (see Holstein and Gubrium, 2000; Järvinen, 2004). Narrative innovation and creativity, therefore, offer individuals the means to intervene in moral, cultural, legal and political structures of social group life, and enable groups to define and redefine the narrative frameworks and relevancies, of a given setting, in response to both internal and external challenge (see also Ewick and Silbey, 1995). Self-narratives, are therefore, crucial resources in human activity, and are central to the 'transactions of meaning' (Maines, 2001: 3) that constitute, reinforce or subvert ongoing relationships and joint activities.

Narrative, are, in effect, social constructions, undergoing continuous alteration as interaction progresses. The individual in this case does not consult an internal narrative for information. Rather, the self-narrative is a linguistic implement constructed by people in relationships and employed in relationships to sustain, enhance, or impede various actions. It may be used to indicate future actions but it is not in itself the basis for such action. In this sense, self-narratives function much as histories within society do more generally. They are symbolic systems used for such social purposes as justification, criticism, and social solidification (Gergen and Gergen, 1988: 20).

Narrative, agency and selfhood

An interactionist perspective, therefore, makes clear that narratives do not shape, constitute or reproduce experience, subjecthood, and social group life in and of themselves. Maines (2001), in particular, warns against the dangers of falsely attributing agency to 'texts' and cultural narratives. As he puts it: '[W]e read that "texts create subject positions" or that "texts read people." Texts, it would appear, do all sorts of things to us...[However,] texts clearly do not *do* anything at all (see Maines, 2001:xi, author's own emphasis). Without denying the impact of 'dominant stories' in shaping accounts of self, interactionist researchers also consider the way self-narratives enable actors to actively interpret their experiences, and self-

consciously alter the 'narrative slope' (Gergen and Gergen, 1988) of their lives. As Plummer suggests:

Narratives tacitly provide answers to questions such as: how has my life unfolded? What patterns does it take? Where might I be heading? Is change possible? Why has my life taken these routes and not others? And ultimately: so what is the story of my life? (Plummer, 2001: 192).

Self-narratives permit individuals to construct defensible accounts of their past experiences and actions, and put forward a credible rationale for their present identities, activities and future-directed conduct (see Järvinen, 2004). The diverse ways, in which individuals narrate the self, reflect variations in individual experiences and biographies, positions within social hierarchies (of class, gender, race, etc.), as well as the specificity of narrators' creative agency and narrative preferences (which influence *how* narrators' construct narrative 'resources' - such as themes and discourses of class - into personal memory, see Holstein and Gubrium, 2000). This is not to underestimate the extent to which the cultural dominance of particular narratives of self, (such as the 'adventurous' and 'heroic' narratives of white, male, middle-class men) has led to the historical silencing and exclusion of 'Other' narrative voices (see Gergen, 1992; Smith, 1993). At the same time, the open-ended, dialogic and dynamic nature of group life means that the dominant stories, circumscribing 'ordinary' and 'acceptable' forms of meaning, imagination and social action, are by no means fixed or permanent (see Maines, 2001). By refusing to stay silent, the dissident voices of excluded 'Others' play an active role in the negotiation of new narrative identities, and new frameworks of meaning, which challenge and sometimes re-define the norms and expectations of a given culture or group (see Gergen, 1992).

Narratives as 'topics' and 'resources'

A useful way of explaining the scope of my narrative analysis of the research interviews is to make use of Plummer's distinction between narratives as 'resources'

and narratives as ‘topics’ (see Plummer, 2001). According to Plummer, the traditional scope of narrative analysis, in sociology, has been to use personal accounts as empirical resources. This approach entails handling people’s life-story accounts as data, that give researchers in-depth, qualitative insight into people’s lives, experiences and social contexts. Treating narratives as resources helps to generate understandings about the social world from the subject’s point of view and, therefore, helps to focus researchers’ attention on the *meanings* the social world has *for participants*, rather than speculating on those meanings from a supposedly ‘objective’ distance or remove. This approach to narrative is, therefore, interpretive in the extent to which it focuses on the meanings expressed in narratives, rather than simply using accounts as unproblematic ‘windows’ on events, social realities and so forth. A ‘resource’ approach to narrative also recognises that the meanings that the social world has for participants may well be highly ambiguous, ambivalent and inconsistent. People’s perspectives, values and identifications may shift depending on the particular relationship, event, situation, or context they are commenting on, or which standpoint they are taking. Rather than glossing over the ambiguities and contradictions in social life and fixing people’s identities and perspectives (as is common in more theoretical or ‘structured’ research accounts), this approach produces accounts of self and social life which are closer to capturing what Plummer refers to as: ‘the confusions, ambiguities and contradictions that are played out in everyday experience’ (2001:40).

Treating people’s narratives as topics, on the other hand, is a more recent development in narrative analysis. It extends the original focus of life-story research, on people’s subjective engagements, with their social worlds by putting greater emphasis on the specifically ‘storied’ or ‘narrative’ aspects of people’s accounts. This approach builds on the notion that storytelling and self-narration are basic ontological and epistemological features of people’s engagements with the social world. Therefore, treating people’s accounts as stories or narratives is seen as a more sympathetic way of investigating how people interpretively experience their social realities. For example, as Gergen and Gergen point out, it is common for

people to 'story' their everyday experiences as a means generating 'drama' and significance out of otherwise inchoate or 'empty' sequences of activity.

Although narrative accounts in no way map or mirror the world, they are typically embedded in a series of life events that furnish them with an undergirding sense of verisimilitude. In effect, people frequently live out sequences of activity with a sense of storyhood. One senses life improving, relations breaking down, a levelling of strife, and so on. Accompanying these actions and the concomitant attempt to make them intelligible is often a sense of drama (or its lack). As one generates intelligibility, so life becomes dramatically saturated. Indeed, without this sense of dramatic engagement born of narrative, life might seem both flavourless and empty (1988: 41).

Treating narratives as topics does not deny the reality of people's experiences. However, this perspective acknowledges that experience is always at least 'first-order' theorised (see Jackson, 1998), and undergoes further interpretation and re-interpretation when it is 'symbolically reconstructed' from a particular narrative 'end point' (see Maines *et al.*, 1983; Maines, 2001). This can lead to some ontological and epistemological 'queasiness', especially if researchers are committed to the search for ultimate and final truth about people's lives. However, if researchers recognise that the 'truth' about events and experiences is always a social accomplishment, and never final or absolute, they can begin to see that narrative forms of interpretations are central to social life, and not merely getting in the way of 'the truth'.

Researchers, who treat narratives primarily as topics, tend to focus on the specifically 'narrative' features of life-stories (e.g. the artifice of biographical storytelling), as well as the social, cultural contexts which shape storytelling practice. Thus, as Plummer remarks:

...[T]he telling of a tale is very much a product of a culture. Here the life story itself comes under scrutiny: just why do people tell the stories of their lives? What makes them tell their stories in particular ways? Would they tell them differently – or not at all – in different times and places? And are there some stories simply not to be told: the so-called

'silenced voices'?...[O]nce life stories are seen as topics, a whole new set of self-conscious questions about the construction, organization and reception of life stories come into play (2001:41, author's own italics).

Like many narrative researchers, my own approach draws on both 'topic' and 'resource' approaches to personal accounts. For example, I try to avoid the extremes of both 'realist' perspectives which treat accounts as 'raw' data, which 'tell it like it is', and post-modern perspectives, which focus solely on the artifices of biographical storytelling. While I am interested in the 'storied' nature of the women's accounts, I am also curious about exploring the way women construct personal narratives as a means of actively engaging with the 'problematics' of self, identity and role in relation to 'external' gender and class structures and processes. This approach does not 'bracket' the world 'out there' in order to focus on the artifice of storytelling. Instead, this approach considers how women actively confront and respond to the realities of class and gender within their personal accounts.

By approaching the women's accounts as topics I am especially interested in the way in which women's accounts of their class pasts are 'symbolic reconstructed' (Maines *et al.*, 1983, Maines, 2001), through the use of narrative repertoires and 'perspectives' provided by their cultures and local contexts (both personal and professional). Nevertheless, I recognise that the women's symbolic reconstructions are constituted in relation to 'implied objective past': those 'obdurate realities' in the past, present in memory, which *must* have taken place for the present 'structure of events' or 'behavioral realities' to be as they are (Maines 2001:46, see also, Maines *et al.*, 1983). In this way, I do not challenge the 'facticity' of the events and experiences retold in the women's narratives; although I am particularly interested in exploring the narrative mechanisms, which help to render meanings to those events (see Maines, 2001). These meanings are more problematic than the facticity of the events themselves since they can be seen to shift about in relation to changing narrative contexts (*ibid.*). Similarly, I also try to acknowledge the insights the women's stories give into the wider social, cultural and historical contexts within which their lives took shape. Here I try to remain attentive to the way the 'social

structural past' (Maines *et al.*, 1983, Maines, 2001) may have circumscribed, conditioned or set limits upon the women's experiences, opportunities and biographical trajectories (even if it did not fully determine them).⁴

What makes 'narrative sociology' sociological?

Despite the growing interdisciplinary interest in narrative research, there remains a certain amount of doubt and suspicion about the relevance of narratives to sociological concerns. According to Maines: 'The idea of "narrative," like "social constructionism," is in the air these days, but there is still the lingering doubt that narratives are mere stories or some cultural studies fetish' (2001: xvii). However, Maines sets out a persuasive case for developing a narrative sociology, as a novel way of exploring the major precepts of pragmatist/interactionist epistemologies, which underpin a great deal of research in the 'interpretive' sociological tradition.

Because Maines frames his narrative sociology squarely within an interactionist framework, he is keen to disassociate his version of narrative sociology (which he terms, somewhat provocatively 'sociological narrative sociology' (2001:168)) from post-structuralist/ post-modern versions which derive their theoretical frameworks from those of literary criticism. 'Literary narrative sociology' (2001:168), according to Maines, bases its line of thinking on post-structuralist ideas about textual deconstruction (i.e. that there can be no 'authoritative texts', and 'no fixed reference points for interpretation' (2001: 168)). This perspective produces a form of inquiry based around 'endless albeit interesting speculation' (2001: 168-168) and 'endless interpretive regress' (2001:169). Within this framework: 'sociological writings and, by implication, sociology's phenomena are viewed as texts and thus can be deconstructed like any other text' (2001: 169). This approach leaves little or no room for a sociology that aims to produce relatively secure and robust accounts of

⁴ The different dimensions of the past set out by Maines *et al.* (1983) are derived from Mead's (1929, 1932) theory of the past. I will return to Mead's theory and its treatment in more recent sociological work (e.g. Maines *et al.*, 1983; Maines, 2001; Järvinen, 2004) in my discussions of the relationships between narrative and temporality.

predominant social meanings (of class, gender, race, nationhood, etc.); and, in particular, the way such meanings are actively handled by members of society at specific points in the ongoing historical process.⁵

By way of contrast, 'sociological narrative sociology' places storytelling firmly within the context of the inter-personal production and reproduction of ongoing social orders. On the one hand, 'storytelling' plays an active role in the reproduction of meanings and understandings that sustain and support particular forms of group organisation (and their specific constellations of identities, roles, relationships, traditions and so on). On the other hand, the way in which agents creatively 'handle' or interpret predominant 'group' meanings, within their stories, also contributes to the ongoing negotiation and evolution of the established boundaries and hierarchies of particular social orders (see also Holstein and Gubrium, 2000).

Therefore 'sociological narrative sociology' can be distinguished from 'literary narrative sociology' by its refusal to treat stories and accounts as free-floating texts which can take on any number of meanings. From the perspective of 'sociological narrative sociology', the meanings of stories are inextricably tied to organisation of the social orders, within which they are articulated. Moreover, by embedding stories within the context of situated human conduct and interaction rather than free floating 'texts', 'sociological narrative sociology' treats narrative meanings as relatively stable (rather than open to endless speculation). Because the meanings of narratives are constructed within the communicative processes of inter-personal activity: 'interpretation can come to resolution at least for a period of time' (Maines 2001:169). Unlike texts, human interaction permits members to inquire about each other's meanings and be relatively satisfied that a meaning has been understood on the basis of the behavioural response given to it. 'Sociological narrative sociology', therefore, sets out to illuminate the mutually constructive relationships between storytelling and established yet ongoing forms of human conduct. Stories are then

⁵ A similarly powerful but more elaborate critique of the post-modernist veneration of 'texts' and 'textual deconstruction' can be found in Smith (1999) (see especially her chapter 'Telling the Truth after Post-modernism' pp:96-130).

accorded a central role within the social processes by which individuals and groups construct, reconstruct, bypass⁶ or redirect the structures, organisation and orientations of human conduct.

The empirical study of the reproductive and reconstructive role of stories in the social process can help to put meat on the bones of Mead's highly sophisticated characterisation of society 'as ordered flux, or as society simultaneously containing predictability and unpredictability or stability and change' (Maines, 2001: 170). According to Maines: 'Underlying [Mead's imagery] is a theory positing that meaningfulness can be transacted only in terms of relatively stable social units (Perinbanayagam 1986). Processes of reality construction, that is to say, must be transacted in terms of sedimented, taken-for-granted understandings and conventions' (2001:170). The active deployment of established social discourses and conventional narrative forms (such as recognisable 'plots', themes and modes of characterisation) by storytellers is, therefore, seen as essential to the successful ongoing construction of a shared social reality. However, the way in which taken-for-granted understandings and conventions are handled, or responded to, in the process of storytelling introduces a degree of unpredictability into the process of reality construction. As Maines points out : 'meanings can range from taken-for-granted, habit like embedded consensuality to conflictual, oppositional, overt nonconsensuality' (2001:3). Storytelling relies on the relative stability of social units as much as it contributes to social unpredictability and change (see also Smith, 1999; Holstein and Gubrium 2000). In summary, the investigation of stories from a 'sociological narrative' perspective arguably contributes to the formulation of 'grounded' social theories, which avoid both the worst excesses of both 'fragmented' post-modernist discourse, which arguably overestimate unpredictability, and overly deterministic structural accounts, which ignore the active role of social agents in the ongoing and open-ended construction of social reality (Maines, 2001).

⁶ Ribbens McCarthy *et al.* (2000), for example, have identified the 'moral bypass routes' found in the narratives of absent parents, who wish to maintain the image of the good, moral parent even though they fail to meet the practical requirements laid out by the 'moral imperatives' on parenting.

Narratives of self: The significance of the Meadean self for a ‘narrative-interactionist’ framework

If we understand life-histories and personal narratives as stories of the self, which are produced out of the self’s active recollection of its past, then we also need to develop clear theoretical models for both the ‘storytelling’ and ‘storied’ self.

Arguably, Mead’s model of the social self is particularly useful for developing an ontology of the ‘storytelling self’, and for mapping out an epistemological framework for making sense of the ‘stories’ it produces. In the section that follows I outline some of the key aspects of Mead’s conceptually groundbreaking model of the social self. In doing so, I try to emphasise the relevance of Mead’s theory for researchers, who wish to develop new ontological and epistemological frameworks for the study of ‘narratives of self’.

I conclude by arguing that a Meadean inspired narrative study of selfhood has much to offer for debates on class, culture and subjectivity. These debates have sometimes overlooked the ‘self-aware’ class subject in favour of a Bourdieuvian model, which places the ‘unconscious’ dispositions of the subject’s class ‘habitus’ at the heart of its analyses of class reproduction and inequality. The concept of ‘habitus’ has a great deal of analytical purchase in debates, which centre around the way subjects are ‘marked’ by their class location. However, with its emphasis on the ‘unconscious’ dispositions of classed subjects, the concept of ‘habitus’ has limited applicability for those researchers interested in agents’ self-conscious awareness of their ‘situatedness’ in relation to contexts, processes and mechanisms of class (see Crossley, 2001). Agents’ self-conscious awareness of class worlds and their own embeddedness within its structures affects the way they build their class selves and identities through storytelling. For narrative researchers, who wish to develop more systematic and detailed analyses of the self-aware or reflexive class subject, Mead’s model of the self has much to recommend it.

Mead's theory of the self: Further elaboration.

Mead's theory of the self focuses on the individual's ability to acquire a reflexive awareness of self through social interaction. Through social interaction, 'play' and 'games', individuals gradually learn to become 'other' to themselves, that is to reflect back upon themselves from the perspectives offered by both 'significant others' and the 'generalized other' (i.e. from the point of view of the 'game' or social process as a whole, as opposed to the point of view of its individual members). As individuals internalise these outside perspectives they take on board the attitudes that others take towards them, attitudes which become part of the 'me' (i.e. established or already-available understandings of self). Once internalised, these attitudes can be roused by the self at appropriate moments, without the necessity of direct prompting from others.

Unlike many classical thinkers, Mead rejects the idea that the self is an intrinsic, essential or natural structure that is given at birth; instead, he envisions a self which develops out of individuals increasingly complex and sophisticated engagements with social groups and settings. Mead's self then is a fully social self.

The individual experiences himself [sic] as such, not directly, but only indirectly, from the particular standpoints of other members of the same social group, or from the generalized standpoint of the social group as a whole to which he belongs. For he enters his own experience as a self or individual not directly or immediately, not by becoming a subject to himself, but only in so far as he first becomes an object to himself just as others are objects to him or his experience; and he becomes an object to himself only by taking the attitudes of other individuals toward himself within a social environment or context of experience in which both he and they are involved ...The self, as that which can be an object to itself, is essentially a social structure, and it arises in social experience (1934: 138 and 140).

Individuals, by arousing in themselves the attitudes of 'others', learn to anticipate what is expected from them in social interaction, and to respond in ways which are appropriate to their position and identity within the social group. Mead's theory of

the self, therefore, draws attention to the fact that the way in which individuals make sense of the world and their place from particular positions within the social process, rather than from 'detached' 'neutral' or 'objective' perspectives. The way in which individuals know the world, and their place within it, is always mediated by the perspectives and attitudes that are available to them in their social contexts.⁷ Moreover, the kinds of selves and identities they can, legitimately and credibly, construct through their 'stories' and self-reflections depends not only on the general attitudes which predominate in particular settings, but also the variable expectations and responsibilities these attitudes place on individuals depending on their position(s) within the social group.

Whilst Mead's model of the self emphasises the inextricable links between self, social positioning and social group, his conceptualisation of the self as an ongoing, reflexive relationships between the 'I' and the 'me' means that Mead is very much opposed to the idea that subjects are merely 'cultural dupes', passively reproducing established social roles, identities and group expectations. Instead, as Mead suggests, the 'I' both calls out and responds to the group attitudes of the 'me'. Crucially, in responding to the 'me', the 'I' can introduce new values into experience, which, if self-consciously taken up by the individual and the wider group, may redirect and reform the social process.⁸

⁷ This point also draws attention to the limits of reflexivity of the social self. While individuals can reflect critically on the social world, they can only do so using the different perspectives and understandings they have available to them in their social contexts and settings (Crossley, 2001)

⁸ Because of his wider interests in 'the reflexive link between individual and society' (Maines 2001:53) and the ongoing construction of social order, Mead is equally attentive to the ways in which both continuity and change are created out of the dialogic encounters between individuals and their wider community. As Mead puts it :

As a rule we assume that this general voice of the community is identical with the larger community of the past and the future; we assume that an organized custom represents what we call morality. The things one cannot do are those which everybody would condemn. If we take the attitude of the community over against our own responses, that is a true statement, *but we must not forget this other capacity, that of replying to the community and insisting on the gesture of the community changing. We can reform the order of things; we can insist on making community standards better standards. We are not simply bound by the community* (1934: 168, my emphasis).

As Mead points out, there is never any certainty about how individuals will react to established group attitudes incorporated into the 'me'. The 'I', that answers to the 'me', is the 'home of novel responses' (Aboulafia, 1993: 151), which means that there is always a degree of indeterminacy in terms of how individuals will react to social situations. As Mead writes:

The "I," then, in this relation of the "I" and the "me", is something that is, so to speak, responding to a social situation which is within the experience of the individual. It is the answer which the individual makes to the attitude which others take toward him when he assumes an attitude toward them. Now, the attitudes he is taking toward them are present in his own experience, but his response to them will contain a novel element. 'The "I" gives the sense of freedom, of initiative.. The situation is there for us to act in a self-conscious fashion. We are aware of ourselves, and of what the situation is, but exactly how we will act never gets into experience until after the action takes place. Such is the basis for the fact that the "I" does not appear in the same sense in experience as the "me". The "me" represents a definite organization of the community there in our attitudes, and calling for a response, but the response that takes place is something that just happens. There is no certainty with regard to it (1934: 177-178).

While novel forms of response (whether these are internally generated or prompted by changes occurring in the wider environment) cannot be predicted in advance, they may be retrospectively incorporated into the 'me' as novel values in experience, or new sets of attitudes which may be 'called out' and responded to, by the 'I', at a later moment. The self is thus constantly being produced and reproduced in social interaction with the 'I' and the 'me' as 'phases of the self' in the social process. The relationship between the 'I' and the 'me', thus takes the form of an 'evolving circle' (Crossley, 2001).

The "I" both calls out the "me" and responds to it. Taken together they constitute a personality as it appears in social experience. The self is essentially a social process going on with these two distinguishable phases. If we did not have these two phases there could not be conscious responsibility, and there would be nothing novel in experience (Mead, 1934:178).

The 'I' and the 'me', thus, continually feed back on one another in ways which variously support or challenge; supplement or subvert; fragment or synthesise the diverse sets of attitudes by which individuals and groups locate themselves in relation to the social process and act toward it.⁹

The relationship between the 'I' and the 'me' then emphasises the fact that self-awareness and self-knowledge are never permanent or fixed. Individuals operate with a clear set of assumptions about who they are, how they should act and how they will respond to particular situations. However, as Mead points out, the ways in which the 'I' will actually respond to situations, cannot be foretold in advance. Individuals may be able to coherently and credibly communicate a firm sense of self but narrative researchers must be careful not to 'misrecognise' people's accounts of self as evidence of a 'found', 'crystallized' or 'achieved' self-identity (see Gergen and Gergen, 1988). Instead, meanings of the self, and the social situation, are often retrospectively reconstructed in light of novel responses and events. As such, the

⁹ While the concepts of the 'I' and the 'me' are useful for conceiving the self, as an ongoing relationship/practice, rather than a fixed structure which merely replicates the attitudes and expectations of the group, they cannot be applied empirically in the investigation of self-stories. While they remind researchers not to treat stories, told by the self, as expression of a fixed, determinate self, the concepts of the 'I' and the 'me' cannot be separately or distinctively discerned from people's self-constructions. As Mead points out 'the "I" does not appear in the same sense in experience as the "me"' (1934: 178), since the novel responses of the 'I' are only retrospectively incorporated in the individual's self-conscious awareness of self. According to Mead:

It is because of the "I" that we say that we are never fully aware of what we are, that we surprise ourselves by our own action. It is as we act that we are aware of ourselves. It is in memory that the "I" is constantly present in experience. We can go back directly a few moments in our experience, and then we are dependent on memory images for the rest. So that the "I" in memory is there as the spokesman of the self the second or minute, or day ago. As given, it is a "me", but it is a "me" which was the "I" at the earlier time (1934:174).

Since narrative self-constructions are always recollected out of the past, the active 'I' can only be represented in the 'memory images' of the 'me'. Similarly, while individuals may have a self-conscious sense that they have produced novel understandings during the narrative process – (e.g. 'I'd never thought about it like that before') they only become aware of the novel response of the 'I' once it has become part of their self-conscious awareness (i.e. the 'me').

‘storied’ self is always subject to change as the ‘storytelling self’ retrospectively re-constructs itself to account for its new relationship to its social environments.

Multiplicity in Mead’s account of the self

Mead’s theoretical scheme acknowledges that individuals, by virtue of their multiple positions within and across social groups, must often ‘handle’ or respond to diverse sets of social attitudes. As a result, individuals assume multiple perspectives towards themselves and others and this often produces a degree of multiplicity in the self concept. As Mead states:

What determines the amount of self that gets into communication is the social experience itself. Of course a good deal of the self does not need to get expression. We carry on a whole series of different relationships with different people. We are one thing to one man and another thing to another. There are parts of the self which exist only for the self in relationship to itself. We divide ourselves up into all sorts of different selves with reference to our acquaintances. We discuss politics with one and religion with another. There are all sorts of different selves answering to different social situations. It is the social process itself, that is responsible for the appearance of the self; it is not there as a self apart from this type of experience (1934: 142).

While individuals may often be happy to enact different forms of selfhood for different groups, it is also possible to imagine times when individuals experience tensions and conflicts, within the self, as they become self-conscious of the different and often incommensurable demands and expectations meted upon them by different individuals and groups (cf. C.W. Mills, 1940). However, as Mead illustrates, it is not difficult for individuals to be aware of the different attitudes involved in a situation, although it can be much more difficult to work out how to respond to the different expectations, held by different participants, in the inter-personal context.

When one sits down to think anything out, he [sic] has certain data that are there. Suppose that it is a social situation which he has to straighten out. He sees himself from the point of view of one individual or another in the group. These individuals related all together give him a sense of self. Well, what is he going to do? He does not know and nobody else

knows. He can get the situation into his experience because he can assume the attitude of the various individuals involved in it. He knows how they feel about it by the assumptions of their attitudes. He says, in effect, "I have done certain things that seem to commit me to a certain course of conduct." Perhaps if he does so act it will place him in a false position with another group. The "I" as a response to this situation, in contrast to the "me" which is involved in the attitudes he takes, is uncertain. And when the response takes place, then it appears in the field of experience largely as a memory image (1934: 176).

While the experience of such conflicting demands may unsettle the individual and lead to feelings of ambivalence and fragmentation, attempts to reconcile the divergent expectations of various 'others' may also prompt 'novel' responses which can be retrospectively incorporated into the individuals' understandings of the social world and the 'me'. The way in which responses to conflicting demands are retrospectively interpreted can sometimes help to re-establish a firm and coherent sense of self, where previously there was only dissonance. However, at other times feelings of ambivalence and confusion may weigh heavily upon individuals' self-construction practices.

Relationships between the self and experience

Mead places the social self at the heart of social interaction and human group activity. Nevertheless, Mead is also aware that not all actions involve a self. For example as Mead argues:

In our habitual actions, for example, in our moving about in a world that is simply there and to which we are so adjusted that no thinking is involved, there is a certain amount of sensuous experience such that persons have when they are just waking up, a bare thereness of the world. Such characters about us may exist in experience without taking their place in relationship to a self... I think it is obvious when one considers it that the self is not necessarily involved in the life of the organism, nor involved in what we term our sensuous experiences, that is, experience in a world about us for which we have habitual reactions (1934: 135-136).

However, Mead also points out that it is not uncommon for individuals to reflect back on habitual actions in such a way that they become incorporated into their conscious experience of self.

One says upon a certain analysis that a certain item had its place in his experience, in the experience of his self. We do inevitably tend at a certain level of sophistication to organize all experience into that of a self. We do so intimately identify our experiences, especially our affective experiences, with the self that it takes a moment's abstraction to realize that pain and pleasure can be there without the experience of a self. Similarly we normally organize our memories upon the string of our self. If we date things we always date them from the point of view of our past experiences. We frequently have memories that we cannot date, that we cannot place. A picture comes before us suddenly and we are at a loss to explain when the experience originally took place. We remember perfectly distinctly the picture, but we do not have it definitely placed and until we can place it in terms of our past experiences we are not satisfied (1934:135).

Clearly, there is a convergence between Mead's notion that we 'organize our memories upon the string of our self' and his idea that we continually reconstruct and give meaning to the past, from the point of view of the present. While I address Mead's theory of the past in greater detail in the latter part of this Chapter, I think it is useful, at this point, to note the evident synergy between Mead's theories on time and the self and 'narrative-interactionist' approaches to self-construction. From both perspectives, the self recollected out of the past (what might be termed the 'storied self') is constructed by a reflexive or self-aware self (in other words, the 'storytelling self'). The self-aware (or 'storytelling self'), retrospectively organizes what might otherwise remain fragmented and disorganized experiences into 'strings' or 'storylines' which (re)establish a sense of order, coherence, continuity and wholeness between its past and present experiences.

Reflexivity: An 'everyday' characteristic of social selves

Mead's theory of the self has a high degree of analytical utility, or purchase, in relation to the study of self and identity construction in the late or post-modern

world, although it sadly continues to be ignored, overlooked or mishandled in contemporary sociological research (see Maines, 2001). Perhaps, of most central relevance to contemporary debates, is the way Mead constructs the social self as intrinsically reflexive. Blumer, for example, portrays the Meadean self as essentially a construct of reflexive ‘self-interaction’.

The human being may perceive himself [sic], have conceptions of himself, communicate with himself, and act toward himself. As these types of behaviour imply, the human being may become the object of his own action. This gives him the means of interacting with himself, addressing himself, responding to the address, and addressing himself anew. Such self-interaction takes the form of making indications to himself and meeting these indications by making further indications. The human being can designate things to himself – his want, his pains, his goals, objects around him, the presence of others, their actions, their expectations, or whatnot. Through further interaction with himself he may judge, analyze, and evaluate the things he has designated to himself. And by continuing to interact with himself he may plan and organize his action with regard to what he has designated and evaluated. In short, the possession of a self provides the human being with a mechanism of self-interaction with which to meet the world – a mechanism that is used in forming and guiding his conduct (1969:62).

Unlike many contemporary conceptualisations of the reflexive self, Mead’s theory implies that reflexive self-consciousness is anything but a specialist or novel form of activity (e.g. the sole preserve of elite academic theorists) [see also Stanley, 1994; Scott and Scott, 2000; Adkins, 2002]. Instead, reflexive processes are best seen as basic features of this thing called the self, which every human being possesses. With regard to social research, this model of the self suggests that we should not look to research to merely tell us what happens to people under certain conditions, or when certain systems or mechanisms or processes act upon them. Instead, researchers need to ‘flip over’ or reverse this line of thinking, in order to analyse how ‘served’ human beings actively engage, confront or wrestle with the social world in which they are inextricably embedded. As Blumer comments:

With the mechanism of self-interaction the human being ceases to be a responding organism whose behaviour is a product of what plays upon

him from the outside, the inside or both. Instead, he acts towards his world, interpreting what confronts him and organizing his action on the basis of the interpretation...the process of self-interaction puts the human being over against his world instead of merely in it, requires him to meet and handle his world through a defining process instead of merely responding to it, and forces him to construct his action instead of merely releasing it (1969: 63-64).

The passive view of the self, as merely responding to forces exerted upon it, may seem fairly outdated to most contemporary sociologists. Yet, according to Maines, however obvious or self-evident Mead's conceptualisation of the subject as reflexive, creative, adaptive may seem to us: 'we still have sociologists who have conjured up explanations of human conduct which completely fly in [its] face' (2001:3). As Plummer also argues, recent social theory often rejects or pushes to one side the active human subject:

The logics of both sociology and anthropology strain towards the systems side of the individualist-collectivist tension. Indeed some have gone so far as to eliminate 'the subject' altogether, the human being becoming an epistemological disaster (an 'idealism of the essence' (Althusser, 1969:228) and a 'myth of bourgeois ideology' (Althusser, 1976:52-3) and humanism becoming little more than an ideological construct, which along with bourgeois notions like democracy and freedom permits the maintenance and reproduction of the late capitalist hegemonic state. There is no human being independent of the material and ideological forces that construct 'it'. In such views 'the final goal of the human sciences is not to constitute man, but to dissolve him' (Levi Strauss, 1966) [Plummer, 2001: 5].

I share Plummer's concern that sociologists should not be seduced by theories of the 'death of the subject'. According to Plummer, sociologists must not lose sight of 'the concrete joys and sufferings of active, breathing, bodily human beings' (2001:5). I respond to the concerns of Plummer and others, by placing the active human subject at the centre of my research and by paying particular attention to women's self-conscious reflections on their selves, identities, lived experiences and social worlds.

Mead's reflexive self: filling in the gaps in Bourdieu's theoretical scheme

As I stated earlier, Mead's theory of the self helps to clarify some of the sticking points in contemporary Bourdieuvian approaches to class, culture and subjectivity, and arguably offers a way forward for researchers interested in developing accounts of the class subject which pay greater attention to the reflexive dimensions of class identity. In this section, I briefly outline Bourdieu's novel contribution to class analysis, before suggesting ways in which Mead's theory provides a useful corrective to the gaps, or flaws, implicit in Bourdieu's scheme.

In recent years, Bourdieu's concept of the habitus has become a key item in the conceptual toolbox used by researchers interested in socio-cultural forms of class analysis. Habitus refers to the subject's skills, dispositions, competencies and know-how, which are seen to 'embody' the logics of the particular 'classed' social field(s) the subject inhabits. According to Bourdieu, 'the habitus as the feel for the game is the social game embodied and turned into second nature' (1988:63, quoted in Reay, 1998: 27). The skills, dispositions and competencies of the class habitus are, thus, routinely incorporated into the subject's 'embodied' actions and practices without conscious effort or 'control by the will' (Bourdieu 1984: 466, quoted in Crossley, 2001: 93).

The concept of the habitus has proved a useful tool for responding to claims that class is not a salient feature of identity (see Savage *et al.*, 2001). From this perspective, individuals are 'marked' by their particular location in the class hierarchy, regardless of whether or not they self-consciously identify themselves in terms of class (see Bottero, 2004). Moreover, the way in which people are recognised or 'misrecognised' by their class habitus (see Skeggs, 1997) has profound consequences for the individual. The way in which a subject's class habitus is interpreted in interaction affects many aspects of their social experiences (including their intimate relationships; their ability to access 'mainstream' or

legitimate social spaces; as well as their ability to 'pass' as 'credible' subjects within the elite worlds of academia, medicine, law, etc) .

The notion of habitus has a particular salience for cultural class analysis because Bourdieu explicitly unites this concept with his notion of embodied cultural capital (Crossley, 2001). Different forms of class 'capital' (such as social, cultural and educational capital) are often 'unconsciously' incorporated into the embodied dispositions of agents. The volume and composition of a person's class capitals (or lack thereof) can then be 'read off' the body, in such a way, that almost instantaneous judgements can be made about a person's respective social value (see Skeggs, 2005) .It is important to note that only middle-class dispositions can function as tradable, exchangeable or 'symbolic' forms of 'capital' within those 'prestigious' fields where social standing and advantage are secured. For example as Crossley argues:

When an agent's ability to 'read' great works of art, or their accent and demeanour suffice to impress others sufficiently that they 'connect' with those others and secure a strategic advantage in the pursuit of their goals, for example, then those specific dispositions function precisely as capital (2001: 107).

On the other hand, the working-class habitus is (mis)recognised, as lacking 'intrinsic' value or talents, because its dispositions are not readily converted in to exchangeable (or legitimated) forms of capital (such as educational qualifications). Working-class disposition and 'ways of being' are often stigmatised and rendered pathological. This can be understood as an effect of the way in which the working-class habitus is 'interpreted' (often at a 'pre-reflective' or 'doxic' level) as both lacking value and incapable of accruing capitals that could be traded for social privilege.

However, as Lawler points out, the role of the social mechanisms of class in the shaping and evaluation of subjects' embodied practices are often obscured by the

way 'classed' cultural competence, and know-how, are misrecognised as the natural talents or characteristics of the 'innate' self.

[Class distinctions] are obscured because they become, not a matter of inequality in legitimated forms of knowledge and aesthetics, but, precisely, knowledge and aesthetics themselves. To not possess symbolic capital is to 'fail' in the games of aesthetic judgement, of knowledge, and of cultural capital...Bourdieu's analysis is useful here because of the way in which it both highlights and overturns conventional assumptions about cultural competencies and cultural knowledges. These knowledges are not usually seen as social mechanisms: rather, they are assumed to inhere within the self (1999: 6)

Crossley (2001) makes a similar point, when he argues that the 'pre-reflective' nature of habitus means that individuals are often unaware of the extent to which they are implicated in the social mechanisms which reproduce class distinctions and inequalities.

[M]uch of the strategic manoeuvring required to reproduce capital and the forms of inequality it entails are sedimented at the level of habitus, such that they often pass unnoticed, both by those who benefit and those who suffer from them. In doing what comes naturally to them, the classes tend to reproduce themselves. And because this happens at the pre-reflective level of the habitus it can be misrecognised as a matter of natural talents and facts of life (2001: 98).

The concept of habitus enables researchers to conceptualise how structures of class, which precede and predate an individual's involvements in the social world, enter into and shape their subjective dispositions. In turn, the concept enables researchers to envision the ways in which classed competencies, skills and know-how (which are enacted as embodied cultural capital) tend to reproduce the very objective structures that give them their shape and form. As such, the concept of habitus allows researchers to conceptualise the 'circuit' which connects objective class structures and subjective modes of expression and action. Class is not merely an external marker of social positions (for example positions in the job market); instead, class shapes ontological 'modes of being' in the world. By understanding

both objective and subjective dimensions of class, as inextricably entwined, researchers can gain a better idea of the structuring and restructuring of social relations in 'everyday' experience.

Bourdieu's concept of habitus, and his wider theoretical scheme, have played a crucial role in both validating the 'cultural turn', in recent research on class, and giving focus and shape to its projects. However, as Crossley argues, even though the habitus is a very powerful explanatory device, the way it is sometimes deployed in Bourdieu's work is not without its problems. For example, Crossley argues that Bourdieu sometimes collapses together the concepts of the agent and the habitus, in ways which obscures the ongoing interactions between reflexive and habitual modes. As a result of this interaction, habits are not static or fixed; instead they are, at least to a certain extent, open-ended, evolving or 'in process'.

It is not habits which act, after all, but rather agents. Similarly, it is not habits that improvise but again agents. I do not mean to deny in making this claim, that mature social agency is habitual through and through. It is, however, we need a more substantive account of the agent or 'creature' of habit if we are to account, for example, for the formation and acquisition of habit. Habits are sedimented effects of action, such that action cannot be reduced to habit in the manner Bourdieu sometimes suggests' (2001:115).

According to Crossley, Mead's account of the social self could be useful in filling out some of the gaps in Bourdieu's work, on the habitus and reflexivity, because it emphasises the dialectical, mutually constitutive relationship between the reflexive or self-conscious self and 'habit'.

The concept of habit does not preclude reflection or reflexivity in Mead's account. Indeed, we acquire the habit of self-objectification and reflection by way of our involvement in the social world' (2001: 149).

Bourdieu, on the other hand, sometimes 'ignores this generative role of agency' in the construction and reconstruction of habits.

Without a more elaborate conception of the agent whose actions generate habits, it is impossible for...[Bourdieu] to explain how habits are generated, modified or indeed fitted to the exigencies of material life circumstances. He is left appearing to suggest, for example that conditions of material scarcity produce habits of this or that kind automatically, where a stronger focus upon generative agency would bridge the gap between habits and their material conditions of existence, allowing him to say that 'these habits' emerge in 'these conditions' as a result of the creative and adaptive work of 'this' particular set of agents' (Crossley, 2001:117).

One of the problems, with Bourdieu's emphasis on the habitus, is that its focus on the 'circular' or 'reproductive' relationship between individual and society deflects attention away from reflective or innovative strategies or practices, which may disrupt the stable and efficient reproduction of existing habits and unquestioned norms (see Crossley, 2001). A more 'emergent' perspective on the self and social world (a perspective, which lies at the heart of Mead's conceptualisations of self and social order) is therefore missing from Bourdieu's conceptual scheme.

Though Bourdieu is at pains to emphasise that habits facilitate improvisation, he does not take the next and important step of considering that and how the underlying structures or principles of fields of practice mutate over time, and with them the habitus required to produce them. The social world is not the perfect circle as described earlier. It changes. And as a consequence of this we must recognise the potential for creativity and forms of innovation, which generate a transformation of habits (Crossley, 2001: 117).

Whilst Bourdieu recognises that large scale social crises may dislodge 'the 'fit between objective structures and subjective expectations' (2001: 115), there are arguably far more mundane occasions in which individuals generate a transformation of their established habits. For example, individuals may come into contact with social fields (e.g. academia) in which they feel 'out of their depth' because their 'feel for the game', in these fields, is underdeveloped (see discussions in Walkerdine 1990; Mahoney and Zmroczek (eds), 1997). Individuals may become conscious of their habitus precisely because it is incompatible with the skills and dispositions required to function effectively in 'new' fields, and they may even try to

consciously adapt or transform their habits to assist their participation in new settings. Bourdieu's emphasis, on the way the habitus enables the effective reproduction of stable social structures, means that he underestimates the extent to which people have access to, or move between, different social fields, logics and perspectives. He, thereby, overlooks the critical reflections on previously unquestioned assumptions and dispositions made possible by movements across social space, such as upward mobility into new class fields.

Many researchers have turned to the concept of habitus as a means of grasping the cultural and subjective dimensions of class. However, Bourdieu's work: 'offers us relatively little in the way of an analytical toolbox for opening up and exploring the subjective side of the social world. The concept of the habitus hints at the possibility of a hermeneutic dimension to social analysis but sadly does no more than hint' (Crossley, 2001: 118). Arguably, the analysis of class selves and identities, from a narrative-interactionist perspective, provides one way of gaining greater analytical purchase on the subjective dimensions of class. According to Polkinghorne, self-narrative is 'the primary form by which human experience is made meaningful' and 'narrative meaning is a cognitive process that organizes human experiences into temporally meaningful episodes' (1988:1). Arguably, an investigation of narratives of self from a Meadean perspective gives us a great deal of insight into 'an agent's active involvement in a structured field of practice' (Crossley, 2001:115), and offers a means to investigate aspects of subjective class experience which remain underdeveloped in Bourdieu's scheme.

Making sense of narratives of self: Outlining the analytical method.

Narrative researchers suggest that the self, which is 'knowable' and available to us through self-reflexive practice, is, at least in part, a temporary construct of the personal narratives, or stories, that we assemble at particular junctions, in both time and space. In the sections that follow, I want to focus on the issues raised by highlighting the distinctly 'narrative' qualities of personal constructions of self and

identity. If self-construction is inextricably tied to the process of interpreting and assembling personal experiences into meaningful ‘stories’, then we need to understand how self-construction practices are mediated by recognizable structures and features of narrative storytelling.

Narratives and the creation of coherence

Perhaps the defining feature of narrative forms of accounting is the use of ‘plots’ to establish causal relationships between disparate events (see Gergen and Gergern, 1988; Polikinghorne:1988; Somers and Gibson 1994; Holstein and Gubrium, 2000; Plummer, 2001; Lawler, 2002; Järvinen, 2004). ‘Emplotment’ converts events into episodes, which take their meanings by way of their integration within a coherent story (see Järvinen (2004), in particular her appraisal of the theories of Ricoeur). Plots allow narrators to construct coherent self-stories, by ordering selected events into linear, temporal sequences, and by establishing causal linkages between events. Emplotment helps to give a sense of meaning and direction to what might otherwise appear to be the ‘shattered and chaotic elements of lived experience’ (Järvinen, 2004: 48). The notion of emplotment is, therefore, central to researchers’ definitions of self-narrative.

[T]he term self-narrative...refer[s] to the individual’s account of the relationship among self-relevant events across time. In developing a self-narrative the individual attempts to establish coherent connections among life events (Cohler, 1979; Kohli, 1981). Rather than seeing one’s life as simply “one damned thing after another,” the individual attempts to understand life events as systematically related. They are rendered intelligible by locating them in a sequence or “unfolding process” (deWaele & Harre, 1976). One’s present identity is thus not a sudden or mysterious event, but a sensible result of a life story (Gergen and Gergen, 1988:19).

Narratives act as a kind of counter-current to the novelty and uncertainty of the ‘knife edge present’ (see Maines *et al.*, 1983), and lend a sense of continuity, order and coherence to the life. Moreover, ‘intelligible’ narratives are fashioned around an

‘endpoint’, which is often evaluative. The evaluative dimension of life-stories is often distinctly social, drawing on shared cultural mores and values to make sense of the outcome of the story as either desirable or undesirable (see Gergen and Gergen, 1988). The ‘point’ of the story undoubtedly influences the events selected for scrutiny and the way they are reconstructed within the story.

In their analysis of personal narratives, researchers should, therefore, pay particular attention to the forms of ‘emplotment’, that individuals use to give substance and meaning to their lives. On the one hand, researchers need to consider the extent to which narrators’ stories conform to the forms and contents of narratives provided by wider cultures. On the other hand, they need to be attentive to narrators’ creative handling of ‘dominant’ narrative forms and contents as they try to make sense of their lives in particular social contexts (see Holstein and Gubrium, 2000). Narrative researchers should, arguably, also adopt a critically reflexive attitude towards conventional modes of assessing narrative credibility, coherence and adequacy (see Gergen, 1992; Smith, 1993; Somers and Gibson, 1994; Byrne, 2003). For example, ‘marginalised’ groups and individuals (see Gergen, 1992), or individuals, who have ambiguous relationships to their subject positions (see Lawler, 1999; Byrne, 2003), may find it difficult to recite their experiences in ways that accord with established life scripts. Rather than dismiss their accounts as inadequate or incoherent, researchers should investigate the extent to which such accounts disrupt or subvert the silencing and exclusion of ‘Other’ ‘voices’ by the traditional coherence structures of self and narrative. Clearly, there are many other stories to tell than that of the singular, heroic (implicitly ‘male’) self who realises his ‘inherent’ potential through his various quests and adventures (see Gergen 1992; Smith, 1993; Somers and Gibson, 1994). By listening carefully to ‘unconventional’ accounts of self, and their particular coherence structures; narrative researchers can identify and promote alternative (and arguably more sociological) models of self (e.g. inter-subjective, multiple and open-ended accounts of self), as well as actively contribute to more democratic and inclusive traditions of self-storytelling.

Inter-subjectivity and ‘storytypes’

In addition to ‘emplotment’, narrative researchers need to be attentive to a number of other common features of self-stories such as modes of characterisation (for example the use of recognizable ‘storytypes’ such as ‘villains, heroes and fools’ (Plummer, 2001: 188), as well as the interweaving of self-stories with the stories of significant ‘others’. The use of prototypical characters, and storytypes, underlines the importance of treating self-stories as interpretive accounts, which do not offer readers unmediated access to the ‘truth’ or ‘facts’ of narrators’ experiences, relationships and so on. For example, Skeggs (2002) highlights the way in which available narratives of class mobility often require storytellers to ‘fix’ the characters of their working-class communities in stereotypical ways. Constructing members of the working-class, as recognizable ‘storytypes’, enables narrators to emphasise their social ‘movement’ away from their class of origin, as well as mark their ‘difference’ from working-class ‘Others’. Clearly researchers should be careful about treating such accounts at face-value. Instead, they need to be attentive to the way established narrative practices can reinforce the ‘Othering’ of marginalized and disempowered social groups.

Another inter-subjective aspect of storytelling involves the merging of stories of self and significant ‘others’. Individuals often weave stories, told by significant ‘others’, into their own self-narrations (see Scott and Scott, 2000), even though they might only do so in order to reject the meanings and realities posited by those stories (as Maines reminds us: ‘narrative occasions are always potential sites of conflict and competition as well as cooperation and consensus’ (1993:21)). The inter-subjective element, of self-narratives, gives us some insight into the importance of storytelling in the active construction of personal and social relationships as well as the affective ties needed to sustain them.

An awareness of the interweaving of self-stories with the fantasies, myths and recollected histories contained in ‘family stories’ (Scott and Scott, 2000), and

‘public memories’ (Plummer, 2001), also discourages a ‘realist’ interpretation of self-accounts. At the same time, if these ‘stories’ are meaningful to narrators and perhaps even acted on as ‘true’ (e.g. in the organisation of conduct, ongoing lines of activity etc.), they can be said to have been ‘internalised’ or ‘incorporated’ into the individual’s self-concept (even if only temporarily, or in specific contexts). This insight unites the interests, and investigations of narrative researchers, with the theories of self put forward by Mead (1934). The self only becomes an object to itself from the perspectives of ‘others’, both local (e.g. family members) and more abstract (e.g. ‘generalized others’ including ‘the community’ ‘the nation’ ‘humanity’). If ‘family stories’ and ‘public memories’ can also be seen to ‘call out’ particular attitudes and modes of conduct in their members, then the incorporation of these stories, into the narrator’s self-accounts, can be usefully viewed in terms of the complex processes/practices of the self-other relationship outlined by Mead.

Exploring the temporal features of narrative

The issue of temporality is also a central conceptual theme of narrative theory.¹⁰ For example, narrative researchers often point out that the stories, that individuals tell about themselves, are both contextually specific and time-bound (see in particular Holstein and Gubrium, 2000; Järvinen, 2004). Defining features of narrative such as ‘emplotment’ are, therefore, inextricably interconnected with issues of temporality. For example, personal stories are ‘emplotted’ from the viewpoint of contextually specific and time-bound ‘end-points’ (see Gergen and Gergen, 1988). Narrative responses to questions relating to the shape and substance of selfhood are, therefore, always tied to present concerns and perspectives (see Crites, 1986; Holstein and Gubrium, 2000; Järvinen, 2004).¹¹ Narratives of self are recollected out of the past

¹⁰ The discussion which follows draws upon research and ideas which are heavily indebted to Mead’s (1929, 1932) theories of time, the past and social order which I discuss in detail in Ch. 5. Because it is impossible to do justice to the subtleties and complexities of Mead’s theory, in such a short space, I use this section to merely sketch some of the key aspects of the relationship between narrative, self and temporality.

¹¹ Narrative understandings of time are, in many ways, counter-intuitive. Rather than viewing the past as fixed and unchangeable, or as inevitably determining the present (as linear, causal analyses of the relationships between events suggest), narrative researchers point out that the nature of the past is

as a means of making sense of present realities, and projecting the self into the future (see Crites, 1986; Maines, 1993, Järvinen, 2004). Individuals, therefore, ‘retrospectively reconstruct’ their pasts (Maines *et al.* 1983, Maines 2001), in order to unite what might otherwise remain their fragmented and unrelated experiences into coherent storylines (which provide a backdrop for future-directed activity).

I have already outlined the relationship between narratives and the self, and have emphasised the fact that stories allow individuals to construct the boundaries of who and what they are. What also needs to be stressed is that the relationships between narrative and self are inherently temporal:

The self-abstracted person also is an organism that has acquired temporality of the self. This means that the person not only lives in temporal orders (clocks, schedules, etc.) but is one who can use time in the construction of action. G.H.Mead (1929; see also Maines, Sugrue and Katovich, 1983) placed temporality inside of social processes, which is a position more recently popularized but not created by Ricoeur (1985), who nonetheless places temporality directly inside narrative. For Mead, time was seen as non-linear, because the person can reconstruct pasts and project futures. Time is an activity that turns back on itself through the intersecting processes of cognition (memory) and sociality (keeping collective pasts alive through language and documents). It thus seems...plausible to conceptualise persons as self-narrating organisms who, in the process of becoming self-narrators, acquire temporality (and spatial abilities) and who therefore can abstract themselves into the past and the future (Maines, 1993: 23).

Individuals make active use of their reconstructed pasts to give substance and texture to their lives, and to formulate meaningful lines of activity in the present. Indeed, selves and social realities arguably have very little intelligibility or meaning outside

also determined by the present. From this point of view, the past will acquire new substance and texture when viewed from the changing perspectives made available in the ongoing present. Narrative researchers’ emphasis on novelty, rupture and emergence in the present (see for example Crites, 1986; Järvinen 2004) also challenges the view that the present, unproblematically, follows on from, or is wholly determined by the past. Indeed, writers, such as Järvinen (2004), are keen to point out the practical value of reconstructed narratives in mitigating the disruptive or destabilizing effects of novelty in the present (see Ch.5 for further analysis).

of the narrative contexts which ascribe to them both a symbolically reconstituted past and a hypothetical future.

[A]ccounts of human action can scarcely proceed without temporal embedding. To understand is indeed to place events within a context of preceding and subsequent events. To bring the matter home, one's view of self in a given moment is fundamentally nonsensical unless it can be linked in some fashion with one's own past. Suddenly and momentarily to see oneself as "aggressive," "poetic," or "out of control," for example, would seem whimsical or mysterious. However, when aggression follows longstanding and intensifying antagonism, it is rendered sensible. In the same way, being poetic or out of control can be comprehended when placed in the context of one's personal history. It is just this point which has led a number of commentators to conclude that understanding of human action can proceed on none other than narrative grounds (MacIntyre, 1981; Mink, 1970; Gergen, 1984a) [Gergen and Gergen, 1988: 19].

The stories, that give shape and substance to the self, are often reformulated or reconstructed, over time, as individuals attempt to make sense of changes in their personal biographies, or unanticipated shifts in their behaviour or conduct. Therefore, while narratives of self are recollected out of the past, they are, nevertheless, constructed both *in* the present and *for* the present.¹² The idea that pasts, and futures, always emerge out of the particular perspectives of the present, draws attention to the ongoing and open-ended nature of the self-narration process. The stories that individuals tell about their pasts are not fixed and unchanging. Novel and unanticipated events or actions in the present often disrupt or undermine established narratives and the sense of coherence and continuity they provide. When novel events cannot be integrated into existing narratives, individuals are often required to 'emplot' new pasts in order to make sense of the changes in their lives,

¹² Once researchers recognise that narratives of self are constructed both *in* and *for* the present, they should be alerted to the influence of the narrator's current contexts, roles, identities, on the retrospective reconstruction of their personal pasts.

and re-establish a sense of coherence and continuity between their past and present (see, Järvinen, 2004).¹³

Narrative researchers, therefore, need to be aware that the stories they analyse only give insight into the ‘self-plots’ that are meaningful to a person at a particular point in the open-ended process of self-construction. The selves and personal identities, conveyed through narratives, do not represent a ‘true’ (i.e. invariable or fixed) self; although the continuities and coherences constructed through narrative often help to reinforce commonplace perceptions of the self as ‘inherently stable’ (Gergen and Gergen 1988: 36). Narrative researchers, who are aware of the temporal features of self-construction practices, should not be surprised to find that narratives of self are revised or completely reconstructed from the different ‘end-points’ perceived by the storyteller at particular times and places. Recognition of the contextual and time-bound nature of narrative self-constructions also means that researchers should also be careful not to treat multiple and shifting accounts of self as evidence of narrators’ confusion or dishonesty (see Maines, 1993). Instead, different versions of self will almost inevitably emerge out of the ongoing process of reformulating personal pasts from the novel perspectives of the present.

Changes in self and identity are accompanied by memory loss and gain, and this begins fairly early in life. That is, as we grow older, we lose previous “contents” but we acquire new ones, and Cohler [1982] argues that to some extent these transformations are developmentally-based. One thing this line of evidence suggests, therefore, is that humans will change their self-narrations (life stories) to some extent whether they want to or not. We will provide different versions of who we are and what we have done at different points of our lives, and we will be completely sincere and honest in telling each version. Inconsistency in self-narration is thus not isomorphic with lying and deception, but rather is an interpretive problematic (Maines, 1993: 23).

¹³ Envisioning selfhood and identity as temporary constructs of ongoing and open-ended processes of self-narration perhaps provides a very fruitful alternative to both the post-modern conceptualisation of self and identity as fragmented, dispersed and decentred, and psychoanalytic accounts of the self as ontologically fractured.

The influence of setting on the reconstruction of personal pasts.

Studies of the temporal aspects of narrative construction practice draw attention to the fact that narratives of self are always constructed from the perspective of the present. Recognising the contextual and time-bound nature of life-stories, researchers need to consider the way in which storytellers' perspectives are mediated, shaped or influenced by the narrative forms and contents available to them in their current contexts. Some of these narratives will be fairly specific to the immediate and local contexts occupied by narrators, whereas others will be general to the cultures and societies in which they belong. Some narratives will have been in circulation for relatively long periods of time, whereas others will have emerged much more recently, providing storytellers with novel ways of reciting the self through narrative. As Maines suggests: '[n]arratives exist at various levels of scale, ranging from the personal to the institutional to the cultural, they exist for varying lengths of time, and they inevitably change' (1993: 22). In the following section, I will consider the complex, dynamic and mutually constitutive relationships between available narratives, local interpretive/interactional contexts, and self-storytelling (see Holstein and Gubrium, 2000).

While narrators commonly strive to produce 'realist' life-history accounts, the past that is reconstructed through narrative, is always mediated by the social contexts in which self-telling takes places.

[T]he story ideally operates as a mirror to nature: the character of events drives the character of the story...[However,] what is remembered and how events are structured is vitally dependent on the social processes in which people are immersed. Memory is not so much an individual as it is a social process' (Gergen and Gergen, 1988: 20).

Narratives of self are always interpreted through the meaning frames that culture and context make available to individuals. 'Personal' narratives are, therefore,

inherently and inextricably social phenomena. Frameworks of narrative, arise out of the ongoing social process, and become key 'resources' in individuals' self-construction practices (see Holstein and Gubrium, 2000). Established cultural narratives provide individuals with interpretive devices, which are crucial for making sense of, and acting upon, their lives and social realities.

Our cultures provide models not only for the contents of what we say but also for the forms. We use these forms unwittingly; they create the means by which we interpret our lives. We know ourselves via the mediating forms of our cultures, through telling, and through listening... "Know thyself," a seemingly timeless motto, loses clarity when we [hear] that our forms of self-understanding are the creation of the unknown multitudes who have gone before us. We have become, we are becoming because "they" have set out the linguistic forestructures of intelligibility. What then does personal identity amount to? (Gergen, 1992: 128)

Narrative constructions of self must 'answer' to cultural narratives, produced and reproduced, at both 'macro' and 'micro' societal levels. However, the construction of cultural narratives into accounts of self is by no means a straightforward process as multiple and diverse social narratives simultaneously 'compete' for attention within individual accounts of self (see Holstein and Gubrium, 2000). It is also important not to overlook the issue of how established narratives are 'handled' in the interpretive process. Actors do not passively reproduce established meanings in their self-accounts; instead personal narratives are also occasions for actively supporting or self-consciously challenging the kinds of subject positions, roles, life courses and fates that 'dominant' narratives make available to us. Narrators often have the chance to select, rework and combine existing narratives in the assemblage of personally meaningful and situationally relevant stories of self (see Holstein and Gubrium, 2000). Moreover, 'established' cultural narratives are not static or rigid features of the social landscape. Indeed, as Plummer points out, researchers wishing to 'track' the historical 'fates' of particular narratives would need to: 'take on board the historical emergence of narratives, their 'tellability' in specific interactional moments, and their social impact' (2001: 186). Cultural narratives are not permanent

structures, which create or 'fix' subjects in highly predictable ways (see Maines, 2001). Variation, uncertainty and change are intrinsic to narrative structures, because they are inseparable from the open-ended, dynamic and agency-endowed activities of social collectivities.

Nevertheless, the dominant stories of the more stable forms of social organisation (e.g. nations) often serve as powerful and enduring frameworks of meaning (e.g. myths of origin and ideologies of personhood), which are very difficult for members to violate, bypass or circumvent (see Maines, 2001). In this situation, it becomes extremely difficult for members to construct narratives of self which do not 'answer', in some way, to the dominant perspective of the wider social group (cf. Mead, 1934). Researchers must not forget the central role of narratives and storytelling, in both the construction of 'order' within particular cultures, and the everyday practices of governance and surveillance deployed by members to maintain established social boundaries and relationships. Researchers can then assess the inter-penetration of public narratives and personal storytelling in particular contexts. Here, the personal is considered social, right down to the most intimate constructions of self and identity.

[N]arratives of self are not fundamentally possessions of the individual; rather they are products of social interchange – possessions of the socius...[T]he traditional concept of individual selves is fundamentally problematic. What have served as individual traits, mental processes, or personal characteristics can promisingly be viewed as constituents of relational forms (Gergen and Gergen, 1988:18).

By emphasising the historical, or time-bound nature of narratives, narrative researchers can also challenge assumptions that dominant frameworks of meaning represent universal, ahistorical truths about the self and social reality. By tracking the historical emergence of dominant stories, researchers can challenge the idea that they offer detached or neutral perspectives (or 'a view from nowhere'). It then becomes possible to expose the situatedness and partiality of dominant narratives, for example, the fact that they are often constructed from hegemonic (e.g. white,

male, middle-class) social positions and perspectives (see; Gergen, 1992; Smith, 1993; Somers and Gibson, 1994)¹⁴

While narratives exist at different levels and scales and for varying lengths of time, there is clearly no neat and tidy separating line between them. Personal and local, as well as social, cultural, and institutional narratives fold back upon, and mutually constitute one another within the ongoing social process. Moreover, narratives, however 'grand' or 'local' in scale, are never situationless constructs, they only exist in so far as they are constituted and reconstituted, by actors, in specific interactive or interpretive contexts. Nevertheless, it is useful, for explanatory purposes, to identify some of the features of both 'grand' and more situationally specific narratives. For example, narratives at the cultural, or societal level, include the 'metanarratives' or 'cultural blueprints' of gender which have a 'prefiguring effect' on both the organisation of social structures, and processes of subject formation. As Maines argues:

[W]e culturally embed women in myths such as the instinct of motherhood, thus tying their social fates to their uteruses, while refusing to speak of an instinct of fatherhood, thus associating irresponsibility and the penis, which is an association that directly contributes to variability

¹⁴ Emphasising the role of culture frameworks and dominant stories, in giving shape and structure of the self, can sometimes create the impression that narratives are oppressive structures which bear down upon individuals and limit their ability to imagine alternate social realities and subjective modes of being. However, it is important for narrative researchers to remember that individuals are not merely constrained by, or forced to 'resist' narrative structures and conventions. Instead, researchers should always keep in mind the 'constructive' dimensions of narrative and storytelling. Narrative self-constructions, it should be remembered, support a wide variety of interpretive and social activities, such as 'giving voice' to issues that are personally significant and meaningful to individuals.

To tell the story of a life may be at the heart of our cultures: connecting the inner world to the outer world, speaking to the subjective and the objective, establishing boundaries of identities (of who one is and who one is not); crossing 'brute being' – embodied and emotional – with 'knowing self' – rational and irrational; making links across life phases and cohort generations; revealing historical shifts in a culture; establishing collective memories and imagined communities; telling of the concerns of their time and place. Often the call to stories is a moral call (Coles, 1989; Plummer, 2000). In short, life-stories can bridge cultural history with personal biography. What matters to people keeps getting told in the stories of their life (Plummer, 2001:242).

in men's social fates. The cultural, interpersonal, and political economic rendering of gender is thus powerful in social structural terms, but it is also powerful in rendering us as persons (Maines, 2001: 175).

Gender narratives configure differences between men and women as fundamental and irreducible. As such, they construct contrasting subjectivities, identities and roles for men and women. Narrative renditions of gendered social reality 'forecast' different life courses and futures for men and women. The powerful 'prefiguring effect' of gender narratives means that individuals must actively engage with the meanings and expectations they construct, regardless of whether they abide by, or live up to them. The fact that gender narratives 'prepackage' personhood, and 'prefigure' the life course, means that: 'we can never leave our genders behind us and act in a genderless manner...[Rather,] our genders lie ahead of us awaiting our conduct' (Maines, 2001: 174).

As well as reinforcing differences and inequalities between men and women, the 'dominant stories' (Maines, 2001) of societies and cultures can also suppress or silence the life-stories of cultural 'Others' (including women). For example 'dominant stories' of the West include culturally specific ideologies and mythologies of personhood such as the notion of the individuated, autonomous, and unified self (see Smith, 1993). These 'dominant' stories have become deeply embedded within western culture. Plots provided by these dominant stories, for example heroic stories of self-actualisation (Smith, 1993), and 'conversion plots' (Järvinen, 2004) have become prototypical or paradigmatic ways of narratively constructing selfhood within Western culture. However, while dominant mythologies construct the Western self as the 'universal human subject', more and more critical voices are exposing the specificity and situatedness of the subject of prototypical life-story narratives (Gergen 1992; Smith, 1993). Dominant stories of self, they argue, make recognizable and legitimate the life-stories of White, male, bourgeois subjects. People, with different histories from the 'universal human subject', find it difficult to recite the self in terms of the discursive plots and frameworks that 'His' story makes available (Smith, 1993). The classed, gendered and raced experiences, histories and

identities of 'Others' are either suppressed, or rendered problematic, as a result of the cultural dominance of 'male' life-story accounts (Gergen 1992; Smith, 1993).¹⁵

In contrast to cultural metanarratives, localised narratives, as their name suggests, exist at a less grand scale and are tied much more closely to particular times and places. Examples of these narratives include homosexual 'coming-out' stories (see Plummer, 1995) or the 'drunkalogues' used to story the alcoholic self in Alcoholics Anonymous meetings (see Holstein and Gubrium, 2000). In the course of their organisation and development, social groups construct ever more formulaic 'scripts' or 'narrative templates' which provide members with a clear set of procedures, themes, and vocabularies for constructing the self. By incorporating established life-story scripts into their personal narratives, individuals are able to convey self-identities that are accepted by, and often shared with, other members of the social group. However, as Holstein and Gubrium (2000) point out, there is still considerable 'narrative play' in the reconstruction of formulaic life-story scripts such as AA 'drunkalogues'. As they put it:

If the discourse of the alcoholic self is pervasive in AA meetings, providing a shared and recognizable template for locally centering experience, it nonetheless enters into narrative practice as a variable form of life. This discourse-in-practice shifts about in discursive practice, as those concerned enter into the local narrativity of surveillance, which in talk and interaction conveys their identity as alcoholics. The resulting storytelling constructs as much difference as sameness in who and what they were and now becoming (2000:123).

Established narratives and conventions of narrative adequacy and credibility, undoubtedly, impact upon the personal narratives constructed by storytellers. The availability of narratives to different groups and individuals, and the local context of storytelling, also affects the construction and reception of self-stories. At the same time, it is important to keep in mind the active agency of storytellers, for example by exploring the way narrators creatively handle available narratives in order to

¹⁵ I discuss the impact of gender narratives and dominant stories on the 'tellability' of women's personal narratives in more detail below.

construct diversity and difference into their self-accounts (Holstein and Gubrium, 2000). From this perspective, dominant narratives are not fixed, for all time, but can change in response to the persuasiveness of ‘novel’, creative, or subversive accounts of self.¹⁶

The ‘tellability’ of narratives

The issue of narrative ‘tellability’ (Plummer, 2001) focuses researchers’ attention more closely onto the way cultural contexts, and narrative conventions, influence both storytelling practice and the reception of stories by various audiences.

Reflections upon the theme of narrative ‘tellability’ should encourage researchers to adopt a more critical approach towards narrative conventions; that is, by situating them squarely within the social, historical, and cultural contexts within which they arise. This, in turn, should influence the way narrative researchers analyse and assess personal narratives. For example, researchers need to be careful that they do not uncritically reinforce established ‘order[s] of discourse’ (Gergen 1992: 129) through their assessments of narrative adequacy and intelligibility.

Established conventions of storytelling, Gergen and Gergen argue, play a crucial role in shaping the kinds of ‘truths’ (about experience, ‘the life’, and the self) that can be credibly and intelligibly conveyed through narratives.

[A]n explication of the rules or elements of proper storytelling establish the criteria for what we take to be truthful accounts. As we understand the restrictions on how we tell stories about ourselves, we confront the limits of potential for “truth telling.” If we do not wish to become unintelligible, we cannot tell stories that break the rules of proper narrative. To go beyond the rule is to engage in tales told by idiots. Thus rather than being driven by facts, we find that truth telling in this instance is largely governed by a forestructure of conventions for narrative construction (1988: 20).

¹⁶ Dominant narratives can also change in response to the exigencies of ‘unanticipated’ events and circumstances, although that is another story (see Ch. 5)

And yet the established conventions of narrative are not universal, timeless or situationless. According to Gergen (1992), the rules of proper narrative derive, at least to some extent, from the life-stories of White, male, bourgeois, heterosexual men. Nevertheless, the forms and contents of 'His' story have become the 'absolute' or 'definitive' standards, against which all other narratives are judged. Indeed, narrative researchers, often, unwittingly, use the conventions of dominant 'male' narratives in order to determine what counts as 'narrative'. Locating the 'rules' of narrative construction, in the context of the historical emergence and dominance of 'male' life-story accounts, Gergen (1992) challenges their uncritical usage in definitions and assessments of 'proper narrative'.

When we began our work on the traditional narrative, Kenneth Gergen and I described it as being composed of a valued end point; events relevant to this end point; the temporal ordering of these events toward the endpoint; the causal linkages between events...Now I become uneasy. I wonder why this definition must be as it is. Doesn't a definition defend an order of discourse, an order of life? Whose lives are advantaged by this form and whose disadvantaged? Should we ask? (1992, 129)

For Gergen, as for other feminist writers (e.g. Smith, 1993), traditional western forms of self-narrative belong to an androcentric order. As a result, Western forms of self-narrative are not equally available to all narrators, nor can everyone recite their experiences in terms of the rules and conventions of proper narrative. According to these authors, differential gendered expectations, regarding the appropriateness of roles, identities and forms of conduct, disqualify women from constructing 'traditional' life-story narratives. Traditional narratives, such as stories of dramatic heroism, adventure and self-actualisation, live up to the rules of 'proper narrative' by emphasising the protagonist's single-minded, unwavering commitment toward the achievement of a pre-established goal state. According to Gergen, gendered cultural expectations and imperatives mean that men can construct accountable narratives of their identities, roles, modes of conduct and goals, which would be deemed unacceptable or improper if the protagonist were female. Gergen

draws upon several contemporary American autobiographies to construct her case. Here is one example:

Yeager is the autobiography of the quintessential American hero, the man with the “right stuff.” His story is intensively focused on his career as a pilot in the air force. He was the father of four children born in quick succession, and his wife became gravely ill during her last pregnancy. Nothing, however, stopped him from flying. Constantly moving around the globe, always seeking the most dangerous missions, he openly states: “Whenever Glennis needed me over the years, I was usually off in the wild blue yonder” (Chuck Yeager and Leo James, 103). America’s favourite hero would be considered an abusive parent were his story regendered (1992:134).

Effectively disqualified from telling heroic ‘manstories’, women, Gergen argues, are encouraged to tell stories ‘relevant’ to their gender – stories of love, work, family, emotional inter-dependency, and personal commitments (Gergen, 1992). Women’s stories weave the ‘public’ and ‘private’ dimensions of their lives into complex and messy webs that do not easily fit the mould of traditional narrative forms. However, precisely because women’s narratives diverge from conventional rules of proper narrative, they are often deemed unsatisfactory or unintelligible. According to Gergen: women’s narratives are: ‘more fragmentary, multidimensional, and temporally disjunctive. “Insignificant” has been the predominant critical judgement toward women’s autobiographies (and their lives)’ (Gergen, 1992:132).

Gergen’s argument is not without its problems. For example, although Gergen implies that gender is a product of long established ideologies, myths and representations, her somewhat polarised view of gendered storytelling sometimes slips between the recognition of the gendered cultural expectations, that women must confront in their lives, and self-narratives (i.e. that they *should* be ‘other-directed’ and *should* put family life before ‘public’ aspirations), and more entrenched, unchangeable or profound notions of gender difference (i.e. that women tell their stories in a certain way because they essentially *are* more ‘other-directed’,

‘relational’ and so on). In this way, Gergen falls into the trap of producing an overly rigid, deterministic view of gender differences, which seems to hold out less hope for the possibility of dramatically transforming gendered social relations.

Gergen also produces an overly determined view of the impact of gender scripts by arguing that men and women are forced to live out gender stereotypes, both in life and in their narrative productions. As she puts it:

[E]ach gender acquires for personal use a repertoire of potential life stories relevant to their own gender. Understanding one’s past, interpreting one’s actions, evaluating future possibilities – each is filtered through these stories. Events “make sense” as they are placed in the correct story form. If certain story forms are absent, events cannot take on the same meaning (1992: 133)

Here Gergen seems to overlook women’s agentic attempts to subvert gender ‘imperatives’. This aspect of her work ignores the way in which individuals can reflexively acquire new story repertoires which lead to the ‘symbolic reconstruction’ of personal and social pasts, as well as current activities and future possibilities. For example, women can construct explicitly feminist ‘story forms’ into personal memory as a result of their participation in consciousness-raising groups (Stanley 1993; Jackson, 1998). Moreover, Gergen’s singular focus on gender – ‘the forms we use to tell a manstory, a womanstory’ (1992: 133) - does not sit well with the important body of feminist work, which criticises ‘universalising’ and ‘essentialising’ forms of feminist theory for ignoring important differences and inequalities, in the experiences of women, from different historic periods, cultures, classes, ethnic backgrounds and so on. Women (and men) are positioned in multiple social, and cultural contexts (not just contexts of gender), and these settings provide them with very different kinds of story repertoires (some of which may be more relational, others of which may be more individualistic). Whilst the construction and reception of personal narratives may always be influenced by women’s gender status, the kinds of stories women construct will inevitably display narrative features specific and peculiar to their cultural locations. As a result, we should anticipate a

great deal of difference and diversity in both women's and men's narrative constructions.

Despite these limitations, Gergen's (1992) research on men's and women's autobiographies, in contemporary America, offers some useful starting points for thinking critically about the way people story their lives from different social locations. For example, Gergen refuses to subscribe to the deficit model of women's narratives and is interested in the way women's stories disrupt androcentric story lines. Gergen also argues that the 'womanstory' offers a model for self-telling, which better reflects the inherent relationality, complexity, and indeterminacy of social experience and selfhood. The female autobiographers, she argues, constructed more nuanced and complex stories than their male counterparts. They narrated their stories from multiple perspectives, highlighting their embeddedness in a variety of relationships. Their narratives contained numerous intertwining story threads, and departed from conventional narrative structures, such as linearity and the establishment of resolute end points. Comparing the 'menstories' and 'womanstories' she reviewed, Gergen argues that:

Men, perhaps even more than women, needed new story lines, lines that were more multiplex, relational and "messy. Both [men and women] seemed imprisoned by their stories; both bound to separate pieces of the world, which if somehow put together would create new possibilities – one's in which each could share the other's dreams. But how can we escape our story lines, our prisons made of words? (1992:141)

By taking up Gergen's call to validate 'alternative' or 'non-traditional' story forms and overturn accepted wisdom about 'proper' stories, narrative researchers can arguably challenge many of the strictures placed on story telling. In doing so, researchers can promote new narrative repertoires, and more importantly, new stories for individuals to 'live by'.

In altering the images and narrative structures through which we compose the story of our lives, we may hope to alter the very

experiences of those lives as well (Annette Kolodny, 1980:258, quoted in Gergen 1992:141).

Multiplicity in narrative self-constructions: A new framework for the study of 'hyphenated' or 'fractured' identities

In the following sections, I assess the relevance of narrative-interactionist perspectives for the study of complex, multiple or fractured identities. This issue is increasingly being recognised as important in studies of class mobility and identity, which often throw into stark relief the multiplication, fragmentation or fracturing of identity, associated with transitions across class boundaries (see Reay 1997, Mahoney and Zmroczek (eds) 1997, Lawler, 1999). Narrative-interactionist perspectives, arguably, have much to offer to contemporary sociological debates about multiple identities. Issues of multiplicity in selfhood are often treated as problematical for sociological inquiry. Fragmented, fractured or multiple identities, are viewed by some post-structuralist/ post-modernists, as further evidence that the human subject is something of an 'epistemological disaster' (Plummer, 2001: 5). Others seem to think that non-sociological analytical frameworks, such as psychoanalysis, are required to explain them. Issues of multiplicity in selfhood, and fractured or ambivalent identities, also complicate traditional sociological assumption about identity, for example, that identity resides in people's stable or fixed identifications with rigid social categories, such as class, gender, race and so on. How are researchers' to make sense of people's social identities, if they refuse to identify with or 'internalise' categories linked to their social positioning? How meaningful are self-conscious identities, if they are so inconsistent, contradictory and unstable? Are people's self-conscious identities too fleeting and ephemeral to be suitable phenomena of systematic sociological investigation?

In stark contrast to these perspectives, narrative-interactionism redefines multiplicity in selfhood as a fundamentally *sociological* problematic. For example, by envisioning the self as processual (i.e. continually constructed and reconstructed in

time and place) narrative-interactionist perspectives treat variation, change and uncertainty, within the self, as inevitable or inescapable consequences of its ongoing social production. Moreover, by recognising the inherently perspectival nature of self, narrative-interactionist perspectives acknowledge that there will always be different sides to the self. However, these different sides to the self are not seen to represent the fragmented or decentred post-modern subject; nor do they distinguish the conscious and unconscious dimensions of self. Instead, they correspond to the social embeddedness of the self, in particular its multiple and variegated relationships to the 'structure of the social process as a whole' (Mead, 1934: 144). Crucially, narrative perspectives also give insight into actors' reflexive or self-conscious attempts to synthesise or reconcile different sides of the self, for example, as a means of constructing coherent self-concepts, or to develop more critical and challenging understandings about selves and social realities. Narrative-interactionist perspectives, therefore, offer a sophisticated theoretical framework for exploring both the complex social processes, which shape the self, and actors' self-conscious and creative attempts to make sense of who they are and where they fit within the wider social scheme.

It is my view that a Meadean/interactionist narrative methodology offers a robust analytical alternative to those narrative social scientific approaches, which posit psychoanalytic processes as the key to understanding how complex relationships between the self and the social are mediated (e.g. Walkerdine *et al.*, 2001, 2002; Hollway and Jefferson, 2000, 2001). From a narrative-interactionist perspective, it is not necessary to have recourse to the ontologically fractured self, posited by psychoanalysis, in order to account for the 'multiplicity' of selfhood often evident in personal accounts. Instead, the multiple selves, in evidence within personal narratives, can be seen to correspond to the multiple social groups that individuals occupy, each of which present their own 'generalized others' (Mead, 1934) or 'social logics' of self (Hey, 2005). Contradictions, tensions and ambivalences, within self narratives, are, therefore explicable in terms of the contradictions and tensions, which enter into the experience of the individual as they move between

diverse social contexts, which call forth different and often competing forms of selfhood (depending on the particular subject positions individuals take up in each of those various social settings).

Narrators often attempt to combine, synthesise and adjudicate the different perspectives, offered from multiple subject positions; and this 'dialogical' or 'reflexive' process often gives rise to 'narrative innovation' (Holstein and Gubrium, 2000) , as well as 'novel' meanings about the self and the social world. Whilst attempts to integrate different experiences, identities and identifications, into coherent narratives, can become sources of tension within the self, they can also prompt critical reflection and novel perspectives on the social world and one's place within it. These reflections can, in turn, become the basis for the construction of a self-consciously reflexive self, which places a high value on its alertness to the dangers of 'sleepwalking' into the taken-for-granted, uncritical modes of knowing and being of the social setting in which it principally resides. Kim Clancey (1997), an academic from a working-class background, celebrates this multi-perspectival, reflexive self, when she comments upon the advantages (as well as the pain) of self-consciously locating herself on the 'edges' of her different class-cultural environments.

So where do I locate myself if I want to both celebrate a connection with my roots, and yet feel creatively alive – if not completely comfortable – in a different cultural environment? Where else but on the edges of these interconnecting worlds? As hooks (1994) has argued, the discomfort of being located 'in the margins' is ultimately worthwhile. Experiencing two worlds, but fully belonging in neither, can bring the pain of displacement and alienation. But the exile can become the outlaw: exploding the myths which accumulate around all social and cultural identities, myths which limit and constrain all women, whatever their class. (1997: 51-52).

The construction of narrative coherence, clarity and harmony is, however, not always achievable. Multiple biographical constructions created, from different subject positions, cannot always be organized into a clear narrative, and attempts to

synthesise these multiple constructions into coherent ‘whole’ might be deemed inadequate by audiences (see Järvinen, 2004).¹⁷ .

From a narrative-interactionist perspective, it is possible to investigate the complex relationships between the self and its social contexts, without having to resort to the notion of ‘unconscious processes’, which are seen to mediate interactions between ‘inner’ and ‘outer’ worlds. The idea of ‘unconscious processes’, that evade capture by the regulatory forces of society, has been used to explain why individuals do not always conform to societal norms or behave as automatons, either in their actions or in their narrative explanations. However, as sociologists, we do not necessarily need to resort to psychoanalytic theories and understandings in order to explain the fact that people rarely respond to their social situations as ‘cultural dopes’. Narrators do not simply reproduce societal norms and traditions within their self construction practices but, instead, display creative agency in the production of their self-stories and ongoing lines of activity (see Holstein and Gubrium, 2000). The idea that personal narratives are not determined, or ‘fixed’ by dominant social structures and discourses, owes a great debt to Mead’s innovative conception of the self. Järvinen (2004) makes this clear in her research on the relevance of Mead’s theories for narrative researchers.

Mead’s conception of the self, drawing *social* meaning out of experience and life and narrative is certainly not a structuralist approach either.

With his focus on emergence and unpredictability, Mead emphasizes the

¹⁷ Writers, with self-consciously ‘hyphenated’, ‘fractured’ or ‘multiple’ class, gender, ‘race’ identities construct their auto/biographies around what they see as the sometimes irresolvable ambivalences, ambiguities and tensions they experience, within the self, as a result of their complex and competing identifications with different (and often unequal) social ‘groups’ (e.g. Pratt, 1984; Ang-Lygate, 1996; Reay, 1997). Such narratives, arguably, fall short when assessed against the traditional criteria of narrative coherence. However, this traditional criteria, based as it is on notions of a singular, autonomous or ‘true’ self, whose life unfolds in a linear, progressive and seemingly inevitable way, arguably needs to give way to a more genuinely social conceptualisation of the self, such as Mead’s theoretical scheme (see Järvinen, 2004). The idea of narrative ‘coherence’, arguably takes on new meanings, when understood in terms of Mead’s notions of a social self, ‘organized with reference to the community [or communities] to which the self belongs, and to the situation in which it finds itself’ (Järvinen, 2004: 65). ‘Narratives’ which convey ‘fractured’ or ‘hyphenated’ identities, arguably acquire new resonance, coherence and credibility, when assessed from the point of view of Mead’s theories of the self and social world.

role of the personal self in shaping its social environment and destiny. The self is always creative in constructing its future and past, and this creativity arises out of the individual's ongoing projects. Therefore, meaning is always dependent on what action is taken in the present, and not solely on the self's reconstructions of its past from the perspective of the community (2004: 65).

A narrative-interactionist perspective enables us to see how individuals avoid social 'fixing' by reflexively deploying the multiple perspective and understandings they have access to in order to (re)construct a meaningful, coherent and purposive sense of self. (Järvinen, 2004). As I previously mentioned, individuals may not always be able to synthesise their different experiences, perspectives and understandings into a coherent self-story or identity. Furthermore, in their day-to-day experience, actors will constantly construct, reconstruct and recast their identities (however subtly) in response to the concrete exigencies of particular contexts, as well as the kinds of selves called forth or 'hailed' within different local settings (Holstein and Gubrium, 2000). However, even in the more prescriptive of settings, individuals can express creativity, agency and discretion in their self-construction practices. For example as Holstein and Gubrium argue:

[W]hile organizational settings provide accountable modes of interpretation, we must emphasize that settings do not determine how selves are constructed. Local cultures or formal organizations supply resources for interpretation, not injunctions or absolute directives. Selves constructed in a particular site or organization may take on the general qualities that the setting or organization promotes, but practitioners of everyday life are not "cultural or organizational dopes," mere extensions of organizational thinking (Douglas 1986). They exercise interpretive discretion, mediated by the complex combinations of meaning that competing professional and institutional affiliations might offer (e.g. such as differences in points of view between hospital nurses and social workers as they interpret and apply organizationally preferred discourses). Locally prevailing discourses of self thus emerge as continuing adaptations of discourses-in-practice...[W]e must [also] keep in mind that self construction is a complex process that responds to multiple "layers" of interpretive constraint and narrative resources. While discursive practice is always local, those contingencies that are brought to bear at any particular place and time coalesce from a vast array of possibilities, including those taken from broader cultural

understandings such as might be drawn from race, gender, class, and myriad other configurations of meaning. This, of course, invites narrative slippage and innovation, as stories are locally crafted from a variegated range of standpoints and resources (2000:167).

Approaches to multiplicity of selfhood in the established literature on narratives

The multiple forms of selfhood, expressed within personal narratives, have been explained by Gergen and Gergen (1988: 35) in terms of ‘the variegated demands placed upon the individual by the social environment’. As people come into contact with the situated conventions of cultures and subcultures, multiple perspectives and related narrative forms are made available to them. As a result, people are capable of ‘storying’ their lives in relation to different and sometimes clashing narrative frameworks and often construct ‘nested narratives’ (independent accounts contained within broader personal ‘metanarratives’) that give expression to multiple and sometimes conflicting forms of self-understanding (see Gergen and Gergen, 1988). According to Ortega y Gasset, “the plurality of beliefs on which an individual, or people, or an age is grounded never possesses a completely logical articulation” (1941: 166, quoted in Gergen and Gergen, 1988: 32). Similarly, Polkinghorne (1988) argues that contradictions in the self-concept mirror the complex and often contradictory social relationships that we are caught up in, over the course of our lives.

The self concept is synthesised out of a myriad interactions across the life span and at any given time its contents of internalized roles, statuses, norms and values are bound to be contradictory and mutually exclusive (1988: 150).

At the same time, Gergen and Gergen (1988) argue that narrators are often called to account for the contradictions and vacillations evident in their accounts. It seems that the desire for consistency, in accounts of self, is a culturally pervasive one with coherent accounts offering a means of communicating that an integrated, ‘true’ or stable self is possessed.

Nevertheless, the notion of a ‘ “found”, “crystallized” or “realized” sense of self’ (Gergen and Gergen, 1988: 36) is robustly challenged from theoretical standpoints, which regard the self as an ongoing, open ended narrative construction (a standpoint developed from the writings of early 20th century social philosophers and psychologists, such as William James and Mead, amongst others)¹⁸. From this perspective, a relatively coherent self-concept may be constructed within the self-narrative, although this narrated-self is always open to revision as the individual adjusts herself to the novel realities that ‘emerge’ in the course of her social activities (Crites 1986, Järvinen, 2004). As Polkinghorne puts it:

[W]e achieve our personal identities and self concept through the use of narrative configuration, and make our existence into a whole by understanding it as an expression of a single unfolding and developing story. We are in the middle of our stories and cannot be sure how they will end; we are constantly having to revise the plot as new events are added to our lives. Self, then, is not a static thing nor a substance, but a configuring of personal events into a historical unity which includes not only what one has been but also anticipations of what one will be (1988:148).

¹⁸ The idea of the self as a narrative construction rejects the Cartesian notion of the self as a unique mental substance (see Polkinghorne 1988), and more recent understandings of the self as an ‘achieved condition’, that is to say the realisation of a ‘true’ self which becomes a perduring state of mind (see Gergen and Gergen, 1988). Whilst narrative analysts posit an evolving self and recognise that ‘the self concept may be vague and disintegrated at times’ (Polkinghorne, 1988: 150), they do not go as far as many post-structuralist writers in positing a fragmented self at the mercy of the ebb and flow of discourse. This is because the ability of the self to reflect back on itself (including its past actions) enables individuals to integrate and synthesise episodes, actions and events spanning various periods of time. Individuals are, therefore, able to appropriate aspects of their past experience, in order to develop self-understandings that transcend a particular moment and which may influence future activity. Consistency of action is by no means guaranteed by this process, something Mead (1929, 1932, 1934) refers to in his notion that novel and unexpected events and actions are common features of human activity. Nevertheless, self-narratives enable individuals to *communicate* to themselves and to others the *sense* of a relatively stable, coherent and reliable self and this interactive, co-construction of personal selfhood, arguably encourages some degree of consistency in belief and action (Gergen and Gergen, 1988). At the very least, interactively produced narrative constructions of a ‘stable’ self require agents to adequately account for breaches in anticipated conduct (Scott and Lyman, 1968). Narratives enable individuals to generate causal relations between events spanning long periods of time and permit them to get some kind of a deliberate handle on their lives by enabling them to draw together our disparate experiences into a meaningful and often value laden ‘historical unity’ (Polkinghorne, 1988). This is a very different notion to the decentred self of post-structuralism; a self which is constantly shaped, and re-shaped, by fragmented and indeterminate discourses and experiences, and which is unable to maintain any kind of unity of personal identity (see Holstein and Gubrium, 2000).

Other authors have also noted that the selves storied into being, within personal narratives, are culturally, historically and temporally specific. Researchers should, therefore, anticipate multiplicity, diversity and variability in forms of self-accounting as differentially situated individuals construct their self-accounts from particular social, cultural and temporal locations. For example Scheibe (1986) writes that:

Human identities are considered to be evolving constructions; they emerge out of continued social interactions in the course of life. Self-narratives are developed stories that must be told in specific historical terms, using a particular language, reference to a particular stock of working historical conventions and a particular pattern of dominant beliefs and values. The most fundamental narrative forms are universal, but the way these forms are styled and filled with content will depend upon particular historical conventions of time and place (1986:162, quoted in Polkinghorne, 1988:106)

From this perspective, the types of 'narrative resources' (e.g. themes, plot-lines, categories and institutional discourses), deployed by individuals, to construct a unified sense of selfhood out of their personal recollections will vary according to time, place and social context (see Holstein and Gubrium, 2000). As such, the particular constellation of narrative resources, available to individuals, will be shaped by their positioning within a range of social institutions, groups, networks and settings (however concrete or abstract). This raises important questions about the limits of the transformative potential of critical agency and reflexivity, since individuals have access to a delimited range of narrative and discursive resources. Individuals creatively combine and reconstruct existing narrative resources in order to challenge dominant structures of narrative and discourse and generate new epistemological frameworks for self (and social) understanding. However, at any particular point in time and space, individuals must work with a restricted range of knowledge 'materials', and this, arguably, sets limits on the novel understandings and transformations that can emerge out of reflexive practice (see Crossley, 2001).

Intersections between debates on class and research on multiplicity in narrative

Narrative investigations (especially those which emphasise the multiplicity of biographical constructions and the pleasures and pains of trying to reconcile these diverse constructions into coherent ‘wholes’) can, in fact, be seen as a very useful means of investigating the related themes of class ambivalence and ‘fractured’ class identities (for debates on class ambivalence see Savage *et al.*, 2001 and Payne and Grew, 2005, for a study of fractured class identities see Lawler, 1999). It is my view that contemporary sociological debates around the themes of class and personal identity can be clarified and enhanced by reframing them within a narrative investigation of self and personal identity (as the initial writings on this subject by Lawler (1999) and Byrne (2003) so promisingly show).

A narrative study of self and personal identity is particularly useful for investigating the personal significance of class for those women, who once occupied a working-class position, but who now occupy (however tenuously) middle-class or ‘professional’ positions (see Lawler, 1999). This is because narrative studies understand the self to be re-collected out of the past, from the point of view of the present, and with any eye to the future. One of the major features of narrative self construction is the way in which the storyteller appropriates his or her past experiences to make sense of novelty and emergence in the present (see Mead, 1929, 1932; Maines et al. 1983; Crites, 1986; Maines, 2001; Järvinen, 2004). By reconstructing a past that can be seen to explain how present circumstances have arisen out of, or have their roots in prior events or experiences, the narrator is able to re-establish sense of continuity, causality and order within the life course. Given the important role of the narrative reconstruction of the past, as a means of ‘repairing’ breaches or disturbances created by novel experiences, it is perhaps not surprising that personal narratives of early class experiences take on a particular significance for women, who have experienced shifts in their class positioning. Reflecting on the fundamental and inextricable inter-relationships between selfhood, story and the recollected past, Crites argues that:

[T]his recollected sense of my personal story has an immense psychological importance. My personal identity, without which I do not know who I am, is at stake in this formative application of narrative art, and the more complete the story the more integrated the self. The poignant search for roots that is such a prominent feature of our rootless age testifies to the acute unease a human being can feel without a coherent story of a personal past...Whether the way is rough or smooth...being a self entails having a story. Self-knowledge, like all other knowledge, is recollection, an ancient wisdom testified. Other things, however, can exist without being known, while it is the uniquely self-reflexive paradox of the self that it comes into existence to the extent that it can be re-collected out of the past...(Crites, 1986: 162-163)

Narrative studies, which emphasise the importance of our pasts, in giving clarity, substance and meaning and to our present selves, help to explain why working-class 'roots' seem to be so psychologically important to women, who have experienced upward class mobility. Diane Reay for example emphasises the enduring significance of her working-class 'roots', despite her detachment from her class of origin, and highlights the challenges of reconciling these attachments with her current experiences and positioning.

We [academics, who were once working-class] have to live with the paradox that a defining part of our identity is turning into a chimera; our 'working-classness' is a fantasy that often we alone are still engaging in. My own experience of growing up working-class has left vivid memories of the heritage and history of my social origins imprinted on my consciousness. However, that consciousness, rooted in working-class affiliation, appears increasingly to be a misfit; a sense of self both out of place and out of time (1997: 24).

The 'misfit' sense of self as 'working-class affiliated' described by Reay is clearly an outcome of the narrative reconstruction of her 'working-class' past from the perspective of her 'middle-class' present. Reay insists that her continued identification with working-classness is a product of 'fantasy' rather than a product of social ascription (she is conscious that she is no longer recognised as 'working-class'). However, the process of self-consciously 'weaving' her early experiences of class with her current awareness of class inequality and prejudice means that

issues linked to class and 'working-classness' continue to resonate for Reay at a deeply personal or subjective level. The result of this is that straightforward, uncritical and unproblematic identification with her current middle-class community becomes impossible.

[T]he psychic refusal of becoming middle-class ...is no longer an issue of not making a good enough job of passing because the process of completing three degrees has ensured that I do. Rather, it is the sense of treachery and accident to institutionalized and socially endemic inequalities the middle-class label holds that I continue to struggle with, while needing to recognise that I am now seen as middle-class (1997: 25).

Reay is, however, acutely conscious that her reconstructions of her class past are not direct or unmediated representations of a 'real' past. While her engagements, with middle-class culture, are shaped by her continued solidarity and allegiance to working-class struggles; Reay also recognises that her proud identifications with working-class culture have in fact been 'steered' by heroic male 'fantasies' of working-class culture.

My father was an outsider; a cockney who married into a coal-mining family and never really belonged in spite of becoming a miner himself. In place of acceptance my father constructed his own community, his own iconography of working-class solidarity, a *weltanschauung* of them and us, the workers versus the noses and their lackeys; a half-true construction in which only he stood strong refusing co-option, always arguing, disagreeing with management, refusing promotion. Out of this curious, confusing concoction of not being good enough while simultaneously being better came his children's drive for credentialism. We worked so hard at school not primarily to be acceptable to the middle classes, who were always the enemy, but to redeem our parents, to prove our family was 'just as good'. And yet when I see any documentary about miners I am overwhelmed, suffused with powerful feelings of belonging, along with a sense of outrage about their treatment. The irony is now there is no real community of coal-miners, however internally divided, to belong to. There is a further irony for me as a feminist academic in that I can see his hand guiding my conceptions of community. It is all his version and very little of my mother's. In spite of my aim of painting an ambivalent, tentative picture highlighting complexities of interpretation and motivation, he is the hero of my

fantasy of community; this man who never really belonged to the community he valorized (1997: 22).

By highlighting the problematic, and uncertain, nature of her class identifications and positioning, Reay seems to question the possibility of reconciling her complex class 'fantasies' and multiple biographical constructions into a coherent class identity. However, her auto/biographical account, arguably, succeeds in synthesising her class history, her current class position and her ongoing professional and personal activities into a *relatively* coherent, communicable and meaningful personal class identity. By constructing a 'working-class affiliated self', which tries to avoid the traps of nostalgic retrospective reconstruction, Reay is able to forge a class self, that draws both strength and critical insight from its working-class history and personal experience of class injustice. On the other hand, by reconstructing her successful transformation into a middle-class professional self, Reay is able to become reflexively self-conscious about her current privilege and power, and the extent to which she is caught up in the reproduction of class inequality. Through her narrative, Reay constructs a personal class identity, as someone who continues to identify with working-class culture and experiences of oppression. Nevertheless, she simultaneously constructs herself as someone who is inextricably caught up in middle-class culture and practices. Reay tries to reconcile the multiple and conflicting class subject positions, she has occupied over time, by adopting a critically reflexive approach to 'doing' middle-classness within the academy.

Only though work which centres class injustice, as well as the injustices of 'race' and gender, can we keep at bay 'the alienation of advantage' (Hennessy, 1993). However, therein lies the double-bind. We know that taken-for-granted superiority is a sham but we learn this just as we are growing into a sense of our own importance. The struggle is to continue questioning academic culture while acknowledging the extent to which we are caught up in them (1997:23).

As I explained in the discussion of temporality in narrative, narratives of the self are always constructed from the 'perspective of the present', with each 'new' present

requiring a 'new' recollected past (see Järvinen, 2004). The construction of 'new' histories, which are relative to the present, helps to bridge the breaches or disturbances caused by 'novel' or 'emergent' events. Women, who have moved from a working-class to a middle-class environment and who have taken up new subject positions within middle-class worlds, often talk about the feelings of dissonance, displacement fracturing and fragmentation, which accompany such a move (see Mahoney and Zmroczek (eds) 1997). Life-narrative and auto/biographies arguably offer a powerful means for such women to restore a sense of coherence, continuity and meaning to their sense of self and their life course, something which has not gone unrecognised by writers such as Reay.

I realize that my own centring of class I am part of a continuing project of reconciling what I have become with what I was, while simultaneously trying to carve out a self that I can feel at ease with (1997: 27).

Nevertheless, we should still anticipate a great deal of difference and diversity in the construction of life-narratives, amongst upwardly mobile working-class women. Lawler (1999), for example, argues that her upwardly mobile research participants mitigated the experience of class fragmentation and fracturing by constructing narratives in which they defined themselves as 'always-already middle-class' (1999: 9). According to Lawler, her interviewees tried to reproduce traditional conventions of narratives, 'in which the self remains the same entity from birth to death and later events are a culmination of earlier ones' (1999: 3). However, the women's 'confessions' of the feelings of pain, displacement and alienation, which accompanied their class movement undermined their attempts to reproduce 'subjectivist' life-histories, in which 'life is a straightforward and lonesome affair, advancing from the individual's prerequisites towards the fulfilment of his/her goals' (Järvinen, 2004: 65).

There were moments at which this narrative [of self-actualization] failed, at which the smooth trajectory of a move from working to middle-class

was disrupted, and at which the 'working-class self' exceeded its containment within this narrative structure' (Lawler, 1999: 10).

Byrne (2003), on the other hand, uses the case study of Sally to highlight how a prototypical 'conversion' plot - 'telling how we became who we are by leaving behind what we were (Rosenwald & Ochberg, 1992, p.12)' [quoted in Järvinen, 2004: 54] - is deployed in order to account for what the narrator sees as her dramatic class transformation.

Both interviews with Sally were littered with phrases that emphasized transformation: '[I] forged my own identity'; '[I] grew up in a vacuum'; '[studying sociology] presented me with another side of things...[and] was quite a big change for me, at that stage'; 'I looked back and thought that it was very narrow'; 'just going out into the big wide world, leaving my little tiny village'; 'I had different experiences and I had my eyes opened up in a different way'; 'I feel like having come from the other side'; 'I've gone beyond it'; 'I came from not knowing anything and being very sheltered'; 'it does feel like I've come from one world into another in a way'. In the account, Sally allocated to both her past and her current situation, certain racialized, classed and gendered features. Thus she occupied different subject positions governed by different norms and discourses in her account. Class and 'race', in particular, become tropes that mark or dramatize the ruptures in her life story. Her narrative suggests the social availability of certain accounts of classed and raced transformation (see Lawler, 2002) (Byrne 2004:34).

In my own research, I argue that two culturally recognisable plots dominate the women's accounts ('Pulling myself up by the bootstraps' and 'Making good through education'). I go on to suggest that the selection of plot influences, and is influenced by the women's reconstruction of their personal pasts, and their corresponding subjective identifications with class and gender. The choice of plot by the women is not arbitrary and is undoubtedly influenced by the narrators' 'biographical particulars' (Holstein and Gubrium, 2000). The use of different plots by upwardly mobile women, and the diverse and creative ways, in which these plots are 'fleshed out' into rich, lively and personally meaningful accounts of self highlights another dimension of multiplicity in narrative; one that acknowledges the diversity and

difference evident in the self-construction practices of upwardly mobile working-class women.

Reassessing ‘ambivalent’ class identities from a narrative perspective

In the last section, I highlighted the relevance of narrative perspectives on the self and identity for research focusing on the inter-relationships between class, gender, identity and subjectivity. In this section, I would like to draw attention to the significance of narrative perspectives, on the self and identity, for current debates on class, culture and identity (e.g. Savage *et al.*, 2001; Devine and Savage, 2004; Payne and Grew, 2005). It is my view that narrative perspectives on self and identity can be used to make novel contributions to these crucial debates in contemporary class analysis.

Current debates on class, culture and identity rarely explicitly attend to theoretical questions about the nature of identity, but, nevertheless, base their arguments around implicit assumptions that personal identity resides in people’s stable or ‘fixed’ identifications with particular social categories (of gender, race, class, etc.). Debates on class, culture and identity have often centred round the problems posed by people’s apparent unwillingness to identify with class labels. Class researchers, who argue for the continued salience of class at social-structural, interactional and subjective levels, find themselves in the awkward position of trying to have to account research respondents’ rejection of class labels and concepts. A common answer to this dilemma is found in the ‘disidentification thesis’ (most articulately expressed by Skeggs, 1997), in which people’s rejection of class is interpreted as an effect of the power of class mechanisms. People ‘disidentify’ with the negative values, and stereotypes, ascribed to working-class identities (lack of taste, profligacy, fecundity, impropriety, etc.) and those ascribed to middle-class identities (snobbish superiority, pomposity, etc.) [see the ‘ordinariness thesis’ in Savage *et al.*, 2001]. Objectors, to these interpretations, suggest that it is unreasonable to read class in ‘the teeth of respondents’ denials’ (see Bottero, 2004: 992). Others argue

that the class analyses of the ‘denial’ of class positioning come perilously close to largely discredited ‘false consciousness’ theories of class and the social subject (see Devine and Savage, 2004).

Narrative perspectives, arguably, offer a route out of the impasse in debates on class and identity by shifting the terms of the debate away from its somewhat restricted focus on identity categories or labels. In contrast to a ‘fixed’, categorical view of identity, narrative perspectives envision self and identity as constructs, ‘storied’ into being within social, cultural and historical contexts, which shape both the form and content of narrative identities. At the same time, stories, told about the self, are not determined by their contexts; instead, the active and creative work, that goes into assembling ‘storied’ selves also contributes to the ongoing and interactive construction of cultural settings (Holstein and Gubrium, 2000). From this perspective, questions about people’s willingness to identify with class labels assume less importance. Instead, a narrative framework enables a new set of questions to take centre stage, i.e. questions concerning the evolving, or ongoing nature of class structures, relations and contexts, as well as questions about the way in which shifting cultural meanings and representations of class are actively constructed into personal narratives.

In the sections that follow, I will briefly summarise the arguments of key contributors to British mainstream sociological debates on class and identity (Savage *et al.*, 2001; Payne and Grew, 2005). I will then show how aspects of this debate can be clarified and reframed from a narrative perspective. I conclude with a ‘case study’, from my research data, which supports the view that ‘storied’ identities of class and gender can co-exist with expressions of ambivalence and confusion about class concepts. Expressions of ambivalence, confusion and hesitancy, which sometimes accompany ‘storied’ accounts of class identity, do not, necessarily, undermine the significance of class, as an aspect of personal identity. Instead, such expressions can help to convey a sense of the often complex, tentative and uncertain nature of personal engagements with the ‘messy’ realities of class. Whilst shifting

and tentative subjective engagements, with class, are entirely consonant with a narrative view of identity, they are arguably not permissible within a fixed or categorical framework on class identity.

A narrative-interactionist critique of current debates on class, culture and identity

Current debates on class, culture and identity have placed a great deal of emphasis on the 'problem' of people's unwillingness to identify with labels or categories of class. Savage *et al.* (2001), for example argue that the majority of their (178) interview respondents were hesitant or ambivalent about placing themselves in class categories. They offer a number of reasons why people do not want to 'see' themselves in terms of 'class', all of which support their argument that ambivalent class identities should *not* be interpreted as evidence of the lack of salience of class in people's lives and experience. Rather than viewing ambivalent class identities as a sign of the 'death of class', Savage *et al.* argue that people's ambivalence about their own class position is a product of their complex subjective engagements with the affective, emotional, political and moral dimensions of class. According to Savage *et al.*, 'people have little difficulty talking about class 'out there', but do not like to think about class closer to home, with respect to their own sense of identity' (2001: 880). They offer a number of explanations, for this 'observation', arguing for example that: 'class pollutes the idea of individuality, since it challenges people's autonomy by seeing them as the product of their social background' (2001: 882). According to Savage *et al.*, individuals also want to see themselves as 'ordinary' (i.e. not snobbish or 'pretentious'). Similarly, placing an emphasis on one's class position would show a lack of commitment to the powerful and ubiquitous 'omnivoric refrain' (2001:887); 'whereby people should be treated the same regardless of social position' (ibid.). Savage *et al.*, therefore, read their interview respondents appeals to 'ordinariness', as a defence against being personally drawn into the morally and politically contentious aspects of class. Savage *et al.*, (2001) thereby construct a Bourdieuvian influenced 'counter-intuitive' argument (developed most thoroughly by Skeggs, 1997), which treats people's *rejection* of

class as a reflection of the *centrality* of class in shaping people's opportunities, material worlds and social and moral value: 'it is precisely because of the power of class that it is difficult for class to be articulated by people' (2001: 878).

Other authors, such as Payne and Grew (2005), suggest that Savage *et al.*, (2001) overstate the extent to which people 'deny' class as an aspect of their own identity and offer alternative explanations for people's ambivalent class identities. They argue, for example, that people's hesitancy to place themselves in class terms could equally be seen to relate to the fact that 'respondents operate with an incoherent model of class relations' (2005: 893). In other words, people's 'conceptual confusion' (2005: 897), about the nature of class, makes it difficult for them to self-identify in class terms. My own criticism of Savage *et al.*'s (2001) analysis is that they appear to make confusing and contradictory statements about the relationship between class and personal identity. On the one hand, they argue that people do not readily or un-ambivalently locate themselves in terms of the categories of class because: 'they do not like to think about class closer to home, with respect to their own sense of identity' (2001:882). According to Savage *et al.*, (2001) hesitancy to place oneself, in class terms, signals that 'class is definitely not a term that is central to a sense of self identity' (2001: 882), 'it is not an identity that is internalised' (ibid). Here Savage *et al.* seem to be working with a fixed or categorical view of identity. From this point of view, identity is seen to reside in people's identifications with various identity categories (race, class, gender, ethnicity, etc.); and because people do not identify with externally imposed categories of class, then class must not be regarded as central to their sense of self-identity. On the other hand, Savage *et al.* suggest that class may be used as an interpretive device in the narrative constitution of personal identity:

In sustaining and articulating the kinds of individualised identities that do matter to people, reference is made to external benchmarks of class as a means of 'telling their story'. In this respect, individualized cultures articulate an awareness of class, and it is wrong to see cultures of individualization displacing, rather than existing alongside, class recognition. If we leave behind the romantic baggage which portrays

class cultures as collective, then it becomes possible to talk about class cultures as forms of individualised awareness. Class does not determine identity, but it is not irrelevant either. It is a resource, a device, with which to construct identity (2001: 888).

Here Savage *et al.* reference an alternative model of identity as a narrative construct, developed out of the stories we tell to ourselves and others about ourselves. Rather than seeing this as a weaker form of identity than the fixed, categorical or foundational version, narrative researchers consider this model as more accurately capturing how identity is produced, known and lived by members of society. As Lawler argues: ‘identity...is not something foundational and essential, but something *produced* through the narratives people use to explain and understand lives’ (2002: 250, author’s own emphasis). Restricting debates about the salience of class identities to people’s willingness to identify with external categories of class, severely limits what we can learn about the relationships between structures of class and personal identities (Lawler, 2002).

People may well belong relatively unproblematically, to groups designated ‘working class’, ‘women’ and so on (although of course, they may not); but this in itself does not tell us about the kinds of identities they build. Although the identities people hold are certainly related to the social context they inhabit, the process of being anything, it seems to me, more complicated than simply an identification with single, externally imposed, categories. What is more, people’s interpretations of the world cannot be assumed from these categories. And if this is the case, then the doing of qualitative research becomes more pressing indeed. If we want to find out how people make identities, make sense of the world and their place within it – if we want to find out how they interpret the world and themselves – we will have to attend to the stories they tell (Lawler, 2002:255).

For Lawler, self-identities are narrative constructions and a refusal to describe one’s identity in fixed, or categorical terms says little about the significance, or otherwise, of class as a self-conscious aspect of a ‘storied’ personal identity. Savage *et al.* appear to be moving closer towards this position, as they develop their argument. However, their insistence that the rejection of class labels means that people ‘do not like to think about class closer to home’ could confuse readers into thinking that

class doesn't explicitly enter into people's sense of their personal identity or selfhood, when this is not a conclusion that can be reached from the data.¹⁹ In the section, which follows, I will try to show how ambivalence about class positioning and location can, in fact, go hand in hand with the self-conscious construction of class into memory and personal identity. I will also argue that we can arrive at less speculative and more 'grounded' understandings of 'ambivalent' class identities, by studying them in the context of the narrative construction of personal identity.

The case study of Margaret: Constructing class into 'storied' accounts of personal identity

Class is a key 'resource' in Margaret's construction of her memories of childhood and her personal story. For example, Margaret refers to her parents' stoical response, to the oppressive aspects of their class situation, as a way of explaining her upward class mobility and adult subjectivity. Margaret makes her upward mobility intelligible and understandable by focusing on her parents' downward mobility, as a result of the upheavals of war. She invokes her parents' attitudes to their class situation 'we are not working-class' and emphasises their efforts to restore her to her rightful (i.e. middle-class) social position. Margaret also explains her adult subjectivity in relation to her class background. Margaret suggests that she has internalised her parents' stoical response to their class situation and that this gives her an 'inner mettle' which carries her through stressful and traumatic life experiences. This is a necessarily brief summary of Margaret's narrative, although it should hopefully provide the reader with a sense of the way class is woven into her narrative of self. Class proved to be key to the 'unlocking' of Margaret's experiences, enabling her to unite her past and present experiences into a coherent

¹⁹ Savage *et al.* (2001) argue that those respondents with a high degree of 'newer' types of cultural capital often reflexively played around with class labels, as a means of displaying their extensive knowledge about class criteria. There is no sense from their analysis however that class was something self-consciously 'mattered' to them at a subjective or affective level (most respondents ultimately rejected or inverted class labels). At the same time, it doesn't appear that the research participants were asked questions, which would elicit the kind of responses that might shed light on class as a self-conscious aspect of their personal identity or selfhood. Perhaps if respondents were given room to talk about class outside of a restrictive discussion of class positioning and belonging they might have been less defensive about relating class to their own personal identities.

plot which configures a classed (and gendered) self that is: 'understood as unfolding through episodes which both express and constitute that self' (Lawler 2002: 250)

Whilst class was a significant feature of the narrative identity constructed by Margaret, she was none the less hesitant about placing herself in class terms

Well, you see, it's like I said, I'm me. I don't think class, but I live in an upper-middle-class area. My neighbours are all upper middle...more so than me really. A lot of the neighbours the women have never worked. They do charity work. I don't know, you see, because I've got friends that live in other areas and I suppose most people that I do socialise with are middle-class, like I say. But then I do go up the pub and... You see, what is class? What is class? It's not what job you did. I don't know. I don't know. I just wonder whether it's behaviours and social skills. Perhaps a social skills base thing. Like that gentleman that just walked in the room the other week. He didn't have the social grace to sort of say, "Oh, excuse me" or, "Are you using this room?" He needed to...was it the fire alarms or something he needed to fix? There was no social niceties. I don't know what class is. The more I think about it the more mixed up I get. I mean there are some people that are very upper-middle-class, or even upper-class, if there is such a thing, that are horrible people. Horrible to children, to animals, to each other. And I certainly wouldn't wish to associate myself. I choose to be with people that I like and I feel a warmth towards, whatever job they do.

From Savage *et al.*'s (2001) perspective Margaret's appeal to individuality - 'like I said, I'm me' - could be seen as an attempt to evade social fixing, by refusing to see herself as a product of her social background. Alternatively, it could be seen as an attempt to 'disidentify' with the morally charged aspects of class. However, taking into account the complexity of Margaret's class history, it is not at all clear which class she should identify herself with even if she does see herself as a product of her social background. Margaret defines her background as working-class, but explains that her parents (who were downwardly mobile into the working-class) would not see themselves in that way. And even if Margaret were willing to take her parent's occupational class as her own, that label would, no doubt, be inadequate for the purposes of capturing her current occupation, experiential 'social field' and the identities associated with them. Margaret was not averse to the idea that her early

experiences have shaped the person she has become, although she refused to see herself as being determined by them: 'I think your formative years are very important, but it doesn't mean to say that it's set in stone. Because learning is life-long and other things come into play.' There seems to be little basis, then, for arguing that Margaret's appeal to individuality subtends a desire to evade social fixing in the way Savage *et al.* (2001) suggest.

From the perspective of Payne and Grew (2005), Margaret's response might be treated not as a rejection of class labels, but rather an example of 'conceptual confusion' about the nature of class. Payne and Grew argue that we cannot expect members of the 'lay' public to share 'sociologists' sophisticated theoretical perspectives' (2005: 903) on class, or know how to apply them to their own experiences and situations. Whilst Payne and Grew perhaps overstate sociologists' conceptual clarity on issues of class, they, nevertheless draw attention to the fact that interview questions, which refer directly to class require respondents 'to handle a genuinely multi-faceted concept at short notice.' (2005: 903). From this point of view, the rejection of class labels does not simply reflect a 'psycho-social' defensive response to a morally charged social category. Here, Margaret displays both a sense of conceptual confusion about class and also a highly sophisticated understanding of the complexities of class. For example, she recognises that class doesn't merely reference different occupational categories, but is also linked to cultural differences/*distinctions*. For example, Skeggs (2005), writes about the way class is configured through the volume and composition of various forms of capital (social, economic, cultural and symbolic) that are read on to different bodies. Within dominant (i.e. middle-class) cultural frameworks, working-class dispositions and forms of embodiment come to signify a lack of cultural and symbolic capital. The embodied dispositions or 'class habitus' of the technician, who interrupted our interview to use the office phone, were evidently perceived as lacking by Margaret: 'He didn't have the social grace,' 'There were no social niceties'. Margaret seems to be aware that class (or working-classness) is culturally configured in negative terms and, in this sense, her refusal to locate herself in class terms might be interpreted as an attempt

to distance herself from a stigmatised working-class identity (see Skeggs, 1997). However, this seems unlikely when we consider that Margaret self-consciously perceives her decision to self-identify as a woman from a working-class background, as a refusal of the stigma and shame attached to that label. Margaret may disidentify with expressions of working-classness that signify impropriety and lack of taste, within dominant cultural understandings, but hers is not a wholesale rejection of a label which clearly has the potential to stand for multiple meanings, experiences, fantasies and stories, not all of which are negative.

Even though Margaret is hesitant about locating herself categorically in class terms and tries to distance herself from the negative connotations of a working-class identity, she is still prepared to think about class 'closer to home.' Margaret is self-consciously aware of her ambivalence about class, and the fractured or 'split' nature of her attitudes and perspectives on class. In this sense, her refusal to self-identify in class terms could be seen to reflect the ongoing dialogue between her multiple 'class selves' and the fact that the 'dialectical tensions' (Maines 2001:178) between them cannot be unified into a precise, fixed or unitary class identity. For example, Margaret prizes her ability to connect with individuals, across the social spectrum, a skill she sees as lacking in some of her middle-class peers:

I mean a friend of mine, her husband's a GP, very clever man, daughter's very clever, string of 'A's at 'A' level and all the rest of it, and we all go walking. We got lost and we got this taxi and I was chatting to the taxi driver 'cause I was so tired and I just wanted him to get us back to the car 'cause we'd got lost, and James said, "I don't know how you could chat to him like that. You didn't know him, Margaret." I said, "Well you just chat." But he could...that was a social skill that he obviously found difficult...

Margaret is also keen not to portray herself as smugly superior for having 'escaped' her working-class origins:

Because a bit like my friend, Fran, with her sons being GPs, both sons now, and they come from a mining background, does...it's like fighting

the cause isn't it? Look at us, we've fought the cause and we've come out of it the other end and it was just circum...and we've been tough and 'cause we've been tough...I suppose my Mum would say that. If she was having this interview she'd say well, you know, circumstances, we fought the cause and look at my daughter, she's a psychologist now. But for me no, 'cause it would make people feel bad, wouldn't it? It would make them feel bad about them not having achieved that and this. And that isn't always the case. I mean I've known people that have got fantastic jobs and hate them. Our own GP [back home], he hated being a doctor. Hated it. He went into it 'cause his dad made him. And that's not good, is it? So, no, I don't know. I don't like making people feel bad and I don't like feeling bad myself really.

Nevertheless, Margaret has, at times, caught herself in the act of assuming and reproducing the 'snobbishly superior' attitudes corresponding to her middle-class social group. Indeed, Margaret explains that she rejects a (presumably middle-class) class label as a 'defence' against internalising such attitudes in an uncritical or non-reflexive way.

CC: Yeah. It really sounds like you don't try to sort of bracket yourself.

Margaret: No. But that might be a defence mechanism. Like I say to the kids, and like I've always...I've always had lots of friends but I never sort of pull myself into one section more than the other, do you know what I mean? Yeah, no, I don't. And I don't really care what people think of me. And I try...It irritates me when I find myself falling into the trap of getting sucked into if you're invited round to dinner...you see I'd rather people just come and I'll say, do you want tea? And we'll have tea and we'll open a bottle of wine or whatever. I enjoy those sorts of times equally as if I plan something. But there are some...You see, there are some people that have a bit of money that push it in your face, all the time, and try to impress you with the best crystal and the best...And you're like, oh. And you don't...you enjoy...you like them as people, but you don't enjoy it because it's..."And, oh, we gave him a £20 tip." And I think *[sighs]* God. I don't need to know this. I want...I like you for what you are. And you find yourself sometimes, if you're in that company, trying to I suppose keep up with the Joneses. You know, you think God, so-and-so's coming round I better, you know... And I think no, don't Margaret, don't get sucked into all this. If they want to come and I haven't got any specialist brandy or whatever, then they'll have to drink whatever's in the cupboard. And if they don't want a drink, it's no big deal. And they've got to enjoy coming because they enjoy coming. I mean I had a dinner party with some of the neighbours

and that, and it was my birthday, and I said, “Right, it’s my birthday, we’ll had a takeaway curry” so I didn’t cook, “And we’re going to play cards.” And we all had a lovely evening. But that would never happen in some other people’s houses because, you see, if you have dinner party,... you cook and you certainly don’t play games or anything, you know. And yet everybody had a really good night. So I don’t know what class is.

While at one level Margaret is ‘defensive’ about class, she certainly does not ‘deny’ class as an aspect of self. Instead, Margaret gives us insight into the ongoing struggles of a self that wants to feel ‘at home’ in a middle-class environment without losing the ‘grounded’ or ‘anti-pretentious’ values that enable her to experience a continued sense of connection with individuals across the boundaries of class. Margaret’s ongoing identifications and disidentifications with both working and middle-class attitudes and perspectives are not easily translated into a coherent or unambiguous class identity. At the same time, Margaret’s self-conscious awareness of the ‘dialectical tensions’, between the incompatible attitudes of class that make the ‘me’ of her self (at least in this narrative), enables her to construct a complex personal identity that is both shaped by, but also reflexively responds to the diverse class contexts she has occupied. Whilst Margaret rejects class labels, she has no problem referring to class as a means of making sense of her experiences, her place in the world and for reflecting on the problematic or complex aspects of her ongoing and evolving sense of selfhood and personal identity (Lawler, 2002).

Overview of analysis chapters

The ‘narrative-interactionist’ framework set out above informs the organisation of the empirical analyses contained in Chs. 3, 4 and 5. Chapter 3 is loosely informed by Mead’s view of the self as both answering to organized attitudes of the social groups and communities (by adopting the perspective of the ‘generalized other’), as well as responding in creative ways to those frameworks (e.g. in ways which challenge, rework, or subvert dominant expectations). The substantive focus of this Chapter is an assessment of culturally available plots of upward mobility (plots which conform to predominant understandings of class, gender, mobility and

identity), and the way these are used by the women to make their lives intelligible and coherent for a wider audience. It also considers how women, creatively, make these plots 'their own' in order to express their 'biographical particulars' (Holstein and Gunbrium, 2000), and actively contribute to the ongoing construction of class, gender, identity, etc., within their particular communities.

Chapter 4, on the other hand, is informed by Mead's envisioning of the self as inherently social and always constructed from the perspectives of various 'others' (e.g. significant and 'generalized' others). This Chapter focuses on ways in which the women's narratives evoke this self-other relationship and highlights the way in which all lives and narratives are, inextricably, tied to the lives and stories of various 'others' (see Plummer, 2001). For example, I explore the way in which mother/daughter relationships are constructed into the women's narratives of class mobility, as a means of highlighting the importance of self-other relationships to the identities we build for ourselves. The fact that significant 'others' are drawn into personal narratives, in order to convey what the narrator perceives as either their 'sameness' or 'difference' from these 'others' (see Byrne, 2003), also raises important methodological and ethical issues about how these 'others' should be 'represented' in research accounts (see Skeggs, 2002). Should researchers treat representations of 'others' at face value? Alternatively, should they be sensitive to the way 'others' are creatively constructed into personal accounts in order to credibly convey the narrator's sense of their 'individuality', 'transformation', 'superiority', etc.?

Chapter 5 is informed by Mead's view that one of the unique capacities of the self is its ability to re-collect itself out of the past. Mead's theory of 'retrospective reconstruction' adds to this the idea, that the self re-collected out of the past is always constructed from the point of view of the present. Substantively, Chapter 5 investigates how women reconstruct their class histories, from the point of view of the present, with the aim of constructing continuity and coherence out of their fragmented and complex class experiences. This Chapter emphasises the way in

which the women's lives are reconstructed in terms of the particular meanings and discourses, which prevail in their current personal and professional contexts. I conclude by showing how the women's reconstructions enable the women to carry forward their class experiences into their future activities rather than simply leave those experiences behind (or below) [see. Mahoney and Zmroczek, 1997 b].

CHAPTER THREE

Narrative cohesion and multiplicity

In this Chapter I explore the way in which women reflexively fashion a coherent self through narrative. I suggest that there is a strong relationship between the between the story plots, used by the respondents to give structure and shape to their class narratives, and the kinds of selves and identities that they discursively construct in the interview context. I explore this relationship through the analysis of the two narrative frameworks used most commonly by the interviewees to tell their stories: 'Pulling myself up by my Bootstraps' and 'Making good through education'.

Analysis of the way in which the women 'emplot' their lives and selves, through their storytelling practice, highlights both the social shaping of women's lives and identities, and women's reflexive and creative responses to the social worlds in which they become actors. For example, the way in which the women emplot their stories can be credibly explained in terms of the cultural availability of particular narratives of class mobility. At the same time, the respondents arguably select story plots that most closely correspond to the actuality and specificity of their social experiences. Moreover, while the storylines, deployed by the women, are understandable and recognisable in broad terms, the creative, variable and contingent way in which respondents apply these frameworks to their experiences means that the women's accounts of self are, in many ways, heterogeneous and distinctive (see Holstein and Gubrium, 2000).

The use of recognisable class narratives in the 'symbolic reconstruction' of personal experience, enables upwardly mobile working-class women to construct continuity and coherence into their narratives of self (for further discussion of 'symbolic reconstruction' see Maines *et al.* 1983; Maines, 2001; Järvinen, 2004, see also Ch. 5.). Indeed, the narrative process of 'symbolically reconstructing' the past, to make sense of the present, may be especially valuable to women who have switched class positions. For example, constructing continuity and coherence into the self-narrative may help to mitigate the experience of fragmentation, confusion and ambivalence

within the self that authors such as Walkerdine (1990) and Lawler (1999) see as arising out of movements across class boundaries. Moreover, women who have experienced profound discontinuity and change during the life course perhaps have a stronger sense of both 'having a story to tell', and wanting to account for the rupture and fractures within their personal biographies. The break in the continuity of the women's class and gender experience arguably encourages upwardly mobile women to construct cohesive or seamless narratives, which explain the 'atypical' or 'extraordinary' nature of their life-histories (see Ch. 5). Women, who sense that they have undergone significant or exceptional transformations or changes in their lives, are perhaps much more likely to become adept self-storytellers (see Scott and Scott, 2000).

As I explained in the previous Chapter, traditional conventions of narrative favour 'well-formed' stories, which possess a sense of direction and drama and which postulate a singular, unified, perduring self as 'driving' the story. As I also explained, a lot hangs on the construction of self-narratives which are intelligible and desirable by cultural standards. The use of culturally available plots of upward mobility arguably enabled the women to construct credible and coherent accounts of their experiences and sense of selfhood. However, while the respondents' narratives were, undoubtedly, constructed with an eye toward traditional rules or conventions of storytelling, they clearly were not bound by them.¹

¹ This may have had something to do with the way that the interpretive context of the interview was co-constructed by both myself and the respondents. Together, the interviewees and I constructed the interview, at least in part, as an occasion for reflexively exploring the problematics of class, gender, self, identity and role as these appear to women located 'in the margins' of interconnected class worlds (see Clancey, 1997). Discussion of personal and professional experiences of gender and class generated insights into the women's divided class loyalties, as well as their ambivalent or uneasy relationship to the dominant cultural frameworks and discourses of both working and middle-class worlds. The respondents rarely constructed their experiences of upward class mobility as straightforward stories of individual transformation, success and achievement. Instead, many of the women would freely admit to the ongoing problems they experienced in sloughing off restrictive or 'provided' subjectivities of gender and class, or of seeing themselves or being perceived by others as powerful and autonomous agents. None of the women regarded her class history as something she had unambiguously left behind (or below) [see Mahoney and Zmroczek, 1997b]. Even though the respondents often attempted to 'synthesise' their multiple perspectives and sides of self into more cohesive and critical forms of self-understanding (see Polkinghorne, 1988; Aboulafia, 1993), the very acknowledgment of multiplicity or plurality in selfhood contravened the rules of conventional narrative (cf. Lawler, 1999). The need to break away from traditional rules of narrative

The importance of narrative and discursive practice for both the construction and exploration of class and gender identity and selfhood also points to a more complex, contingent and elaborate conceptualisation of identity than class researchers have traditionally envisioned. For example, in trying to determine the salience of class identities, class researchers have often relied upon restrictive 'categorical' notions of identity (e.g. Savage *et al.*, 2001). In determining what counts as class identity, researchers have often unwittingly slipped back onto older, largely discredited, forms of class theory, which assume that class identities and actions are inextricably linked to people's self-conscious awareness of their class positioning. However, attributes of identity and agency cannot be simply 'read off' from people's categorical identities, whether these are externally imposed upon individuals or defined by individuals themselves (see Somers and Gibson, 1994; Lawler, 2002). People's identifications, or indeed 'disidentifications', with externally imposed categories, such as class, give little insight into their subjective identities and sense of self. In order to gain insight into the class and gender identities that are both meaningful and purposive to individuals, researchers arguably need to turn their attention to the complex narrative identities that respondents reflexively fashion through personal storytelling. From this point of view, investigating the plots respondents use to give shape and substance to experience and selfhood yields fruitful insights into women's creative engagements with issues of class.

Cohesion and multiplicity in narrative

Issues, linked to the multiplicity of selfhood in narrative, can be usefully explored through an analysis of the different forms of 'emplotment' deployed in the women's narratives. The use of different types of culturally available 'life plots' constructs diversity and difference into women's narratives of class mobility. Conversely, the deployment of the same widely circulating life-story plot, by more than one woman, tends to produce at least some degree of convergence and regularity in the accounts

in order to reflexively explore the complex, multi-faceted and problematical aspects of social experience and selfhood adds weight to calls for a more flexible and pluralistic approach to the understanding of narrative adequacy (see Maines, 2001).

of self constructed by those women. Each of the accounts, given by the interview respondents, drew upon one of two popular life-story plots which help to account for upward class mobility: 'Pulling yourself up by the Bootstraps' (in other words, improving your life situation by your own efforts); and 'Making good through education' (in other words, becoming upwardly mobile by capitalising upon educational opportunities, available to those who are recognised as diligent and/or excellent students). As I will argue, the women do not arbitrarily 'pluck' a particular life-story plot from established repertoires of culturally available story formats. Instead, I will argue that the women carefully select those plots, which resonate with their particular experiences of class and upward mobility. The interviewees can be seen to artfully tailor their chosen plot in order to fit the 'biographical particulars' of their lives (Holstein and Gubrium, 2000), as well as to illuminate the particular nature of the selves they wish to convey through their narratives. As a result, the women's accounts are not determined by the choice of plot, and diversity and difference can be constructed out of judicious application of the same, culturally recognisable life plot (cf. Holstein and Gubrium, 2000).

We might also speculate that the cultural availability of these popular life-story plots may well have been constructed into the women's actions and orientations towards their social contexts (i.e. that the existence of these two plots of upward mobility may have influenced and supported the women's active attempts to become upwardly class mobile) (see C.Wright Mills, 1940). At the same time, as several narrative researchers tell us (e.g. Gergen and Gergen, 1988; Polkinghorne, 1988; Somers and Gibson, 1994; Holstein and Gubrium, 2000), the use of a particular plotline inevitably influences the selection, interpretation and appraisal of personal life events. The use of particular plots shapes the way in which personal life 'events' are converted into 'episodes', which are endowed with significance, only in relation to other events and their linkage within an overarching story-line (Somers and Gibson, 1994:59). Arguably, the choice of plot by the women affects the way in which the women (dis)attend to the multiple (spatial, temporal, contextual; social, cultural and historical) dimensions of their personal experiences in the construction

of their self-stories (i.e. the choice of plot influences the way women's pasts are retrospectively reconstructed - see Ch. 5).

Some of the interviewees were self-consciously aware that they were constructing their personal narratives through culturally recognisable 'plots'. These women would reflexively signpost the particular plot that they were using as a resource to tell the story of the self. The two main plots that I refer to above were initially drawn to my attention by interviewees, who directly invoked these culturally circulating plots of upward mobility, perhaps in an attempt to actively shape how I (as their 'audience') heard and made sense of their stories of self. There are several examples of this kind of reflexive 'narrative editing' (Holstein and Gubrium 2000: 113). For instance, Christine comments that her struggle, to reach her academic and career potential, has given her insight into some of the barriers to achievement faced by members of the working-class: 'I've been there done that and dragged myself up by the Bootstraps you know and it's given me greater insight and greater understanding.' The phrase 'Dragging yourself up by the Bootstraps', signals the familiar life-story plot of improving one's life situation by one's own efforts, and struggling against harsh odds to achieve one's life goals. Whilst other interviewees, such as Stacey, do not refer directly to this phrase, they, nevertheless, make it clear that their self-narrative should be understood in terms of this familiar plot. As Stacey puts it:

I think, really, academically I've gone against everything, you know, adversity, because I haven't had any support from my family at all, right the way through because they just haven't got that in them and that's fine. I've had to find my own, so I think I'm quite resilient and must admit, I think I suppose I've got quite, quite...a strong sense of...motivation really to do what I'm doing to get on and to work.

Joan also, indirectly, reproduces a version of the 'Bootstraps' plot when she describes her struggle and determination to gain a good education and achieve career success:

Whatever I did, academically, I had to work at it, I had to work hard and I still do and it's that, oh what can I call it, it's the determination that gets me where I want to be because I'm not an academic, never will be... [Educational achievement] ...wasn't something...as I say encouraged by my mum or dad... And so today I'm still studying but I do know that whatever I do is, you just scrape through, because it's just your determination that makes you do it, at a cost of lots of things in my life I have to say.

There is, I would argue, a mutually constructive relationship between the choice of plot, and the sense of selfhood, that the women wish to convey through their narratives of upward mobility. In the case of the women who drew upon the 'Bootstraps' plot (e.g. Amy, Christine, Carole, Joan, Judith, Julie, Stacey), there was a strong tendency for the women to construct an oppressed and embattled, yet also highly subversive and resourceful self that has fought long and hard to escape the classed and gendered 'fates' that history, society and culture has held in store for it (see Maines, 2001). These interviewees placed a great deal of emphasis on what they saw as the constraining aspects of their original working-class social and cultural contexts. They, regularly, constructed themes of class shame or 'lack' into their stories of childhood, and often expressed lingering feelings of class-cultural 'lack' or inadequacy.

Whilst those women who constructed narratives around the 'Bootstraps' plot, formed one distinct 'group', a second 'group' of interviewees (e.g. Alison, Jill, Madeline, Margaret, Pat) referred to a distinct, yet equally recognisable, narrative of class mobility. For example, Alison refers to herself as 'Coming from a working-class [background] and then kind of Making good through the education system'. Similarly, Pat argues that she: 'feel[s] very strongly about...that business about education being a passport to fame, I always feel very, very defensive of higher education'. Pat argues that she had many 'helpful breaks and opportunities' as a result of her education, and even uses this to explain her willingness to contribute to my own educational advancement by taking part in my doctoral research. As Pat puts it: 'I feel very, very strongly that education is a, you know, a passport really

and so I feel it incumbent on me to do as much as I can to help other people, you know, achieve what they want to achieve.'

A very different kind of class mobile self was conveyed through the deployment of the 'Making good through education' plot vis-à-vis the 'Bootstraps' narratives. Rather than constructing an oppressed or embattled self, which has risen up against the constraints its class-gender cultural environment, these women tended to construct a self which has always been supported and nurtured in its attempts to achieve educational and career success. The self conveyed in these women's narratives has undergone a relatively painless or 'smooth' transition into the professional classes by successfully harnessing opportunities made available by the education system. For example, interviewees who deployed the 'Making good through education' plot tended to place less emphasis on any enduring feelings of class 'lack' and they, less frequently, constructed feelings of class 'lack' or 'inferiority' into their constructions of their childhood selves and experience.

This is not to say that these women 'forgot' their working-class histories, or reconstructed their childhood selves as somehow 'always-already middle class' (cf. Lawler, 1999:9). Issues of class and gender remained central these women's narratives, but these themes were constructed into these women's accounts judiciously and appositely (see Holstein and Gubrium, 2000). For example, women in this group often portrayed themselves as confident, creative and empowered professionals, who *nevertheless*, maintain a powerful and enduring empathetic identification with the working-class cultural 'groups' whose experiential worlds, understandings, belief systems and values they once intimately shared. For instance, Pat acknowledges the role of her family in supporting and enabling her education 'out' of the working-class:

Both my parents were, though not well educated, were both very, very intelligent people and I think we also got a good selection of genes [laughs] as well. So, you know, we'd got the intellectual ability to do it, we'd got the encouragement, we just didn't have the material trappings.

And even though Pat recognises that she has moved a long way away from her class of origin, she, nevertheless, constructs a powerful sense of continuity between her working-class childhood self and her current self. As she puts it:

I mean I do see myself as being very, very much from working-class origins. But I can't...I couldn't describe myself as working-class...Well, in the sense that I work I could, but in terms of my trappings in life, i.e. a big house, a considerable income, erm, cars, holidays, meals out, high standard of living, then that's got to be described as something other than the characteristics of what I would see as working-class. What I still think...what I've never lost, though, are the values that were developed in me through my family. So, I still hold those...I don't hold the religious beliefs anymore but I certainly do hold the humanistic value systems.

Interviewees, like Pat, construct coherence and continuity into their narratives of self by attributing many of the values, perspectives and moral outlooks, held by their adult selves, to the knowledges, values and insights, which they either derived 'directly' from their working-class experiences, or which were actively 'called forth' by older family members.² Most, if not all of the 'Making good through education' women, anchored their adult selves (who, what and how they are) in early class-gender experiences (e.g. experiences of poverty and hardship and their social-psychological effects; their awareness of their mothers' longings and desires for a better life etc.) [cf. Maguire, 2005]. The narrative linkages made by these women reference another side to the class self that is not always seen (often being obscured by a middle-class habitus), but which is, in fact, crucial to how these women know and understand themselves, 'others', as well as the wider social and historical context (cf. Lawler, 1999). For example, as Madeline puts it:

² The women who deployed the 'Bootstraps' plot, also often constructed a sense of continuity between their personal attributes and outlooks, and some of the classed attitudes and subjectivities of older family members. For example, these interviewees would often comment that they shared their parents' 'work ethic', as well as their anti-pretentious attitudes towards material goods and consumption practices. However, because these women tended to strongly 'disidentify' with what they saw as the atavistic and constraining class-gender attitudes, held by their families, their continued identifications, with their class context of origin, tended to be much more ambivalent and partial than the 'Making good through education' women.

Even though, obviously, I come over as very middle-class which I know I do, people tell me I do [laughs], I don't feel any problems relating to people who are, who are what you might call working-class...I have a definite sense of connection with people who have difficulties, because I feel as if I've had difficulties and I've managed to work through some of them.

The women's deployment of these different culturally recognisable plots of upward mobility, in their accounts, enabled them to construct powerful personal narratives that were satisfyingly coherent and dramatic. We can assume that these women drew upon these plots (whether self-consciously or indirectly) because they resonated strongly with their memories of their personal experiences (i.e. the plot corresponded, in some way, with the women's 'implied objective' and 'social structural' pasts – see Ch. 5). For example, the women in the 'Bootstraps' group were overwhelmingly women who had failed the 11+, or women who had been forced to leave the education system at a relatively young age (either at 15/16 or 18), in order to become economically active (and thus ease the financial burden faced by their poor working-class families). By way of contrast, the 'Making good through education' group was mostly made up of those women who passed the 11+, studied for 'A'levels, and who did well enough at school to go on to teacher training, university or other 'suitable' 'career' routes for capable and diligent working-class girls (e.g. nursing). Interestingly, this group of women also occupied more 'senior' positions with the caring-professions (e.g. as Educational Psychologists or senior social workers).

The 11+ exam selection process (borne out of the 1944 Butler Education Act) was part of a deeply controversial selective education system which operated throughout most of Britain between the 1950s and late 1960s/early 70s. The 11+ was used to allocate or 'sift' final year (i.e. 11 years old) primary school pupils into a tripartite secondary school system (composed of academic 'grammar schools', technical or functional 'secondary modern' schools). If working-class pupils managed (against difficult odds) to pass the 11+ exam, and take up a place at 'grammar school', they

had a greater chance of becoming upwardly mobile, as a result of the opportunities and prestige afforded by the elite grammar school system. For the majority of working-class pupils who failed the 11+, the opportunity to become upwardly mobile through opportunities afforded by a 'good' education was effectively closed off. Very few specialist technical schools were actually opened and secondary schools (and their pupils) were viewed as second rate against their prestigious grammar school counterparts. Many writers and commentators have discussed the resentment generated by the 11+, as well as the profound and enduring feelings of 'lack' and inadequacy that accompanied 'failing' the exam (see Mahoney and Zmroczek (eds), 1997).

It is, therefore, easy to imagine how the women's actual personal experiences of this education system would lead to the production of very different recitations of the experience of class and upward mobility. Here we can, perhaps, see a clear example of the effect of what Maines *et al.* (1983), and Maines (2001) refer to as the 'social structural past' on the women's narratives. Maines *et al.*, argue that the idea of a 'social structural past' is implicit in Mead's theory of time and social order (see Ch. 5) and refers to that aspect of the past, which has a real structuring effect on the present. The past is not merely something which is retrospectively reconstructed through stories but instead 'functions in creating the present' (Maines, 2001: 45-46). Clearly, the way in which the women were allocated within the tripartite educational system had a very real impact in conditioning, setting limits upon and structuring 'choices' available to the women, and this is confirmed by the different 'positions' within class/professional hierarchies from which the women now speak (with the 'Bootstraps' women occupying less 'senior' or prestigious positions in the caring professions).

However, as the 'Bootstraps' narratives in particular show, the women's lives were not entirely determined by the 'social structural' past. Instead, the women were able to self-consciously act upon their social circumstances, in ways that generated new and novel possibilities (and probabilities) of what was likely occur in the future.

The 'Bootstraps' women's pasts established probabilities that the women would not take up professional jobs, yet their responses to the structuring effects of the past overturned these probabilities, and set in place new conditioning processes which made it possible for the women to take up professional positions (even if it remained improbable that they would take up the more 'senior' positions available within the caring professions). The 'Bootstraps' women were, often, very much aware of the 'social structural' past and its structuring effects on the present and constructed narratives which both 'emplotted' and celebrated what they regarded as their 'success against all odds'.

In the sections which follow I will draw upon further examples, which illustrate the deployment of one of the two identified plots in the women's construction of their narratives of self. For the sake of brevity, I will focus on particular respondents' narratives to illustrate each 'plot'. By using detailed 'case studies', I also give more of a flavour of the difference and diversity that is constructed out of the use of the same cultural plot by more than one woman. This should help to draw the readers' attention to the active and creative dimensions of storytelling; i.e. that plots are not 'social templates' that 'lurk behind our backs... to stamp us into selves according to the leading stories of the day' (Holstein and Gubrium, 2000: 103), and that 'narrators artfully pick and choose from what is, experientially, available to articulate their lives and experiences' (ibid).

'Pulling myself up by the Bootstraps'

Christine's account provides a clear example of a self-narrative formulated around the 'Bootstraps plot' of improving one's life situation through one's own efforts. Christine's account, of her childhood, self reproduces many of the familiar themes associated with a working-class childhood: struggling at school; receiving little support and encouragement from teachers and parents; experiencing first-hand the stigma and shame that attaches to those living in poverty. The way in which these experiences are recited, within the key episodes of Christine's account, gives them a

powerful dramatic quality which only serves to highlight the extent of Christine's remarkable class transformation. The idea that Christine's account is formulated around a particular narrative plot (i.e. 'the Bootstraps plot') is supported by the way in which Christine constructs the active responses of her childhood self to her experience of common class themes (of hardship, educational disadvantage and so on). Through the retelling of major episodes of her childhood, Christine constructs an 'always-already' opinionated, rebellious and independent minded self (cf. Lawler 1999), that refuses to bow to the pressures and constraints of her social and cultural context. For example, Christine remembers her teachers having low expectations with regard to her educational attainment. However, as Christine recites her story she makes it clear that she was not willing to passively assume the role of the low achieving working-class girl, and, instead, describes how she actively fought-off this imputed/ascribed class-cultural self-identity:

I was quite intelligent, but, from that sort of background, it was twice as hard. I always felt, because the pupils who were from the same background as me weren't as bright so there was a lot of... um I think there were lower expectations... from the teachers, as well, because I was from that sort of background where I wouldn't do well and I wouldn't go to university, and I wouldn't go to college, and I wouldn't do this, and it was like they were trying to keep me down. And I felt socially, I mean it's like my ex-husband's just a brilliant one for this he's like, what did he say to me: "You don't know your place, you're working-class and you should remember that" [laughs]. And that was how the teachers were then you know that "You belong down there, you stay down there because that's where you belong. Just because you've got a brain doesn't make you any different, don't think it makes you better because it doesn't". And I thought I'll show 'em, I'll show 'em I can do it. And I think I must have always have had that inner core of self belief that made me know I could achieve or that I could do more.

Christine narrates many other episodes from her childhood and youth, some of which appear, at first glance, to be disconnected from a story of struggling against the constraining aspects of class and gender. For example, near the beginning of her narrative, Christine tells the story of one of her earliest memories: falling down an icy well in the middle of a field near her home:

I was walking along looking at the sky, all the blue sky had gone, there's no blue sky. Anyway all of a sudden, plop, I fell down this well. Oh, I mean what a shock it was and it was it was really cold, it was in November it had really cold icy water in and it came about up to my waist you know but you know it was quite...

CC You must have been terrified.

I was, I was, it was quite a deep well it was about 5 foot, 5, 6 foot deep so I could sort of see the sky above, you know, above me. But because it was like a hole in the ground with sort of rough earth sides it was really hard to get out of it. And I can remember shouting for help and starting to cry and thinking "Oh nobody can hear me" you know "I'm going to be here for ever and ever and I'll not get out", you know. You know, at 3 I don't know what I thought, I was very frightened I thought if I'm going to get out I'm going to have to do it myself and I did I actually climbed, scrambled out of this well.

When read as an isolated event, Christine's story of falling down a well appears, simply, as an amusing childhood anecdote. However, when reinterpreted as an 'episode' in Christine's 'Bootstraps' narrative, this particular story takes on an altogether different meaning. For example, even earlier in her narrative, Christine had talked of the traumatic experience she had in a children's home, where she was placed during the time her mother was suffering from post-natal depression after the birth of a younger sibling (see also Ch. 5).

I didn't feel I was valued, that my opinions were valued. I wasn't expected to even have an opinion. I wasn't expected to say what I wanted, or ask for what I wanted. *I just had to do what I was told, and be quiet, and behave, and of course that wasn't me anyway* (my emphasis).

Similarly, in her recollection of primary school, Christine describes herself as a 'rebel':

All the kids, in the school, had to have an afternoon nap. Well I didn't want an afternoon nap, I was wide awake. I thought "well I don't want to go to sleep" and I would sit up and I wouldn't lay down so I was the rebel, "Out of here we don't want her". So, they asked my parents to

take me away, which I was really glad about because I hated it there, that was super I thought, “Yes!”

In the narration of these episodes, Christine constructs a self that has faced adversity and oppression from the very outset of the life course but which has always exhibited reflexive agency, resourcefulness and courage in response to the harsh realities of its social, cultural and historical context. Another example, which typifies this mode of emplotment, is as follows:

Because we were different, they [Christine’s neighbours] didn’t want to be friends with us, they didn’t want to know us and we were like outcasts. Because, not only were we foreign, my mum was divorced, and in those days there was quite a stigma attached to that because people just stayed together, they didn’t get divorced. So that really made me very aware that I was very, very different because I wasn’t in a two parent household.... So that made we even more different if you like, and, sometimes, I hated that. But, as I grew older, I preferred it and now I quite value it. I like to be different, I really do I think it’s great to be different and there’s nothing wrong with being different and, you know, I try and instill that in, in any clients that say “Oh” you know “I’m different”. I say “Well that’s good, we’re all individuals anyway aren’t we?”... “Be proud of the difference, it’s nothing to be worried about, really you know so”.

CC So you don’t think it held you back it didn’t make you...?

No, it spurred me on actually ...I thought I’ll show ’em I can be what I want to be, you know, and I will yeah.

Christine constructs a self that has always tried to slough-off the constraints of her classed and gendered social and cultural contexts. This is not to suggest that academic achievement and career success came quickly or easily to Christine. Christine returned to education, as a mature student, many years after leaving school to become a wife and mother. While Christine relished the prospect of returning to education, her husband gave her no support arguing that her duty was to home and family. Christine’s refusal to conform to her husband’s expectations about the appropriate roles and identities of working-class women, later led to the breakdown of their marriage. Christine argues that she received little support, from ‘significant

others', at key stages in her life process and this both contributes to, and lends credibility and persuasiveness to her 'Bootstraps' narrative, as can be seen in the following extract.

While I was doing all this studying, my marriage broke up and, you know, I just thought "enough" because it was a very, very unhappy marriage and I sort of stuck it out for the sake of the kids, because I didn't want my children to be brought up in a one-parent household. Because, in those days, there weren't that many kids who were, and I didn't want them to be deprived in any way, you know, either financially or emotionally. Um, so I changed, as a person³. I mean my ex-husband... he was very Victorian in his attitude and, oh, and he just came out with some corker phrases. I mean I ought to write them down and stick them on the bathroom door um "You, the trouble with you, you don't know your place, you're working-class and you should remember it", um what was another one "I should have never let you go to that uni" [laughs]. I mean that was, that was the best and I thought the only answer to that is "Well no you shouldn't should you cause look at me now, look what you've got now, I'm divorcing you [laughs]"

[...]

[On entering social work] My family couldn't really understand it actually you know I think they were a bit like my husband I think, oh you know, "People like us, people from our family don't do social work", you know "What does she think she's doing?" I thought "Well I'll show you I can do it" [In contrast] I think most of my friends quite admire what I've done, actually, the ones that know me, like Dee and Mary, my two oldest friends they really do, you know um, because

³ In another part of the interview, Christine reiterates the point that she is a very different woman than her earlier self: 'I changed as a person and I'm a very different person now to the person I was twenty years ago when I was just a housewife you know.' The idea that Christine has changed, as a person since she was married as a young woman, disrupts her 'Bootstraps' plot in which she was 'always-already' a rebel, challenging the constraints of her class-gender cultural context. The idea that Christine willingly or begrudgingly acceded to the roles of wife and mother, within a traditional working-class household, cannot be easily contained in the particular 'Bootstraps plot' that she deploys throughout the main part of her story. Here Christine, whether intentionally or not, points to other stories to tell and other dimensions of self than those foregrounded in the 'Bootstraps' narrative. Here, Christine hints at another story in which class barriers to career and educational achievement cannot be easily surmounted by the desire and longing for a different life, leading to the acceptance, whether happily or reluctantly, of traditional classed and gendered fates. Christine compromises the narrative coherence of her story with this revelation and provides another example of the difficulty of combining the notion of class transformation, i.e. rejecting the classed and gendered roles and identities she had previously 'fated' herself to (cf. Maines, 2001), and continuity of selfhood, i.e. the 'always already...' narrative, into a clear and coherent storied narrative (see Lawler, 1999; Byrne, 2003).

they're so pleased that I've done so well. *Because I have, I've done it all myself you know that's the good thing about it, it's all me, out of my hard work, you know, which has been great really, you know, it has been really good yeah* [my italics].

Unlike some of the other women, who drew upon a 'Bootstraps plot' (see below), Christine restricted her discussion of personal feelings of class-cultural inadequacy to the story of her childhood self. In contrast to some of Lawler's (1999) upwardly mobile interviewees, Christine did not express painful feelings of cultural inadequacy in her discussion of her personal and professional experiences as an adult. According to Lawler, the women she interviewed 'develop narratives in which the 'real self' is middle-class' (1999: 16). However, the women's personal expressions of cultural inadequacy (which they ascribe to the enduring impact of their working-class history on their self and subjectivity) disrupt their narratives of being 'always-already middle class': 'the past is able to 'catch up' with you and disrupt the smooth trajectory of a narrative move from working to middle-class' (ibid.). Whilst these women cling to a self-affirming, culturally valued middle-class identity (which they attempt to naturalise through their stories of being 'always already middle-class'), they are also, according to Lawler, painfully aware that the identity, they claim for themselves, is not entirely authentic and could be exposed by others as 'fraudulent' at any moment. As Lawler puts it:

All of these women might be able to 'pass' as middle class, but there remains within the self a continual reminder that the habitus claimed is not the one which can be fully inhabited; that the dispositions implied (by the habitus) are not fully possessed. Further, there is always the danger that you might not pass; that someone might 'see through' you. Accents are a particular pitfall here, particularly in Britain, where they are assumed to clearly mark social location. 'Middle-class' accents are preferable in most social sites, but only when they are (or can pass as) authentic. When they are not, or cannot, they become a joke. In being 'revealed' as inauthentic, they are simultaneously marked as a pretension, which Bourdieu (1984:251) defines as 'the recognition of distinction which is affirmed in the effort to possess it'. 'Pretentious' is a charge levelled at people in whom what they seem *to be* is not (considered to be) what they *are* (Bourdieu, 1984): in whom there is a gap between *being* and *seeming* (1999:17).

By way of contrast, Christine avoided the threat of being labelled as pretentious by refusing to make any claims upon a middle-class identity which might be seen as 'not rightly hers'. Whilst Christine's 'Bootstraps' narrative can be seen as the story of her hard fought personal 'escape' from the constraining aspects of her working-class social and cultural context of origins, she makes no attempt to 'escape' her working-class habitus or identity. As she puts it:

I think people, I don't know if I'm just too open and honest, but people, I think, guess that [her class background] in me, you know, I'm sure they do. It's like they already know without telling them that I'm not sort of, you know, from a sort of an average white, middle-class background being a social work do-gooder. It's like they can tell that, almost, you know, I think well, erm, but I'm just me, you know, I'm me and I'm not going to change for nobody. And I think I do the best I can from where I'm coming from and to me that's OK, you know. And to do anything different would be to be pretending I'm being something I'm not and there'd be no point to that, that you know, that'd just be false, wouldn't it, and I think people would sense that as well, you know, so I think that the secret is you've got, in life, you've got to be yourself, you know, whatever that is.

In this extract, Christine's pronouncement of her authentic identity and sense of self as an individual - 'I'm just me' - is not built on the refutation of class as an aspect of self/identity (cf. Savage *et al.*, 2001). Instead, Christine's working-class habitus/identity is simply regarded as part of who she is, as an individual. Here Christine coherently combines themes of individuality and the social structuring of the self into her narrative of identity, producing a credible counter-narrative to the anti-historical (and deeply flawed) social-theoretical accounts of the abstract, autonomous self (see Somers and Gibson, 1994).⁴

⁴ From Christine's response, we might also begin to ask whether a working-class female habitus does *not* threaten to undermine the positive evaluation of a social worker's professional legitimacy and competence in the way it might in other, traditionally male and middle-class dominated professions such as academia. In this way, Christine, and other women like her, may experience less pressure than other professionals (such as academics, doctors, etc.) to 'pass' as middle-class in order to conform to normative understandings about the 'proper' dispositions, competences and ways of being a 'true professional' self.

Whilst expressions of cultural inadequacy were, largely, absent from Christine's account, they were, nonetheless, evident in other accounts which loosely adopted the 'Bootstraps' plotline. Like Christine, these women made no suggestions that they wanted to 'pass' as middle-class and they made no attempt to disidentify with a working-class identity. Similar to Christine's account, these women also narrate the story of the difficult 'journey' they have taken to escape the most constraining and oppressive aspects of their class-cultural social and historical context. Like Christine these women construct, into their stories, a clear sense of a self which 'carries' forward aspects of its working-class biography and culture into its new cultural and social environments (cf. Mahoney and Zmroczek, 1997b; Maguire, 2005). However, unlike Christine, these women emphasise not only the positive aspects of the classed experiences, and sense of self, they carry forward with them, but also what they see as negative aspects, of this self, that they would prefer to slough-off or 'get away' from, if only that were possible (though often it is not). For example, Stacey admits that she is envious of people who 'can read and enjoy books' and expresses, in her own way, her sadness that she has never acquired the requisite cultural capital and dispositions to fully participate in the middle-class literary cultural mainstream.

I was really very behind and I've still got all my school reports and it always says if you could just read with her for ten minutes every day, and nobody asked if my mother or father could read and of course they didn't [Stacey has already stated that her parents were both illiterate] We didn't have, we had books if they were around, we had, you know, I mean, magazines and I'm still not a brilliant reader. I can read very well but I don't, I have to really force myself to read and its got to be quite an easy novel. I'm very much into magazines and newspapers. I read a newspaper everyday, but, you know, it's got to be really easy, sort of I would class quite an easy read and it just takes me ages and ages and I just think that's just from before. And I really admire, I really think, I'm really jealous of people who can read and enjoy books because I've got lots of friends who do.

Similarly, whilst Joan formulates an identity around the idea that she has 'escaped' the oppressive constraints of her class-cultural upbringing and the stigma that

attaches to working-class positions, she also narrates a depth model of self, which expresses her need to guard against the resurfacing of 'buried' childhood feelings of unworthiness and inferiority (cf. Lawler 1999) :

I always remember the day I started senior school. It was a senior school that had a navy blue uniform, everything had to be navy blue, apart from the tie and the berry, they had to be red. Now, I thought like the majority of my friends, because there were one or two people, very working-class in the same council house street as me who had been out and got these bits and bobs and all had their navy blue stuff, not me! And I know my mother had the money but she was so thrifty, my mother would save and live like a tramp, if you get the analogy, but she didn't have a lot of money, just enough for a rainy day she would call it. Though when I'd started school, about a week before she came with this suitcase, I came home and she'd been up the road and bought everything for me for school, second-hand from somebody up the street, because everything I had was second-hand, if my mother could have made a shoe she would have done....and it was all green because she'd bought it all from the green school ...so I had a green gymslip, green jumpers, green cardies and, the only thing that matched, was my white shirt and, of course, I knew I wasn't quite right but I didn't realise the implications of that until when I actually got to school on the first morning because everyone was in navy blue but me. So, that was, you know, had a major impact on me because I think things like that can really knock your confidence because, you know, it wasn't my fault I didn't have the right things and I guess it wasn't my mother's fault that she didn't feel she had enough money to splash out and get me what I needed. So it's, you know it's difficult...I felt let down and I think, thinking about it I've got this, I feel quite upset thinking about it, because I can see this suitcase coming in the house now. *I think it's a situation where some, some level of unworthiness was there that hasn't left me, it's still there if I allow it in. I have to be very careful, sometimes, because I really felt that's fair enough, I've got a uniform but I don't deserve any better, really, and I.. I am quite convinced that wasn't the intention because we didn't have the money, etcetera, etcetera. But, yeah, I felt let down and quite unworthy really* (my emphasis).

Even though Christine, Joan and Stacey draw upon the same culturally available 'Bootstraps' plot, there is clearly still a relatively high degree of 'narrative slippage' (Holstein and Gubrium, 2000), or flexibility, in terms of the way in which the women's representation of their current classed selves and experiences are 'emplotted' in relation to the retrospective reconstruction of their childhood

experiences. The multiplicity between narratives, which draw upon the same culturally available plot, reaffirms what Holstein and Gubrium refer to as creative intersection between what they term 'discursive practice' and 'discourses-in-practice'.

Individuals compose their accounts; these do not come fully formed or organized on their own. While local and broader narrative formats offer familiar or conventional guidelines for how stories might unfold [discourses-in-practice], they do not determine individual storylines [discursive practice]. Who and what we are is not frozen in available discourses of subjectivity...Rather, the integral work of putting discourses into narrative play stretches the boundaries of the self on its own, supplying substance and organisation. (2000: 107).

'Making good through education'

There are marked differences between the accounts of those women, who excelled in the school environment (i.e. those women who attended grammar school and then went straight on to nursing, teacher training or university), and those women who struggled at school, or who were denied the chance to continue with their education beyond secondary school (i.e. those women who failed the 11+ or who were forced to cut short their education to take up employment, e.g. Judith). For the latter group of women, the path of upward class mobility has been much more circuitous and complicated, and their achievement of a middle-class position much more ambiguous and partial (for example, these women tend to occupy less 'senior', and less well remunerated, positions within the caring professions). By way of contrast, the former group of women (those who actively draw upon a plot of 'Making good through education') narrate what they regard as their relatively smooth transitions into positions of middle-class authority and power, and tend to speak from what they see as their secure, authoritative, powerful positions within the caring profession. Unlike many of the women who draw on the 'Bootstraps plot', these women tend *not* to construct affective expressions of class-cultural inadequacy into their childhood or professional narratives. The idea that cultural understandings and

beliefs about class cultural inadequacy, or 'lack', are internalised by working-class women has been at the heart of novel interventions into debates about the relationships between class, self and identity. For example, understandings about the internalisation of class 'lack' or inadequacy are at the heart of Skegg's (1997) 'disidentification' thesis; much of Lawler's (1999; 2000a; 2000b; 2002) work on class and narrative; Reay's (1997, 2001) auto/biographical writing on class; as well as many of the articles on class and the self contained in the Mahoney and Zmroczek edited collection (1997).

The absence of expressions of cultural inadequacy in the accounts of the women, that draw upon the 'Making good through education' plot, suggests that the internalisation of class lack is not necessarily a universal or intrinsic feature of working-class women's sense of self, and that this particular narrative of self may only emerge in accounts conveyed from particular standpoints, or in particular temporal, situational and interactive contexts. What these accounts also show is that issues of class and gender can be central to women's narrated sense of self even when expressions of class-cultural inadequacy are absent, or muted. Despite the relative absence of expressions of class 'lack', themes of class and gender are, nevertheless, woven into these women's narratives in ways that enable them to convey the centrality of these issues for both their reconstructed accounts of their past and more recent experiences.

A good example of an interviewee, who self-consciously constructs a narrative of upward mobility based around the established plot of 'Making good through education' is Alison. Alison's narrative is constructed around the themes of class, gender, morality and social values amongst others. Her narrative uses these themes to select and process major events in her life – moving home and moving to grammar school aged eleven; leaving home and getting married; going to college and starting her career as a teacher; losing her father to cancer and divorcing her husband; and moving from teaching into social work and then educational psychology. These events are turned into episodes in an "emplotted" personal

narrative. The meanings that Alison gives to these episodes and the (spatial, temporal, sequential and causal) connections she draws between them help to give shape and substance to her storied self.

Alison makes it very clear, from the outset of her story, that she has undergone a significant class transformation, and that, whilst she has a working-class history, she now speaks from a 'middle-class' subject position which endows her with 'knowledge', authority and proper judgement (cf. Lawler, 1999). This can be seen in the way Alison contrasts her childhood response to the brand-new council-house she and her family moved into, with her subsequent reinterpretation of this context from the point of view of the present. Alison strongly implies that she is now speaking from a wider, more knowledgeable and informed perspective than that which was available to her working-class childhood self. As she puts it:

I have some very kind of clear memories of visiting this house, on this council estate which looked really posh but actually if you go back now and have a look at it it's a real pokey little place, you know an end terrace house, but, at the time I remember it seemed quite a big move for us, really.

Alison is especially conscious that she is not merely retelling her working-class childhood but is, rather, composing an account of her childhood which self-consciously draws on narrative resources made available in her educational and professional settings. Again, this reinforces the impression that Alison self-consciously speaks from a subject position which is enriched with culturally legitimate cultural capital; a position which might render her less vulnerable to self-conscious feelings of 'lack' or cultural inadequacy. Note, for instance, how she refers to the knowledges, skills and insights she acquired during her teacher training:

[My] college at the time was taking people, on the teacher training course, who didn't need 'A' levels necessarily. It was one of the last years they took in based on life experiences, so we had a lot of mature students. So the people I was mixing with came from all cultures, all walks of life, all social strata. And it was quite a radical, it was quite a

radical course, really. It was very much into multicultural education, it was very much into the politics of education, the philosophy of education, the psychology and sociology of education; so, I think I got a really good grounding in all those things. And we'd debate Marx and we'd debate, you know, teacher training, don't do that any more do they, it's unknown. So, I was made more socially and politically aware and I think that's why when I start to look back on my childhood and can put that perspective on it now because I did sociology. In a way we called it industrial studies but, basically, it was the study of industrial societies and we did like family networks and family patterns and you look back and you think "Oh yeah, that's making sense now". So, you use your own childhood experiences to kind of put the meat on the bones of the theories and you kind of find something.

Like some of the women who used the Bootstraps narrative, Alison also expresses a degree of class-cultural inadequacy with regard to her childhood self. However, the way in which these expressions are woven into her narrative of self constructs a very different set of relationships between class, identity and the self from those expressed by women like Joan, for example. While Alison expresses a sense of cultural inadequacy, with regard to her childhood self, she does not use these examples to convey a deeply internalised sense of 'lack' within the self, or any lingering sense of cultural inadequacy that she might experience as an adult. Instead, Alison attempts to link her personal/biographical experience of cultural inadequacy, to her wider cultural context, by reconstructing her memories from the point of view of the class and gender inequalities that shaped her childhood experiences. For example, Alison remembers her presumably middle-class peers at grammar school as 'Extremely confident in their abilities, they never expressed any kind of self doubt', whilst reconstructing herself as a relatively unconfident, timid young pupil. As she puts it:

I kind of went to a grammar school with more middle-class kids and we moved house to our own house, a private house in [town]. So I, everything kind of came, that was when I was 11, we moved on decimalisation day actually, 1971. Erm, kind of everything came, so socially all of a sudden, because I'd lost a lot of friends at my junior school because not a lot of them had moved to the grammar school, because our school didn't tend to, I think 5 of us went from our junior school because our junior school tended to draw from the council estate

...so a lot of the kids were from there, really, so it was a bit of a different, a bit of an eye opener for me, a different world. Erm, and I remember being quite confident at my junior school, whereas I kind of lost a lot of confidence. I often say it kind of arrested, put me back two years in terms of my development.

CC In what ways did you lose your confidence?

I think, socially, I lost my confidence in terms of mixing with people I mean, you know, the people at that school always seemed very assertive, very sure of themselves, and, academically, because it's okay being quite able at your junior school, but when you go to the grammar school and everybody's been selected because it was obviously, you know, the 11+ and everybody's been selected for their academic ability, all of a sudden you're kind of not in the top pile. And one of the things, I used to dread, was they used to read out our results, end of term exams, and they used to like go from the like bottom up and when you're in a class of twenty/thirty and you're like the twenty-sixth or twenty-fourth or twenty-fifth, you know, it really rocks your confidence. Even though I was at a grammar school, I was in the top stream of the grammar school, yet I still felt incompetent and incapable because of this system of, you're there within that group. It used to be awful, it used to be awful.

While Alison reflects upon her experience of inadequacy in the competitive environment of the grammar school, she also implies that her problems had nothing to do with any intrinsic inability or 'lack'. Instead, she makes sense of them in terms of an elite educational system organised around unspoken assumptions about the kinds of dispositions and competencies (i.e. expressions of a middle-class habitus), which pupils are presumed to have acquired outside of the school environment and which, therefore, need not be actively taught.

I felt no one ever taught me how to study for 'A' levels. Well it was a case "Well you're at grammar school, you should know what you're doing so just get on and do it." So no one ever taught you study skills, or you know, what you needed to do. So, I think I was quite a naïve learner really, I don't think I had a lot of knowledge about that.

Alison also hints at other ways her peers were advantaged by a school curriculum and exam system that rewarded knowledges and skills that her middle-class peers had ready access to:

CC Erm going back to what you were saying about when you moved to the grammar school and you were saying it was an eye opener, can you say a bit more about what it opened your eyes to?

Erm, it was just like the lack of familiarity like how people lived their lives. You know people were given allowances for clothes. I mean, I'd never ever been given money for shopping for clothes and, like I say, going on holiday [to France]. I mean some of them came up already being able to speak French and, erm you know just, just those kind of things really just lifestyles that I hadn't come across.

By contextualising her expressions of inadequacy, in relation to wider class-gender cultural, social and historical formations, Alison conveys a 'subversive story' (Ewick and Silbey, 1995) which exposes and critiques, however subtly, the class and gender hierarchies and inequalities that shaped her childhood and personal biography. However, whilst expression of cultural inadequacy are incorporated into Alison's narrative of her childhood self, the overall tenor of her account points to her smooth transition into a confident, powerful, autonomous middle-class subject. For example, consider how Alison represents her life during her early twenties, when she embarked upon a career as a teacher and married an upwardly mobile working-class man who had also 'made good' through the grammar school and university system. As Alison puts it:

I stayed on at college got my degree and went into teaching and did very well socially. We chose not to have children. I wanted to have a career, I wanted to go into teaching, got a teaching job and, all of a sudden, we had two professional incomes coming in. So, we were quite well off, double income, dinkies they call us, double income, no kids...And when I was married and working, you know, I used to have three holidays a year, I mean, abroad. Malcolm was very good with money he, he used, he went into insurance so he was quite astute, quite tight some people would say, but he was good with money and as I say we did quite well out of it. That time, in terms of the housing market, we did very well so we kind of made quite a bit of money on the housing, things like that.

Interestingly, Alison suggests that she inherited her social confidence and grace from her father and, in doing so, inextricably ties her performance as a confident and

powerful adult self to the working-class moral and social values called out by her working-class father.

We didn't stay friends with my friends but, certainly, Malcolm's friends. They were all three years older than me, same age as my brother actually, my brother knew a lot of them. And they'd all gone to grammar school and, as I say, the boys tend to come back [to their home towns]. So, a lot of them had come back and they were playing rugby at the local rugby club, so a lot of them were in professions, like teaching or business or something like that, because you know they were like ex-grammar school. So, I suppose we did move in professional circles, you know, there was a lot of young couples who had a lot of, like we used to go to the pub, and quite often a lot of money a lot of disposable income really.

CCAnd did you move easily within those circles or...?

I've always found it easy to move in lots of different social circles, but my dad's like that. My dad can mix with the humblest of people and there was a guy lived down our lane in a caravan and he was, he had alcohol problems he was an alcoholic, Jm....you know, my dad would chat with anybody he'd chat with him. We were always brought up with a very strong moral sense, my dad, I think by being brought up with his parents, his grandparents were Victorians, he was brought up with Victorian people and there's a very kind of strong moral theme going through, but a very strong idea about how you treat other people. So my dad, some of my dad's messages would be like, "Well there but for the grace of God go I", you know, or "It takes all kinds of people to make a world" or "Cleanliness is next to godliness" you know. My dad had like little sayings, all the time, but also he modelled, how he related to people he could chat to anyone he was very sociable. My mum was very anti-social actually, she'd never go out anywhere, never go to the pub but my dad was always very gregarious and it didn't matter, he could get on with... my brother's girlfriend's parents who were teachers, he could chat, he wasn't bothered, he didn't let social status phase him and I think kind of I picked up a lot of that, really, erm. You know because he. I don't know where he got that from because if I think about his own life experiences it must have been devastating I think to be in care in the 1930s, 40s if you think about it must have been absolutely devastating, no regulation or anything, God forbid, God knows what must have gone on. But from somewhere he found that strength of character, really I don't know if it was being in the navy, he travelled the world a lot when he was young. He saw a lot of things, he went to South Africa, I think he saw a lot of the treatment of the black people out there and it obviously made an impact, erm, so I kind of got these little moral threads from my

dad, really. I used to chat a lot to my dad, not so much to my mum but to my dad about being with people.

CC So you never had a sense of being like inferior or?

No not when I , I did when I was at grammar school but I think I, when I went to College and I left home, I had to do, a lot of growing up really, very quickly I had to become independent and it was great.

Alison's positive sense of connection to her father's working-class social and cultural values and practices lends a sense of continuity and coherence to her narrative (and helps to explain the relative ease with which she became socially mobile). Whilst Alison tells the story of her transformation from 'a very local girl' from West Yorkshire, her emerging confidence is not dependent on 'forgetting', or turning her back on her working-class roots. Alison's account, instead, implies that she is "doing" middle-classness differently from some of her peers. For example, she rejects the mainstream middle-class individualistic ethos in favour of a strongly moral and social democratic outlook, a perspective undoubtedly reinforced by her work in the caring-professions. Alison also dis-identifies with the stereotype of the arrogant middle-class individualist who lacks both self awareness and a social conscience. Instead, she constructs a middle-class professional caring self that is reflexively self-conscious of its privilege and powers.

I think professionals put a lot of barriers around things and, you know, I think we need to start breaking down those barriers, I think it's about people relating to people at the end of the day, and you know social status. You know, if I had to go in, it's a bit like the way I dress you know so, today, you know, if I go in dressed up... with jewellery and do that, you know, and it's going to be much, much harder for some of the people I work with to relate to me. I've got to set up some kind of common ground I think really and not create a distance and a boundary.

CC So you're very conscious of like your authority and the effect that has on people?

And the potential power I have because I think power and influence, I think. You know people say "We don't talk about empowering people because we shouldn't believe we have power" and I'm thinking "Tosh, you know, we do have power I do have power". My work is important,

you know, what I say and the decisions I make do have an impact on people's lives...If I accept that, then I can start to work on how do I make sure I use that power, I don't abuse that power.

CC You use it positively?

How can I use it positively to really help people or, you know, facilitate the growth and development of people rather than get, put it up as a barrier. I think if we pretend we don't have power, I think that's awful because people know. I don't try and pretend, I think that, you know, I don't think that's right, I think that is a misuse... If you try and pretend what we do doesn't affect people because it does, yeah, that's how I feel really.

The idea that Alison has always retained a powerful connection to her 'working-class' roots and values, whereas others around her tended to 'forget' their working-class history is a key theme of Alison's narrative and is used as an explanatory device for her eventual separation from her first husband.

By the end of September, I was heading for a divorce because I found out my husband was having a relationship with someone else and had been for three and a half years. So, that was a shock to my system, although we were growing apart. Interestingly, our value systems were growing apart, you know, we said we come from similar backgrounds, but ... I was really into the kind of, you know, race awareness, gender awareness stuff, he was very much going into the more middle-class aspirational value base stuff. He worked in business, he worked in insurance, he worked alongside people, who had a lot of money, yeah you know, I was working in more of a social setting with all these values going on so we kind of drifted apart.

Overall, the women who made creative use of the 'Making good through education plot' tended to produce much more positive identifications with their working-class histories, than their 'Bootstraps' peers. This is not to say that the women would not talk about experiences of hardship, abuse, depression, etc., within their families, although when these women discussed more painful memories from their childhood they were much more keen to trace the causal relationships between abuse,

depression, etc., within the family and wider social contexts and processes. For example, as Madeline comments:

Now my father was, as I said, he had violent tendencies but he was actually a very soft hearted man, he was the sort of person that the expression "He wears his heart on his sleeve" is applied to, right. But the reason he had violent tendencies was because he'd never learnt to control his temper, and he himself had had a very bad background...So basically he was, you know a product of his environment, erm, he, you know, he'd been beaten by his father, he'd grown up in extreme poverty in the nineteen twenties.

CC Right

I mean he describes the poverty, erm, that he experienced as a child, I mean in the times you know when people actually had to go to soup kitchens that was the level of poverty he'd experienced and so he'd had...

CC Erm before like the welfare state as well, yeah.

Yeah so he'd had a, you know, he was born in 1919 so he'd and of course all these, the depression of the twenties and thirties had totally, you know, really affected him and his family. So he'd had a pretty awful upbringing and I think that's the only, the only way we can explain the way he was. But he was actually a very kind hearted and very soft in many ways, and he was very caring about his family, you know he always provided well for them, there's no doubt about that. He, he would have he would have leaned over backwards to do something for you

A key difference between the 'Making good through education' women and those who used a 'Bootstraps plot' is that they were much less likely to represent the working-class cultural contexts they grew up in as a major source of oppression and constraint within their lives. For example, although the 'Making good through education' women would often make jokes about the reproduction of gender conservative attitudes within their households, they tended to place much more emphasis on the idea that their parents played an active role in their upward mobility, for example by supporting and encouraging their progress through education.

For example both Madeline and Alison commented on the difference, they felt their gender made to their experiences within their working-class households:

Alison: The other thing, as a girl you know, I had to stay in and do the ironing whereas they [her brothers] were allowed out to do whatever. And, again, I remember having quite a strong sense of injustice at quite an early age really because I was a bit of a “tom”, you know I was physically a bit of a “tom boy”, and out and about type kid you know...so that seemed a bit unfair.

Madeline: My father, I told you, he smacked me twice, he didn't like smacking me and he's never liked smacking me, so he didn't because I was a girl, whereas he used to leather into, he used to... really hit him [her brother]. I was, I didn't used to be witness to it, though, but I used to know about it.

Nevertheless, both Alison and Madeline (see Ch. 4) suggest that their parents hoped they would take advantage of educational and career opportunities and not be constrained by the traditional gender ‘blueprints’ for the life-course (although this was not always experienced by the women as positive). For example:

Alison: I think my mum felt she was respectable...her granddad was a mason, we've got a picture of him with his chains, he was a mason, he's actually got the chains on. So I think there was like, you know, a bit of social respectability there but she I think, I think she very much felt having her nose pushed out for her brother Jack. I don't think she ever felt she was encouraged as a girl. Her sisters never did anything academic, they got married to... and it was the men, they never really worked and it was the men who were the breadwinners...My mum could have gone to the London School of Economics and, instead, she chose to marry my dad and she had four children, quite early on, so I always think there was she was frightened when I got married early on, because I think that she was frightened I'd do the same as she did and throw away an educational opportunity you know... I think she wanted more for me but I don't think she was very good at communicating that, really, I think it just created a distance between us.

It is evident from these examples (and others), that the ‘Making good through education’ women tended to place greater emphasis on what they regarded as the progressive nature of their parents’ outlooks and values (unlike the ‘Bootstraps’

women who tended to concentrate on what they regarded as the atavistic and retrogressive nature of their parents' attitudes about gender and class). As a result, the 'Making good through education' women constructed a less ambivalent or ambiguous emplotted continuity between their general outlooks on life and those of their parents.

Alison: My mum and dad were quite active in the church and my dad ran the youth club, I mean *I suppose again, you see, there's that strong kind of sense of social justice* there because my mum and dad were active in the church and my dad ran the youth club...I used to go and help him and, of course, the kids that came to the youth club, some of them were quite young tykes really. But my dad used to provide soup and sandwiches and, you know, he was just that kind of person...But, then, they fell out with the church and the reason they fell out with the church was which I thought was really interesting...was because they were on the committee, they said it's all right them coming and quoting this, this, and this on the committee but they turn up in their fancy hats and their big cars and things like this. So, I think I was made aware and my family did talk about this quite openly, I was made aware of social strata quite early on as a young child because my family talked about that and they talked about the, you know, the kind of way that people kind of contradicted what the word...

CC Kind of double standards

Yeah, double standards, really, they'd say you know people turn up ...and they set up this meeting. And I think from my dad's point of view, they didn't show enough empathy for these young kids who were really struggling and have difficulties you know...you call your self a Christian, but you're not acting in a Christian manner towards...

Madeline: You get a very strong sense of morality from a catholic background. I mean and, you know, I've got, you know, talk about a sort of solid sense of morals, well, you know, you certainly get that being brought up as a Catholic and it never, ever leaves you, never erm...But it's hard to talk about it without sounding pompous [we both laugh]. I'm not, I'm not a practising Catholic now .

The 'Making good through education' women also placed much less emphasis on 'feelings of pain and estrangement' (Lawler, 1999: 3), which feminist writers on class strongly associate with the disrupted/fractured class habitus of the upwardly mobile working-class woman. Could it be that the narrative thread, these women

construct to inter-subjectively link their 'core' beliefs and values to those of their parents, encourages them to disattend to the more painfully disruptive aspects of class transformation and movement?⁵

However, it would be misleading to overstate the extent to which inter-subjective and inter-generational continuity is constructed into the women's accounts of their classed selves. For example, the women often expressed a profound discontinuity between their subjectivities and practices and those of their mothers, and the distinctions they made between their own and their mother's ways of 'doing' class and gender seemed crucial to their attempts to construct a class mobile self/identity that might be accepted as credible and authentic (thus avoiding 'calls to order' or accusations of pretension and inauthenticity) [see Ch 4 for more in-depth analysis on this issue]. For instance, while Alison recognises that her own class mobility is consonant with her mother's attempts to become socially mobile in later life (she retrained as a teacher when Alison was at secondary school), she, nevertheless, strongly disidentifies with her mother's attempts at 'taking on the markers of middle-class existence' (Lawler 1999:3). Alison describes her mother as a snob: 'My sister married the son of a doctor and that's okay you see, she's a bit of a snob

⁵ There might be a number of reasons why feelings of class 'lack' or class cultural inadequacy are generally absent from the accounts of those women who construct a life-story plot of 'Making good through education'. We can read the accounts, at face value, and conclude that feelings of class inadequacy were simply never a part of the personal experience of these women. We might then suggest that these accounts (and the contrast between these accounts and those of the women who used the 'Bootstraps plot') tell us a great deal about the specificity or particularity of working-class experiences, at particular historical junctures (for example, that at least some of the women who succeeded under the 11+/grammar school system and who regarded themselves as 'respectable' members of the working-class had little personal experience or awareness of being stigmatised as a result of their position within class hierarchies). However, from a narrative perspective, it is also possible to ask whether the women might have excluded themes of class 'lack', or inadequacy from their accounts, in order to construct a clear, unambiguous storied narrative of their successful education out of the working-class and into the professional classes. Emphasising class 'inadequacy' might be seen as discordant with the plot of 'Making good through education' leading to narrative incoherence and ambiguity, hence its exclusion from the women's accounts. This group of women also construct themselves as confident, empowered professional women and it is plausible that their own sense of their professional legitimacy and capability might leave them with little sense of personal vulnerability, which they might otherwise (re)construct as a significant aspect of their earlier class experiences. Although we can only speculate about the 'absences' from the women's accounts, it is arguably still useful to ask such questions as part of a hermeneutic exploration of the complex relationship between narratives and 'experience'.

really', and suggests that her mother detached herself from working-class culture, 'My mum was very anti-social...she'd never go anywhere, never go to the pub'. Alison also argues that her mother could not contain her feelings about the 'superiority' of her class origins to those of her husband:

Her dad was a carpenter, he was a skilled... working-class but skilled working-class had a trade erm. And then, erm, her mum, erm she used to work in the mills but, at one time, they had their own confectionery shop so my grandma baked fantastic cakes. And she used to work in the mills but she used to work in the kitchens providing the meals and things for the men. So she was always baking was my grandma. I have some very fond memories of licking out the bowls. So I think you know, again, you kind get, you kind of get divisions because my dad's family were working in Grimsby, were from the fishing trade, you know, not going out on the trawlers but gutting the fish and stuff like that. But my dad, my dad's family were very poor. He used to live in ..a street in Grimsby which [was] basically a slum and it ended up being condemned ...*So I think my mum always felt that she was quite socially above that.*

By pouring scorn on her mother's 'pretentiousness,' Alison repeats the pathologisation of working-class women's attempts to claim a middle-class, or at least 'respectable', social position and also preempts/defends herself against similar attack. Alison's story provides yet another example of the difficulty women have making positive identifications with women whose classed performances of femininity are constituted as pathological from a middle-class perspective. In order to construct a narrative of class transformation which stands a greater chance of achieving narrative legitimacy, it seems that these women have to stress the fact that they are 'doing' class and femininity differently from their mothers, and in ways that hopefully leave them less open to accusations of being 'cultural dupes', 'pretentious', etc. (Lawler, 1999).

Conclusion

The study of the different narrative frameworks, used by interviewees to narrate their experience of upward mobility, helps to clarify the relationships between

personal experience, reflexive storytelling practice and identity. For example, the use of different narrative frameworks highlights the heterogeneity or multiplicity of lived experience amongst upwardly mobile working-class women. In this sense, the different ways in which women emplot their class mobility can be seen to reflect the particularity and specificity of the women's experiences of class, gender and upward mobility. At the same time, the differences between the women's accounts also highlight the multiple 'narrative options' (Holstein and Gubrium, 2000) available for women to artfully and creatively construct their accounts of the classed and gendered self. Multiplicity of selfhood in narrative is, therefore, constructed out of both differential experiences and the selective and artful way in which women construct their experiences into cohesive and intelligible narratives. Here, the notion of narrative 'slippage' between discourses-in-practice (e.g. culturally circulating plots which provide common reference points for 'anchoring' classed and gendered selves) and discursive practice (e.g. the active deployment of cultural plots in 'giving voice' to experience) helps to both illuminate and explain the diverse, yet socially meaningful, relationships women construct between class, gender, self and identity (see Holstein and Gubrium, 2000).

Class and gender seem to be highly relevant to the women's sense of a coherent and perduring self-identity, regardless of how they construct their narratives. At the same time, the multiple, contradictory ways in which concepts, categories, discourses and 'experiences' of class and gender are used to convey particular understandings of self seem to indicate that women's subjective relationships to these cultural constructions are often complex, variable, ambiguous and emotionally charged. Arguably we require sensitive and subtle analytical approaches to 'capture' some of the ongoing interactions between available narrative resources and subjective constructions of experience, identity and self. Narrative analysis, arguably, offers us the 'tools' we need to investigate and unpick empirical or 'concrete' examples of these complex processes.

Nevertheless, the traditional emphasis, in narrative analysis, on ‘wholeness’ and ‘coherence’ can be seen to discourage attention away from such ambiguities. Therefore, researchers must be careful not to overlook the fraught and ambivalent nature of women’s identifications with class and gender. It is true that, in broad terms, the respondents are able to construct coherent narratives around culturally recognisable plots. Nevertheless, closer examination of the narratives enables us to see that multiple and ambivalent identifications with class and gender are often ‘nested’ in the women’s narratives (see Gergen and Gergen, 1988). The women’s accounts, therefore, lack narrative coherence in the traditional sense of the term, although it could be argued that the women use their narratives to express, as coherently as possible, their felt sense of the tensions and complexities of occupying the interstices between class worlds.

CHAPTER FOUR

Self and Others

In this Chapter, I explore the relational and inter-subjective dimensions of self-narratives. Using the analytical frameworks of narrative-interactionism, I explore the ways in which inter-subjective relationships are both conducted through and constituted in biographical narratives. For example, I address the topic of family narratives' (Scott and Scott, 2000) to explore how stories, told within the context of the family, are used to inter-subjectively fashion subjectivities and identities, which are suited to the family's collective goals, activities and projects. Linked to this, I also assess the way in which narratives of self are constructed in dialogue with various 'others' both present and absent (see Collins, 1998). From this perspective, the stories that we tell to ourselves, about ourselves and others, are shaped (though by no means determined) by the narrative identities and frameworks provided to us by 'significant others'. At the same time, the practice of narrative self-construction gives individuals the opportunity to reflexively respond to the identities and frameworks of self ascribed to them by others. Nevertheless, the use of self-narratives to claim agency, autonomy and individuality is, by no means, unproblematic. For example, established conventions of self-narrative require narrators to evoke recognisable 'story-types' (e.g. villains, heroes and fools) for their stories to be culturally recognisable and engaging (Plummer, 2001). In making the self the protagonist or hero of its own story, Others are often portrayed in 'fixed', and stereotypical ways, and may only appear in stories to emphasise the heroic struggles and achievements of the narrative's subject. While narratives conventions and structures enable storytellers to 'give voice' to personal struggle and individuality, there may be costs to Others who are rendered in narratives in extremely one-dimensional or pathological ways.

Exploring the relational, inter-subjective and social aspects of narrative represents a radical departure from traditional approaches to self-narrative. Traditional life-narratives celebrate the heroic adventures of the autonomous and individuated self

and have tended to envision social structures and relationships solely in terms of the constraints they impose on the individual (see Gergen, 1992; Smith, 1993). Traditional conventions of life-narrative have been widely criticised for: '[neutralising and suppressing] ideologies, histories, and subjectivities non-identical to those of the universal human subject' (Smith, 1993: 393). However, the silencing and exclusion of 'Other' life-stories is not the only problematical aspect of traditional life-narratives. Also of concern is the fact that heroic western narratives treat the self and the wider social environment as mutually exclusive. Traditional life-narratives, therefore, have little utility or value for those wishing to develop sociological perspectives on the self, experience and narrative (see Somers and Gibson, 1994). A key proposition of interactionist sociology is that: "'society" and "the individual" are never separable but are merely different phases of social processes' (see Maines, 2001:4). Sociologists, such as Somers and Gibson (1994) and Maines (2001), are, therefore, interested in developing narrative analytical frameworks that enable researchers to explore the mutually constitutive relationships between society and the individual. As such, the: 'the fixed and universal self driven to maintain separation and autonomy from others', clearly has no place within the new conceptual frameworks of narrative sociology (Somers and Gibson, 1994: 49).

Rejecting the traditional conventions of life-history, narrative researchers are increasingly emphasising the relational and social embedding of self-narrative: 'although the object of the self-narrative is the single self, it would be a mistake to view such constructions as the product or possession of single selves' (Gergen and Gergen, 1988: 37). From this perspective, selves, self-narratives and social relationships are mutually constituted in processes of ongoing social interchange. This analytical framework is hugely indebted to the Meadean perspective on the social self (see Mead, 1934). As I explained in Ch. 2, Mead envisions the self as relational, processual and reflexive. Mead conceptualises the self as constructed and reconstructed out of the open-ended and evolving relationships it has with others (both 'significant' and 'generalised'), and the ongoing reflexive relationship it has with itself (see Mead, 1934). The self comes to know itself by seeing itself as others

see it, that is, by taking the perspectives of others toward itself. As a result of its varied social relationships and engagements, the self is able to become aware of itself from the point of view of multiple others and social groups. At the same time, the self is not a mere reflection of how others perceive it. The social self is an intelligent self which can actively draw upon the multiple perspectives to which it has access in order to reflexively respond to the particular versions of self anticipated or called forth by others in particular interactional contexts. Context specific constructions of self are undoubtedly shaped by the social perspectives available to the self, as well as the narrative expectations or interpretive demands of various others, whether absent or present (see Collins, 1998; Holstein and Gubrium, 2000). At the same time, the creative and agentic ways, in which individuals use the perspectives available to them, means that their narrative responses to others are not pre-determined; instead narrative self-constructions are often used to negotiate, redefine and reshape ongoing social interchanges and relationships. Meadean perspectives on the self, therefore, offer a robust conceptual framework for studying the relational and inter-subjective dimensions of self-narratives.

In the sections that follow, I discuss in detail the conceptual turn towards a more relational and social view of selfhood, experience and narrative. I then assess the ways in which issues of intersubjectivity and relationality in narrative are being addressed by contemporary researchers before turning my attention to the interview data. Using examples from my own research, I explore the roles of relationality and inter-subjectivity in the fashioning of women's class and gender narratives.

The prototypical life story plot: obscuring relationality

Prototypical 'Western' life-narratives, such as heroic stories of individual struggle and achievement, are implicitly constructed around Enlightenment theories of the self as 'autonomous, rational and unified' (see Smith, 1993: 393). Enlightenment conceptualisations of the 'modern' self overturned classical views, which regarded human actors as inextricably tied to their social contexts (see Somers and Gibson, 1994) and laid the foundations for the archetypal 'Western' life plot, in which the

actor heroically struggles against or resists external forms of power, structure and ‘authority’.

The mythic heroism of the social actor was canonized in a revolutionary idiom, an idea so potent it dissolved classical views of the mutual constitution of the subject and the social world. While the classical view believed autonomy to be conditional upon social and political embeddedness, the new idiom substituted the notion that the freedom of the individual was conditional upon an antagonistic differentiation of the individual from his/her cultural and institutional webbing. Social relations and “traditions” became the “object” - the domain of constraint – in a subject-object duality. Social connectiveness became part of the *external* structure alone. It was the object in a subject-object, individual-against society, antagonism from which the actor was impelled to be free. (Somers and Gibson, 1994:64).

Many feminist writers have exposed the gender subtext of this ‘heroic’ life story plot. For example, as Smith writes:

For three centuries now, traditional autobiography and biography have, through what Jaques Derrida calls the “law of genre,” both reproduced and consolidated the West’s notion of self, or...Rousseau’s “eternal being.” Generic clothes have made the man, so to speak. Making men in specific ways, these practices reinforce dominant ideologies, official histories, and founding mythologies of the subject. In effect, the white, male, bourgeois, heterosexual human being becomes representative man, the universal human subject. “His” life story becomes recognizable, legitimate, and culturally real. Making representative men in this way, generic practices reinforce the subjectivities provided to those who do not share this set of identities. Moreover, they neutralize or suppress ideologies, histories and subjectivities non-identical to those of the universal human subject. The life stories of many people whose history differs from that of the universal human subject because of race, class, and gender identifications go unwritten, or if written, misread or unread (Smith 1993: 393-394).

Gergen (1992) also highlights the way the prototypical ‘Western’ life story plot both constructs and reinforces gender differences and inequalities. As she puts it:

Life stories are often about quests; they...are stories of achievement. The story hangs on an end point – will the goal be achieved or not? In such stories all is subsumed by the goal. The heroic character must not allow anything to interfere with the quest. Do you assume that a heroine is the same as a hero, except for gender? Some might say that the narratives of heroes are equally available to women. I doubt this is so. Cultural expectations about how the two genders should express their heroism are clearly divergent. Consider the central characters and the major plots of life stories codified in literature, history, or personal narrative; we could easily conclude that women do not belong, at least in the starring role. The adventures of the hero of the mono-myth would make rather strange sense if he were a woman. If He is the subject of the story, She must be the object. In the System opposites cannot occupy the same position. The woman represents the totality of what is to be known. The hero is the knower. She is life; He is master of life. He is the main character; She is a supporting actress. He is the actor; She is acted upon... In general, the cultural repertoire of heroic stories requires different qualities for each gender. The contrast of the ideal narrative line pits the autonomous ego-enhancing hero single-handedly and single-heartedly progressing toward a goal versus the long-suffering, selfless, socially embedded heroine, being moved in many directions, lacking the tenacious loyalty demanded of a quest (Gergen: 1992:131).

Traditional life-stories not only ‘silence’ women, but construct men and women as diametrical opposites. While traditional life-stories construct men as agentic, heroic and autonomous, they also construct women as passive, submissive and ‘socially embedded’.

In recent decades, some feminists have responded to the ‘Othering’ and ‘inferiorization’ of women in traditional life story accounts by publicly celebrating and revalorizing women’s ‘difference’. However, as Somers and Gibson (1994) argue, this strategy is not without its problems. Difference perspectives ‘fix’ and ‘remove’ women’s identities from history, by placing them on ‘newly revalorized ontological foundations’ (1994:64). As Somers and Gibson argue:

[T]he argument that women are more attuned to “being-in-relations” than the (male) norm of individuation becomes the grounds for a new theory of fundamental analytical differences between men and women generalized from what is in fact a questionable *normative* affirmation of

the moral relationality believed to be characteristic of female identities (1994: 64, authors' own italics).

Whilst challenging the valorization of the autonomous and individuated self, identity perspectives, nevertheless, share the enlightenment view of identities as fixed, essential and ahistorical. As a result, identity perspectives construct social connectedness and relationality as essentially female attributes. Rejecting the idea that relationality is merely a characteristic of female identities, Somers and Gibson (1994) argue that new perspectives on identity are needed, which emphasise the ongoing and mutually constitutive relationships between narrative, self, identity, and social order.

[N]arrativity and relationality are conditions of social being, social consciousness, social action, institutions, structures, even society itself – that is, the self and the purposes of self are constructed and reconstructed in the context of internal and external relations of *time* and *place* and *power* that are constantly in flux. That social identities are constituted through narrativity, social action is guided by narrativity, and social processes and interactions – both institutional and interpersonal – are narratively mediated provides a way of understanding the recursive presence of particular identities that are, nonetheless, not universal (Somers and Gibson 1994: 65, authors' own emphasis).

While traditional or enlightenment stories of self pit the heroic autonomous individual against the external social structures which seek to subjugate 'him', feminist identity politics construct stories of self which celebrate women's 'relational' and 'caring' identities. Both these approaches ignore the conditions of 'relationality' and 'narrativity' which underpin the construction and reconstruction of selfhood and social order over time. On the other hand, researchers working from pragmatist or interactionist perspectives configure 'relationality' as a 'foundational' precept of sociological analysis. For example, as Maines comments:

"Society" and "the individuals" are never separable but are merely different phases of social processes. Cooley (1909) said it earliest and best: society, he said, is the collective phase and individuals the distributive phase. Accordingly individuals are always social beings,

and societies are always composed of interacting individuals. The interactionist is reluctant to study one without studying the other, and in any case, the choice is merely a matter of emphasis brought on by the research question at hand (Maines 2001: 4).

From both a 'narrative identity' and 'interactionist' perspective, identities are never 'fixed and removed from history' (Somers and Gibson 1994: 65). Instead, identities evolve and adapt in response to shifts taking place in ongoing social relations. Similarly, individuals and groups creatively respond to their environments in ways which generate new social identities and relationships. Selves and identities, and social relationships, groups, and structures are, therefore, mutually constituted through the ongoing transactions of meaning that take place between interacting individuals (cf. Maines, 2001). From both these perspectives, identities are not essential, permanent or unchanging. Instead, 'narrative' identities are continually constructed and reconstructed by individuals in the context of the complex 'relational matrices' in which they are embedded.

Joining narrative to identity introduces time, space, and analytic relationality – each of which is excluded from the categorical or "essentialist" approach to identity. While a social identity or categorical approach presumed internally stable concepts, such that under normal conditions entities within that category will act predictably, the narrative identity approach embeds the actor within relationships and stories that shift over time and space and thus precludes categorical stability in action. These temporally and spatially shifting configurations form the relational coordinates of ontological, public and cultural narratives. It is within these temporal and multi-layered narratives that identities are formed; hence narrative identity is processual and relational (Somers and Gibson, 1994: 65).

Relationality and narrative adequacy

David Maines (2001: 176) argues that the interdisciplinary nature of narrative studies can be characterised by an: 'inconsistency in the identification of narratives and pluralism of theoretical framing'. Maines regards this plurality as one of the strengths of narrative analysis and argues against a narrow conceptualisation of

storytelling adequacy not least because traditional assessments tend to be based on implicitly 'male' models of storytelling 'in which plot moves from beginning to end in a linear fashion' (2001: 184) (see also Gergen 1992, Smith 1993). Research on gender and narratives, Maines points out, indicates that women are more likely to 'co-narrate' and 'collaboratively construct' their stories. They also tend to construct narratives which envision social life as relational and interdependent.

Women tend to tell stories of social relations, downplaying the main characters' personal roles and emphasising community and mutual dependence. Men, on the other hand, tend to tell stories about themselves and their abilities such as stories of skill, overcoming problems, or being clever. Second, they tell or express stories differently. Men tell stories in ways that draw attention to themselves as storytellers. They are more likely to tell tall tales, for example, in which they fool listeners into thinking that a joke is really a personal experience story. Women tell stories in ways that induce listeners not to focus on them as storytellers, or if they do, they portray themselves as foolish, embarrassed, or frightened (Maines, 2001: 184-185).

Gender differences in storytelling do not represent essential or ahistorical differences between men and women, although they may tell us something about the different social locations men and women tend to occupy. Smith (1987) for example points out that men, who occupy elite positions in science, academia etc., are encouraged to 'disattend' or 'bracket' their everyday worlds and, as such, pay little attention to the social structures, relationships and support networks which free them from everyday 'duties' and 'concerns'. Without the burden of social reproduction being carried by 'Others', men in elite positions would not be able to engage in their autonomous, individualistic pursuits or projects. At the same time, the 'abstract' or 'bracketed' nature of the worlds of science, academia, etc., obscure the roles played by various 'Others' in making such 'individualistic' projects and subjectivities possible. Social relationships, and structures of interdependence, underpin supposedly 'solitary' and 'autonomous' projects, pursuits and adventures, at every turn. Nevertheless, conventional 'male' models of self-narration and narrative adequacy discourage attention to relationality in accounts of self. While conventional narrative approaches have tended to preserve the autonomous,

individuated and solitary subject of the classical life-story, new narrative frameworks are arguably needed which pay much more attention to issues of relationality in narrative.

Mead's theory of the relational self

While Somers and Gibson (1994) make no mention of Mead, his theory of self arguably provides the most comprehensive statement on the mutually constitutive, processual relationship between the self and social order. According to Mead:

The self is something which has a development; it is not initially there, at birth, but arises in the process of social experience and activity, that is, develops in the given individual as a result of his relations to that process as a whole and to other individuals within that process (Mead, 1934:135).

In Mead's view, mind and self are always embedded in the social process, they are never external to it:

No individual has a mind which operates simply in itself, in isolation from the social life-process in which it has arisen or out of which it has emerged, and in which the pattern of organized social behaviour has consequently been impressed upon it (Mead, 1934: 222).

Mead's view of the self as an ongoing reflexive relationship between the 'I' and the 'me' means that he avoids constructing subjects as a 'cultural dopes' who are passively shaped by structural forces. On the one hand, the fully formed self is social in all respects since it can only become aware of itself by taking the attitudes of other individuals, or the group as a whole (the 'generalised other') toward itself.

The individual enters as such into his own experience only as an object, not as a subject; and he can enter as an object only on the basis of social relations and interactions, only by means of his experiential transactions with other individuals in an organized social environment...[S]elf-consciousness involves the individual's becoming an object to himself by taking the attitudes of other individuals toward himself within an

organized setting of group relationships...[U]nless the individual had thus become an object to himself he would not be self-conscious or have a self at all. Apart from his social interactions with other individuals, he would not relate the private or “subjective” contents of his experience to himself, and he could not become aware of himself as such, that is as an individual, a person, merely by means or in terms of these contents of his experience; for in order to become aware of himself as such he must, to repeat, become an object to himself, or enter his own experience as an object, and only by social means – only by taking the attitudes of others toward himself - is he able to become an object to himself (Mead, 1934: 225-226).

On the other hand, the self does not merely internalise and reproduce organized group attitudes. During processes of self-reflection, the ‘I’ both calls out, and responds to, the organised social attitudes which attach to the ‘me’. As a result of this process both the self that we are self-consciously aware of (the ‘me’), and the wider social environment to which the individual belongs can undergo adaptation and adjustment.

Both aspects of the “I” and the “me” are essential to the self in its full expression. One must take the attitude of the others in a group in order to belong to a community; he has to employ the outer social world taken within himself in order to carry on thought. It is through his relationship to others in that community, because of the rational social processes that obtain in that community, that he has belonging as a citizen. On the other hand, the individual is constantly reacting to the social attitudes, and changing in this co-operative process the very community to which he belongs (Mead, 1934: 199-200).

Analysing relationality in biographical narratives

Raising the issue of relationality in narrative, highlights the complex, multi-layered and multi-faceted relationships between the individual and society. Clearly the scope for analysing relationality in biographical narratives is wide-ranging. In this Chapter, I want to focus on the way inter-personal relationships are mediated by narratives produced at different levels and scales. I also wish to explore the way inter-personal relationships are constructed into narratives of self. Mead’s theoretical framework is particularly useful for exploring the way in which ‘self’,

and 'other', are inextricably intertwined and mutually created. Self-knowledge and self-awareness are produced through the process of calling out and responding to the perspectives of various 'others'. Narratives of self, then, are not constructs of an autonomous and individuated self. In order to tell the story of the self, individuals are required to locate themselves in complex and sometimes conflicting inter-personal relationships, and respond to the identities called forth from the perspectives of both 'significant' and 'generalized' 'others'. Narratives of self, therefore, give insight into the way in which the self is constructed within (classed, gendered, raced, etc.) inter-personal and institutional contexts of action, as well as the creative responses of individuals to the groups and communities to which they 'belong'.

Relationality and the narrative construction of class and gender identities

An innovative study of relationality in biographical narratives of gender and class can be found in Scott and Scott (2000). These authors are primarily interested in investigating the role of their mother's stories in the constitution of their own class and gender identities. More specifically, Scott and Scott investigate the way their mother's stories of self facilitated their upward mobility into the professional middle-classes. Therefore, Scott and Scott not only seek to explain the role of their mother's stories in the shaping of their childhood class and gender identities, but also the impact of these narratives on the women they have become. Scott and Scott's analysis of the impact of their mother's stories on their own biographies and class-gender identities allows the authors to unpick what they see as the complex relationships between narrative, identity, inter-subjectivity and class-gender contexts of social action.

Scott and Scott see their mother's stories as evidence that she was an 'active producer of meaning' (2000: 130), 'a teller of tales about her experiences of gender and class transformations which have shaped the twentieth century' (2000: 139). The authors view their mother's stories as part of a wider 'reflexive' project aimed

at 'recruiting' each of her daughters as 'co-authors' of cross-generational narratives of class mobility (see p129).¹ For Scott and Scott, their mother's stories highlight the 'intertextuality' of narratives of self. Their mother constructed her life stories 'with the intention of their entering other narratives (ours); that is to say, with an eye to the future of their intertextual influence' (2000: 130). The sisters are also interested in comparing the different ways their mother told her life story in each of their childhood locations. Sue and Sara Scott grew up ten years apart, in very different class cultural contexts: 'Sue spent her childhood in Inverness, when the family was upwardly mobile into the lower middle class; Sara spent hers in Middlesbrough when they returned abruptly to the extended working-class family, previously left behind' (2000: 131). According to Scott and Scott, their mother selectively tailored her stories to 'suit' each daughter's particular class context of action. Their mother's stories were always constructed with the aim of facilitating the daughters' upward class mobility, but the means of achieving this end needed to be specific to each setting. While their mother's stories were adapted to the exigencies of each daughter's class context, they were always 'plotted' around the same end-goal: the achievement of upward mobility. As Scott and Scott put it:

[W]e believe the versions of [mother's stories] were adapted to the different class contexts in order that they could best function to the same ends of securing our allegiances to the mobility project, and pass on the skills most relevant to achieving it. It is interesting that in our mother's characterisations of our childhood selves Sue was timid and shy, Sara was robust and outgoing. Sue had to be 'sacrificed' to nursery school in order to encourage her to socialise, while Sara need no such hardening practices, and might defer mixing with her Middlesbrough peers as long as possible. What this maps onto is the very different tasks which maximizing our mobility potential presented in Inverness and Middlesbrough. Sue needed opportunities in the surrounding environment opening up; Sara needed them limiting! Even the ascription of character was appropriate to the different contexts of our childhood – Sue needed to observe and pass; Sara would be better off fighting for her opportunities. For Sue it seemed to be important that Mum's stories told her 'where she came from' in order that she could be

¹ The idea that their mother self-consciously engaged in a reflexive project of self through her storytelling is presented by the authors as a challenge to sociological assertions that 'reflexivity' is a specifically late-modern or 'elite' phenomenon.

recruited to the upward trajectory *and* appreciate the struggle which preceded her. For Sara they conveyed Mam's anxiety about slipping back, but also a sense of possibility. The stories Sue first associated with class when we began discussing this chapter were the cautionary tales, which might help her function as a class-mobile child entering middle-class homes. Whereas Sarah immediately identified a sense of being recruited to stories of Mam battling to escape the confines of her class (2000: 136-137, authors' own emphasis).

Scott and Scott's analysis of the significance of their mother's storytelling, in the construction of their class biographies, challenges traditional approaches which envision social mobility as a 'trajectory of individuals' (2000: 138). Acquiring the 'right' 'cultural capital' and learning how to perform 'class' and 'gender' in ways that maximised their educational and employment opportunities were both necessary to the women's achievement of upward class mobility. Yet, as Scott and Scott argue, their 'mobility projects' were not masterminded by a solitary or autonomous self. Instead, the women's efforts to achieve academic and career success need to be understood, at least in part, as responses to the kinds of identities and forms of conduct actively 'called out' by their mother's stories.

According to Scott and Scott, the stories told by their mother 'called forth both resistance and capitulation to the 'preferred reading' set up in [their mother] Olive's 'writing'/telling' (2000:129). The authors, therefore, make it clear that they should not be seen as 'dupes', who unwittingly served their mother's class desires and longings. Theirs is *not* the story of their straightforward 'socialization' into class and gender identities and positions preferred by their mother. On the other hand, Scott and Scott recognise that their motivation and desire to 'better themselves' did not stem from an 'essential' or 'inner' drive to succeed; instead 'cultural ambition as a sense of direction' (2000: 132) was something they 'inherited' via their mother's stories.

Although there were times when our mother attempted to 'police our femininity' in conventional ways, she generally encouraged our movement beyond her experience in both class and gender terms. How then were her aspirations passed on in such a way that they became part

of her daughters' subjectivity? We believe this occurred primarily through the telling of stories about her life, and that these stories conveyed not just 'aspiration', i.e. *her* desire, but class awareness, specific social skills and a narrative of upwards movement in which we were 'always already' placed as actors. Our mother's life was told as a precursor to our own (a story of origins) our trajectory a continuation of hers. In a not always welcome sense, our achievements were built on the pre-history of her life' (2000: 132).

As sociologists, the authors are keen to situate their mother's stories within broader, cultural, historical and social structural contexts by highlighting what they see as the 'interpenetration' of 'public' stories and practices of class and gender, and the 'private' stories told by their mother (2000: 128). For example, they argue that the 'childhood' identities, conveyed in their mother's stories, should not be perceived at 'face value' (i.e. as 'essential', 'fixed' or 'ahistorical'); instead, these identity constructions should be seen as mediated by shifting narrative frameworks of gender, class, childhood etc. 'Dominant' frameworks of gender and class shaped the kinds of stories of self that their mother could tell at particular times and places. Public stories of gender and class, therefore, played a crucial role in giving shape and substance to the identities and lives of all three women.

The 'umbrella narrative' over all our mother's stories was that of upward mobility – by dint of work and will-power she had bettered herself, escaping the poverty, misery and almost continuous pregnancy which had been her own mother's lot. Her childhood self is invariably described as snivelling and pathetic, a sickly, put-upon eldest girl with a 'mawky, shittin' look', kept off school to be 'Billy Muggins' until she could be found a job 'in service' at thirteen. The mother we knew was confident, stropky, proud of her abilities as an organiser and impatient of the less assertive of her friends and relations. Her transformation was an achievement of which she was immensely proud, and one she assumed her daughters would build upon. In terms of confidence and 'character' we were to start out where she left off. Believing that Sue showed toddler tendencies to shyness (like her mother), nursery school and a full social diary were administered. Sara was diagnosed as cheerful and sociable from birth and therefore required no additional stimulation. What these stories tended to occlude is the contexts within which these character assessments were made and the salience of class to these. Just as Olive's account of pulling herself up by her own nurse's uniform is ignorant of the commonality of this particular route to social mobility for

young working-class women in the 1930s, so her stories of our infant selves were unaware that views about what constituted the 'nature' of children, 'a good baby' or 'a good little girl' shifted between the 1950s and 1960s. The quiet passive baby, who was the darling in large, impoverished families, lost status to the active and entertaining infant as family size continued to shrink and affluence to spread. Such public stories about ideal family life can be seen to interpenetrate the private praxis of our lives (2000: 132-33).

Sociological understandings of the complex interrelationships between class and gender also enable the authors to make sense of the seemingly contradictory 'dare devil' and 'goody two shoes' selves they currently embody (2000: 135). Olive's stories often encouraged the women to fight conservative stereotypes of both class and gender. At the same time, her stories taught the daughters to know when to 'play by the rules' of femininity and propriety, in order to procure 'legitimate' middle-class positions, and escape the drudgery associated with impoverished working-class life. The desire to achieve both these goals required the women to construct both subversive and compliant classed and gendered selves which they learned to contingently and judiciously apply to their particular circumstances. The authors' exploration of the impact of their mother's stories, on their adult subjectivities, therefore helps to account for the contradictory nature of their class-mobile, gendered selves. Moreover, by attempting to make sense of the narrative construction of multiplicity in selfhood, Scott and Scott's analysis also contributes to wider debates about the 'fractured' or 'split' nature of upwardly mobile 'working-class' women's identities (cf. Mahoney and Zmroczek (eds) 1997; Lawler 1999).

Issues of 'memory' and 'retrospective reconstruction'

While Scott and Scott (re)interpret their mother's stories from a sociological perspective, the authors do not fully explore the issue of the construction and reconstruction of their mother's stories in both their separate and joint recollections of their personal biographies. For example, in their assessments of the impact of their mother's stories on their childhood identities, the authors situate the telling and reception of their mother's stories squarely in the past. However, when issues of

‘memory’, ‘recollection’, and ‘interpretation’ are introduced into the discussion, it becomes very difficult to disentangle the original ‘experience’ or ‘impact’ of the mother’s stories from the construction and reconstruction of that relationship from the point of view of the present (see Ch. 5). Of course, it is important not to underestimate the value of the authors’ ‘family narratives’ in terms of helping them to make sense of the women they have become. At the same time, it is important to recognise that the inter-subjective relationships which are so meaningful to the authors’ sense of self, identity and past now only exist in ‘memories’, which are always open to retrospective construction and reconstruction from emergent perspectives (see also Reay, 1997). The authors’ analyses of the ‘relationships between childhood experience and adult identity, and of the specific impact of our mother on the women we have become’ (2000: 129), are persuasive because of the way they carefully and creatively synthesise their pasts and presents, their personal memories and their sociological understandings into coherent auto/biographies. However, the complex, multi-layered and slippery nature of the memory ‘materials’, they are working with, means that their auto-ethnographic accounts (however meaningful, insightful and sociologically significant) should perhaps be regarded as tentative, open-ended and subject to revision.

Constructing inter-personal relationships into narratives of self

The article by Scott and Scott (2000) emphasises the way in which identities and stories of self are often collaboratively constructed. Plummer (2001:44) also argues that the production of life story accounts ‘is not an isolated affair’. Instead, the construction of the life story is mediated by narratives of self and identity provided by both ‘significant’ and ‘generalized’ others. Thus, according to Plummer:

When hearing a life story, it is often wise to ponder just how these stories are coming to be told in this way, and where they come from. Thus *significant others* – from parents and family to loved ones, teachers and friends – may be the important people in your life who play a part in shaping the stories of that life (and of course as the people change so the stories change). These ‘others’ often tell you ‘the kind of person you

are' and remind of what you did in the past. Life story production is not an isolated affair: others help you tell the tale, and who better than those you value most? Sometimes these others are more abstract – they are 'generalized others'. Here a sense of a life story is constructed from fragments provided in the wider culture. From great literature to soap operas, from adverts to news, you look for the signs of a life through the culture, for clues as to how life should be lived and for elements of self identity (2001:44).

If we consider self and other to be two sides of the same coin, we not only need to be aware of the way in which stories of self are shaped by 'others', but also the way in which selves construct and reconstruct the identities of 'others' through their storytelling practices. For example, Byrne (2003) has explored the way tropes of sameness and difference are used by women to specify their own class, gender and race identities vis-à-vis the identities they construct for 'significant others'. In her analysis of 'Sally's' narrative of upward class mobility, Byrne argues that the narrator's account of her working-class childhood self makes no clear distinction between her stories and her sisters' stories. In this account, 'Sally' and her sisters are presented as a 'collective subject'. Sally narrates the sisters' childhood experiences, identities and subjectivities as more or less interchangeable and treats parts of her sisters' life-stories as if they were part of her own.

However, Byrne argues that the 'point' of Sally's story is the explication of dramatic class and gender transformations or 'conversions' that define her personal experiences. According to Byrne, Sally's account charts 'progress from darkness to light' (2003: 34) and as such the 'end-point' of her narrative is evaluated as highly desirable. Sally's positive transformation is emplotted (at least in part) through the narration of her 'growing difference and independence from her sisters' (2003: 36). The narrative construction and positive evaluation, of her transformed class and gender subject positions, therefore relies on the negative evaluation of the subject positions she constructs for her sisters. While both Sally and her sisters have become upwardly mobile into the middle-class, Sally differentiates her own performance of middle-classness from that of her two sisters. Sally constructs her adult self as a reflexive middle-class subject, who is critical of normative constructions of gender,

race and sexuality. On the other hand, Sally represents her sisters 'as having an unquestioning relationship to dominant norms and acting out racism, sexism and homophobia in their everyday lives' (2003: 36). Perhaps in order to highlight what Sally sees as her transformation into a modern, multicultural and reflexive middle-class subject, she 'fixes' her sisters as 'locked' into the performance of dominant class, gender, race norms. As Haylett points out, the white working-class have often been used 'as symbols of a generalised 'backwardness' and specifically a culturally burdensome whiteness' (2001:351). This particular social 'group' is often singled out as a 'disorganised, racist and sexist detritus', whose atavistic cultural attitudes and practices are seen to block the nation's goals of modernisation and multiculturalism (Haylett 2001: 358). It is interesting in light of this, that Sally presents her class transformation primarily in cultural terms. Sally presents herself as different from her sisters because she (unlike them) has rejected the narrow views of homophobia, sexism and racism, traits which are often interpreted within British culture as markers of an unreconstructed working-class identity. While Sally recognises that her sisters have acquired the external markers of middle-classness (wealth, a private school education for their children, etc.), she nonetheless provides her sisters with subject positions, which imply a relative lack of movement or independence from their class-culture of origin. This gives the audience the impression that Sally's particular class movement is perhaps more fundamental, dramatic and desirable.

Skeggs (2002) has also written about the problematic way in which 'others' are often constructed into self-narratives. While academics, publishers and audiences often view researchers' self-narrations as clear evidence of reflexive methodological practice, Skeggs is sceptical of their role in addressing issues of power, representation, ethics, reciprocity and responsibility in the research process. According to Skeggs, 'reflexive' self-narratives often reproduce and reinforce existing power relations rather than challenge and disrupt them. Skeggs learned this lesson the hard way when her parents confronted her about the way she had represented them in her autobiographical accounts. As she explains:

[W]hen I did attempt to write myself into the research after much persuasion I regretted it. I unwittingly (or stupidly) reproduced the fixity of my parents in a way they had spent all their lives – like the research participants – trying to avoid. To explicate I will reproduce what I wrote in *Formations*:

I write this as my mum unpacks the crystal glasses she has bought me to mark my respectability. I have never achieved the respectability that my parents spent their lives desiring and struggling for (I am not married with children, supported and protected by an economically secure male, sexually contained, and my house is rarely immaculately hygienic - although to others my independence and my job may appear as highly respectable). If my parents surround me with the appropriate symbols they hope I may be marked. (Skeggs 1997:14)

The chapter on class was excruciating to write as I realised how I, too, had strongly invested in respectability when intimidated at University. I was forced to remember how I had lied about my mother and father's occupations because I was scared to be recognised as inferior. (Skeggs 1997:15)

My parents were hurt and horrified by this. Why am I ashamed of them so much? They wondered why they were positioned as inferior. Then I realised what I had done. My self-telling had fixed them in order to explain my movement from them, the distance that I had drawn (I later write about the different capitals: economic, social, symbolic and cultural that I have accrued). My reflexivity, my mobility, my self-narration was based on them remaining in place. Steph Lawler (2000) explores concepts of escape and escapism and shows that while escape from the working class is read as heroic, escapism can be seen only as failure (2002:367).

Skeggs' comments on the problems associated with the representation of 'others' in accounts of self are perhaps directed most strongly towards those who treat self-telling as evidence of a researcher's sincerity, honesty and openness. Researchers who tell the self, in a confessional way, are often regarded as more credible and believable, so much so that the apparent 'openness' of the researcher and the perceived 'truthfulness' of his/her research findings are often collapsed together and treated as one and the same thing. Self-narration then becomes a short cut for

claiming reflexivity, although, as Skeggs point out publicly 'confessing' one's position and perspective and using self-knowledge in a critical and reflexive way (for example in the construction of research practices that challenge and disrupt existing power relations) does not automatically go hand-in-hand. As Skeggs puts it: '[There] is [a] tendency to think that the problems of power, privilege and perspective can be dissolved by inserting one's self into the account and proclaiming that reflexivity has occurred in practice. Telling and doing are two very different forms of activity' (2002: 360).

Skeggs is right to problematise the move towards self-narration in research accounts. Autobiographical accounts should not be treated as 'truthful', 'anti-oppressive', liberatory, or 'power-free' simply because they appear, to some, to be more 'open' and 'honest' than traditional 'scientific' accounts. However, I do not think that Skeggs' argument should be used as a reason to turn away from autobiography and narrative in social research. On the contrary, if self-accounts are treated as stories and narratives, rather than accepted at 'face value', we can arguably turn to life story accounts as a means of assessing issues of power, representation and inequality from new and exciting perspectives.

For example, researchers might be interested in exploring the ways in which established practices of self-storytelling actually reinforce existing power relations. From this perspective, the 'fixing' and 'Otherisation' of key characters, who appear in the 'plots' of self-narratives, can be re-conceptualised as a problem linked to the dominant structures and conventions of personal narrative. Skeggs, for example, narrated her self-story in conventional terms, which were likely to be easily recognised and accepted by her audience. She positioned herself as the subject of her story, the 'hero' in a narrative of upward mobility, who bravely struggles to 'find' herself in both the middle-class world she has entered into and the working-class world she originates from. In order to tell this story in ways that the audience recognise and accept, Skeggs needed to 'people' her story with characters whose roles would serve the development of the themes and plot of a culturally

recognisable narrative of upward mobility. In order to tell a credible and understandable story about the problems facing upwardly mobile women in the context of the British class system, Skeggs perhaps had little choice but to 'people' her story with 'fixed' 'class' 'storytypes'. As Plummer explains:

The narratives of life stories will be peopled by recognizable 'characters'.... We write, read, or hear life stories being tuned into look for 'villains, heroes and fools', and seeking a whole array of what has been called 'storytypes' – not far indeed from stereotypes. Usually there will be a protagonist, an antagonist, and a witness of some kind. For some these can feed into a Jungian concern with 'archetypes' – with prototypes such as the Great Mother, the Wise Old Man, Gods and Demons which are presumed to have some unconscious significance in history. There could be a vast array of such 'personifications' to appear in our stories, but often they are reduced to a small clustering of basic types: fathers and mothers, parents and children, the good and the bad. Listening to life stories may mean listening to the stories of the personifications that people a life (2001: 188).

Class 'storytypes' will tell us little about the 'real' subjectivities of the people portrayed in accounts of self. At the same time, the construction and insertion of stereotypical class characters into stories of class mobility arguably helps to bring to life the personal story of the pain and estrangement associated with class movement. Here, we get some insight into the problems and dilemmas associated with the process of constructing class, gender and other social structures into personal identity. In writing or speaking oneself into social processes of gender and class, it is possible to retain a sense of individuality, agency and uniqueness by making oneself the subject of the story. However, the use of 'storytypes' and tropes of sameness and difference in the construction, of the narratives of class transformation and mobility, often 'fix' 'significant' others in unflattering ways (for example as cultural dupes). These 'others' often end up playing supporting roles in a plot which ties them irrevocably to rigid class and gender subject positions. 'Fixing' significant 'others' in stereotypical or culturally recognisable ways, allows the narrator to emphasise his/her lucky 'escape' from the personal fate dominant narratives of class and gender forecast.

As Lawler (2000: 104-105) has also pointed out, working-class women, in particular, are often 'fixed' within cultural representations as pathological, exotic or repugnant 'Others'. As she comments:

Eulogized in the figure of 'Our Mam' (Steedman, 1982, 1986), or pathologized as bad and insensitive mothers (Walkerdine and Lucey, 1989; Walkerdine, 1990), or laden with sexuality and dirt (Skeggs, 1997), or displaying the wrong amount and type of femininity (Walkerdine, 1997), these women are constituted as exotic and repulsive 'others' when observed from a middle-class perspective. They are also positioned as particularly disappointing from the standpoint of Left politics: they are the cultural dupes who want the trappings of capitalism at the expense of real class struggle. These women become objects in a plot in which the only position for them to occupy is one of pathology. It is little wonder, then, that women might want to mark an 'escape' from such a position. To grow up a working-class girl is to grow up subject to the knowledge that you are excluded from a range of cultural and material resources which are highly valued. To grow up the daughter of a working-class mother and then to find that your family life is represented in pathological terms is to have this lesson brought home to you very sharply.

For Lawler, the 'otherisation' of working-class women, in dominant cultural representations, helps to explain upwardly mobile working-class women's desire to narrate their 'escape' or 'distance' from working-class positions. Nevertheless, as Mahoney and Zmroczek point out, some women reject the assumption 'that they strive to rise out of or escape from their working-class beginning', and retain their working-class identity as a 'positive choice'. As they argue:

[C]lass experience [for many women] is deeply rooted, retained and carried through life rather than left behind (or below). In this sense it is more like a foot which carries us forward than a footprint which marks a past presence. How else should we understand the difficulties we experience within our families when we are perceived as 'getting above' ourselves? Why would we encounter such difficulty with the stereotypes of us if we had 'left it all behind'? And conversely, having absorbed elements of other class identities, why else would we experience so many contradictions in locating ourselves fully and clearly within our working-class communities? (1997b:4)

Indeed, the women I interviewed often expressed multiple, ambivalent and complex disidentifications with their working-class subject positions. The women's sense of their personal agency, creativity and legitimacy was often constructed around tropes of sameness and difference (or identification and 'disidentification': see Skeggs, 1997) with 'significant' classed and gendered 'others', especially mothers. At times, the women's mothers were fixed in pathological or 'stereotypical' terms in order to convey their 'distance' from working-class positions of pathology. At other times, the women blurred the boundaries between 'self' and 'other' by weaving together their mothers' and their own stories of self, in the construction of accounts which positively affirmed shared identities of gender and class (based for example around popular themes of class pride and women's opposition, solidarity and struggle, see Scott and Scott, 2000).

Self and other in personal narratives of class and gender

In the section that follows I will use empirical examples from my own research to explore issues of relationality in the narrative construction of class and gender identities. I will explore the way the women's stories of self seem to be influenced or shaped by stories told to them by 'significant others'. I will also look at the way the women actively construct their class and gender narratives of self through their situated responses to the identities called forth by 'significant others'.

Here, it is also important to consider the influence of the interview setting and my role as 'coaxer' of the women's stories. I asked the women to reflect upon their working-class childhoods and to consider the impact of their early experiences on the women they have become. I also encouraged the women to discuss how they handled their early childhood experiences, and to evaluate their upbringing and early relationships from their current perspectives. Generating 'rich' data, which would allow me to explore these research themes, depended upon the women's willingness to narrate their stories of self in terms of the narrative frameworks I had constructed

for them. On the whole, it was not difficult to get the women to talk in-depth about their childhood experiences, and in particular the impact of their early relationships on the women they have become.

The framework of the interview drew (in part) upon powerful cultural understandings about the importance of childhood in shaping adult subjectivities and identities, and most of the women were happy to construct their lives in terms of this dominant cultural narrative. Moreover, by asking the women to talk about the roles of their early relationships in the formation of their identities, I implicitly encouraged the women to produce narratives that upheld the rules of 'proper' narrative. 'Childhood fix' narratives (see Plummer, 2001) conform to the established narrative forestructures (see Ch. 2), and storytellers, who construct their lives in terms of this narrative, are therefore likely to produce culturally recognisable, intelligible and credible accounts of self.²

Nevertheless, as Plummer points out, there are problems with the 'Childhood fix' narrative, in particular the way it assumes the life to be determined by early childhood experiences.

[T]he '*Childhood Fix*' Narrative... [is] a story overwhelmingly shaped by early childhood experiences - 'the child is father to the man'. In the telling of this life, a great deal of emphasis has to be placed on early life – especially family life, and it usually has to be told in a linear, sequential sequence which implies the life is a cumulative sequence of causes. Freud's work is perhaps the most significant variant of this in modern times – his work is often seen as causing a radical rupture in approaches to biographical study. Here early causal family dynamics, centring around the Oedipus complex, serves to structure psychic life and shape adult personalities. Other 'personality' theories also stress the importance of childhood. Yet there are well known problems with this narrative: Lillian Rubin's *The Transcendent Child* (1997), for instance,

² Indeed, I would even go so far as to suggest that it might have been extremely difficult to develop a meaningful communicative exchange with the women if I had encouraged them to break the rules of proper narrative from the outset of the interview. It may have been particularly difficult to construct shared understandings about the purpose or 'relevancies' of the interview, or the kinds of self-understandings that the women might wish to communicate if I had actively blocked the women's attempts to construct culturally intelligible narratives of self.

tells the stories of eight people whose lives were in some way severely damaged as children, but who seem to rise above this and achieve some form of success and happiness in their adult life. They become 'transcendent children', and the book tells the 'tales of triumph over the past'.

The idea that what happens to a child in those early years in the family *determines* the future is much too simple. It assumes, first, that the child is a passive receptacle; second that the experiences of early childhood inevitably dwarf everything that happens afterwards. In reality, however, how the child handles those early experiences makes a difference in the outcome. As does what happens in the years ahead...too much intervenes between infancy and adulthood for the experience in the family alone to govern how a life will be lived...(Rubin, 1997:3) (Plummer 2001:193).

I tried to counter the problems associated with the 'Childhood fix' narrative by generating accounts which also highlighted the women's agency, creativity and reflexivity. While I was interested in the way in which the women saw their working-class upbringing as significant to their sense of self and identity, I was conscious of the danger of eliciting accounts, which gave the impression that the women's lives and identities were overwhelmingly determined by their early class and gender environments. Because of this, I was also interested in generating accounts, which would give a sense of the women's reflexive responses to their early class and gender environments.

My interest in stories and narratives also made me aware that the idea that the life is determined by past experience is, in itself, an effect of established 'forestructure of conventions for narrative construction' (Gergen and Gergen 1988: 20). For example, a key feature of conventional narratives is that they treat later life events as a culmination of earlier ones: 'the ideal narrative is one in which the events preceding the goal state are causally linked. Each event should be the product of that which has preceded' (Gergen and Gergen 1988:21). I also had a sense, from my readings of the narrative literature, that pasts are always in a sense 'created' by narrators to enable them to make sense of who and what they are (see Ch. 5). By encouraging the women to discuss how they reflected upon and actively handled

their early class experiences and relationships, I prompted them to story their pasts, in such a way that they became the subjects rather than the objects of their narratives. In this way, I encouraged the women to tell me stories, not only about how the life they have live was determined by 'others', but also how their lives took shape through their own self-conscious 'choices' and actions.

However, even in the latter case, I could be seen to be calling forth conventional narratives of self by prompting the respondents to tell the story of how they have made the life they have lived *their own*, for example by valiantly struggling to overcome the constraints of culture and social structures (including "the family"). In a sense, I could be seen to be encouraging the women to produce accounts, which move between more 'female' forms of narrative which emphasise the inter-subjective nature of selfhood, and more 'male' forms of narrative, which position self-storytellers as the 'subjects of their own lives – as the actors' (Bertraux-Wiame, 1982: 192-3, quoted in Byrne 2003: 35).

While the respondents would often willingly construct themselves in terms of the multiple narrative frameworks, I discretely and perhaps sometimes unwittingly provided for them, there were obvious moments of tension in the interviews when the respondents resisted producing the accounts of self they felt were being 'coaxed' out of them. Amy, for example resisted the 'Childhood fix' narrative by self-consciously refusing to tell the story of a life overwhelmingly shaped by early childhood experiences and relationships (see Ch. 5). On the other hand, Madeline expressed concerns about making herself the principle subject of her narrative. Madeline was worried about misrepresenting her 'working-class' family and silencing their experiences and stories and tried to redress the balance by trying to include their stories in her biographical account of class and gender.

Madeline: I've just had a little break which has...given me the chance to reflect on what I've said so far about my parents. And I feel as if I'm actually giving quite a...distorted picture of them...I feel as if I really need to describe them as people a bit more. Now, my father was, as I

said, he had violent tendencies but he was, he was actually a very soft hearted man...

Paying attention to the contextual circumstances of self- storytelling does not invalidate the identity constructions that emerge in specific settings. On the other hand, it should make researchers aware that accounts of self are not the autonomous expressions of the individual narrator, but rather co-constructions of the numerous participants in the storytelling process (both present and absent) [Collins, 1998]. As Somers and Gibson (1994) point out, identities do not exist outside of the contexts in which they are produced. It is inevitable that identities will change and take on new shapes depending on the particular relational or interactive contexts in which they emerge. While the specific class and gender identities, constructed by the women, may in some senses be specific to the interview context, they are no less 'real' or 'meaningful' because of this. Nevertheless, by paying attention to the context in which narratives are produced and the impact this has on the kinds of stories that get told we can arguably gain a better grasp of the relational, temporal, and processual nature of narrative identity.

Emplotment and the representation of 'Others'

In the section that follows, I will attempt to make links between the particular plots, used by the women, to 'story' their lives and the way in which 'others' are constructed into the narratives. In very broad terms, while the respondents, who constructed their narratives around 'individualistic' 'Bootstraps' narratives of upward mobility (see Ch. 3) tended to construct oppositional and antagonistic relationships with significant 'others', respondents who told stories of how they 'Made good through the education system' tended to construct more solidary and relational 'family narratives' of class mobility. Here, constructions of 'self' and 'other', in narrative, are shown to be inextricably linked to one another, as well as being shaped (though by no means determined by) the kind of plots into which individuals insert themselves.

Constructing the life-story around a 'Bootstraps plot' (see Ch. 3) enabled the interviewees to reconstruct the experience of upward class mobility in terms of a positive transformation of self. Interviewees, who constructed their personal narratives around this particular plot, focused on their (often lifelong) struggles to overcome 'the constant drip of negative and oppressive experiences' (Mahoney and Zmorcek, 1997b: 3) linked to gendered class structural divisions. The women talked of their struggles with constricting models of femininity, the low expectations of their parents, and their fight to overcome class biases in the education system. The 'Bootstraps' plot allowed the women to articulate their uphill battles to transcend the identities, roles, responsibilities and positions allocated to them by their local cultures:

Joan: Our family, I've since realised, has been extremely working-class based with the expectation that you will be a young woman, wife, mother and so on, because that is how all my family historically have been and still are, apart from me...I had a very loving mum and dad, but I do feel at times angry with them because I just fitted into a slot...a lot of people from where I come from, that little community, that are, have established, what's the word I'm thinking of, culture and expectation and sometimes depending on how I feel, at that moment in time, sometimes I do feel quite angry about how I was led down a certain path... [Forging my own life path] has been very difficult and I have sometimes, unintentionally, placed myself in very, very difficult situations through my journey of getting to where I am because of the things that, the experiences and education that I haven't had.

Stacey: I went to sixth form to do 'A' levels and, actually, I was told I wasn't clever enough. I was thrown out of sixth form because I only got one GCSE 1 or whatever. Another thing I remember...the head of the sixth form college said, you know, "You're wasting our, I'm sorry Miss... but you're wasting our your time and ours, you're not academic and ...and we can't offer you a place for 'A' levels"....It took me five years and night classes to get 'A' levels and I think that was partly going, you know, putting two fingers up and saying I will get an 'A' level. I mean I've only got two now and I still haven't, I haven't got a degree and I still have got this chip on my shoulder about having a degree. I mean, as a social worker, I'm a practice teacher and I work with people, who have got degrees and are getting MA's, and I help them but I haven't got one, and I feel quite... bad about that for some

reason. So I keep saying, to myself, one day I'm going to get a degree but I'm always studying, I'm always wanting to learn.

Julie: I suppose I was quite bright as a child...but I think the head-teachers and the teachers used to look down on us because we were from council estates...[Also] I was doing my 'O levels, I remember coming home from school and she [mum] didn't ask how I'd done...I remember it really bugging me, and I think that has affected my self-esteem at work, I never think that I'm good enough.

Judith: I was expected to go shopping with my mum on a Saturday, that I was expected to do. Or I was expected to go to the shops with a list and do it and yet my brother didn't do that it seemed to be only the women in the family that did it. I suppose maybe there were stirrings, then, about what was happening about women's roles then. When I was still with my ex-husband, I never felt total, completely fulfilled in what I was doing as a wife and a mother and I always thought, when I was taking my daughter to school I used to stand in the playground and people were obviously taking their children to school and I used to listen to the conversations that were going on. And the whole conversation was "Well I don't know what we should have for tea, I don't know whether we should have beefburgers or fishfingers and shall I do, I'd better do the washing today or I've got the ironing to do" and I thought "I can't cope with this because this is not enough for me"...I listened to these women and I'm thinking "Is that all life's about really....Because your mum did the shopping up the road, you've got to do it and carry"...I used to see people...carrying heavy bags of shopping down through town to catch the bus and I thought blimey, you know, is that what life's all about because if it is I'm glad I'm still not doing it, that I've found something else. [But it was a struggle]...I mean if I look back now I wouldn't even like to be thinking how many hours I did in a week. I mean, erm, when I did my degree I was doing my dissertation at night, while I was doing night shifts. So, I was doing all that and still having to do what I needed to do, but I did it, you know, and I went up for my degree, which was wonderful, I achieved something that I aimed for but never thought I could. And then, I did the [Diploma in Social Work] despite what people were saying to me, that, "We're not seconding you, there's no point you going for it any more, forget about it", and I thought, "no I won't, this is what I want". So I got it, I ended up, you know, working extremely long hours and working dammed hard for it, but it was mine and I had it in my hand, proved them all wrong.

Carole: I'm not sure that I chose the right path [when I went into nursing]. I was going into a role where I was told what to do, taught

how to do it and did it and it was almost as though there was no room for my artistic creativity, if you like. And it's only, I mean, I was nursing what twenty-five years and then had a change in career and it's only after that, I mean, I became very disillusioned prior to me actually leaving, where I suddenly felt that I had never been allowed to think for myself. I had never been allowed to voice my opinions...So, erm, I'm not sure now that that was the route, you know, on reflection, that that has, ever, really was ever the correct or the right career path for me, really, because you know I love drawing, I love art, I love gardening, I love plants, I love seeing things grow...There's lots of things now, on reflection, that, if I hadn't been so heavily influenced as a young child to do things just as you'd been told to do them, I might have done things differently.

The popularity of the 'Bootstraps' narrative may be that it enabled the interviewees to foreground their active attempts to create 'non-normative' futures for themselves, for example by heroically pursuing roles and configuring identities which allowed them to express their creativity, agency, and 'individual' talents.

The framework, around which these women constructed their narratives of self, was undoubtedly influenced by culturally dominant 'heroic' (male) life-story plots. Themes, such as the desire to escape tradition, or the drive to become an autonomous 'modern' subject are central to 'enlightenment' models of self and agency and the individualistic life-story narratives they have supported (see Somers and Gibson 1994). 'Heroic' plots chart the progress of the individual in his/her attempts to '[move] forward toward individuation and "freedom from..." (Somers and Gibson 1994: 48). Within this narrative framework, relationships between the 'individual' and 'society' are treated as antagonistic and oppositional (ibid.). In order to become a free modern self, the individual must struggle to liberate him or herself from the constraints of institutions, cultural traditions and social 'others' (ibid.).

Elements of this framework were reproduced in the 'Bootstraps' plots, most pertinently in the women's emphasis on their moves towards separation from the constraint of class 'others'. From this perspective, it is extremely difficult to

disentangle the particular plots used to construct personal narratives of gender and class, and the particular ways in which 'others' are configured within the women's stories. The representation of key characters within the women's stories is arguably crucial to the 'emplotment' of a 'Bootstraps' narrative of upward mobility (for example the way themes of 'escape' and 'personal transformation' are constructed into the women's accounts). For example, significant 'others' are often configured in the women's accounts as recognisable class 'storytypes' (see above). Working-class 'Others' are often portrayed in the women's accounts as sexist, racist, and homophobic.

Joan: I got a job...caring for the older people in the centre, bathing them and doing...it must have been about six years after that I, then, *dared* not only just to go part time but to actually have a full-time job. And I say 'dared' because my mother-in-law was quite against it, because I should be at home looking after the children and getting 'person's' tea and pipe and slippers and things....[Becoming a social worker also] had a negative effect in respect to my husband. We had a tottering time, when I was going through my social work qualification, and he didn't like it, and he didn't like it, after that either, when I got the qualified post. He said if we were to ever split up, which he was considering at the time, it would be down to me getting qualified as a social worker, certainly didn't like it. And when I got a car, in my own right, he actually said one day that he'd been embarrassed at work, erm, because one of his mates had said "Well who the hell does she think she is, is she the breadwinner now?" And... I asked him, on various occasions what he meant, but I can guess what he meant and he's never liked me being a social worker, never liked the independence.

Stacey: I think I was always challenging at home. I don't know why I was challenging at home, because I just, probably the unfairness of it, you know. My dad, sitting there going, "I want some butter on my potatoes," and my mother having to put her knife and fork down and having to go and get it, or go and get this, and go and get that. But then, I suppose, I disagreed with my mother getting, I mean, it's always, it's been a long running, gosh you know, obviously forty odd years of, "No mother he can wait you know"; "I want a glass of this, this glass is dirty, go and change it." You're supposed to stop what you're eating and get up you know. "I want some more gravy", always "I want some more gravy," sitting in his chair, be waited, waited on hand and foot, just old-

fashioned you know. But it grates on you and, erm, again I don't know where the knowledge that women aren't just about that, you know..

[...]

[It was jut a] I think in some respects typical, northern, old-fashioned family, very patriarchal. He holds the money, he holds the power and, I suppose, I pushed against that as a, as a teenager and then moving away and seeing the big wide world, you know.

Even in the more 'sympathetic' accounts, 'significant others' (especially mothers) are represented as either 'cultural dupes' or passive victims, who uncritically or reluctantly submit themselves to 'stereotypical' classed and gendered fates.

Stacey: My dad [was]...very bad tempered. As I say he took a knife to my mum once and I got in the way but he never, followed it through, but that fear being there...I mean we used to call him the hulk because...his neck used to [widen], he used to shake...At the time... I thought he was uptight because he wanted his own way and I suppose...Now I think, I don't think he could properly express himself but he's controlling. I mean and, erm, *I think my mother has always been the sponge, I mean she's worked her..heart out, her heart out and they're still together* (my italics).

[...]

My mother's quite subservient and she never learnt how to drive. In fact, now I will take her on holiday and stuff sometimes because my dad won't take her on holiday she's semi-invalid now in some respects. And, erm, it really irritates me because she wants me to make all the decisions and I find it really hard. *And I just feel in a way that I've gone, if you like on you know, a spectrum of them and everything I've gone right the other way really, I, you know, as an independent woman you know* (my italics).

Judith: It was clear, even when I was younger, that she [mother] wanted to do other things. She was an intelligent women, she was logical, er, she worked things out, she was interested in the law, she loved crosswords, she loved books and she encouraged that love of sort of crosswords and books in all her three children...But I always felt she wanted something more, and I felt she died a very bitter, old lady. ..She was of an age where ...her brother could go to have music lessons but she couldn't, it had to be the eldest son who actually made nothing, as far as I'm aware, of his life as such. He never wanted to go on to university or anything

like that. Whereas, my mum won all the scholarships to the local school and wanted to do that, but yet that was cut short...I just always feel that bitterness was always there and that wanting more, erm, and I suppose, to some degree, there's maybe some of that in me as well that I have lifted from that time, that I've always tried to get on and do more things.
[...]

My mum came to the degree ceremony but it was a big effort really for her, erm, and she complained about everything but she really, deep down you know, I know she's thinking that "she's done this". But, I also think there might have been a little bit of, I wish I'd have done that sort of thing. My father wasn't, he was a hard worker, he saw himself, as I say, he was very satisfied with his life, even though it was hard. He was happy if he had his money in his pocket for a Friday night for a pint and a bet and he'd got his book to read and life was okay... He was the only person I think I've ever known who was satisfied with his life and never asked for anymore...But my mum was entirely the opposite, who always seemed to want more and was never satisfied with her lot, so how they ever got together, as a couple, always surprises me, it always will...It's a thing that I could never understand, that two people, who never seemed totally and completely at one or happy in the relationship, stayed together ... [S]he did what she had to do, in order to put food on the table and give what she could and have a roof over her head, and manage the money, and if she had to go out and work she did. I mean at [her]...funeral there were no friends, there were just a few family, there was nobody else. And I just think the ending was as bad as the life, to be honest, lonely and isolated, which is really sad you know because she did have a lot to offer life. It's just such a shame that she never did experience what she'd have liked to experience.

In the construction of a 'Bootstraps' narrative of class mobility, class caricatures or 'storytypes' are perhaps used to symbolically embody the social and cultural institutions, traditions and norms that the women must struggle against in order to become liberated, modern and autonomous social actors. The cases of Stacey and Judith are slightly different, because their mothers do not symbolically stand in for an abstract 'oppressor'. Nevertheless, the way in which Stacey and Judith construct their mothers as 'fixed' by historical structures and process of gender and class also serves to highlight the dramatic nature of their own movements or 'escape' from their own classed and gendered fates.

At this point, it is also worth reflecting upon the complex interplay between individualistic life-story models, dominant discourses of class, and the women's own attempts to construct themselves into cultural frameworks of class and narrative. The construction of an individualistic narrative of escape from oppressive working-class cultures and institutions is perhaps crucial to the women's attempts to situate themselves within dominant discourses of class. As Haylett argues, dominant discourses, on class in contemporary Britain, construct working-class groups as atavistic or 'backward' cultural 'Others'.

[T]he white working-class [are represented] as impoverished by more than their economic situation. Theirs is also a cultural impoverishment, a poverty of identity based on outdated ways of thinking and being (2001: 352).

According to Haylett, working-class groups are 'fixed', in this way, in order that middle-class groups can reconstruct themselves as moving away from their problematic cultural and economic imperialist past. The validation of middle-class selves, as 'liberal' 'modern', and 'multicultural', therefore relies on the construction of working-class 'Others' who 'lack' the signs of being modern. Cultural representations of middle and working-class groups are, therefore, inextricably entwined with the middle-classes symbolising the 'vanguard of 'the modern'' and the working-classes symbolising its antithesis: 'a generalised 'backwardness' and a 'culturally burdensome whiteness' (Haylett 2001:351).

A representative middle class is positioned at the vanguard of 'the modern' which becomes a moral category referring to liberal, cosmopolitan, work and consumption based values, and 'the unmodern' on which this depends is the white working-class 'other', emblematically a throwback to other times and places. This middle-class dependency on working-class 'backwardness' for its claim to modern multicultural citizenship is an unspoken interest within the discourse of illegitimacy around the white working-class poor. (Haylett 2001:365).³

³ Authors such as Haylett (2001) and Reay (1997) challenge dominant representations of different class groupings. As Reay argues 'sexism, racism and homophobia are more hidden and denied among the middle classes, but equally prevalent' (1997: 18). And, as Haylett argues, once the moral authorisation of middle-class identities is shown to rely upon the reproduction of historical class

The narrative of the modern middle-class subject, who achieves 'freedom from' a problematic imperialist past, also bears many of the hallmarks of enlightenment models of agency described above. The combined force, of these dominant modes of reciting the self, helps to explain why narratives of 'escape' from working-class traditions, and accounts of personal 'transformation' (stories of becoming a 'modern', 'multicultural' subject) are so attractive to both storytellers and their audiences. Reciting the self (and 'Others') in terms of these dominant discourses helps to give meaning and legitimacy to the personal struggles retold through the women's narrative.⁴

In order to claim possession of socially legitimate, modern or nonproblematic identities, the women are arguably drawn towards plots which emphasise their growing difference/distance from a class group, which has come to symbolise outmoded traditions and problematic identities. For example, note how Stacey constructs difference/distance between herself and her family: 'We're worlds apart, you know forty-two miles but worlds apart academic wise, and everything.'

According to Haylett (2001), dominant discourses have made it extremely difficult for members of working-class groups to construct class as a positive aspect of personal identity. Hegemonic cultural processes have: '[closed] down... spaces of representation for the white working class, specifically spaces of representation where cultural dignity and political significance can be forged' (2001: 354). Within

prejudices, the symbolic association between middle-classness and liberal cosmopolitanism is severely disrupted: 'the representation of poor whites within the discourse of 'multicultural modernisation' can be considered as a modern form of imperialism, with class-racist elements.' (2001: 365). Nevertheless, these dominant meanings of class are so embedded in British culture that they have become widely accepted 'truths', which are routinely reproduced without challenge.

⁴ I do not wish to suggest that the way in which the women characterize significant working-class 'Others' bears no relationship to the actuality of their experiences, relationships within the family, etc. At the same time, it is important to acknowledge that the way in which the women represent class 'Others' is inextricably linked to the construction of a culturally recognizable and legitimate narrative of class mobility. Without denying the facticity of the women's experiences within their families, the way in which they select and symbolically reconstruct their experiences and relationships with significant Others is undoubtedly mediated by the narrative plots and dominant discourses on class, which they use to fashion their self-narratives (see Ch. 5).

dominant representational fields, narrative options for credibly conveying a sense of self as 'normal', 'modern' and 'mobile' are extremely limited. In order to construct a culturally legitimate narrative identity, the women arguably have little choice but to reproduce discourses which ascribe negative value, 'pathology' and illegitimacy to 'Other' members of their class of origin.

However, within the women's metanarratives of class transformation, we also find 'nested narratives', which represent significant 'others' in ways which subvert and challenge dominant representations of gender and class. The presence of these 'nested narratives' (see Gergen and Gergen, 1988) within metanarrative of class transformation points to the problems of constructing single, unified stories of the class self from complicated or 'interstitial' class positions (cf. Lawler, 1999). On the one hand, the women want to be recognised as legitimate 'moral' and 'modern' subjects and so draw distance between themselves and stigmatized working-class identities. On the other hand, the women's continued identifications, with aspects of working-class experience and culture, encourages them to build perspectives which challenge some of the 'social logics' (Hey, 2005) of middle-class worlds, including the negative representation of working-class 'Others'.

Julie for example, contrasts her childhood sense of embarrassment, about being recognised as working-class, with a later refusal of the class judgements others. In the first extract, Julie remembers internalising the shame or stigma attached to symbols of working-classness (in this case, coming from a council estate). However, in the second extract, Julie recalls an episode, in her twenties, when she self-consciously resisted the class judgements of a work colleague.

Julie: I suppose another big thing was I didn't like living in a council house, because all the other girls at school, or most of them, didn't live in council houses...And I remember thinking it was really quite untidy...I remember one other girl coming round and I remember her looking and she must have thought, "Oh this is a bit mucky"...I remember being embarrassed.

[...]

I don't know whether it was ...myself or [my friend] who swore...[but] he [a work colleague] said "What're you doing swearing, I bet you come from a council estate"...Me and [my friend]...we were really annoyed and I remember saying, "It's got [nothing to do] with coming from a council estate"...and I remember having a big argument with this bloke about it didn't matter whether you came from a council estate or not, people swear all the time...I suppose there might be something in there, as well, about that he's actually calling my family, calling my background, isn't he...so it's, I don't know maybe about sticking up for them.

Julie constructed a 'Bootstraps' narrative of personal struggle (against the class prejudices of her teachers, the low expectations of her parents), fuelled by a desire to escape the constraints of working-class life. At the same time, she also expressed a continuing sense of loyalty and solidarity toward her class of origin. The individualistic 'Bootstraps' plot, therefore, does not fully capture the complex relationship that many of the women have with their class background, in particular the fact that they rarely experience their working-class history as something they have, straightforwardly, left behind (or below) them (see Mahoney and Zmorczek, 1997b; Lawler, 1999). The plurality of beliefs, expressed within the narratives, highlights the women's complex identifications and disidentifications with both working and middle-class 'Others'. However, it is difficult for the women to logically articulate their multiple perspectives on class in a singular narrative of self. It is, therefore, important to be alert to 'nested narratives' which are used by women to express their 'multiple consciousness' of class (Somers and Gibson, 1994:75).

The Bootstraps plot: Combining 'male' and 'female' forms of narrative (Betraux-Wiame, 1982: 192-3)⁵

As I explained above, the women's narratives of struggle (e.g. overcoming the constraints of working-class culture) and transformation (into modern subjects) draw upon culturally dominant narratives of the autonomous and individuated human actor. However, while the women's stories were, undoubtedly, influenced by

⁵ Quoted in Byrne, (2003: 35).

prototypical 'heroic' male narratives, they were by no means determined by them.⁶ Other elements of the narratives were informed by more 'relational' understandings of experience, self and social action. For example, several of the 'Bootstraps' narratives refer to the role of 'enlightened' significant 'others' in shaping the women's lived narratives. These 'others' are shown to offer the women perspectives on the self, which challenge the constricting classed and gendered versions of self and identity, provided by their working-class communities. 'Enlightened others' implicitly or explicitly question the way the women's lives have been prefigured in the narratives of working-class others, and encourage the women to breach the expectations of significant others (for example, assumptions about women's roles, responsibilities and positions within the family unit). In addition, these 'enlightened others' often offer the women tangible help to realise their potential and become 'who they really are'.

The women's narratives contained several examples of such 'transformative encounters'.

Stacey: I was on the tills [at the college canteen] and I used to see a lot of teachers coming through and I used to and one day this old guy, I, I mean, I used to, literally, I just used to serve him sausage sandwiches, he always had a sausage sandwich every week and he, we used to chat ...so ...I was on the till and basically this guy used to come through he said one day he said "Stacey what did you ever want to do with your life?" I said "Well originally I wanted to work with children... but I was told that I wasn't clever enough,". He said, "What a load of rubbish!" He turned out to be Head of the department for the Nursery Nursing and they were looking for mature students and he offered me a place just like that. And he said "Well have you got any [qualifications]", and I go "Oh I've just got my English 'O' level" and he said, "Do you want to come for an interview, we desperately want, we've got lots of sixteen, seventeen, eighteen year olds we want a couple of mature people." You know how old was I? I was about twenty-four and he said, "Do you fancy going for it," and I went "Alright then", because I have to say I

⁶ It is perhaps also important to distinguish between prototypical 'male' narratives and men's narratives. As Stanley (1992) points out, men's narratives also often deviate from the conventions of heroic or 'ego-focused' plotlines. It is not at all uncommon or atypical for men's narratives to incorporate themes more often associated with 'female' narratives (e.g. inter-subjectivity, social embeddedness, and so on) (ibid). Researchers then should be careful not to overstate the differences between men and women's modes of storytelling (see also Plummer, 2001).

don't think any of my life's been planned, it's been really just being at the right place or the wrong place, you know, and I think, I just believe sometimes you can, you could, should give things a try but it doesn't matter sometimes things aren't meant to be...And the guy with the sausage sandwich, you know, he just saw something in me, I mean I was probably quite articulate, you know, probably quite friendly, chatty and as soon as he heard I was interested in kids....

Joan: A part-time care worker's job came up in the Centre and I applied for that and I got that job...About a year after that, we had a new manager, a man who had been in the RAF all his life, who you wouldn't seemingly think would actually fit into managing a Day Centre that took in about seventy or eighty old people a day. But he was excellent and he came and he said to me one day, "I'd like you to go on this course". It was the old in-service, social services course, they don't run it now, and it just gave people a basic understanding of, you know, social development, all the sort of things that you learn about communication, all sorts of things it was, and I didn't want to go on it because I hadn't studied anything like that at all. Anyway, I went and that was the, that was the change of direction really because he, he made me realise, actually for the first time in my life, he made me realise that I'd got a brain and that I could do other things. And to be honest I'd never really, and that was 1980, and I never realised until that point that I could go into a lecture and underpin theory and practice and actually write something down, because I've never been able to spell, historically our family are non-spellers. And he made me realise that even Einstein, even he couldn't spell. So I felt that my confidence was growing and that I could actually, the more I knew, the more I did, and the more I wanted to do the more I could, and I'd never acknowledged that concept before, I'd just gone along with things, you know, I realised my confidence, my autonomy was growing, and from then on, I never stopped....Whilst I was on that [initial] course I don't know, it must have been like a metamorphosis, really, because I realised I did have a brain and could do other things and wasn't just a wife and mother.

Carole: We used to holiday... my mother's eldest sister moved down south and I always, I never knew of her living anywhere else but there, and we used to spend holidays, erm, with her and they were the most wonderful holidays ever. I think that was where I had my first taste of fizzy pop and my first burger...She was fab, you know, they say don't they there's one person in your life who you know was meant and triggered things off for you. And she, er you know, she treated me like a little, you know, a proper little girl. She was a career woman... she broke away from tradition...she could quite happily stand on her own two feet. She was very much her own woman, erm, she was very smart, loved nice things, loved nice cars and... and clothes and things like that,

you know erm, liked treats, loved treats. Used to give us you know, erm me and my cousin, treats when we used to go down there, which was not something that I was subject to at home, now which sounds a little bit hard doesn't it really, and I'm sure there were treats.⁷

In acknowledging the role of others in facilitating their class mobility, these women artfully introduce 'female' forms of narrative into their otherwise individualistic 'male' accounts of class mobility.

On the one hand, the 'Bootstraps' respondents often posit an intrinsic self as 'always-already different' from 'other' working-class selves. From this point of view, the achievement of class mobility can be understood within a narrative of the individualistic realisation of the 'true self'. For example, Joan describes a confrontation with her mother over her desire to take piano lessons. Joan explains how she was unsuccessful in her original attempt to acquire cultural capital and break out of the 'box that my family, and the culture, and the area that I lived in, that everyone conformed to'. Joan successfully integrates this episode into her narrative

⁷ Carole's identification with her aunt is inextricably linked to her disidentification with her mother. While Carole's constructs her aunt as an independent, liberated career woman, her mother is constructed as a working-class 'cultural dupe' obsessed with respectability and 'keeping up appearances' (see Lawler, 1999).

Carole: I don't ever remember my mother playing with me, whereas my dad, we had tea parties and all sorts of things, you know. ... as you grow up, I always said that ...I would never tell my children that they were back chatting you know ... I've always tried with them to listen to their side of the story, because I was never allowed to do that, erm, and as a result That, in turn, affected my confidence and self-esteem tremendously. ... I didn't want that to happen to my children, you know it was okay for the table, you know, the kitchen table to be covered in paint and we were always gluing and sticking and, you know, the pictures went up on the walls and things like that. Whereas, as a child, I was never even allowed to have a picture of a pop star on my bedroom wall. You know and so I felt in some respects my, my freedom was restricted.

[...]

She [Carole's mother] loved her [Carole's daughter] but didn't... I think she found it extremely difficult to do the baby thing you know...But she again, you know, wouldn't take time out to play with the baby if hoovering up was to do. That always, her home and how she seemed to others always came first.

of class struggle and transformation. She emphasises both what her class culture and circumstances withheld from her, as well as her eventual realisation (however partial and limited) of her 'true self' and interests.

I always wanted to play the piano. I remember I wittered and wittered and I kept this going for quite some time because I hadn't been able to do anything. I didn't belong to any clubs, I just had to trudge to church every week... When I was a little bit older and wiser, still sort of like relatively youngish teenager, I pushed and pushed, "You're not going to learn piano, one, we can't afford it and, two, you need a piano and we haven't got one". ..Well, anyway this day I got home from school and there was absolutely merry hell in our house, my dad had got a piano given him, yes, it was an old piano it had like chandeliers coming off the front. Of course, once I got in the house I realised that, one, my mother didn't want it because it was old and, two, there was nowhere to put it. Whatever, in the end my dad moved the settee and put it along the chimney, at the side of the chimney breast and my mother was so angry it was unbelievable, er "She wants to play the piano well who's going to teach her? We can't afford the lessons."... Anyway, the long and the short of it all was that piano lived in our house a week, until my mother got her own way and she got my dad to take it outside and it got chopped up and was taken to the local bonfire ...I couldn't learn the piano, my dad never said any more, and I knew my dad was really quite upset about it, and my mum got her own way and...So when my own daughter started to play the piano, and she was five, I had a lesson after her every week for five years. She still carried on and got her Grade Eight, one day I went and I got Grade Three and I couldn't believe it, I stood there, absolutely, so proud. But I will never forget that I was led to feel so guilty that that piano actually came in the house and left a week later [pause]. But it wasn't, I'm sure, about me not being able to achieve, it was the fact that it was money again, you know, know your place, we're working-class, we have money for food and the rent and that's it.

The 'male' aspect of the women's narratives also involves the skilful combination of two basic narrative forms: the 'stability' narrative and the 'progressive' narrative (see Gergen and Gergen, 1988). For example, while Stacey explains that she has always been different from the rest of her working-class family, she nevertheless narrates her class movement as an uphill struggle, which was by no means inevitable.

They never really overtly encouraged me to do anything, it's very strange, I can't work it out they've never ever said "Don't do this, don't do that", it's always been very, "Do what you like, it's up to you" and, actually, that means I felt like I wanted them to encourage me, sometimes. And, even now, they find it really difficult I think because I feel I am so different. I've got an older sister. She left school when she fifteen, without any qualifications, she was married the day before her eighteenth birthday, she had two children quite young, she was divorced and she's never moved out of [her home town]. And my father used to call her the hero...I think it was because she was a single parent, she managed and, erm, and I just think, erm, I just feel that I've always felt very different. I've always been more emotional than the others, I used to have paddies, I always remember, and I think I was labelled as always strange, and even now I'm the strange one because I like to bring everything out into the open and sort it out, well, in our family we don't talk about things generally.

Storytellers, such as Stacey, try to show that they are essentially the same character that they have always been, as well as showing that they have made positive changes in their lives (for example by struggling to gain an education). Indeed, if it were not for these changes, women like Stacey would arguably have no story to tell.

Consider the person who characterizes him/herself by means of a stability narrative; life is directionless; it is merely moving in a steady monotonous fashion neither toward nor away from a goal...' (Gergen and Gergen, 1988: 28).

On the other hand, the narrators also emphasise the significance of their relationships with particular 'enlightened others'⁸ in the realisation of their achievements. Here, the realisation of the 'true' self is seen to be dependent on significant others, who are recognised as playing a crucial role in shaping the life-story. Whereas, 'male' forms of narrative treat self-actualisation as the outcome of the heroic pursuits of the autonomous individual, these female or 'relational' forms of self-accounting recognise the central role played by others in the inter-subjective

⁸ The representation of middle-class 'enlightened others' who gently push and prod the women down the path toward upward mobility, also needs to be understood in the context of broader understandings about different class groupings. References to role of 'enlightened' middle-class subjects in (re)shaping the women's stories of self, helps the women to emphasise their (re)construction as fully 'modern' subjects (and, therefore, draw some distance between themselves and stigmatised working-class groups and identities).

construction of 'lived' narratives. The smooth, linear trajectory of 'male' life narratives - in which experience is recounted in terms of 'goal-directed, coherent sequences' (Gergen and Gergen 1988: 19) - is also subtly undermined in these accounts. Stories of fortuitous life-changing encounters with others, exemplified in the idea of epiphanies: 'interactional moments and experiences which leave a mark on people's lives' (Denzin, 1989: 70, quoted in Plummer 2001: 194), expose the often contingent, haphazard and improvised nature of the life course, something which is obscured in conventional life-narratives.⁹

The women's emphasis on the significance of crucial 'interactional moments', in directing them along a path toward upward class mobility, should also caution the reader against interpreting the narratives as straightforward proof of the success of meritocratic individualism. The enthusiasm, with which the narrators construct themselves into the narrative of the 'self-made' woman, is tempered by the recognition that their achievements were not inevitable or predestined.¹⁰ The discourse of meritocratic individualism suggests that education and employment systems are sufficiently open and flexible so that those who have talent, ability, and a strong work ethic will always rise to the top. However, the women do not attribute

⁹ At the same time, epiphanies need to be understood as narrative devices, which are used to plot the life story and add a sense of drama to its telling. The notion of an 'epiphany' privileges particular interactional moments as decisive in shaping the life. However, we should remember not to confuse the telling of the story with life as lived (or 'equate the account with its putative object', Gergen and Gergen, 1988: 18). The way in which particular encounters are constructed and reconstructed into narrative (and indeed whether or not they are privileged within a particular narrative) will depend upon the narrative frameworks adopted by the narrator at a particular point in time and space (see also Jackson, 1998).

¹⁰ The women were drawn to the dramatic narrative of the 'self-made woman', even though becoming a social worker might be regarded as an unexceptional route to social mobility for a capable and diligent working-class woman. Becoming a caring professional can be seen as a 'contingent choice' (Maguire, 2005) because cultural discourses and practices of gender and class have traditionally restricted working-class women's career routes to the 'feminized' professions. According to Maguire (2005), working-class women's ambition and expectations have been severely constrained by 'pre-scripted and historically located biographies of 'a good job for a woman' (2005:14). Indeed, some of the women interviewed constructed continuity and coherence, into their narratives, by acknowledging the way in which their personal biographies and adult identities were prefigured in the identities and narratives that their cultures provided for them as children and young women. On the other hand, the women argued that they, personally, received little or no support (e.g. from families and teachers) to pursue even the more conventional, or 'feminised', routes to social mobility. The narrative of the 'self-made woman', who succeeds 'against all odds', therefore allowed the 'Bootstraps' women to articulate the uphill struggles they faced to build *any* sort of career.

their success solely to their talents and hard work; instead, they explain their upward mobility as consequence of both individual agency and chance happenings. While the women construct narratives which emphasise their valiant struggles to transgress the norms of their class-cultural environments, they nevertheless, recognise that their class movements were contingent upon the intervention of 'enlightened others': exceptional individuals who (unlike most others) recognised and nurtured their creativity, talent and, individuality.

As I have shown, the interviewees, who adopted a 'Bootstraps' narrative of upward class mobility, emphasised their individual struggles to overcome the constraints of their (classed and gendered) social and cultural contexts. These women tell stories of their 'escape' from the problematic aspects of working-class communities (e.g. the constricting versions of femininity they make available to women), as well as their struggles to achieve educational success in an often hostile classed and gendered school system.

The women's accounts of their personal transformations into modern, multicultural subjects seemed to be dependent upon the construction of 'fixed' class 'storytypes' (see Plummer, 2001). These class 'Others' served to mark the distance moved by the women, as a result of their heroic struggles to slough-off the 'provided subjectivities' (Walkerdine, 1986, quoted in Smith, 1993: 393) of their cultures of origin. In order to construct themselves as modern, progressive and independent women, the narrators often portrayed significant others as locked into the performance of stereotypical, retrogressive and constricting versions of masculinity and femininity. Class 'Others' were arguably constructed in such a way as to symbolize or embody the constraining structures of gender and class that the women fought against. At other times, class 'Others' (especially mothers) were represented as powerless victims of oppressive class-gender formations. In this case, the mothers' failure, to escape their ascribed positionings, helped to render the women's 'progressive' narratives of heroic struggle and personal transformation all the more meaningful and persuasive. By highlighting the costs, to their mothers' selves of surrendering to conservative gendered class roles and becoming reconciled to their

classed and gendered fates, the women provide a credible motive or explanation for their personal class struggle.

The respondents, who constructed their narratives around a 'Making good through education' plot (see Ch. 3) also reproduced recognisable class 'storytypes' within their personal accounts. In trying to make sense of the impact of their working-class histories on the women they have become, the respondents were careful to distance themselves from class 'Others' who unwittingly occupy positions of pathology (see Lawler, 2000b). Perhaps aware of their own vulnerability in terms of their proximity to categories and positions marked as 'Other', the women were keen to draw distance between themselves and the gendered class performances of significant others. By poking fun at their mothers' snobbish pretensions and obsessions, with respectability for example, the women were able to convey a reflexive understanding of the dominant rules of class, judgement and distinction, that mark 'respectable' working-class women as 'Other' (see Ch. 2, and the example of Margaret below). By pointing out where their mothers had failed in the attempt to 'pass' as middle-class, or to own the markers of distinction, the women conveyed an intimate 'feel for the game' that set them apart from significant class 'Others' (see Lawler, 1999).

Drawing reflexive distance between themselves, and class 'others', enabled the women to pull off the tricky move of constructing working-classness as a crucial aspect of their personal history and identity, whilst persuading (imagined or real?) audiences that they themselves possessed mobile, modern and reflexive identities. In exposing their working-class histories, the women were, therefore, careful to defend themselves against assumptions that working-classness signifies a 'lack' (of 'proper' knowledge, taste, judgement, etc.). Here, the respondents were perhaps trying to claim class, as an aspect of their personal identity, whilst avoiding being 'misrecognised' as class 'Others'. The women also made themselves vulnerable to judgement by constructing narratives of upward mobility (including tales of their desire and longing for a middle-class existence) that might prompt 'calls to order' or

accusations of pretension. In the light of this, the women's 'disidentifications' with the snobbish characteristics of 'Others' can perhaps also be interpreted as an attempt to avert such negative responses to their stories.

Inter-subjective 'family narratives' of class mobility

Nevertheless, there were also crucial differences, between the stories of self told by the women who adopted a 'Bootstraps plot' and those told by respondents, who constructed accounts of how they 'Made good through education'. Whereas, the women, who constructed their self-accounts around an individualistic 'Bootstraps' narrative, often spoke of the divisions and conflicts between themselves and working-class 'others', respondents who told stories of how they 'Made good through education', were more likely to construct themselves into relational and solidary 'family narratives' of gender and class (see Scott and Scott, 2000).

Madeline, for example, talks about the way both her parents helped to actively shape her upward class mobility by encouraging Madeline to take advantage of the opportunities that the structures of history, society and culture had, unfairly, withheld from them.

They were both extremely keen that we should take advantage of the fact that, was it the 1948 Act that brought in education for all?...They were conscious of their lack of education, they both had to leave school at fourteen and they saw education as the key to... future life, and that was a very strong part of our childhood....I think my mother, in a way, was slightly more keen than my father because she remembers...My mother passed her 11+ actually, but she wasn't allowed to go to the grammar school because her father was against education...for girls...She never forgave him for that, and she was determined that I would go to grammar school...That was a very, you know, dominant factor in her life to get, that I would be educated. She was very conscious that all three of us should get to university.

In addition to promoting the value of education, Madeline's mother also tried to actively equip her daughter with the cultural outlooks and dispositions which would usefully serve her on her path to upward mobility.

She was very keen to impart middle-class values to me...because she never regarded herself as working class at all...It was a process of socialization, I suppose, that she thought, my mother thought she came from a better family than my dad came from...and that the values of her family were better than the values of my dad's family and that came across strongly. And those values were to do with...behaving nicely, perhaps...That combined with going to a...girls' grammar school really did do the trick. I mean, when people have met me, nobody, nobody would believe that I had a working class background because they say I just don't come across as working-class.

At the same time, Madeline makes it clear that her mother was aware of the risks attached to facilitating her daughter's upward class mobility. Madeline's mother seems to have been conscious of playing an active role in bringing about changes, which might make her 'Other' to her educated daughter.

The other thing about education, I remember my mother saying, "I hope that you won't look down on us when you've had this education." She was frightened...that education would make some sort of division in the family.

Here we get a sense of the dilemmas associated with encouraging family members to 'better' themselves through the education system.

Incorporating the life-stories of others into self-narrative

Sections of Madeline's life-story also conformed to more 'female' forms of narrative by including parts of the life-stories of 'others' (see Byrne, 2003). Madeline's account drew upon the popular 'Childhood fix narrative' which sees the life-story as 'overwhelmingly shaped by early childhood experiences' (Plummer, 2001:193).

Interestingly, Madeline chose not to focus on the way in which her *own* life was determined by the particular classed, gendered, historical conditions in which she was raised. Instead, Madeline presented herself as a rational, autonomous subject whose childhood had left her with no ‘scars’ or pathological traits.

I’ve turned out to be, well I don’t know, whatever normal is [laughs]. My life has gone along a normal route shall we say, you know. I mean... I’ve been through the education system and ...I’ve, I’m married, I’ve got children.

At the same time, Madeline was keen to talk about her brother’s life, and what she saw as the damage inflicted by his childhood. According to Madeline, a traumatic childhood illness experience, and the arbitrary discipline of working-class family life had both played a significant role in shaping her brother’s adult life.

When he was about three, he got scarlet fever and he was taken to hospital...And in those days it was considered to be an illness that you had to isolate children with. And he was taken, he was put in an isolation ward, all on his own at the age of three. And his mother wasn’t allowed, nobody was allowed to visit him and he has been severely traumatised by that...He remembers our mother, she was allowed to come to look through a window and he remembers her coming to the hospital looking... through the window at him. And she brought some colouring books and that, but she wasn’t allowed to give them, she could only give them to the nurse and he remembers looking at her [respondent visibly upset]

CC Do you want me to stop the tape?

Madeline: Now this has, this has, been, if you like, a therapy session [laughs]. Now the reason I got upset then is because it’s got, it’s to do with, it’s issues of attachment....If you know anything about attachment theory...this will make sense in terms of attachment theory.¹¹ So my

¹¹ Here Madeline acknowledges the way her ‘memories’ of her brother’s experiences are reconstructed from the perspective of her professional outlooks and discourses. Her storytelling practice, therefore, gives some insight into the way early ‘experiences’ of class, gender etc. and adult/professional senses of self mutually constitute one another. ‘Memories’ of childhood, perhaps, put experiential meat on the theoretical bones of social work discourses and frameworks, and help to

brother remembers my mother looking through the window in the hospital and she, she couldn't bear to look at him, presumably. Now what he remembers, he remembers her looking at him and then turning away... Now presumably the reason that she turned away was because she could not bear to see her child suffering like that, but the effect it had on him of his mother turning away was very profound. And he never recovered from that, basically... it's affected his whole psychology... I mean when my brother and me were little,... there was, obviously we used [to have] the usual fights, like you do with your brothers and sisters. But, over the years, we became very close because we were, we were able to understand, erm, a lot of the ways we'd both been affected by the upbringing we'd had. So, he had this feeling of the relationship with his mum was never, ever the same again. Combined with this, my father who was very, who was very authoritarian, and with a tendency to being very violent as well, so my brother was caught up in that situation of having a difficulty in relationships with [both] parents, he was, so he never felt... safe and secure you see. And that's, it's badly affected him that... he, he's never been able to maintain relationships... He's had a, a very poor history of relationships, which has affected him... he, he says he's been damaged by his childhood and he's ...you know he manages, he manages... I think my father dealt with him in a lot, a much more tough disciplinarian tough way to what he dealt with me... So it was, basically, my brother's relationship with my father which was obviously quite a bad one, combined with the incident in the hospital... which damaged his relationship with his mother... So he didn't have a relationship with either parent which was, which was good enough basically, whereas I suppose I did so that's the difference.

By incorporating parts of her brother's story into her own narrative of self, Madeline was able to convey the powerful and enduring resonance of her early childhood 'experiences' in her current sense of identity and self. Inscribing her brother's experiences into her personal memories of childhood enabled Madeline to 'give voice' to what she saw as the long-term damage inflicted by childhoods similar to her own. Madeline argues that she was fortunate enough to live through her childhood with her subjective well-being intact (something which is perhaps seen as

give meaning to current personal and professional outlooks and identities. At the same time, professional perspectives and outlooks can be seen as 'recipes' for 'structuring experience' and 'for laying down routes into memory' (Bruner, 1987: 31). Reconstructed memories of childhood arguably help to establish a sense of continuity and coherence to the life which supports the narrator's ongoing investments in her personal and professional perspectives and identities (see Ch. 5 for further discussion of this issue).

a prerequisite for becoming an effective caring professional, or ‘enabler’ of others). However, by including parts of her brother’s life story in her own personal account, Madeline is able to convey a deep-seated and enduring sense of identification with the ‘hidden injuries’ (Sennett and Cobb, 1977) of gender, class, impoverishment, etc.

The ‘co-production’ of self-narratives

As I explained above, the women I interviewed were told, from the outset, that I was interested in exploring the relationships between their early experiences of class and their current sense of self and identity. The framework of the interviews, therefore, encouraged the women to construct accounts of self which foregrounded issues of gender and class. This interview ‘template’ also prompted the women to construct coherent narratives of self by establishing causal linkages between their childhood experiences of gender and class and their adult selves and identities. While debates about women’s experiences of class mobility often focus on the fragmentation and fracturing of the class-mobile self, the narrative framework of the interviews encouraged the respondents to construct continuity and coherence into their stories of self. It is, therefore, important to recognise that I was a ‘coaxer’ of the women’s stories and played a crucial role in structuring the accounts given by the women (see Plummer, 2001). The narratives of class mobility told by the women, therefore, need to be recognised as ‘researched’ or ‘solicited’ stories, which are, inevitably, shaped by the contexts of their production. As Plummer explains:

[L]ife stories are specifically gathered by researchers with a wider usually social science goal in mind. These do not naturalistically occur in everyday life: rather they have to be seduced, coaxed and interrogated out of subjects, often in special settings using special instruments (tape recorders, videos, psychiatric couches). Oral history, sociological life history, literary biographies, psychological cases studies – all these can bring life stories into being that would not otherwise have happened in everyday life. The role of the researcher is crucial to this activity: without them there would be no life story (2001: 28).

However, it was clear that I was not the only ‘producer’, who possessed power in structuring the stories told by the women. Significant others also seemed to play a

role in shaping the women's accounts of self. As Collins (1998) points out, the interviewee often addresses audiences other than the interviewer. Dialogues with 'absent' or 'imagined' others may play a key part in the complex communicative exchanges taking place in the interview setting. As Collins explains:

The interviewee may be engaged in multiple dialogues with themselves, the interviewer and others imaginably present...Bakhtin, who is himself in dialogue with de Saussure, argues that all utterances are part of a chain of communication forming a dialogue in which situated others are an integral part. The chain is complex in that exchanges may take place over long stretches of time and take place with interlocutors who are remote and imaginary as well as immediate and real....Utterances are 'double voiced', meaning that they are 'oriented to the object of speech as well as towards the previous speech of others whether these be individuals or groups, present or absent' (Simpson, 1997). The implication is that the interviewee might be addressing audiences other than the one immediately present. Bakhtin calls this phenomenon, the generation of voices within voices, or 'ventriloquation' and, like Mead, he understands the self to be dialogic (1998: 4.3).

A clear example of the way in which the interviewees were engaged in 'multiple dialogues', with situated others, can be found in Margaret's narrative. Margaret's mother's stories encouraged her to disavow class and this presented her with a real dilemma, when confronted with the task of constructing class into her personal narrative. As we saw in Ch. 2, Margaret was able to use her understandings of class as effective interpretive devices, for making sense of her experiences and rendering intelligible her sense of self. At the same time, the particular set of attitudes toward class, 'hailed' by her mother's narratives, frequently interfered with Margaret's attempts to self-consciously construct class into her self-narrative. Margaret's mother's narratives encouraged her to 'disidentify' with the working-class world she grew up in (cf. Skeggs, 1997). While the interview template encouraged Margaret to construct class into her memories, Margaret recognised that this approach, to self-narration, clashed with her mother's preferred 'family narrative'. At times during the interview, Margaret drew my attention toward the conflict between our shared interest in exploring class, as an aspect of her personal identity, and the attitude of class denial called forth in her mother's narratives.

I feel a bit as though if my mother could hear me... she would be very upset to think that I could think that I'd come from a working-class background, because she doesn't think that we were working-class. And... culturally, I don't think we were, but they worked in factories, erm, they weren't professionals, so, and it was a hard life. And a lot of the issues, like you say their own past times and that...it was just earning money to survive and to get their daughter through. And so, I feel a bit of a traitor, in a way, but I mean I am confused, in a way, because, yes, we were working-class, we weren't middle-class in that sense, but it, it's how you, erm, what criteria you use for working-class you see.

[...]

Your background, and I'll call it my working-class background, even though my mother would shoot us down in flames, is still there quite strong in, in the walks of life that, and the journeys that we've gone down, yeah, yeah.

Self-consciously constructing a life-narrative around the concepts of gender and class was fraught with difficulty for Margaret because she had been brought up by her mother to see class as a morally charged signifier from which she must always keep a safe distance. During her account, Margaret highlighted her mother's efforts to meet culturally and historically specific expectations surrounding notions of respectability and propriety. She also indicated how themes of respectability and moral value were woven into her mother's family narratives. Her mother's stories, it seems, constituted working-classness as a kind of 'morally constitutive limit' (see Skeggs, 2005), a pathological form of culture and selfhood which was 'Other' to the family's culture of morality and respectability. Themes of morality, discipline and 'knowing the rules' were also essential to the family project of securing Margaret's 'escape' from the impoverished working-class (cf. Scott and Scott, 2000). Her mother's stories, therefore, seemed to perform a dual function, constituting both the family identity, as well as facilitating Margaret's upward class trajectory. Fragments of this 'family narrative' crop up many times in Margaret's account.

C.C. What kind of values did, did your mother try to impart upon you?

Work ethic, succeed, strive, do well, be the best, erm, “You’re going to be better than we are”, money is the all and everything, as well as status, “We are not working-class”, erm, but, although she doesn’t go to church, but also very, from a very Christian approach in the sense of be, be good, do good unto others.

[...]

Well there were people down the road like Uncle Billie, Auntie Maureen’s husband, who always used to go to the pub every night and every Sunday and you see “We don’t do that Margaret”, that sort of thing. Erm yeah, she was, I mean she’s quite a snob really, she, you know, it’s well, yeah, I can’t, you know, “We sit at the table for tea” and “We have a dinner every night with a cloth on and a knife and fork”, I suppose that sort of thing.

[...]

I wasn’t allowed to put posters up in the bedroom, I didn’t play pop music around the house when she was in, we always had to have proper music on, erm yeah, we always had a Sunday dinner, I wasn’t allowed to play out on Sunday, erm, I wasn’t allowed to eat on the street because “Nice people don’t do that”.

[...]

I never, ever, ever heard either of my parents swear, never, but there were a lot of arguments between them a lot. My dad always went to work with a collar and tie on, even though, when he got there, he got changed. And my, my mother always was, you know, presentable, always wore make-up even though she was going to a factory..or catering, you know to work in the hospital, yeah. It was things like going to the pub, it was things like being loud and rowdy, things like outside, erm, yeah we just, we just didn’t do it because it wasn’t done.

In order to tell the story of the self, Margaret frequently constructed herself into her mother’s family narrative. Margaret tells us that she was raised to strive for a kind of ‘classlessness’ or, at least, ‘not working-classness’ in order to achieve respectability, moral value and upward class mobility. However, by positioning herself as the subject of a self-conscious narrative of class and gender, Margaret subverts her mother’s attempts to avoid being fixed in class terms. Retold in the context of a narrative of class, Margaret’s mother’s stories of respectability and propriety serve only to underline her mother’s working-class positioning. Margaret’s mother arguably went to such lengths to deflect the negative values, ascribed to members of the working-class, because her ‘objective’ class positioning

meant that she was particularly vulnerable to being marked as 'Other'. In the context of Margaret's personal narrative of class and gender, her mother's attempts to avoid fixity are somewhat ironically reconfigured as expressions of a recognisable class 'story type': the 'pretentious' working-class woman obsessed with the markers of distinction and respectability (see Lawler, 1999). In Margaret's narrative of class, her mother's desire, to escape her class positioning, unwittingly marks her out as a particular kind of class 'Other': 'I mean she's quite a snob really'. According to Lawler, attempts to escape class fixing, by investing in respectability, leave women exposed to specific kinds of shame and ridicule.

[I]f working-class existence is pathologized, so too are many of the desires associated with 'escaping' that position (Kuhn, 1995). Again, women are particularly vulnerable here since they stand in a specific relationship to these desires. To want and to envy the markers of a middle-class position is to be in a position of extreme vulnerability. As Carolyn Steedman comments, in Britain at least:

There is no language of desire that can present what my mother wanted as anything but supremely trivial; indeed there is no language that does not let the literal accents of class show, nor promote the tolerant yet edgy smile. (Steedman, 1986:113).

What Steedman's mother wanted was 'fine clothes, glamour, money to be what she wasn't...things she materially lacked, things that a culture and social system withheld from her' (Steedman, 1986:6) – desires, in other words, for specific forms of femininity which were not available to working-class women like her. Yet there are few narratives into which women could inscribe this kind of desire: there is, for example, no female equivalent of the heroic tale of the 'working-class boy made good' (Steedman, 1986). Instead, women's desires for, and envy of respectability and material goods are marked as apolitical, trivial, pretentious...(Lawler 1999:12).

In making herself the subject of her 'own' narrative of class, Margaret constructed for her mother a classed identity that undermined her mother's disavowals of class. Perhaps aware of the way the respectable working-class female identity has been stigmatized within mainstream cultural representations, Margaret was keen to generate some distance between herself and this category. For example, Margaret

argues that her mother would construct a heroic narrative of upward mobility for her daughter, in which the attainment of status and markers of distinction are a just reward for her hard work and strength of character. Margaret, on the other hand, cautions against the construction of an individualistic narrative of 'escape' (see also Ch.2).

[I]t's like fighting the cause isn't it? Look at us, we fought the cause and we've come out of it the other end and it was just circum...and we've been tough and 'cause we've been tough...I suppose my Mum would say that. If she was having this interview she'd say well, you know, circumstances, we fought the cause and look at my daughter, she's a psychologist now. But for me no, 'cause it would make people feel bad, wouldn't it? It would make them feel bad about them not having achieved that and this. And that isn't always the case...I wouldn't like to rub people's noses in the fact that, look at me, I'm the Queen of England now. No.

Margaret also seems to hint at the risks attached to working-class women's attempts to claim authority and distinction through self-storytelling. Constructing an individualistic narrative of 'escape' could easily mark her out as pretentious provoking "calls to order" (Bourdieu, 1984:380; quoted in Lawler 1999:18). At other times during the interview, Margaret explained how she sometimes catches herself obsessing over the markers of distinction, and chastises herself for becoming preoccupied with such trivialities (see Ch.2). As Margaret herself explains 'there's more to class than money' and she is perhaps aware that trying to 'keep up with the Joneses' is a sure sign of a lack of 'true' class. However, the distance drawn between self and 'Other' is less clear-cut in this example. Margaret owns up to her own preoccupations about 'keeping up appearances', at the same time as she rebukes such 'pretensions'. Here, Margaret becomes 'Other' to herself and recognises how she too might be positioned as 'trivial' and 'pretentious'. While she expresses an eagerness to 'change' this aspect of herself, she nevertheless recognises that such preoccupations still make up part of her self (what Mead would refer to as the 'me').

Margaret's refusal to disown class constituted one kind of disloyalty to the family narrative. In making herself the subject of her own narrative of class, Margaret betrayed her mother's preferred narrative in a second way, in this case undermining her mother's carefully constructed 'respectable' identity. Margaret constructed a coherent narrative of the class self by establishing causal linkages between her adult personality and the impoverished class conditions in which she grew up. Margaret described herself as a strong and resilient woman, who has successfully juggled the competing demands of work, motherhood and study. Moreover, she attributed her strength and resilience to her early class experiences, which she believes taught her to develop an 'inner mettle'.

Margaret explained that her family was never defeated by the multiple class hardships they faced, and suggested that her parents' stoicism offered her useful lessons in how to cope with traumatic life events. Nevertheless, in order to paint a picture of the class hardships faced by her family, Margaret had to lay bare some of the harsh realities obscured by the family's public image of respectability and moral propriety. For example, in Margaret's narrative, the exigencies of working-class life meant it was difficult for her mother to uphold the moral imperatives (of parenting, etc.) in which she invested so much of her self-worth. In the following extract, Margaret provides an example of when difficult circumstances led her mother to 'get it wrong' as a parent, resulting in her being shamed by the judgments of others.

Apparently, one Saturday morning my mum had to leave me in the house and I was only little, because she had to go and get her wages and she'd needed those wages to feed us. And my auntie Doris had seen me looking out of the bedroom window, knowing that I'd been left on my own. [She] had an argument with my mum saying that she shouldn't have done that and, of course, my mum now looking back realises she shouldn't but, at the time, obviously I had no idea, I mean I just did as I was told, she needed that money and needed to get it quickly and it was quicker to go fetch it herself, so...

In order to tell the story of the personal costs of class hardship, Margaret is forced to undermine her mother's efforts to 'pass' as a morally 'correct' and legitimate

subject. Margaret's narrative reminds us that the process of constructing class into memory and personal identity can be fraught with tension and ambiguity. Class proved to be a useful interpretive device that helped Margaret to get a handle on her experiences and render her sense of self and identity intelligible. At the same time, attitudes called out by 'significant others', such as her mother, impelled her to erase class from her personal history and sense of self. Margaret explains that her mother would be appalled by the way in which she actively constructs class into her narrative of self 'My mother would shoot us down in flames'. Her account, therefore, highlights some of the problems faced, by working-class women, in reconciling the costs and benefits (both to themselves and 'Others') of making themselves the subjects of self-conscious narratives of class.

Conclusion

The investigation of self-other relationships in narrative, offers a particularly fruitful way of addressing the relational, inter-subjective and co-produced nature of narrative identities. The substantive analyses contained in this Chapter, shed light on the multiple ways in which relationships between self and other give shape to, as well as being shaped by, women's class narratives. Focusing on the inter-subjective dimensions of the women's stories explodes the myths of the archetypal Western life-story plot - myths which construct an autonomous, individuated and unified subject committed to the single-minded pursuit of goals, which give expression to its 'true' self (see Gergen, 1992; Smith, 1993; Somers and Gibson, 1994). For example, the respondents' class narratives (in particular, the 'Making good through education' narratives), were shown to be interwoven with 'family stories'. Here, others (and especially Mothers) were shown to play an active role in shaping the class identities, and class fate, of their daughters. Similarly, while the 'Bootstraps' respondents constructed stories that saw them rejecting the identities and roles provided by their classed cultures of origin, they, nevertheless, acknowledged the pivotal role played by 'enlightened others' in securing their upward class movement. At the same time, elements of the traditional 'Western' life-story plot were,

undoubtedly, woven into the women's narratives, and these were shown to have particular consequences for the way in which Others were represented within their accounts. For example, in making themselves the subjects of heroic class narratives, of struggling 'against all odds', the 'Bootstraps' women constructed stories in which significant others, and especially mothers, were often made to play the roles of cultural dupes who willingly, or reluctantly, acceded to the traditional classed and gendered roles and identities provided by their environments.

The analysis of self-other relationships also focused on other key issues such as the co-construction of self-narratives, in the context of the research interview, and the significance of ongoing dialogues with multiple others (both real and imagined) in shaping the self-narrative (see the example of Margaret, above). Further investigation also examined the idea that individuals draw, not only, on their own direct experience, but also the experiences of those close to them, in order to articulate issues and concerns that lend substance to their own sense of self (see the example of Madeline). The account of self-other relationships in narrative offered in this chapter is, however, by no means exhaustive. Other avenues of enquiry, which have not been developed here, may shed further light on the inter-subjective construction of narrative identities. For example, while issues of class were often central to the women's accounts of their personal histories, they were often downplayed and downgraded in their accounts of their professional lives. When talking about 'what they do', as 'caring professionals', the respondents often constructed themselves into 'post-socialist' or 'Blairite' discourses, which emphasise community, inclusivity and reciprocal relationships between 'service users' and agencies (cf. Cannadine, 1998). When the women talked, 'on message', to an imagined audience (presumably of service users, and other professionals), little room was arguably available for them to introduce morally charged issues of class. While the women willingly discussed issues of class stigma, shame, resentment and conflict in their personal narratives, these issues were curiously absent or downgraded in their accounts of the professional self. In order to construct themselves for an imagined audience, who work with particular assumptions of the

caring professional (as 'modern', 'mobile', and 'reflexive', etc.), the women perhaps had little choice but to erase class, and its unpleasing associations (with notions of bias, resentment, antagonism, anger etc.), from their professional accounts of self.

To sum up, reflections on the significance of self-other relationships in narrative reinforce Mead's (1934) argument that selves are social through and through.

Analysing the role of 'others' in life-narratives, i.e. the parts played by others in the co-construction of accounts; the way in which others are represented in accounts; and the interweaving of the life-stories of others into personal accounts and projects, yields fruitful insights into inter-subjective and relational dimensions of personal identity and selfhood. Approaching class narratives, from these perspectives, generates fresh understandings of identities of class and gender, for example, by illuminating the multiple, contextually specific and 'dialogic' nature of their articulation. The next Chapter develops further insights this reconceptualisation of class identity, by exploring the contextual and time-bound nature of self-narratives.

CHAPTER FIVE

Narrative, time and self-identity

In this Chapter, I explore the relevance of Mead's often overlooked theory of the past for women's narratives of upward class mobility. Mead's theories on time, social order and the past, offer a flexible, yet robust, conceptual and epistemological framework for reflecting upon the temporal dimensions of experience, self, identity and storytelling. As I will show, Mead's theories offer multidimensional and counter-intuitive understandings of the relationships between past, present and future. Mead's re-conceptualisation, of time and the past, enables researchers to gain new forms of analytical purchase on life-narratives and personal accounts. Linked to this, I will also explain how Mead's insights, on the past, enable narrative analysts to get a better handle on the epistemological status of the data, they engage with, in the construction of their research analyses. Using examples from my data, I will explore the utility of Mead's theory for making sense of women's narratives of class mobility and personal identity.

Mead's theory of time and social order: A brief overview

Maines *et al.*, (1983) [see also Maines, 2001] have observed three main conceptual dimensions to Mead's theory of the past: the 'implied objective', the 'social structural' and the 'symbolically reconstructed' past.¹ The different dimensions of Mead's theory help to clarify the ontological and epistemological status of the past, for example the 'facticity' or obdurate nature of past events, the structuring effects of the past in creating the present, and the ways in which past events acquire meaning *in* and *for* the present. Crucially, the distinctive qualities and interrelationships between the different dimensions, of the *past*, only become

¹ While it is useful to delineate the three dimensions of the past, I also hope to make clear to the reader their fundamental inter-dependence, as well as the way in which they relate to Mead's wider conceptual scheme on time and social order. As Maines, points out, the 'implied objective', 'socially reconstructed' and 'social structural' past are not 'mutually exclusive'; instead they 'variously flow through and affect the specious present' (Maines, 2001: 47).

apparent when one gains an appreciation of the novel way in which Mead conceptualises the *present*.

Mead's theory represents a fundamental departure from traditional conceptualisations of the past as both fixed and irrevocable *and* determining what happens in the present. By emphasising the ongoing, open-ended and emergent nature of human activity, Mead radically reconstitutes the relationships between past, present and future. Mead's interest in the ways in which novel values enter into human experience (as a result of unanticipated changes either in the wider environment, or innovative human responses to their environments) leads him to envision human experience, agency and symbolic meanings as residing firmly in the present. Reflexive and intelligent agents respond to changes in their environments by constructing pasts and futures, which give substance and shape to the present. The present, for Mead, is the 'locus of reality' (1932: 1), and it is from this standpoint that individuals and groups construct selves, identities, events and lines of action, which stretch beyond the specious present.

The core of Mead's theory rests in his assertion that although the present implies a past and a future, "reality is always that of a present" (1929: 235). The past arises through memory and exists in images which form the "backward limit of the present." Likewise, the future has a hypothetical existence since it exists in our anticipations. The question of boundaries marking off the past, present and future are fundamental for Mead, but he maintained that no matter how far we build out from the present, the events that constitute the referents of the past and future always belong to the present. In that sense, Mead's theory was a radical departure from traditional views. As he stated, "We speak of the past as final and irrevocable. There is nothing less so..." (1932: 95). Rather, "...the long or the short of it is that the past (or some meaningful structure of the past) is as hypothetical as the future" (1932: 12). It is the specious present, in which "memory and anticipation build on both ends" (1932: 66), that exists (Maines *et al.*, 1983: 161).

The idea of the '*symbolically reconstructed*' past is crucial to Mead's argument that the present is the 'seat' of reality. For Mead, reconstructing the past is the intelligent response of human agents to the confusion, uncertainty and disruption introduced

into the present by emergent events. According to Mead, novel circumstances, arising in the 'knife-edge' present, cannot be explained in terms of prior frameworks for making sense of social reality and the causal relationships among events. As Mead states: 'If the novel emerges, there can be no history of a continuity of which it is a constituent part, though when it has emerged the continuities it exhibits may enable us to state a succession of events within which it appears' (Mead, 1929: 353). Therefore, in order to make sense of new realities emerging in the present, social agents *must* reconstruct the past. The novel event must be causally related to preceding events and conditions in order for agents to both make sense of the event and act toward it in a purposeful fashion. The causes and conditions of novel events by their very nature are not self-evident or pre-given: 'the new can never be found in the old' (Järvinen, 2004:49). Instead, the meanings and histories of novel events can only ever be reconstructed retrospectively by developing new perspectives on the past after emergence has taken place. The importance of the 'symbolically reconstructed' past in 'filling out present perceptions' (Mead, 1929: 349) is borne out by the urgency with which agents embark on the process of redefining the past when confronted with novel events.

[T]he emergent has no sooner appeared than we set about rationalizing it, that is, we undertake to show that it, or at least the conditions that determine its appearance, can be found in the past that lay behind it. Thus the earlier pasts out of which it emerged as something which did not involve it are taken up into a more comprehensive past that does lead up to it (1932: 14-15).

The notion of the symbolic reconstruction helps to explain why the past is not fixed and unchanging. Changes occurring in the present require new histories, which are always relative to the contextual and time-bound events out of which they acquire their meaning.

The past which we construct from the standpoint of the new problem of today is based on continuities which we discover in that which has arisen, and it serves us until the rising novelty of tomorrow necessitates a new history which interprets the new future (Mead, 1929: 353).

The process of reconstructing a history, for the emergent event, results in it losing its 'tang of novelty' (Mead, 1929:345). By situating the event within 'a history of becomings in nature leading up to that which is becoming today' (Mead, 1932: 21), the once novel event acquires the status of a 'determining condition' for what might occur in the future. The process of symbolically reconstructing the past, therefore, enables agents to both rationalise the emergent *and* pre-empt the kinds of futures which might flow out of it. As such, symbolic reconstruction can be seen as a crucial mechanism or device for managing the uncertainty of the knife-edge present. The act of redefining the past gives us a sense of ontological security in the present; as well as providing a means of effectively confronting change and novelty arising out of the social process. As Mead argues: 'the validity of these pasts depends upon the continuities which constitute their structure. These continuities of passage are the essence of inevitability, and when we feel the continuity we have reached the security we seek (1929:352). Furthermore: 'Within our narrow presents our histories give us the elbowroom to cope with the ever-changing stream of reality' (Mead, 1929: 353).

The idea that pasts are 'symbolically reconstructed' from the point of view of the present in order to mitigate the disruptive, confusing and destabilising effects of novelty and emergence brings us to another key aspect of Mead's theory. This facet of Mead's thinking emphasises the interplay of continuity and discontinuity in the ongoing construction of both 'obdurate' social reality and human meaning (see Maines *et al.*, 1983, Maines, 2001). For Mead, continuity and change in experience are not mutually exclusive. On the one hand, novelty and emergence are 'necessary condition[s] for experiencing a succession of events' (Maines *et al.*, 1983:162). On the other hand, the construction of continuities is essential in order to solve the problem of 'bridging contingent factors' (*ibid*). Without the sense of continuity provided by our reconstructed pasts, human experience would fundamentally lack substance and texture.

If there were bare replacement of one experience by another, the experience would not be that of passage. They would be different experiences, each wrapped up in itself, but with no connection, no way of passing from one to the other....[B]are continuity could not be experienced. There is a tang of novelty in each moment of experience....Without this break within continuity, continuity would be inexperienceable. The content alone is blind and the form alone is empty, and experience in either case is impossible....The continuity is always of some quality, but as present passes into present there is always some break in the continuity – within the continuity, not of the continuity. The break reveals the continuity, while the continuity is the background for the novelty...The character of the past is that it connects what is unconnected in the merging of one present into another (1929: 349-351).

While Mead insists that the past has ‘no status apart from its relation to the present’ (Maines et al., 1983:162), he still accepts that there is a certain amount of irrevocability to past events. Nevertheless, the past would be lost to us if we were not capable of summoning up ‘memory images’ of prior events in the process of making sense of the present: ‘[a] string of presents conceivably existing as presents would never constitute a past’ (1932: 30). While the events of the past are unalterable in the sense that they have already taken place, they only have value and meaning *in* and *for* the present.

There is a finality that goes with the passing of every event. To every account of that event this finality is added, but the whole import of this finality belongs to the same world in experience to which this account belongs (Mead, 1932:3).

Mead places the obduracy and facticity of past events beyond doubt, even though he argues that the meaning of past events is always relative to the present: ‘The historian does not doubt that something has happened. He is in doubt as to what has happened’ (Mead, 1932: 9). This idea lies at the heart of the notion of the ‘*implied objective*’ past. As Maines explains:

From time to time, Mead refers to “what must have been.” He states...that “the past is what must have been before it is present in experience as a past” (1929:238). He is not referring to the meaning that

the past has for the present; rather he is referring to the facticity of previous events. Something had to have taken place, in other words to exist in present experience as an event that had taken place (2001:46).

The idea of the '*implied objective*' past emphasises the obdurate nature of past events and explains how these events are available to us in the present. 'Implied objective' pasts 'exist in the present through memory' (Maines *et al.*, 1983:164), and become knowable to us through the structures of our present realities. We gain assurances about the reality of past events, contained in memory images, by testing or verifying those images against the structure and conditions of the present reality. As Mead puts it:

There are certain sorts of images which belong to our pasts and we are confident of them because they fit in...The assurances which we give a remembered occurrence come from the structures with which they accord (Mead, 1929: 348).

The perspective of the present will, therefore, influence which events are selected out of memory as that which 'must' have taken place for present realities to be structured and arranged as they are.

The "what it is" has a temporal span which transcends our experience. This is very evident in the pasts which we carry around with us. They are in great part thought constructs of what the present by its nature involves, into which very slight material of memory imagery is fitted. This memory in a manner tests and verifies the structure. We must have arisen and eaten our breakfasts and taken the car, to be where we are. The sense of this past is there in implication and bits of imperfect scenes come in at call – and sometimes refuse to arise. But even in this latter case we do not feel that the past is lost (Mead, 1929: 348).

It is worth reemphasising Mead's point that while the obdurate nature of the past is beyond doubt, the *meanings* and *significance*, accorded to past events, are always 'symbolically reconstituted' from the point of view of the present. Regardless of their obduracy and irrevocability, the events of the past have little meaning in and of themselves. It is only from the perspective of the present that we can experience

them as ‘causes and conditions for the emergence of the novel’ (Järvinen, 2004: 49).
As Mead states it:

The moment that we take these earlier presents as existences apart from the presentation of them as pasts they cease to have meaning to us and lose any value they may have in interpreting our present and determining our futures (1932: 9).

While the ‘facticity’ of events, recalled in memory, can often be placed beyond doubt, the meaning of experiences and the way in which they are constructed into accounts of the past are often more problematic: ‘the irrevocability of the past event remains even if we are uncertain what the past event was’ (Mead, 1932:13).

The ‘symbolically reconstructed’ past makes sense of the ‘new problem of today’ by constructing relationships between the events of the ‘implied objective’ past (for example by causally linking the newly apparent event with the events of previous presents). However, Mead is also keen to stress that the continuities and causal relationships between events (as well as the changes involved in the present) are not merely the constructs of thought processes alone. According to Mead, the past also structures and conditions events, taking place in the present, in a substantive or ‘real’ sense, independently of the way in which people self-consciously reconstruct it. It is this aspect of Mead’s theory that Maines et al. (1983) refer to as the ‘*social structural*’ past. As Mead suggests:

I am proceeding upon the assumption that cognition, and thought as a part of the cognitive process, is reconstructive, because reconstruction is essential to the conduct of an intelligent being in the universe. This is but part of a more general proposition that changes are going on in the universe, and that as a consequence of these changes the universe is becoming a different universe. Intelligence is just one aspect of this change. It is a change that is part of an ongoing process that tends to maintain itself (Mead, 1932: 4).

The notion of the ‘social structural’ past draws attention to the fact that passage, from one present to another, takes the form of a sequential process which has a definite shape, structure and direction: ‘there is more involved in continuity than

mere overlap. There is a succession of events which connects phases of a continuous process' (Maines *et al.*, 1983: 162). As Mead describes it:

There is a certain temporal process going on in experience. What has taken place issues in what is taking place, and in this passage what has occurred determines spatio-temporally what is passing into the future (Mead, 1932: 13).

Furthermore:

Passage as it takes place in experience is an overlapping of one specious present by another. There is a continuity of experience, which is a continuity of presents. In this continuity of experience there is distinction of happening. There is direction. There is dependence or conditioning. What is taking place flows out of that which is taking place. Not only does succession take place, but there is a succession of contents....What is going on would be otherwise if the earlier stage of the occurrence had been of different character. It is always a passage of something. There is always a character which connects different phases of the passage, and the earlier stage of the happening is the condition of the later stage. Otherwise there would be no passage...Mere juxtaposition of events, if this is conceivable, would not constitute passage....The connection involves both identity and difference, and it involves that in the identity which makes the condition for that which follows.... But that the continuities of space-time do carry with them conditions of that which takes place is a fundamental presupposition of experience. The order within which things happen and appear conditions that which will happen and appear. (1929: 346-347).

The 'social structural' past gives shape to, but does not determine the present: 'Everything that is taking place takes place under necessary conditions...these conditions while necessary do not determine in its full reality that which emerges' (Mead, 1932: 16). The 'social structural' dimension of the past, therefore, refers to the 'conditioning of the present by the past' as opposed to the 'complete determination of the present by the past'. (Mead, 1932:17). The idea of the 'social structural' past allows us to reflect upon the structuring effects of the past in establishing the 'necessary conditions' in which novel and unanticipated events may arise. It also allows us to reflect upon the relationships between continuity and discontinuity in the ongoing social process, in other words those : 'two inseparable

components of passage – the continuous and the emergent’ (Mead, 1929:352). As Mead points out: ‘All that emerges has continuity, but not until it does so emerge’ (Mead, 1932:353). Once novel events have taken place, we set about deducing that which has arisen and the conditions under which they arose. Understanding the history and nature of the novel event is essential because the ‘what it is’ sets limits upon and establishes probabilities of what is likely to occur in the future. Novel or emergent events, therefore, lay down the structures and conditions within which evolution proceeds: ‘The emergent is itself a conditioning as well as a conditioned factor’ (Mead, 1932: 15).

Having provided the reader with a brief overview of the three major dimensions of Mead’s theory, I will use the next section to emphasise the relevance of Mead’s theory to the study of life-narratives and personal accounts. Using examples from the interview data, I will explore the utility of Mead’s theory of the past for the study of women’s narratives of class mobility and identity. It is my view that Mead’s ideas about dis/continuity in experience, emergence, and the essentialness of symbolic reconstruction ‘to the conduct of an intelligent human being in the universe’ (1932: 4), are particularly useful in making sense of upwardly mobile women’s accounts of experience, self and identity.

The symbolically reconstructed past

The notion of the ‘symbolically reconstructed’ past is perhaps the most immediately relevant aspect of Mead’s theory for narrative research and helps to clarify and support the major precepts or assumptions of narrative theory. This holds that narrative accounts should not be read at ‘face value’ i.e. as offering unmediated access to lived experience and the human actors ‘behind the stories’ (Järvinen, 2004: 46). Mead’s theory of the past offers a strong conceptual basis for this argument. Accounts should not be read at ‘face value’ because storytellers, understood to be inextricably bound up with their living presents, can only access their pasts from the point of view of their current experiences and perspectives.

When one records his boyhood days, he cannot get into them as he then was, without their relationship to what he has become, and if he could, that is if he could reproduce the experience as it then took place, he could not use it, for this would involve his not being in the present within which that use must take place. A string of presents conceivably existing as presents would never constitute a past (Mead, 1932: 30).

Mead's argument, that human actors and the meanings they construct only ever reside in the present, also supports the idea that narrative identities are ongoing, open-ended and processual. Stories change as people change and vice versa, as well as being inextricably tied to the interpretive contexts and settings in which they are produced (Holstein and Gubrium, 2000). The idea that individuals make active 'use' of their pasts, for example to add shape and substance to their current lives, identities and activities, also resonates with major themes and concerns of contemporary narrative theory. From this perspective, an individual's present personal identity would be empty, fragmented or incoherent without a story that offers a meaningful and coherent account of its emergence or synthesis.

One's personal story or identity is a recollected self in which the more complete the story that is formed, the more integrated the self will be. Thus, self-knowledge is an appropriation of the past. When this appropriation is not recollective, integrative, and self-discovering, then the person (the "I") experiences unhappiness or a form of despair. Although everyone has a past, one can forget or suppress it, or one can be so intent on a future project that one lets his or her roots grow weak. This results in a loss of identity with no more of a story than a bare chronicle. Identity, recollected out of the past, is the depth dimension of the self that gives the self character. "A self without a story contracts into the thinness of its personal pronoun"... (Polkinghorne 1988: 106-107).

The emphasis in Mead's theory on the 'use value' of the reconstructed past for both rendering the self intelligible and 'hypothesising' its future also correlates with narrative analysts concerns with stability and change in narrative. On the one hand, narratives enable individuals to construct enduring, and inherently stable, characteristics into the self-concept (such as accounts of how one has 'always been'

intelligent, caring, independent and so on). On the other hand, the cultural preference for 'progressive' narratives also encourages individuals to construct their lives in terms of series of challenges and goals, which the individual has actively confronted in order to realise his or her potential (see Gergen and Gergen, 1988). The construction of the self, as both inherently stable, and actively confronting new situations in a flexible and creative way, lies at the heart of dominant cultural understandings regarding 'valuable' and 'desirable' personal characteristics. Establishing a sense of personal continuity, and adopting an open and flexible approach to life's challenges and changes are, therefore, by no means mutually exclusive. Instead, a willingness to reconstruct a coherent personal past may offer a crucial means of adapting to, and mitigating life's changes and creating a new, and ideally optimistic, sense of future possibility.

If a person fails to project a hopeful story about the future, he or she undergoes a second kind of unhappiness, a life without hope. Although everyone has a future, it is possible for one to ignore or actively resist its claims and live from day to day without a projective scenario, or to devote one's energies to protecting and reiterating the identity recollected out of the past. The creation of a future story that imposes in the tightly woven recollective story and attempts to maintain an unchanged self leads to unhappiness with the future. At the same time, treating the past as if it were as indeterminate as the future produces a story so loose and fragmentary that it resembles a fairy story. There needs to be some continuity between past and future stories. A problem may arise, however, because the past story is a recollection of what has already been, and the future story, although it needs to be a continuation of the past, requires an open and adaptive character (Polkinghorne 1988: 107).

The notion of the 'symbolically reconstructed' past arguably has much to offer for the investigation of the narrative identities of upwardly mobile working-class women. The theory of symbolic reconstruction helps to explain how women naturalise their class movements, and mitigate the experience of upheaval, fragmentation and estrangement that may accompany shifts in class positioning (cf. Lawler, 1999). The 'symbolically reconstructed' past helps to demonstrate how women incorporate their earlier class experiences and identities into their present

lives, projects and perspectives (see Ch. 3). It also helps to explain how such women negotiate class as a valuable and significant aspect of their experience and identity, whilst avoiding the dangers associated with 'fixing' or 'essentialising' the class self. The symbolic reconstruction of self and identity takes place *in* and *for* the present. This encourages women to use their narratives to reflexively fashion selves that serve their current activities and self-identities. For example, claims to professional legitimacy, authority and autonomy, within the caring professions, arguably rest upon the construction of a reflexive, agentic and mobile self.² This self is not a passive receptacle of early experience. Instead the reflexive self critically responds to, and transcends, the constraints of experience, background, culture and so on. Therefore, whilst women, who are upwardly mobile into the caring professions, can usefully draw upon their early experiences to give substance and texture to their ongoing projects and identities, they must be careful to symbolically interpret their pasts in ways which are meaningful and acceptable to their current 'audience'.

In the discussion that follows, I draw upon examples from the empirical data to explore the role of the 'symbolically reconstructed' past in the narrative construction of coherent and continuous narrative class identities. While the experience of class hardship and inequality is something that is shared by the interviewees, the meaning of class experience, and the way in which it is incorporated into self-identity, is by no means automatic. In recognition of the way in which the self is actively narrated, I try to give a flavour of the variable and judicious ways in which the class past is constructed into the self-narrative.

In the following interview extract, Christine recollects what she sees as a very difficult period during her poor working-class childhood, when she was temporarily split up from her family and placed into a children's home:

² See Adkins (2002) and Skeggs (2004a) for critical discussions of the reflexive/mobile self of late-modernity.

When my youngest brother was a baby...my mum got very severe post-natal depression. So my dad couldn't look after us alone. She had to go into hospital and we all had to go into children's homes, and that's something that really sticks in my mind and how awful that was. We were all split up, as well, ...I was in a home on my own...I was away from home for about six months and what they did was they re-integrated us all into the home, gradually. I was the eldest, so I was the last one to go home. That was when I was seven... It was awful...because... in those days, which was sort of the mid fifties, children were still, it was very Victorian really, you know children were seen and not heard. I was given no explanation about what was wrong, what was happening, how long I would be there. It was, you know, you were treated like imbeciles really, you were not respected and not valued as children and so no explanations were given. And I can remember going there because my mum, my parents were foreign³, and they cooked foreign food... We ate garlic and spicy foods at home and here I was, in this children's home, eating this English food and the first meal they put in front of me was a plate full of tinned spaghetti. Oh, I thought it was worms! [laughs]. I, I just sat and burst in to tears. I couldn't eat it, it was like "I don't like this", "Have you ever tried it?" "No I can't eat it its worms". "No it's not worms, get it eaten, there's nothing else if you don't eat it". And that was their attitude, so I had to do. But, oh, I hated every minute of it. The only good thing about it was there was a couple. It was children's homes, it's actually been bulldozed....and there were like separate houses and it was a unit you know. Each unit was individual, had about twelve children in it and like there were house parents, a couple who ran it, and who looked after children in that house, and they had a daughter that was my age. So I played with her quite a bit and became friends with her, but there was always that me and her thing, you know. Well it was like you know, "I'm better than you lot because I belong here" sort of thing. It was a bit, it wasn't really an equal friendship, you know. I think it was a friendship of convenience, really, because I was her age, but it was a horrible time that, actually. It really, really made an impression on me: how people should talk to children, and how they should not talk to children, and how you should treat children. And I think that probably did have a bearing on the work I do now because I work with children. You know, I'm sure that's where it comes from. A lot of that comes from the fact that I didn't feel I was valued, that my opinions were valued. I wasn't expected to even have an opinion I wasn't expected to say what I wanted or ask for what I wanted. I just had to do what I was told and be quiet and behave and...of course that wasn't me, anyway. I used to wet the bed, which they, you know, castigate you for doing that and the only thing was there was a fourteen year old boy who did it as well, so I thought if he did it, he's fourteen, it's not that bad if I do it as well, you know .

³ Christine's father was Ukranian, her mother Austrian.

For Christine, this early childhood experience is recalled as an especially traumatic one and there appear to be numerous dimensions to the story, which come together to evoke a similar response from the listener. Firstly, Christine draws upon the historical construction of Victorian childhood in which children are seen and not heard. This enables her to place her experience in a 'real' historical context which lends credibility to her representation of the children's home as draconian and authoritarian. Christine narrates the story of the young child, wrenched from the comfortable familiarity of home into an environment which is both alien and other. The experience is also narrated in such a way to suggest the ways in which the childhood Christine, working-class and of 'foreign' parentage, also becomes alien and 'Other' in this unwelcoming environment. For example, Christine appears to draw upon the experience of being placed in the children's home as a way of articulating how class divisions are experienced from the point of view of the young child. Christine explains how she was conscious of being unfairly judged and found wanting by both adults - 'You were treated like imbeciles really you were not respected and not valued as children,' - and other children - 'I played with her quite a bit and became friends with her, but there was always that me and her thing you know, well it was like you know, "I'm better than you lot because I belong here" sort of thing'. Christine seems to be engaged in the telling of a 'moral tale' of the child denied a voice, denied agency and made to feel useless and 'Other'. At the same time, she neatly manages to avoid a one-dimensional portrayal of herself as a child 'victim' by constructing an agentic childhood self, that questioned the negative meanings and evaluations ascribed to her by others : 'I just had to do what I was told and be quiet and behave and, um, of course that wasn't me anyway.'

This particular 'moral tale' seems to be given shape by the professional knowledges and standpoints that Christine has access through her work role. At other points in the interview, Christine expresses her commitment to discourses of Children's needs and Children's rights (see Lawler, 2000b). Re-listening to the interviews, it seems to me as if she is not simply expressing a commitment to these issues because she

ought to as a social worker; that is to say, I don't think she is providing the interviewer with what Collins describes as an 'official account' (which reifies norm, values, ideals)' (1998:1.4). It seems to me that Christine is, in fact, genuinely 'hailed' by these discourses at a personal level. The way Christine constructs and articulates her memories of being placed into a children's homes is, then, perhaps influenced by the preoccupations and concerns with 'Children's needs' and 'Children's rights' in governmental and academic discourses and policies, although I think it would be mistaken to see her narrative as determined by these discourses. Rather I think that her reflections of her personal experience and the professional discourses she has access to, could be seen to be mutually reinforcing, providing Christine with a sense of coherence and continuity between her own past experiences and sense of self, and the understandings, values and motivations that shape the work she is presently engaged in.

This sense of continuity is, however, not pre-given, but is, instead, provided by the active construction of past experiences into linked elements of a coherent or 'whole' life narrative. Christine's account of being placed into a home provides a very good example of the symbolic reconstruction of the past, as the basis of establishing personal continuity since she regards the work that she does, in the present, as following on from her early childhood experience: 'It really, really made an impression on me: how people should talk to children and how they should not talk to children and how you should treat children and I think that probably did have a bearing on the work I do now because I work with children. You know I'm sure that's where it comes from, a lot of that comes from the fact that I didn't feel I was valued, that my opinions were valued.' That Christine views her present work as an almost inevitable consequence of her childhood experience is confirmed in another section of the interview. Here she comments on the living condition of her childhood family home:

We didn't have electricity in this cottage either it was gas mantles and we had log fires or coal fires so there was no electricity and no hot water, well no running water in the end because it just, I don't know what

happened to the tank it just dried up, um, yeah. *So it was pretty, pretty dire, it really was, it's no wonder I became a social worker, really is it? I suppose it was on the cards then, you know, um, but yeah* (my emphasis).

Interestingly, these comments contrast starkly with other elements of Christine's life-story that emphasise how her social work career was not inevitable or planned, but was the result of a number of highly contingent or 'happenstance' encounters and experiences. However, the idea that Christine was somehow destined to become a social worker seems to me to perform a vital function, that is, this particular narrative construction of her life-history allows her to preserve her early class experiences as meaningful aspects of her self-identity, despite the shifts and changes her life has undergone over the years.

The active use of personal class histories to explain the embodied, affective, auto/biographical self that lies behind the 'professional self' was not shared, in this way, by all interviewees however. For example, while Christine made spontaneous links between her childhood experiences and professional role, another interviewee, Amy, refused to construct a 'Childhood fix' narrative (Plummer, 2001) (see Ch. 4) in which adult identity is seen to be determined by childhood experience. While Amy recounted her difficult early childhood experiences, at my request, she warned against making inferences about her 'choice' of career from these childhood narratives. Instead, Amy self-consciously narrates her career trajectory and, in particular, her developing interest in social work as being shaped in relation to a different set of circumstances, namely that her current carer path was borne out of her experience of managing her child's disability and her desire to help other families in similar circumstances.

The charity thing and the family-link carer, the psychology course, and also meeting the other social workers and things gave me a real interest in social work. And I thought how families could really be supported if there were people there to support them. And *that's how I came on this line, really. It was coincidence, it wasn't...it wasn't my life-history, it was my current [inaudible] with my daughter.* And I put things into perspective and realised that I did have a lot of family history, a lot of

experiences, that I could use to support other people and to care for them. And that's where it came in. It wasn't...wasn't my family at all, it was my child...my child really, and what they'd done through [the charity]. But I think the rest did contribute to it and probably [increased] my interest. But that wasn't where it came from, because I wanted to be an accountant (my italics).

Amy appears to be comfortable with the idea that her early class history may have added value to her already burgeoning interest in social work. However, it also seems clear that Amy is deeply uncomfortable with the idea that she was somehow 'destined' to become a social worker, as a result of her early childhood experiences, or that her adult experiences have somehow been determined by her earlier childhood experiences. This is, perhaps, because she doesn't want to be seen by her colleagues and others as carrying a lot of emotional or psychological 'baggage' from her past - Amy's recollections of her past included domestic abuse and alcoholism within the family, events and episodes, which could easily be interpreted as not only damaging her childhood but also shaping her adult subjectivity. The idea that Amy was, somehow, fated to become a social worker would deny her any role in shaping her own destiny, once again stripping her of agency and autonomy.

However, even for Amy the desire to find continuity in her life-narrative and uncover elements, within her life experience which point to the 'unfolding' of self, is extremely powerful. In the following extract, for example, Amy expresses how her current positions of relative power and autonomy enable her to express aspects of self, which were suppressed within her oppressive childhood environments.

Never did those rebellious things. I never rebelled. I think I would like to have rebelled, at some point, which I'm doing as a social worker and have done. I rebel for people that I work with to get them what they want and need. So, it's strange to get to adulthood and start rebelling, which is what I've done. Even though I was very active in childhood, I never had a childhood. I now have a childhood, in my adult life, with my children and can be very silly, even though I'm a serious person. So, I'm now reliving the things that I think I missed out on.

It is easy to see why this narrative might be preferable to Amy, rather than one that sees her current experience and work role as being somehow determined by her prior oppressive experiences. In this narrative, Amy is shedding the shackles of her childhood and making full use of the freedoms granted within her latter day environments to become a multifaceted, empowered and non-conformist individual. Here, Amy's past becomes a marker of the extent that her external and inner worlds have altered and changed (progressively and for the better), rather than an exerting force that pulls her backwards into those childhood experiences that Amy remembers as being so negative. Here, the past doesn't fully explain the present, rather, Amy produces a present, the 'success' of which has been brought about despite her troubled past. At the same time, she retains a link to the past through her desire to bring about positive changes for people still living with the negative and oppressive effects of inequalities that pervaded her own childhood.

I want to use my final example to show how one of the interview participants 'symbolically reconstructed' her past in such a ways that she was able to draw her experiences of being working-class towards herself as positive sources of identity. Judith negotiates class as a positive sense of identity by rooting her class self in a nostalgic reconstruction of a homogenous and 'respectable' working-class community (cf. Blokland, 2004). Her positive identification, with her working-class childhood community, is in marked contrast to her 'disidentification' with the contemporary working-class, who make up much of her professional client base. The way in which Judith symbolically reconstructs class as a positive aspect of identity, arguably, needs to be understood in the context of contemporary cultural processes, which have: '[closed] down... spaces of representation for the white working class, specifically spaces of representation where cultural dignity and political significance can be forged' (Haylett, 2001: 354). The dominance of discourses postulating the social, cultural, and, moral decline of the working-class mean that it is extremely difficult for individuals to proudly identify with 'the working-class' or 'working-classness'. Judith resolves this issue by constructing a

personal class history, in which she can be proud to locate herself, and by disidentifying with contemporary working-class culture.

For example, Judith describes her respectable, community based working-class childhood as giving her a solid grounding in manners and ethics, which she uses to ascribe to herself legitimate and socially valued forms of personhood.

You went to church dressed up with your gloves and your handbag and you know your hair done and everything. So there was always, she [mother] maintained that. There was always a distinction between everyday life and weekends, now it's not, everything is more casual for everybody but that's what you did and when you went to funerals you wore black, there was nothing else, nothing else was acceptable, it was black and there was the routine to that. There were outfits for weddings and christenings and you dressed up accordingly and your manners had to be immaculate, if you were going to a wedding, usually you didn't have buffet it was always sit down, it was always the full wedding breakfast and you behaved yourself, and you didn't make a noise you didn't run about, nowadays that's relaxed and children are, you were always little adults, you followed that routine and that's what you did and that's what you'd maintain and, to a degree, that's very good as well because again, you know, I think we grew up with good manners, we were polite, we knew when to say please and thank you and all that, we were naughty as well, you know, as children are, but you knew your place and you knew how to behave in particular situations. It was almost as though that had been instilled in you from a very early age so you didn't have to be told [when] you were in those situations.

Judith later speaks of the contrast between the working-class environment in which she sees her personhood being shaped with what she regards as the defining features of current 'working-class' groups and contexts:

Now, there's a different sort of ethics... There are people around us now that are never going to work in their lives, whereas then you got a fair day's pay for a fair day's work, and you grafted for that money and you worked hard for it. And when you'd finished at the end of the week, you'd earned that money, you deserved it so your weekends off - you know,... the dad would have a drink in the pub, the mum would look after the kids but the Sunday you might be out as a family - were well earned. Well all that's disappeared now, erm, and, as I say, some of that

for the good but some of the bad because we've lost a lot of things as well...but it will never be the same as it was then and lots of people have different ideas, as I said different morals, different ethics about things and that in itself's not a bad thing. But the base that was set in the fifties from people that had come through sort of, you know, Edwardian times, things like that, some of those values were not good but a lot of them were and, you know, they made me a lot of who I am and what I've passed on to my daughter and what's come through there but I think a lot of those things have gone.

Furthermore:

I don't know whether its because people younger than me, that have families now, have not had a role model previously, but when I go into particular families, I see how children and parents interact and there's no manners between them, there's no, I mean this sounds superficial but these are the things that I notice even within families. And there's never now... family life seems to have sort of, what was a tiny sort of group where you, you know, you had your breakfast, you went to school, you came home at lunchtime, you had your tea but you had it together.... And there seemed to be time to talk about things that had gone on whether it might have been, you know, major issues or if you'd misbehaved at school it was always, "Well what did you do?". It wasn't, "I'm going into school to slug the teacher", whereas there's a lot of that and I go into families now and there might be two or three children and more often than not it's single parents that you're going into, or that the family sort of thing is not even there. Within the house children are eating different things, the television's on all the time, there's no books or comics and there's just this 32 inch screen.

Dominant class narratives are clearly being drawn into Judith's self-construction practice. Here, as Skeggs has frequently pointed out, we have class being coded through 'moral euphemism': 'relying on the process of interpretation to do the work of association' (2005: 965). In this portrait, working-class families are watching too much TV, they're letting their kids eat whatever they want, there's no attempt at moral or intellectual improvement through reading, etc. Working-class families, this story goes, are not what they used to be. While Judith is able to proudly identify with her working-class heritage, her construction of contemporary working-class culture contributes to the closure of positive representational spaces for its current members.

Judith's narrative echoes those academic and public narratives, which chart the demise of the collective, 'all-together' working-class community (a class both *in* and *for* itself) as Britain moved towards a more individualised, consumption based post-war culture. While aspects of this narrative, undoubtedly, reflect real shifts in British society (e.g. the destruction of mass industry, the demise of the trade unions, the dominance of Thatcherism in the 1980s), several authors (e.g. Cannadine, 1998, and Blockland, 2004) have questioned the dichotomous relationships this narrative constructs between class pasts and presents. For example, while Marxist inspired collective accounts of class were much more popular in the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s, many historians now question how well they actually described class realities during that period (class realities that were arguably more messy and complex than the Marxist orthodoxy on class acknowledged). Nevertheless, the rhetorical shift away from explicit and collective accounts of class, and the loss of many of the traditional bases of working-class community and identity (factories, trade unions, institutes, etc.) have arguably contributed to the closure of physical and representational spaces within which individuals and groups can forge positive senses of working-class belonging (whether these are based on fact or fantasy, or some combination of the two). Accounts of the demise of the 'respectable' working-class, and the emergence of a new 'Underclass', perhaps tell us more about the rise and fall of contrasting political visions of society (e.g. the demise of socialism and the rise of conservative, neo-conservative and post-socialist discourses) than the 'true' state of contemporary working-class morality and personhood.⁴ Nevertheless, the popular belief that 'class is dead,' or has 'had a great fall' (Cannadine, 1998: 16), helps to explain why narrators, such as Judith, construct a nostalgic personal class history, as the only base from which they can build positive identifications with class.

The examples, that I have provided, hopefully illuminate the utility of the 'symbolically reconstructed' past for exploring the processual, temporal and

⁴ At the same time, researchers should perhaps be careful not to overlook the possible psycho-social impact of the cumulative pathological representations and punitive policies constructed in relation to the working-class poor (see Sayer, 2002).

contexts specific aspects of identity construction. The notion of the 'symbolically reconstructed' past reminds researchers that, while identities and selves are not fixed or directly determined by early experiences, personal pasts, nevertheless, play a crucial role in the ongoing reflexive construction of selfhood and identity. In this way, personal pasts can be seen to provide individuals with 'malleable' memory materials (at least in terms of the meanings imputed to memories), which can be picked out and put to work in the attempt to construct coherent and credible personal narratives.

The social structural past

The 'social structural' dimension, of Mead's theory, helps to remind narrative analysts of the importance of situating women's accounts in the contexts of the wider cultural, social and historical contexts within which they became social actors. Rather than treating the women's biographical narratives as stories of the 'exceptional woman', 'the exceptional and unusual figure whose life story explains only itself' (Steedman, 1991: 249, quoted in Smith 1993: 396), narrative analysts need to reflect closely upon the political and social conditions within which the lives recollected, in narrative, took shape.⁵ From this point of view, the women's narratives can be investigated as 'resources' (see Plummer, 2001), which give insight into the ways in which the women's experiences and life trajectories have been shaped, or conditioned, by the wider structuring processes in operation, in their social environments, at particular times and places. These structuring processes are not rigid or deterministic, as is evident in the fact that the constraints on the

⁵ This argument is especially pertinent to the analysis of women's narratives of class mobility. For example, as Reay (1997) points out, it is all too easy for upwardly mobile women's achievements to be appropriated by those who attribute academic and career success solely to natural ability and individual psychology.

We [academics from working-class backgrounds] stand for a triumph of individualism over community; proof that equal opportunities work. Or, as Peter Saunders concludes in his study of educational achievement, success depends on ability not social class. He asserts that when middle-class children do better than working-class children it is due to inherited talents and personal qualities (Saunders, 1995). In a period of increasing class inequality (Oppenheim and Harker, 1996), we stand for the 'success' of meritocracy and validation for findings such as those of Peter Saunders. It is not a comfortable place to be (1997: 20).

women's actions, and the opportunities, available to them, have shifted in time and space. Moreover, at least part of the reason why the structuring processes of social environments are not deterministic is because the agentic and novel actions or 'responses' of individuals can prompt the adjustment or modification of the expectations, goals and plans of the wider community (see Mead, 1934). While the 'social structural' past structures and conditions the experiences found in the present, the way in which women actively confront the realities it constructs means that neither their own lives, nor the frameworks of the wider community is determined by it.

The idea of a 'social structural' past also provides a means of bridging the use of narratives as 'resources' and 'topics' (Plummer, 2001) [see Ch. 2]. For example, the two main plots used by the women to narrate their upward class mobility (the 'Bootstraps' plot, and the 'Making good through education' plot) can be viewed in terms of the social and cultural availability of these accounts of class movement and transformation (see Ch. 3). At the same time, the women arguably select plots which correspond best with the (socially structured) experiences which have had the most profound impact on their lives and identities. From this perspective, we can also clarify the relationship between the 'social structural' and the 'implied objective' past (Maines *et al.*, 1983). The notion of the 'implied objective' past draws our attention to the fact that the reality of the experiences, reconstructed in the women's narratives, is corroborated by the reality of their present experiences. For example, the women who used the 'Making good through education' plot often occupied more senior, prestigious and secure positions, within the caring professions, than the women who used a 'Bootstraps' narrative. The idea of the 'implied objective' past helps to explain why the women's accounts of their pasts are so convincing and believable. From this perspective, the reason we can have confidence in the women's accounts, of their classed and gendered past, is because they accord with the women's present realities. Stories of struggles to overcome class discrimination, and the constraints of working-class culture, connect in a believable way with the 'Bootstraps' women's current realities, in particular the

tenuous nature of their 'professional' positions and their ongoing struggles to claim authority and legitimacy within their personal and professional fields. On the other hand, stories of 'Making good' by capitalising on available educational opportunities and the support of 'significant others' fit in with the reality of these women's relatively high career status and the power and professional autonomy which goes with it. The 'implied objective' past draws attention to the fact that narrators select, from their past, those events and experiences which help to explain their current situations (Maines *et al.*, 1983). More importantly, it helps to explain how we have assurances of the 'facticity' or 'obdurate nature' of the past, remembered in narrative (*ibid.*). We gain a sense of certainty about what *must* have been by verifying 'memory images', belonging to the past, against the structure and arrangement of the present (*ibid.*).

The implied objective past

The 'implied objective' past also acts as a reminder to narrative analysts of the 'obdurate' nature of the realities reconstructed in narrative. While the idea of the 'symbolically reconstructed' past draws narrative analysts' attention in the direction of the artifices of self-storytelling (in addition to the contextual and time-bound nature of narrative construction); the notion of the 'implied objective' past reminds analysts of the importance of the human agents and lived experiences behind or beyond the text. The idea of the 'implied objective' past encourages researchers not to lose sight of more traditional concerns with biographical accounts, such as 'giving voice' to the experiences of those who have been silenced, excluded or oppressed as a result of social, historical and political inequalities and abuses of power.

The notion of the 'implied objective' past provides researchers with a buttress against the most 'sceptical, cynical, ludic and despairing' positions on the value of human stories (Plummer, 2001:264). By providing 'a factual basis for the movement between a present and that which must have been' (Maines, 2001: 47), the implied object past places the facticity of events recalled in narrative beyond

doubt. The 'implied objective' past, therefore, counterbalances extreme relativist approaches to the past, by providing assurances about the reality of past events. At the same time, the notion of a 'symbolically reconstructed' past reinforces the idea that there is no simple memory at work in people's accounts.

[M]emory is no simple 'psychological faculty' from within—it is shaped through and through by setting, society and culture (Plummer, 2001: 235).

It is important to recognise that narrators and their audiences (including researchers) can only 'give voice' to experiences when there exist social and cultural frameworks which endow 'personal' memories with shape and meaning.

[Life] stories can only be told once a societal framework becomes available for them to be told: stories of North American Blacks 'up from slavery', of gay men and lesbians 'coming out' or indeed 'victims of sexual abuse' can only be told once a societal framework has emerged which helps organise them and make them more accessible. Many stories and histories simply cannot be told when the social frameworks are not there (Plummer, 2001:235).

While personal accounts of the past give deep insight into the lived actualities of women's experiences, the social contexts in which these accounts are generated, and the uses to which they are put, means that the collective process of 'giving voice' to stories should never be perceived as 'a straightforward evaluation of pre-given experience' (Jackson, 1998:45). In 'giving voice' to experience, narrators and their interlocutors do not simply 'discover' the social and political dimensions of experiences; instead, they construct the personal as political by symbolically reconstructing memory from new perspectives (ibid.). As Plummer suggests,

[M]emory...here [is] a form of 'political practice which helps 'give voice' to stories that have either never been told or which have been lost, returning such memories to their communities where they may be reworked for the present. Here are the memories of class, traditional

communities, oppressed minorities, indigenous peoples, the colonized, the marginalised, the depressed and oppressed. Often they are heard surfacing in the practice of 'consciousness raising' - starting with the student movement in the 1960s but achieving spectacular success in the women's movement of the 1970s. Here...women found new spaces to speak collectively about their personal experiences – of rape, housework, abortion, wife battering, work, pregnancy, bodies and the like; and found role models, friendship networks and new senses of self which helped to give a collective shape to their 'memories'. One woman's previously silenced story led to another woman's story: memories became political (Plummer, 2001:236).

Conclusion

Analysis of the relevance of Mead's theory of the past for narrative analysis both reinforces and clarifies its novel contributions to debates on class and gender identity and selfhood. For example, the importance for individuals of symbolically reconstructing the past, in order to adjust to new situations and re-establish a sense of continuity and coherence to the life, implies a more reflexive, self-conscious and creative view of identity construction than sociologists have traditionally envisioned. That identity is constituted by symbolically reconstructing the past, from the point of view of the present, also means that attributes of identity and agency cannot be simply 'read off' from people's categorical identities, whether these are externally imposed upon individuals or defined by individuals themselves. People's identifications, or indeed 'disidentifications', with externally imposed categories, such as class, give little insight into the meaningful and purposeful identities that individuals assemble by symbolically constructing and reconstructing the self in narrative (see Lawler, 2002).

The processual, time-dependent and context specific nature of the process of symbolic reconstruction should caution researchers against conceptualising class identities as fixed, stable, or crystallised. At the same time, the way in which symbolic reconstruction 'roots' the subject and its identity in a past, which gives substance and texture to present experience, also warns against an overly decentred, fragmented, chaotic or unanchored view of identity construction. The self,

constructed through symbolic reconstruction, may well be time-dependent and context specific but it would lack substance and depth were the subject not able to draw upon past experiences and perspectives in order to give meaning to the present.⁶ On the one hand, the selves and the identities constituted through symbolic reconstruction are discontinuous with past selves and identities, as a result of the processes whereby they are modified and adapted to meet the challenges of new situations. On the other hand, there is a certain amount of continuity between past and present experiences, identities and selves, as older perspectives are incorporated into the present, albeit in a modified or reconstituted form.

The emergent and time-dependent nature of the present is what provides the present with its social nature. This is so because novel and emergent events create new situations to which the person must adjust. It is in this adjustment process that previous presents are socially aligned with current presents, and thus adjustment by its very nature belongs to both earlier and later perspectives. This interpretation is inherent in Mead's conceptualisation of sociality – “the capacity of being several things at once” (1932:49) – and it leads us to envision both continuity and change as involved in the present as social phenomena (Maines *et al.*, 1983: 162).

The fact that selves and identities are ‘symbolically reconstructed’, out of the personal past, helps to explain the continued resonance of class experiences for those, who have moved away from their class of origin, as a result of upward class mobility.

Class experience is deeply rooted, retained and carried through life rather than left behind (or below). In this sense it is more like a foot which carries us forward than a footprint which marks a past presence, (Mahoney and Zmroczek, 1997b: 4)

Both the events of the ‘implied objective’ past and structuring and conditioning of life experiences by the ‘social structural’ past remain salient to upwardly mobile working-class women’s current sense of self and identity. At

⁶ This is why Maines (2001:47) prioritises the ‘implied objective’ past in his interpretation of Mead’s theory: ‘without it there could be no events to symbolically reconstruct; nor could there be a frame for determining what is and what might be’.

the same time, the meanings of events and experiences are not given in and of themselves. Instead, the meanings of the past, and its relationship to the present, are constructed and reconstructed as women adjust their sense of self and identity in response to events, situations and contexts specific to the present.

CHAPTER SIX

Conclusion

In the preceding chapters I mapped out a 'narrative-interactionist' methodology for the study of self and personal identity. I then used this framework to investigate women's narratives of class mobility. The aim of these chapters was to study the complex relationships between the frameworks, conditions and contexts of established narrative practice and social actors' reflexive and creative attempts to form meaningful social identities through storytelling (see Holstein and Gubrium, 2000). The analysis explored the 'narrative linkages' (ibid.), that the respondents built between the self and personal experiences of gender, class and upward mobility into the caring professions. Utilising the methodological perspectives set out in Ch. 2, Chapters 3, 4, and 5 investigated the ways in which the construction of the women's stories of self was mediated by interlinked narrative frameworks, resources and interpretive contexts. Here I explored how the women storied their lives in meaningful and recognisable ways, for example by drawing upon established 'discursive practices' (ibid.), such as prototypical storylines of the self and upward mobility, and shared cultural understandings concerning narrative coherence (see Ch. 3).¹ In addition, the stories assembled by the women, were shown to be influenced by available cultural discourses and categories, for example cultural representations of class 'Others', and professional knowledge frameworks (see Chapters 3, 4 and 5). 'Biographical particulars' (ibid.), such as 'family stories' (Scott and Scott, 2000), as well as the multiple other inter-subjective relations in which the self is dialogically articulated, were also identified as playing a crucial role in the process of self-storytelling (see Ch. 4). Linked to the issue of self/other relationships, the social contexts in which the women constructed their stories were considered for their impact on the stories they told. Here I addressed the mediatory role of the interview format (see Ch. 4), as well as the influence of 'the perspective of the present' (i.e. those interpretive horizons, which only emerge at particular

¹ For example, most of the women were careful to construct accounts with satisfactory, if only temporary, 'end points' (see Gergen and Gergen, 1988).

junctures in time and place) on the retrospective reconstruction of the women's lives and narrative identities (see Ch. 5). The shared aspects of the women's experiences, and the influence of established narrative practices, produced a number of similarities, in the classed and gendered selves constructed through the women's narratives. At the same time, the women were also active storytellers, who selectively and self-consciously assembled available narrative resources into coherent and personally meaningful stories (see also Holstein and Gubrium, 2000). As a means of recognising the role of women's creative agency in the construction of narrative identities, the analysis remained alert to difference and diversity in the women's stories (rather than focusing solely on common themes, outlooks and identities).

Narrative-Interactionism: A novel framework for rethinking class identity.

The narrative-interactionist framework that I deployed in the assessment of the women's narratives, arguably has a great deal to contribute to contemporary sociological debates on the relationships between class, culture and personal identity. Before specifying the novel contribution, made by the research to existing work on gender and class, it is perhaps necessary to re-familiarise the reader with the recent twists and turns in debates on class identity. Alongside the more general 'cultural turn' in sociology, there has, of late, been a resurgence of interest in qualitative analyses of class (see Devine and Savage, 2004). More and more researchers (e.g. Fiona Devine, Steph Lawler, Bev Skeggs and Mike Savage) are now arguing that greater attention should be paid to issues of class in qualitative sociology. Concepts of class, they argue, are relevant not only to the quantitative analysis of structural and institutional formations and social relations (e.g. economic relationships), but also have analytic purchase in studies of discourse, culture, everyday practices, lifestyles and identity formation. Researchers, influenced by theorists such as Bourdieu, also contest traditional distinctions between the cultural and the economic, including the belief that lifestyles and identities are 'merely' cultural phenomena. Instead, cultural phenomena, and macro social structures, are

said to be mutually constituted within a constantly dynamic social process (see Lawler, 1999). At the same time, 'new' class researchers are keen not to fall back upon abstract and deterministic theories of 'stratification', which wrongly envision class-consciousness and identity if as 'a 'reflex' of class positioning' (Savage and Devine, 2004:12). Instead, there is an increasingly widespread recognition amongst qualitative class researchers of the often complex, incoherent and indeterminate nature of class cultures and identities. The challenge for class researchers is to find novel ways of investigating the salience of class at the level of personal identity, without reproducing overly simplistic accounts of the relationships between 'objective' class positions and 'subjective' cultural beliefs, identities and practices.

Recent conceptualisations of the classed nature of self and identity echo many of the basic ideas and propositions of both narrative and interactionist approaches. For instance, both cultural class analysts and narrative researchers emphasise the relational, fluid and contextual nature of identity formations (see for example, Järvinen, 2004; Blokland, 2004). Both perspectives also recognise the way in which identities are constructed or 'negotiated' in the context of complex relationships of power and inequality (see, for example, Holstein and Gubrium, 2000; Hey, 2005). It is possible to identify a long-term, general shift in class research, away from clear-cut, deductive, categorical and collective models of class identity (e.g. Marxist approaches), and towards more individualized, relational, tactical and situationally embedded conceptualisations of class practice and identity (e.g. Bourdieuvian approaches) [see Bottero, 2004]. From these 'new' perspectives: 'identities are not labels of your position but 'claims for recognition'...which are both contested and fraught' (Devine and Savage, 2004:12). Class research has, therefore, overwhelmingly turned away from 'grand theory' and reductive models of the relationships, between class positioning, beliefs and identities, and has moved towards multiple, indeterminate, open-ended and agency-endowed conceptualisations of class(ed) contexts, relationships and identities (see Devine and Savage, 2004). As a result, contemporary class analyses now share an increasing

amount of conceptual terrain with interactionist and narrative approaches to self, identity and social action.

Sticking points in contemporary debates on cultural class identity

While cultural class analyses have gradually moved towards more fluid, contextual and agentic notions of class identity, there, nevertheless, remains a degree of debate and discord amongst scholars about how class identities might be conceptualised, elicited and interpreted in qualitative research (see Savage *et al.*, 2001; Bottero, 2004; and Payne and Grew, 2005). For example, Savage *et al.* (2001) question whether class is a self-consciously internalised aspect of identity. However, they argue this on the basis that interview respondents are often reluctant or unwilling to insert themselves into 'objective' class categories. Their argument is, therefore, open to criticism because they fall back upon the discredited idea that questions of identity 'are answered simply by assigning a predicate to the subject "I"' (Polkinghorne, 1988:152) (as in 'I am working class').² Nevertheless, Savage *et al.* (2001) argue for the continued salience of class in the ongoing construction of social order, and suggest that people's 'defensiveness' about class often stems from a desire to distance themselves from the injustices, inequalities and 'hidden injuries' (Sennett and Cobb, 1977) associated with class hierarchy.

² Polkinghorne is one of several narrative researchers who suggest that questions of identity need to be addressed, within a conceptual framework, which links together self, identity, and narrative.

The question of "Who am I?" is not answered simply by assigning a predicate to the subject "I," as in such phrases as "I am an American," "I am male," and "I am a farmer." The everyday answer is given as a narration of the sort, "I was born in St. Louis, and then I went to school, which got me interested in these things," and so on. The experience of the self is organized along a temporal dimension in the same manner that the events of a narrative are organized by the plot into a unified story. The self is that temporal order of human experience whose story begins with birth, has as its middle the episodes of a lifespan, and ends with death. It is the plot that gathers together these events into a coherent and meaningful unity, and thereby gives context and significance to the contribution that the individual episodes make toward the overall configuration that is the person. The whole of an individual human existence is articulated in the narrative plot, it is much more than a simple chronicle listing of life occurrences. The self then is a meaning rather than a substance...(1988:152).

The 'defensiveness' of respondents, who might feel guilty or uncomfortable about their class privileges and 'selfish' (i.e. aspirational and individualised) class practices (see Hey, 2005), needs to be distinguished from the defensive attitudes of marginalized respondents, who might want to 'dis-identify' with stigmatized 'working class' identities (see Skeggs, 1997). Accounts of defensive class 'disidentifications' have been criticised for '[imposing] class categories in the teeth of respondents' denials' (Bottero, 2004: 991). According to Bottero (2004), residues of older stratification theory in 'new' accounts of class expose disidentification theories to the charge 'that they shore up class analysis by a sleight of hand, substituting weaker evidence of 'class (dis)identity' as proof of [collective and oppositional] class processes' (Bottero, 2004:991). Critics of the disidentification thesis argue that there is little or no evidence to show that 'denials of class' are the result of the triumph of the dominant ideology of the middle-class (e.g. the ideology of classlessness or meritocratic individualism) [see Bottero, 2004]. According to Bottero, disidentification theorists need to make it clear that they do not treat 'class (dis)identity' as evidence of the success of collective and explicit attempts by middle-class groups to suppress working-class consciousness and action. Notions of 'class (dis)identity', Bottero argues, may still have analytical purchase, but only when they are used in the context of tacit, relational, hierarchical and individualised analyses of class.

Writing from a different perspective, Payne and Grew (2005) argue that once class is reconceived as tacit, individualized, and relational, the terms of the debate, on which notions of class (dis)identity stand, alter dramatically. In the context of these 'new' understandings of class processes, treating interview respondents' hesitancy, to locate themselves as members of social classes, as straightforward evidence of 'disidentification' becomes highly questionable. According to Payne and Grew, class is often referred to indirectly in the construction of relational class identities. These authors are, therefore, critical of Savage *et al.* (2001) for assuming that only conceptually unambiguous, unhesitant and direct expressions of class count as evidence of the salience of class as an aspect of personal identity. Researchers, they

argue, should not expect respondents to be aware of, or know how to handle the esoteric conceptual categories used by sociologists to specify class. Instead, researchers should be alert to the everyday (i.e. messy and conceptually indeterminate) 'euphemisms' or 'sub-articulations' of class (mentions of money, education, lifestyle, attitudes etc.) which are used to construct relational class identities.

Skeggs (2004a, 2004b, 2005) has arguably produced the most detailed thesis of the moral stakes implicated in the construction of relational class(ed) identities. According to Skeggs, euphemisms of class (signalled through references to clothing, embodiment, eating and drinking habits, etc.) are used to specify the boundaries of normalcy and acceptability, to calculate moral value (or a 'lack' thereof), and have become one of the central means by which individuals define and evaluate 'self' and 'Others'. Implicit or tacit meanings of class are, therefore, used in the continuous and open-ended process of establishing and re-establishing our sense of who we are and where we stand in relation to various 'Others'. Rather than viewing class disidentifications as the most pervasive or significant subjective response to class processes, these 'new' understandings of class processes should alert researchers to the multiple and often incoherent 'subarticulations' of class in personal accounts. In adopting tacit and relational understandings of class identity, researchers should be more attentive to the ways in which 'subarticulations' of class are deployed in everyday discourse to articulate identifications and disidentifications with various 'Others'. 'Subarticulations' of class can then be seen as an important means of constructing the self into multiple social relationships and forging lines of joint activity in the ongoing course of interaction (for example they may be essential to attempts to gain recognition from others, or in helping to establish shared outlooks and mutual goals).

While there have clearly been some major advances in recent work on the nature of class identity, a quick perusal of the recent debates in this area shows that there is still conceptual confusion, inconsistency and lack of agreement over how

researchers should 'tap into' and interpret 'subjective' meanings and expressions of class identity. One possible reason for this is that many class researchers lack coherent models of self and identity, which are most suited to the kinds of data they most often work with e.g. in-depth qualitative interview accounts. For example while popular Bourdieuvian approaches to social identification are particularly suited to the study of implicit ways in which class is encoded in 'identity through practice' (see Bottero, 2004), they are arguably less useful to the study of people's self-conscious attempts to grapple with issues of class in their personal narratives.³ As Devine and Savage point out:

By emphasising the power of everyday practice, and the ways that people become actively involved in various fields through 'playing the game', it is unclear in Bourdieu's thought where critical and discursive consciousness arises from. How do people's actual elaborate identities relate to the complexities of their everyday lives and how is it possible for these identities to take on more critical forms? (2004:16).

By placing the Meadean reflexive self at the heart of its frameworks, a narrative-interactionist strategy elicits data and permits analyses, which can begin to supply answers to the questions posed by Devine and Savage. The Meadean social self - which knows itself from the point of view of the 'game' (or games), and which is aware of the kinds of roles and duties it must perform, within a community, to meet the expectations of 'generalized others'- bears striking similarity to Bourdieuvian identity perspectives. At the same time, the very social foundations of the self - e.g. the fact that the self comes to know itself from the point of view of 'others' - are used by Mead to draw attention to the fact that individuals are not passive dupes, who merely reproduce the 'games' of the communities within which they arise. Individuals can take on the diverse perspectives of multiple 'significant' and 'generalized' others (in so far as they are aware of, or participate in, multiple groups and communities). At the same time, there is never any certainty as to how individuals will respond to the multiple and often conflicting identities called forth

³ This may explain why Savage *et al.*, (2001) focused on people's self-identification or (disidentification) with class categories as a means of investigating whether or not class is a self-conscious aspect of personal identity. Lacking an alternative model of self and identity, the researchers perhaps saw little option but to return to limited 'categorical' notions of identity as a means of exploring whether people 'internalise' class in their self-understandings.

by various others (in other words, we can never fully predict the response of the 'I' to the identities called out by the 'me'). In the process of responding to social situations, problems and so forth, the individual may modify, or adapt their perspectives and behaviours in novel ways, which break with both prior senses of self, as well as the established meanings and practices of their wider community. Individuals and communities may undergo mutual adjustment as a result of the novel and creative responses of human agents to their social activities.

The ability of individuals to take on multiple perspectives toward themselves and synthesise or integrate these meanings into a coherent self-narrative also helps to explain how individuals can develop more critical forms of awareness of their lives and personal identities (see Polkinghorne, 1988, Aboulafia, 1993).⁴ At the same time, Mead's views on the inherent unpredictability of people's responses and social actions fit neatly with the idea that identities and forms of awareness are never entirely stable or fixed, but are instead in a constant process of emergence. Even the interview setting itself provides an interactive opportunity for the occasioning of novel and more critical forms of self-awareness, or the construction of new forms of narrative coherence, which give a sense of a unified personal identity (something which is recognised in the increasing preference of the term 'data generation' over against 'data collection' in guides to qualitative researching, see for example Mason, 2002). The relationship, between elaborate identities and everyday lives, can therefore be seen to reside in the process whereby individuals construct the perspectives or 'narrative resources' offered to them in the course of their day-to-day experiences into narrative identities. Furthermore, the process of narrative self-construction is mediated by the different interpretive settings individuals enter into in

⁴ By recognising that individuals acquire the ability to assume multiple positions in social relationships (whether in reality or in imagination) and therefore know themselves from the perspectives of multiple 'others', we can see how they might, for example, become self-conscious of judging others and of being judged in classed terms. The outcomes of this self-conscious understanding are not predictable although we might envision a spectrum of responses. These might range from (1) attempts to justify particular forms of judgement or prejudice as more acceptable and valid than others; (2) the acceptance of internal contradictions or fractures within the self-concept; or (3) self-conscious attempts to iron out hypocrisy and contradiction within the self as a means of achieving a more coherent moral self-concept.

the course of their day-to-day activities (see Holstein and Gubrium, 2000).

Narrative identities are, therefore, never fixed or stable but 'emerge' in the course of social interactions and 'dialogues', which are rarely completely controlled or predictable.

The 'narrative-interactionist' framework that I have deployed, in this thesis, is unusual in drawing together Mead's theories on the self and time, as well as the growing body of literature, which explores the relationships between narrative, self, identity and social action. This framework provides an interconnected set of perspectives, on the identity construction process, and offers a robust theoretical and methodological framework for exploring the multiple ways in which class is constructed into personal identity. The framework I have used arguably complements the more innovative developments in new class analyses (with their focus on the relational, fluid and contextual dimensions of identity construction). At the same time, the strategy I have adopted is unusual in explicitly drawing on the insights of pragmatism, interactionism and narrative analysis as a means of gaining analytical purchase on women's narratives of class mobility. According to Maines (2001), whilst there has been a drift towards interactionism in general sociology, this has largely been an 'unaware' or implicit process with few researchers explicitly drawing upon interactionist ideas and theories within their work. The precepts and ideas of pragmatism, interactionism and narrative analysis will not be alien to most class researchers, and any attempt to become familiar with these conceptual frameworks should make clear their relevance to debates on class, gender and personal identity. Moreover, these frameworks are arguably particularly useful for clarifying understandings of the social nature and construction of self and identity (thus helping to overcome the 'conceptual confusion' associated with contemporary research on class identity (see above)). In the final section I highlight some of the key points that emerged out of the 'narrative interactionist' analysis of the women's accounts, and explain their novel contribution to debates on class, gender and personal identity.

Narratives of self: The creation of coherence

In Chapter 3, I studied the narrative linkages the respondents built between the self and personal experiences of gender, class and upward mobility into the caring professions. More specifically, I addressed the way in which the women made use of culturally available plots of upward mobility ('Pulling myself up by the bootstraps' and 'Making good through education') in order to 'story' the classed and gendered self. According to Savage *et al.* (2001) class categories, themes and plots are often used by interview respondents as 'external anchors', which help bridge the gap between social structures and individuals' lives. Class concepts, according to these authors, are entirely compatible with telling a story of the life: 'the idea of class invites respondents to make sense of themselves in a broader context. It is a connecting device, whereby people locate themselves, but it is not an identity that is internalised' (2001: 883).

In telling their life-stories, the women I interviewed made references to the 'social structural past' (see Maines *et al.*, 1983). This enabled the women to situate their lives and experiences within social structural, historical, cultural and inter-subjective contexts of class and gender. At the same time, the women also 'symbolically reconstructed' (*ibid*) their life-histories in ways that enabled them to endow their experiences with meanings and significance, which resonated with their current perspectives, identities, activities and so on (see also Ch. 5). Stories of gender and class were, therefore, used to convey senses of self that were personally meaningful to the storyteller, for example the heroic, strong self of the 'Bootstraps' narrative, the indebted self of the 'Making good through education narrative', or the empathetic, caring self (linked to both narratives), that intimately identifies with the struggles of those facing class hardship and barriers to achievement. From this perspective, class did not merely provide a set of 'external anchors' for situating the life in a broader social context. Instead, class and gender were often constructed into the women's stories as a means of furnishing explanations of self and personal identity.

Stories of gender and class, therefore, helped the women to build contexts within which they could communicate meaningful, recognisable and defensible subjectivities. Experiences of gender and class, and in particular the women's active responses to their classed and gendered worlds, were used to justify and explain the principled, affective and attitudinal dimensions of their self-identity. Moreover, the narrative linkages, the women constructed between their early class experiences and their adult subjectivities, enabled them to communicate a coherent and enduring self-concept (what Holstein and Gubrium refer to as 'the beacon of experience' (2000:81)).⁵ Even though the women's class histories were fragmented or disrupted by the experience of class mobility, narrative frameworks and conventions enabled the women to construct a sense of continuity and coherence into their stories of self. In constructing narrative linkages between early experiences of class and gender and adult identities, the women were able to convey relatively stable self-identities that had withstood numerous changes in the women's personal circumstances and social positioning. Even stories of personal transformation (such as the 'bootstraps' narratives) were not entirely incompatible with stories conveying a sense of continuity between past and present. In communicating both 'progressive' and 'stable' narratives of self (Gergen and Gergen, 1988), the 'Bootstraps' women were able to tell stories of their personal class struggles, achievements and transformations, *and* convey a sense of self, as 'grounded' in early experiences of class (i.e. a self which still has its roots in working-class worlds and which is careful not to 'get above' itself).

While there was difference and diversity in the way in which experiences of class and gender were constructed into the women's self-concepts, both categories were significant in terms of unifying the women's sense of where they came from, who they were, how they developed their interests and outlooks, and how they might direct them into the future. In sharp contrast to this perspective, Savage *et al.*, (2001:8) argue that 'class is not an identity which is internalised', although they, too,

⁵ It might be necessary to remind the reader, at this point, that the ability to communicate an enduring or stable self-concept does not mean that the individual has, in fact, acquired a state of 'true self' (see Gergen and Gergen 1988).

acknowledge that class is often used 'as a resource, a device with which to construct identity' (ibid.). Class, according to Savage *et al.*, (2001), is not central to a sense of self-identity because individuals often resist the idea that they 'have' or belong to a particular class. However, as I argued above, many class and narrative researchers are re-conceptualising 'identity' by rejecting 'categorical' notions of identity (in which identity is seen to reside in the appropriation of labels of position) in favour of the idea that self and identity are narratively constructed out of a range of resources (including 'experience'). From a discursive or 'narrative identity' perspective, it is possible to identify clear examples of the internalisation of class as an aspect of personal identity, although these point towards more complex and indeterminate relationships between class, gender, self and identity than sociologists have traditionally envisioned.

Self and Other: Inter-subjectivity and narrative

In Chapter 4, I addressed the way in which the women's narrative identities were constructed in dialogue with various ('significant' and 'general') others. Here I drew upon Mead's (1934) theory of the relational self as a means of reflecting upon the different social relationships (e.g. inter-subjective or 'generalized'), in which the respondents articulated their classed and gendered sense of self. The analyses, in this Chapter, aimed to draw attention to the idea that cultural identities are not constructed solely through, or in relation to 'discourse'. Instead, identities are always constructed in the context of social relationships and interactions. While discourses are highly significant to the construction of identity, they are always 'activated' in the context of particular social interactions and relationships. The impact of discourse on identity is, therefore, always mediated by interactive or interpretive context and settings, and then, again, by social actors' creative attempts to refashion discourses into personally meaningful, 'situated' identities (see Holstein and Gubrium, 2000).

A novel contribution of this Chapter, was the way in which it explored the linkages between popular cultural plots of upward mobility and the construction of

self/Others. For example, those women, who constructed a 'Bootstraps' narrative of class mobility, arguably inserted themselves (either wittingly or unwittingly) into culturally dominant 'individuated' narratives of self. Western 'heroic' narratives of self (see Somers and Gibson, 1994) and narratives of 'multicultural modernisation' (see Haylett, 2001) perhaps provided loose narrative templates for constructing class mobility narratives. The women's stories often centred around their 'heroic' struggles to break free from what they saw as the constraining and atavistic aspects of working class culture and tradition. This plot also enabled the women to affiliate themselves with the liberal, modern 'middle-class' subjects of 'multicultural modernisation' narratives. In this narrative, the 'new' cosmopolitan British middle-class are seen to have successfully reconstructed themselves as modern, liberal, anti-oppressive subjects by sloughing-off their imperialist past. As Haylett points out, the authorization of the new middle-class subject in 'multicultural modernisation' narratives relies upon the pathologisation of working-class 'Others', who function as 'ciphers for the offloading of a culturally shameful and burdensome whiteness' (2001:366). Working-class 'Others' are constructed as sexist, racist, homophobic; they are 'culturally impoverished', unambitious and 'abject' outsiders who (in the more 'tolerant' rhetoric) require 'support' from the multicultural mainstream to modernise and recuperate their cultures and identities (ibid.). The symbolic construction of the contemporary working-class, as not only materially poor but 'culturally impoverished', has, according to Haylett, produced a context of 'representational closure' and 'derogation', which denies positive spaces of representation for the white working-class, e.g. 'spaces where cultural dignity and political significance can be forged' (2001:354). In this context, it is difficult to see how the respondents (especially those women in less prestigious positions within the caring profession) might stake a claim on legitimate, modern, independent identities *without* drawing distance between themselves and working-class 'Others'.

On the other hand, respondents who constructed their narratives around a 'Making good through education' plot tended to produce self-consciously inter-subjective and relational class selves. These women often conveyed a sense of continuity between

their own subjectivities and those of 'significant others' (such as mothers), for example, by constructing themselves into shared inter-subjective and inter-generational narratives of upward class movement (see Scott and Scott, 2000). It is possible that there was less pressure on these women to make claims to be recognised as modern liberal subjects because they had moved classes as young women (often going straight from school to higher education to professional work) and tended to occupy more prestigious positions within the caring professions. Madeline, for example, spoke of how easy it was for her to 'pass' as middle-class and how surprised people seemed when she revealed aspects of her class background. For this group of women there were perhaps fewer risks attached to 'exposing' their class histories or constructing positive links between their class background and cultural identity. Their links to the working-class are also firmly rooted in the immediate post-war period when positive representational spaces for the working-class still existed; a period which is now often nostalgically reconstructed as the heyday of the 'all-together', aspirational and collective working-class (see Blokland, 2004). These respondents, therefore, have the opportunity to ground their class identities in a proud working-class culture, which preceded the perceived 'decline' of working-class values, community and respectability.

While the narrative identities constituted through these meta-plots were relatively coherent and clearly signposted, meanings of self constructed, in 'nested narratives', conveyed much more fragmented and contradictory 'relational' class-gender identities. For example, while the respondents, who produced narratives of personal struggle and transformation (into modern, liberal and individuated selves) often distanced themselves from working-class 'Others', at other times they expressed pride in their class of origin, identifying positively with personal qualities 'inherited' from their working-class cultures (e.g. a strong work ethic, an attitude of care towards others, a healthy disregard of status hierarchy). In the latter context of identity construction, the respondents implicitly and sometimes self-consciously 'disidentified' with middle-class 'others'. For example the women were often keen

to state that they were *not* preoccupied with, or impressed by wealth, status, and conspicuous consumption, sometimes self-conscious distancing themselves from middle-class 'others' caught up in such games. Therefore, whilst the conventions of life-narratives often encourage and enable the construction of coherent and synthesised self-concepts, close assessment of self-other relationships and dialogues in narrative shows that multiple, situated and partial class, gender identities often emerge during the course of self-storytelling.

Recognition of the situated, context specific and processual nature of identity construction makes sociologists' traditional criteria, for what constitutes class identity, seem all the more problematic. Sociologists have, traditionally, only linked class to identity when respondents are willing to see themselves in fixed, unequivocal and singular class terms. On the other hand, the analyses, contained in this research, suggest that class may be highly relevant to the construction of a self-conscious narrative identity, regardless of whether class identity is uniform, unambiguous or unequivocal.

Mead's theory of the past: Temporality and Narrative

In Ch. 5, I used Mead's theory of the past as a means of exploring more closely the temporal aspects of identity construction. Mead's (1929, 1932) theory of the past is linked to his work on time and social order, which emphasises processes of emergence, as well as the intrinsic variation, change and uncertainty at the heart of social existence. According to Mead, unexpected or novel events are inevitable components of dynamic, ongoing and open-ended social processes. At the same time, abrupt and novel events disrupt established social, cultural, scientific, etc., meanings and expectations and, therefore, create situations of confusion, loss of coherence and unintelligibility. According to Mead, explanations of new and abrupt events, by their very nature, cannot be found in the old. Therefore, for every 'new' present, brought into being by novel events, it becomes necessary for actors' to construct 'new' pasts. The process of reconstructing the past, from new

perspectives, helps to mitigate the disruption caused by novel events and re-establish a sense of continuity and coherence between past and present. Using Mead's theory, it is possible to recognise the significance of the 'symbolically reconstructed' past (see Maines *et al.*, 1983) for constructing coherence into the life-narrative and mitigating disruptions to the self-concept created by the novel, emergent or abrupt elements of personal experience (such as switching class positions, and entering new class worlds). Personal and cultural identity, from this perspective, is inextricably entwined with the particular narrative of the past that individuals construct out of experiences, activities and ongoing projects taking shape in the present (see Järvinen, 2004).

However, the link between self, identity and the symbolically reconstructed past is not unanimously acknowledged by class researchers. For example, in their research on class identity, Savage *et al.* (2001) did not encourage respondents to tell their life histories, although several of their respondents, nevertheless, replied in these terms. In order to 'see' themselves in terms of class, some of their respondents started to reflect upon their pasts as a means of making sense of where they 'fit' within class schemes. The complexity of people's personal class histories may make it difficult for people to unambiguously locate themselves in terms of class categories, although Savage *et al.*, (2001) do not consider this as a possible reason for people's hesitancy to assign themselves 'objective' class labels.

Mead's idea, that we can only access our pasts from the particular vantage points of the present, alerts researchers to the fact that accounts of the past do not offer unmediated perspectives on lived experience. The meanings, significance, or truth of personal experiences, are not directly retrieved from memory; instead they are constructed into memory, from vantage points and perspectives that were unavailable at the moment in which events took place. Researchers then need to be careful not to treat accounts of the past at 'face value' i.e. as directly reflecting experience. However, rather than merely problematise the study of personal

accounts, I have tried to show how such research can be enriched by playing closer attention the interpretive dimensions of experience and identity.

Similarly, I have tried to make sure that my analysis of the symbolic, or narrative reconstruction of experience, in accounts of self does not fall into the trap of 'dismissing' lived reality or the 'concrete' human beings behind the stories. Towards this end, I employ two other dimensions of Mead's theory: 'the implied objective' and 'social structural past' (see Maines *et al.*, 1983; Maines, 2001). Mead's references to the 'implied objective' past, for example, remind us that the facticity of events, reconstructed in memory, should not, in general, be placed in doubt; instead, it is the meaning of those events which is open to scrutiny (Maines, 2001). While the implied objective past 'provides a factual basis for the movement between a present and that which must have been' (Maines 2001:47); the 'social structural' past, referred to by Mead, gives to the past a concrete or substantive role in structuring (though by no means determining) the present: 'the past can only establish probabilities for what will take place in the present; it can never establish causes' (Maines, 2001:46). Whilst 'new' and abrupt events cannot be completely explained by earlier perspectives, we can, nevertheless, adjust these perspectives in the light of the novel and emergent events, in order to try to ascertain the 'conditioning processes', which had a structuring effect on the present. The women's accounts of the past, for example, give insight into the inter-subjective, social and historical mechanisms and circumstances, which increased the women's opportunities for becoming socially mobile, although we should be cautious not to assume that the trajectory of the women's lives was, in fact, directly determined by such processes. Finally, by emphasising the role of symbolic reconstruction of the past as a means of giving shape and substance to present identities and projects, I tried to make sure that the active, reflective human agent remained firmly in the picture. This was made easier by adopting a 'narrative interactionist' and Meadean framework, which focused, not only on the textual dimensions of life-narratives, but also kept the interacting, reflexive social self squarely within its sights (see also Järvinen, 2004). Within this framework, life-narratives illuminate some of the ways

in which individuals self-consciously and purposively insert themselves into social relations and take up active roles in the ongoing construction of their social worlds. Here the emphasis is on the way individuals construct narratives of the past, which are meaningful from the point of view of their present situations and activities; and how these narratives help individuals to build self-identities, which support particular social relationships and future-directed projects. This approach encouraged me to explore the links between narrative, self, identity and action whilst remaining alert to the dangers of losing sight of the richness and humanity of the women's narratives (see Plummer, 2001). It is left to the reader to decide how successfully I balanced these dual concerns.

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