

**Religion and higher education: making sense of the
experience of religious students at secular universities
through a Bourdieuan lens**

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

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Abstract

Despite a decade of research into student 'difference', religious students have been largely ignored within the widening participation and diversity literature. Unlike considerations of class, race or gender, religion remains, for the most part, unrecognised within institutional policy making, whilst the actual experiences of religious students are omitted from many of the debates around fundamentalism on campus and the role of universities in enhancing community cohesion. This thesis is designed to address this omission and to enhance theoretical and conceptual understandings of the social and academic experiences of religious students in UK secular higher education.

Using a Narrative Inquiry approach, fifteen students from Christian, Muslim, Jewish and Sikh backgrounds were interviewed about their social and educational experiences, throughout their first year at a post-1992 University. The students' stories were analysed through the lenses of race, gender, class and religion with Bourdieu's notions of *habitus*, *field*, *capital*, *othering* and *strategy* adopted as conceptual tools in order to help better explain and understand their practices and actions.

The research provides new insights into the relational nature of religion, the ways in which the interactions between habitus, field and capital inform students' 'otherness' or 'fit', the levels of self-awareness and reflexivity shown by religious students in their daily lives, and the strategies they undertake to resist being 'othered', namely defiance, charm, avoidance, 'passing', and emotional and physical disengagement. The research highlights the need to bring religion into the fold of recognised social categories, to conceptualise religious 'othering' as exclusionary, and to restructure Bourdieuan theories of habitus and strategy to take into account the individual habitus of religious students. The thesis, therefore, has significant implications not only for widening participation and diversity policy and practice but also the broader ways in which difference is understood and valorised.

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Chapter One Introducing the thesis

Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to introduce the background to my research and describe how this thesis was conceived and constructed - the culmination of a decade of academic and professional interests in widening participation, diversity and the student experience. In the first part of the chapter I describe the genesis of the research. In the second part I outline the structure of the thesis and introduce each of the subsequent chapters. I establish how the chapters link together to build up a picture not only of the social and academic experiences of fifteen religious students at a secular higher education institution but why incidences of isolation and 'othering' occur, as well as the strategies the students undertake in their attempts to be successful within their new social milieu.

The genesis of the research

I am a Reader in widening participation and my work is concerned with the socio-cultural and political contexts of higher education, particularly in relation to widening participation, student diversity and inequality (Stevenson et al, 2010; Stevenson and Clegg, 2010a; Stevenson, 2011a).

Much of my work has centred on those sub-groups who, traditionally, have been the focus of widening participation and diversity initiatives, for example research with Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) students (Stevenson, 2010a and b) and those from working-class backgrounds (Stevenson and Clegg, 2010a; Stevenson and Lang, 2010). I have also analysed my broader research through the lenses of race (Stevenson, 2010d), gender (Willott and Stevenson 2006; Stevenson and Clegg, 2011) and class (Stevenson and Clegg, 2010a and b).

In addition, I have a long-standing interest in narrative research and the majority of the work referred to above has drawn on students' stories, not only to help illuminate their 'lived experiences', but also as a useful corrective to the ways in which some students from particular social groups are conceptualised as lacking and liable to failure. This includes work, for example, focussing on the resilience of students from BME and working-class backgrounds (Stevenson 2010c, 2011b).

When I initially began my doctoral work I was interested in following a small group of these 'traditional' widening participation undergraduates as they

experienced their first year at a post-1992 UK higher education institution. However, at the commencement of my studies I was also involved in a range of research projects designed to facilitate access to higher education of students less frequently recognised in the widening participation and diversity literature, including refugees from professional backgrounds (Stevenson and Willott, 2010), unaccompanied young asylum seekers (Stevenson and Willott, 2007a), women from Sikh and Muslim communities (Stevenson, 2010b), and Muslim and Hindu women entering the UK for arranged marriages (Stevenson and Willott, 2008a).

As I undertook these research projects I began to reflect on whose voices I was hearing within the academic literature and whose were conspicuously absent. A preliminary search of the literature (outlined in more detail in Chapter Two) highlighted the absence of certain groups of students in much of the widening participation and diversity literature. In particular I was struck by the dearth of studies exploring the experiences of religious students, particularly in the face of contemporary debates about the role of universities in enhancing religious tolerance, and the heightened interest, particularly post-September 9/11 and July 7/7, in the growth of extremism on campus (Universities UK, 2005, 2011; Home Office, 2011).

More significantly, however, those studies that did exist were often either survey based (NUS, 2011) and/or drew on evidence from religious or student support organisations (A-PP, 2006; ECU, 2011), rather than from individual students. Whilst such research is clearly beneficial, it may fail to elicit the rich data which can arise from listening to students' own stories. In addition these types of research may highlight some of the challenges faced by religious students but not necessarily *why* they are experiencing the things they are.

It was in hoping to address some of these evidence-gaps that I, therefore, chose to focus on the social and academic experiences of religious students, in secular higher education in the UK, by drawing on their individual stories.

The structure of the thesis

To further contextualise my study, in Chapter Two I provide an overview of the move from elite higher education in religious universities to mass higher education in secular institutions in order to highlight the ways in which different groups of students have, or have not, historically been positioned

as 'non-traditional'. In the second part of the chapter I highlight the discrimination faced by religious students as well as the absence of research into their experiences, contrasting this with the proliferation of studies which have explored the experiences of other groups described as 'different'. I conclude the chapter by outlining the importance of researching religious students in higher education, and by re-stating the overall aims of my research.

In Chapter Three I explore some of the theoretical and conceptual frameworks traditionally used to make sense of student diversity and difference, such as Critical Race Theory and Intersectionality, in order to explain why I have subsequently chosen to draw on Bourdieu's theories of social and cultural reproduction as a framework for this particular study. In particular I describe how *habitus* (Bourdieu, 1977a, 1984, 1986), *field* (Bourdieu, 1992, 1993; Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1996), *capital* (Bourdieu, 1984, 1986), *reflexivity* (Bourdieu, 1984), *strategy* (Bourdieu 1975, 1993) and 'othering'¹ (Bourdieu, 1984) are useful theoretical tools which can help me make sense of religious students' experiences. I conclude the chapter by describing my specific research questions.

In Chapter Four I summarise how I established an overall research design, Narrative Inquiry (Clandinin, 2006; Clandinin et al, 2007), which would enable me to draw on my selected theoretical tools in order to address my research aims, answer my research questions, and elicit religious students' voices. I then present the research site, introduce the fifteen students who participated in the study, and draw attention to some of the ethical and methodological issues which arose from the research. I lay out the validity criteria that govern my study, and highlight the ways in which I dealt with issues of subjectivity, reliability and authenticity. I conclude the chapter by identifying why I chose to analyse the students' stories through the lenses of race, gender and class before focussing on religion.

In Chapter Five, I begin my analysis by using gender as a lens through which to explore how, and why, some religious students are 'othered' (Bourdieu, 1984) in higher education. In particular I draw attention to issues of caring, masculinity and the intersection between gender and familial responsibility to highlight some of the complexities faced by religious students. I also highlight the ways in which students resist being 'othered' by

¹ Inverted commas are used to distinguish the terms other, othering and otherness from the more general use of other.

the institution or by their peers, including through their diverse capital accumulation strategies (Bourdieu, 1998a).

In Chapter Six I explore habitus, focusing on the experiences of students from different racial, and gendered, backgrounds. I examine how the habitus of religious students may have arisen from an amalgam of racism, familial demands, trauma and intolerance. I also explore how the habitus can be 'fractured' and the implications this can have for students' sense of belonging. I also draw further attention to the ways in which an 'institutional habitus' (Thomas, 2002) may not be open to, or accommodate, the habituses of 'non-traditional' students.

In Chapter Seven I use class as a lens through which to highlight the complexities of social class positionings. I reveal how, for some students, being middle-class, despite prevailing assumptions, is not a guarantee of acceptance, of being a 'fish in water' (Bourdieu 1990a), nor is being working-class an assurance of alienation and 'otherness'. I also continue to explore how some students are positioned as the 'other' by both staff and students, and continue to emphasise the role of individual and institutional habitus.

In Chapter Eight I draw together the common themes from the students' stories and emphasise how, whilst race, gender and class are of significance, it is the overt and visible adherence to religious identity that is paramount in determining the extent to which the students in this study are 'othered' during their first year at university. In addition, I highlight the importance of religion in making sense of the ways in which habitus and 'discursive consciousness' (Giddens, 1984) generate in the students a wide repertoire of strategies which they utilise on a daily basis, not just during moments of 'crisis' (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992). Finally, I summarise the students' resistant strategies of defiance, charm, avoidance, 'passing', and emotional and physical disengagement.

In Chapter Nine I summarise my overall findings from Chapters Five to Eight and draw attention to the complex and on-going development of the habitus of religious students; the intersectionality between gender, race, class and religion in positioning students as 'them' or 'us'; the ways in which 'otherness' and 'fit' are informed by the interactions between individual habitus, field and capital; how reflexive, judicious strategising is part of the routine, daily activity of religious students; and, finally, the ways in which

religious students are highly strategic in negotiating their way through secular higher education.

In Chapter Ten I conclude my thesis by recognising the limitations of my study before drawing attention to the theoretical and practical importance of my findings and the need for further research. I stress the need to include religion as a social category in debates about who may fit in and who may struggle in higher education, and for religious students' voices to be heard; I emphasise the need for greater recognition and valorisation of the diverse forms of social and cultural capital that religious students may bring in to the institution; I expand theoretical considerations of individual habitus and the strategising of religious students; and, finally, I call for institutional strategies and structures to be put in place to support them.

Summary

The rationale for this introductory chapter has been to explain how this particular research project arose, and outline the structure of the thesis and how it has been constructed. In the next chapter I will describe the specific historical and contemporary context within which my research interests are located, in order to provide an even clearer and more coherent rationale for the focus of my study.

Chapter Two From elite to mass higher education

Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to provide an understanding of the contemporary experiences of religious students in UK higher education. I begin the chapter by charting the significant historical reversal of the place of religion in relation to higher education, as well as providing an overview of the move from elite higher education in religious universities to mass higher education in secular institutions. I then outline the changing social composition of universities during the recent period of 'massification' (Scott, 1995; Langa Rosado and David, 2006) and the ways in which different groups of students have, or have not, been the focus of widening participation and/or diversity initiatives.

I continue the chapter by providing a clear picture of how religious students are currently perceived, portrayed and researched in higher education as well as the research which has been conducted exploring the experiences of other students positioned as 'different'. To achieve this, I review both the academic and the 'grey literature' (government papers, research reports, newspaper articles) relating to both student diversity and widening participation. Since the body of research into widening participation and diversity is so extensive, the review focuses primarily on the last decade of research within the UK, rather than the international context (although only limited research is available from a specifically Scottish, Welsh or Northern Irish context), and on the full-time under-graduate student experience, the focus of my research.

I conclude the chapter by clarifying my research aims.

The development of mass higher education

The place of religion, and of religious students, in universities has historically been contested (Bebbington, 2011). However, debates over religious diversity on campus (Siddiqui, 2007) as well as fears over the increase in religious fundamentalism (UUK, 2005; DIUS, 2008; Home Office, 2011) have recently brought these concerns into new and sharper focus. The place of religion in contemporary higher education cannot, however, be understood without first understanding the origins of higher education.

The first universities founded in the UK were the Universities of Oxford (c. 1170) and Cambridge (c. 1210). Both institutions were integral parts of the

church, with theology being a major subject, fellowships and places to study restricted to Anglicans, and, from the outset, one of the chief functions of both universities being to educate the next generation of parish priests (Bebbington, 2011). The two universities remained the only English universities for over six hundred years.

The 18th and 19th century ushered in the era of Enlightenment, however, exalting the power of reason, a belief in science, and a skepticism towards the doctrines of the church, thus posing a secular challenge to the established universities (Bebbington, 2011). In 1826, the establishment of the non-denominational University College, London (UCL), heralded the age of the English Civic University movement, growing out of various 19th century private education and research institutes located in the industrial cities. The Civic Universities were distinguished by being non-collegiate, and having a curriculum based on continuing the economic growth of colonial Victorian Britain, thus moving away from the more traditional subjects like classics and mathematics offered by Oxford and Cambridge, towards science, medicine and engineering (Jones, 1988). However, whilst UCL was the first university in England to admit students regardless of their religious beliefs and (later) to admit women on equal terms with men, it was the passing of the University Tests Act in 1871 that brought to an end religious discrimination in higher education for non-theological courses (Gillard, 2011).

The late C19th and early C20th saw the growth of new, secular universities when the expansion of manufacturing and trade necessitated different forms of education for the growing and increasingly influential, middle-classes (Harris, 2011). However, universities remained highly elite², maintaining their role as transmitters of heritage and preservers of the social hierarchy, with a university degree controlling access to elite posts and thus to higher social status (Anderson, R.D. 2006).

Higher education in the latter part of the twentieth century was, in contrast, characterised by a period of enormous expansion - the 'massification' of higher education (Scott, 1995; Langa Rosado and David, 2006) under both Labour and Conservative governments. Whilst growth had commenced pre-1939, from the end of the Second World War there was sustained pressure to expand higher education following the increased post-war birth rate, as

² Defined by Trow (2006) as enrolling up to 15 per cent of the age group.

well as an expansion in those achieving the university entry standard (Ross, 2001a). Pressure led, in the early 1960s, to the commissioning of the Robbins Committee, charged with undertaking a structured review of higher education (Robbins, 1963). The subsequent acceptance of the report's main recommendations saw the building of a range of new universities - leading to a huge expansion in the number of full-time university students (Ross, 2001a).

The 1970s saw the creation of 30 new polytechnics, designed as different but equal to the universities, with the aim of accommodating those students 'unable' to access traditional universities (Pratt, 1997). Growing at twice the rate of the universities, the polytechnics were profoundly successful in increasing and widening participation (Ross, 2001b), attracting new and different student populations, including local, ethnic minority, female, mature and part-time students, thus having a major impact on the profile of the English higher education population. In 1992, the binary divide between universities and polytechnics was eradicated under the Further and Higher Education Act (1992), which incorporated the polytechnics and universities into a single sector, thus doubling the number of universities in England, and increasing the number of university students from 300,000 in the 1960s to 1.8 million by 1997 (HESA, 1999; Ross, 2001b).

Widening participation in higher education

Despite the rapid expansion of UK higher education in the second half of the 20th century, in 1996 the Dearing Committee, commissioned to make recommendations as to how the higher education sector should develop over the next 20 years, highlighted that access to higher education remained predominantly the preserve of the middle-classes (NCIHE, 1997). Non-participation levels were particularly high amongst those from lower social classes as well as disabled and older learners (*ibid*). In addition, despite the rapid increase in student numbers, polytechnics had not only failed to increase working-class participation but they had actually achieved an increase in the participation rate of the middle-classes: only 14 per cent of young people from unskilled manual backgrounds and 19 per cent from skilled manual backgrounds participated in higher education, compared to 80 per cent of those from professional backgrounds (Ross, 2001b).

With the election to government of New Labour, widening participation became a national concern, with the need for both social inclusion and economic prosperity being cited as key goals of higher education (Blunkett

2000; HEFCE, 2006). In order to address inequitable participation rates, New Labour committed to achieving fifty per cent participation among 18- to 30-year olds by 2010 (HEFCE, 2003) and pursued a vigorous, and expensive, policy of widening participation activity (DfES 2003a and b; NAO, 2008). The National Audit Office (NAO, 2008) has calculated that the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) gave institutions delivering higher education £392 million in recurrent funding for widening participation between 2001-02 and 2007-08.

Throughout New Labour's term in office the focus of widening participation remained broad-based and wide-scale, with activity designed to ensure:

Equality of opportunity for disabled students, mature students, women and men, and all ethnic groups (HEFCE, 2009).

Although the lack of an effective system of data collection (Passey et al, 2009) has made it difficult to determine either the impact of these activities or the numbers of individuals involved in them, in the academic year 2009/10 alone it is calculated that Aimhigher (the English national widening participation programme) delivered a total of 54,544 events comprising 2,226,580 individual contacts (Moore and Dunworth, 2011). These activities focused specifically on 18-30 year olds from lower socio-economic groups and/or those from low participation neighbourhoods, 'looked after' children in the care system and people with a disability or a specific learning difficulty (HEFCE, 2008).

In order to assess progress, since 2003 all publicly-funded higher education institutions in the UK have been required to set Performance Indicators (PIs), enabling the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) to provide comparative data on the performance of institutions in widening participation (amongst other areas). PIs are set for young full-time students who attended state school or college, come from National Statistics Socio-Economic Classification (NS-SEC) categories 4-7 (the lowest paid occupational groups), or from a 'low participation' neighbourhood, as well as mature students from low-participation neighbourhoods and with no previous experience of higher education, and students in receipt of the Disabled Students' Allowance (DSA).

Such vigorous and active interventions have resulted in a higher education student population unrecognisable from that of thirty years ago. However, despite the numerous policy and practice interventions designed to widen

participation, religious students have rarely featured in any of these initiatives, and almost nothing is known about their presence in, or absence from, higher education. No data relating to the religious profile of students is collated by the Universities and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS) (except in Northern Ireland) or the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA), and no PIs relating to students from diverse religious backgrounds are set. In addition, other than a few small-scale, local projects designed to raise the aspiration of Muslims boys (for example that run by the University of Central Lancashire)³, there has been little if no widening participation activity focusing specifically on religious students. It is perhaps, therefore, not surprising that there has also been little research drawing attention to the experiences of religious students in UK universities.

Researching 'difference' in higher education

Widening participation research is dominated by studies exploring the experiences of ethnic minority (Reay, 2001; Bains, 2002; Ball et al, 2002; Pickerden, 2002; Tyrer and Ahmad, 2006; Bagguley and Hussain, 2007), mature (Reay, 2002; Reay et al, 2002; Reay, 2003; Merrill, 2004; Tett, 2004), and, in particular, working-class students (Hutchings and Archer, 2001; Archer and Leathwood, 2003; Quinn, 2004; Moreau and Leathwood, 2006; Crozier et al, 2008b; Reay et al 2009) identified as 'different' from the mainstream student population.

Within the studies, higher education institutions are viewed as positioning their students as either mainstream, traditional and 'acceptable', or as non-traditional, different and 'other' (Read et al, 2003). Particular groups, primarily working-class and mature students, are pathologised as being 'deficient in ability, in not having a 'proper' educational background, and/or in lacking the appropriate aspirations and attitudes' (Leathwood and O'Connell 2003, p.599). Such students are also regarded as being 'unprepared' for learning and lacking academic ability (Christie et al, 2007), and of being unwilling to adopt a 'student' identity and so more likely to drop out (Thomas, 2002).

It is unsurprisingly, therefore, that working-class young people in particular, consider higher education to be 'not for people like them' (Hutchings and Archer, 2001), deliberately exclude themselves from higher education through fear of getting 'above themselves' (Archer and Leathwood 2003),

³ See http://www.actiononaccess.org/resources/files/resources_UCLan.doc.

make choices of where to study based on a desire to 'fit in' (Ball et al, 2002), or, on arrival at university, face 'middle-class worlds' and are thus required to devise coping and engagement strategies (Crozier et al, 2008a, b). Those who chose not to do so may elect, instead, to drop out 'as resistance to the middle-class hegemony of the university' (Quinn, 2004, p.70). In contrast young, middle-class students receive 'the message from birth that...their destiny is to go to university and become professionals' (Walkerdine et al, 2001, p.162).

However, whilst many of these studies have drawn on multiple social categories since the 'complexities of ethnicity, gender and marital status intersect with, and compound, the consequences of class' (Reay et al, 2002, p.5), those ethnic minority students whose voices are heard in the literature are almost exclusively working-class (Archer and Hutchings, 2000; Reay et al, 2005). Indeed there has been little research conducted with middle-class students regardless of race. Whilst there have been theoretical papers (for example Reay, 2001), there has been almost no empirical research, perhaps because it has been assumed that, unlike working-class students in higher education who are the 'lucky survivors' (Bourdieu, 1988), middle-class students are moving in their world 'as fish in water' (Bourdieu 1990a, p.163). Where studies with middle-class students have taken place, the students are almost exclusively White (Crozier et al, 2008a, b).

There are obvious reasons for this: when sample groups are small, as in the case of much of the qualitative research reviewed, disaggregating further may be unfeasible. However, it does mean that much research is focused on whole or generalised sub-groups and thus the voices, for example, of middle-class mature students, 'White-Other' students, or ethnic minority students from diverse religious backgrounds remain absent and unheard across the widening participation research literature.

Diversity in higher education

Recognising the diversity of British society was also a central theme of New Labour policy making, and the government placed a particular emphasis on diversity within its education policy (CPPR, 2002). In particular New Labour argued that not only would educational diversity facilitate the inclusion of different social groups, but that education institutions would also benefit from valuing difference (Shaw et al, 2007), leading to the recruitment of a more diverse student body, improving teaching and learning practice, and facilitating access to new and different markets (Anderson, J. 2007).

As with widening participation, diversity policy has, primarily, encompassed ethnicity, gender, and social class. However, there has also been some recognition of the value that religious diversity can bring to universities. For example, in 2007, the then Minister of Higher Education, Bill Rammell commissioned a report on 'what measures can be taken to improve the quality of information about Islam that is available to students and staff in universities in England'. The report argues that:

Universities by and large are places where ideas are aired and contested, where students and teachers can debate even very controversial issues openly, encounter and understand other perspectives and make sense of what the other is saying. Diversity and difference bring out the best in students; they taste their freedom but also learn tolerance and respect for intellectual debate (Siddiqui, 2007, p. 38).

Guidance on building religious diversity has also come from those diversity organisations working to support higher education institutions. For example the Higher Education Academy (HEA) has produced a range of Faith Guides for higher education staff covering Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Islam, Judaism and Sikhism⁴.

These publications have not just, however, arisen from the growing recognition by universities of the benefits which may be gained from valuing difference. They have also arisen from an increasing belief that universities are key places within which to combat religious intolerance and build community cohesion. Thus guidance has been issued to universities encouraging them to put strategies in place to increase greater interaction between individuals, communities and wider society (Smith, 2004; Phillips, 2006) and to promote trust and 'common understanding' (Beider and Briggs, 2010), including facilitating a greater understanding of diverse religions and, consequently, increasing religious tolerance on campus (Hussain and El-Alami, 2005).

Of even greater concern to policy makers (UUK, 2005; DIUS, 2008; UUK, 2011) than the need for community cohesion, however, has been the growing fear that universities may actually be seed-beds for the growth of religious fundamentalism, and may have played a role in educating those Muslims who have participated in major international events, such as the

⁴ See <http://www.ecu.ac.uk/publications/?browse=subject&filter=religion-and-belief> for the full list of publications.

London bombings of July 2005, perpetrated by British-born Muslims, educated in the UK (Home Office, 2011). However, whilst there is indeed evidence that some of those who have committed Islamist related offences (IROs) have at some point attended university or a higher education institution (Simcox et al, 2010), much of the discourse of religion in relation to higher education appears to draw on a 'moral panic' relating to Muslim urban unrest, the growth of fundamentalism, global terrorism, and the threat posed by 'Muslim' young men (L. Archer, 2003), rather than being predicated on actual evidence that fundamentalism on campus is increasing.

Whilst fear over Muslim fundamentalism is not a new phenomenon, it has gained new heights post- 9/11 (Allen, 2010). Since then, and not unsurprisingly, Muslims and Islamist students have been constantly in the news (with the terms often used synonymously and interchangeably), and alarmist discussions about 'Muslims' are now pervasive: claims that 'leading Islamic extremists have 'infiltrated' universities on a widespread basis', (Daily Telegraph, 2007) and that 'top universities foster extremism' (Daily Mail, 2008), run alongside accusations that 'Universities [are] failing to fight extremism' (The Guardian, 2011) and that '.. 36% of our universities [are] training Muslim terrorists' (Daily Express, 2010).

Increasingly, young Muslim men are being portrayed as the cause of intolerance and discrimination, and not as the victims. As Salgado-Pottier (2008) observes, the events of 11 September 2001 in New York and 7 July 2005 in London have allowed the media to construct Muslims within a narrow and negative framework and vilified them as a threat to the social and moral order. He describes how:

In March 2005 The Sun printed the headline: '100s of terrorists in UK' (The Sun, 1 March 2005), yet 17 months later this number had increased significantly: '1,000 Brits ready to die' (The Sun, 11 August 2006). What is interesting in the latter headlines is the shift from 'foreign terrorist' to 'British terrorist' (2008, p. 11).

It is not exclusively the media, however, that is intensifying alarm: the annals of Hansard are scattered with concerns over the growth of extremism in universities (see for example 27th Jan 2011 and 14th Feb 2011), whilst ever-increasing guidance is being provided to universities on how to tackle violent extremism on campus (UUK, 2005; DIUS, 2008; Home Office, 2011). The foreword to the most recent Universities UK publication, 'Freedom of

Speech on campus' (UUK, 2011), for example, begins with the statement that:

Violent extremism is one of the greatest threats to the liberty and safety of citizens in modern times. To an extent unprecedented in history, individuals acting alone or in small groups have the ability to cause mass murder in pursuit of a political cause. Recruitment to the cause is through diverse routes and secretive processes.

Whilst the Coalition Government's new 'Prevent' strategy (Home Office, 2011, p. 72) states that:

Universities and colleges – and, to some extent, university societies and student groups – have a clear and unambiguous role to play in helping to safeguard vulnerable young people from radicalisation and recruitment by terrorist organisations.

In response, religious student societies are reacting angrily to what they regard as this discourse of fear, with Muslim students in particular objecting to being positioned as a 'threat' to the social and moral order, and protesting against strategies being put in place to eradicate such threats including increased surveillance and monitoring (The Guardian, 2011; FOSIS, 2011a, b) which, it is claimed, amount to religious discrimination (The Guardian, 2009).

Religious discrimination

The United Kingdom has a strong history of religious discrimination (Weller, 2006); however legislative protection from religious discrimination has trailed behind that put in place to protect individuals on the grounds of their race, gender and disability. Throughout the 20th century, concerns about religious discrimination 'were not generally articulated as such even by those who might have been experiencing this form of discrimination' (Weller, 2006, p. 302). Whilst the Human Rights Act (1998) had set out fundamental rights with regards to religion and beliefs, the right to freedom of thought covered in the Act only pertained to public bodies. Thus, at the turn of the 21st century there was explicit protection from religious discrimination only in Northern Ireland.

Over the last decade, however, 'discrimination on the grounds of religion has re-emerged as a matter of vigorously contested public, political and legal debate' (Weller, 2006, p. 302), through the agency of those affected by it, and linked to the broader development of the 'politics of identity' and the

phenomenon of 'globalization' (see Weller, 2006 for a detailed overview of these twin drivers).

In 2000 two significant research papers were commissioned by the Home Office. The first (Hepple and Choudhury, 2001) identified and examined the main options available to policy makers and legislators for tackling religious discrimination in Great Britain. The second (Weller et al, 2001) explored the level of religious discrimination in England and Wales. Weller's research found that ignorance and indifference towards religion were of widespread concern amongst research participants from all religion and faith groups, particularly amongst those who actively practised their religion and for whom religious identity constituted a highly significant aspect of their lives. Hostility and violence were also very real concerns for organisations representing Muslims, Sikhs and Hindus, whilst Black-led Christian organisations, Mormons and Jehovah's Witnesses also reported unfair treatment across nearly all domains (education, housing etc.). In addition, Pagans and people from 'New Religious Movements' complained of open hostility and discrimination, including being labelled as 'child abusers' and 'cults', by the media.

In 2005 the UK Parliament set up an inquiry into anti-Semitism, which published its findings in 2006. The inquiry found both an increase in anti-Semitism, and that violence, desecration of property, and intimidation directed towards Jews was on the rise. The resultant report by the All-Party Parliamentary Group against Anti-Semitism (A-PP Group, 2006) noted the link between anti-Semitism and racism, commenting that:

Ironically, the latest form of anti-Semitism appears to be based on anti-racism. Jews are no longer accused of killing Christ, or possessing sinister racial traits. Modern anti-Semitism has, out of necessity, become more nuanced and subtle. Many witnesses told us that the latest mutation of anti-Jewish prejudice is now infused with a 'social conscience', focused on the role of Israel in the Middle East conflict (para 19).

At the same time as the A-PP Group were reporting, evidence showed that the number of Islamophobic attacks were also on the rise (Sheridan, 2006). However, as detailed above, Muslims are often accorded little sympathy and are often regarded as the cause of religious prejudice and bigotry. Christians, in contrast, are increasingly represented as the 'victims' of religious intolerance, with the Express newspaper, for example, following the

case of an evangelical Christian couple accused of making derogatory remarks about one of their guests, describing the:

Insidious and creeping reign of terror that the Government has introduced in Britain by facilitating this kind of prosecution. While the criminal justice system actively promotes real crime by its refusal to repress it vigorously, it attempts to make criminals of Mr. and Mrs. X because they expressed forthright Christian beliefs (The Express, 2009).

Research collated by Woodhead (2011), outlining work by legal scholars, has drawn attention to the increasing complaints about religious discrimination taking place within the courts and at tribunals. The evidence suggests that, despite a decade of policy and practice designed to prevent and address discrimination on the grounds of religion or belief (the Human Rights Act, 1998; the Religious and Racial Hatred Act, 2006; the Equality Act, 2010), religious discrimination is still manifest, including within higher education.

Religious discrimination in higher education

Whilst both the Civic and the 'new' universities were founded as secular organisations, higher education today is not, in fact, a wholly secular institution (Gilliat-Ray, 2000). Universities such as Oxford and Cambridge are still overtly Anglican in nature, with the importance of chaplains and the chapels essential and the language of the academies infused with religious terminology. The names of the terms as Oxford University (Michaelmas, Hilary and Trinity) and Cambridge University (Michaelmas, Lent and Easter), for example, all have religious origins. Even within overwhelmingly secular universities there are also disciplinary differences, with both the sciences and the social sciences predominantly secular whilst the arts and humanities are more mixed (Gelot, 2009).

Nonetheless higher education institutions are regarded as secular within both prevailing academic and governmental discourses. It is perhaps not surprising, therefore, that the experiences of religious students have been overlooked. Recent research by the National Union of Students (NUS), however, found that 31 per cent of their Jewish higher education student respondents, 17 per cent of Muslim and 13 per cent of Sikhs stated they had been victims of a religiously-prejudiced incident (NUS 2011); Jewish students (followed by Sikh, Muslim and Pagan students) also reported the highest number of incidences of discrimination or harassment in the recent

ECU report (2011), although the recorded number of incidences were much lower. Examples of discrimination and victimisation include institutional racism, xenophobia and threats of violence (Jewish students: Worth, 2010; UJS, 2011); criticism and censure in attempting to undertake legitimate religious activities (students in Christian Union societies: BBC news, 2007; Hames, 2006); and being the victims of surveillance and monitoring (Muslim students: FOSIS 2011b).

Under the recent Equality Act (2010), wherein religion and belief is a protected characteristic, higher education institutions have a legal duty to eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other conduct prohibited by the Act. They are also required to advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not, and to foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not. Responding to these new obligations all higher education institutions now have policies relating to religion and belief, one of the Act's protected characteristics. However, an analysis of 10 institutional policies relating to religion and belief (Stevenson, 2011, unpublished⁵) indicates that the majority are focused solely on 'every-day' practical initiatives to support students such as, dress codes, food requirements and/or religious societies. Few are addressing issues of racism, xenophobia or intolerance, and even fewer appear to be drawing on evidence based research.

Research on religious students in higher education

Data on the religion of staff and students in higher education is not systematically collated. Whilst the recent ECU (2011) report argues that 'over the past few decades, the religion or belief composition of students and staff in UK higher education institutions has diversified substantially' (p.1), this is purely speculative, based on recognition of the increasingly diverse student population and the growing numbers of international students. In fact, scholars and policy makers actually know very little about

⁵ In 2007 I conducted an analysis of 61 higher education institutions for the Higher Education Academy looking for references to student attainment in race and gender equality policies and schemes (Willott and Stevenson, 2008). As part of this literature review I used the same methodology to undertake a review of institutional policies relating to religion and belief. The policies were from the Universities of Bath, Bradford, Cardiff, Glasgow, Lancaster, Liverpool, Portsmouth, as well as Aston University, University of the Arts London, and the research site institution. This work is not yet published.

the profile of religious students in higher education and even less about their experiences.

This may, in part, be because religious students are a less easily identifiable group than those from class, gender or ethnic backgrounds, particularly since it is difficult to agree a consensual definition of religion and religious. Identifying 'fixed' identity such as ethnicity is easier than determining a person's 'faith', 'religion', whether someone is 'religious', or their 'belief' (Perfect, 2011): these terms are not easy to define and are often used interchangeably. In addition, as Barker (1989) argues, some definitions of religion exclude beliefs and practices that others would consider clearly 'religious' - for example a definition which includes a belief in a God responsible for the creation of the universe and for its continuing operation would exclude non-theistic religions such as Buddhism. In addition, there has, of late, been 'an explosion of popular interest in spirituality' (Hunt and West, 2007, p. 1) with many people increasingly describing themselves as 'spiritual' – a phrase that may acknowledge the existence of a God or may not (see Hunt, 2009), and the two terms are increasingly used together, or as proxies for each other (see, for example, the Times Higher Education, 2008).

The absence of both research and/or policy interventions may also arise from the fact that religion is often regarded not as a relational system, but as an affiliation category that can be easily divested or strategically shaped by actors according to context, rather than a status category, such as those commonly employed in intersectional analyses (such as race/ethnicity, gender and class). In consequence, as Barber (2010, p.2) argues:

The saliency of race, class, and gender...has relegated religion to the realm of the "etc." The common disappearing of religion into the "etc." can give the impression that religion is somehow less deserving of the analysis given to race, class, and gender, or that it is somehow different.

The answer may also lie, in part, in an overwhelming academic commitment to the secularity of higher education. The majority of studies reviewed for this chapter have been conducted within what might be termed a paradigm of critical theory⁶, and undertaken as a response to what researchers

⁶ Critical Theory research seeks, as its purpose of inquiry, to confront societal injustices. The role of HE in reproducing inequality (principally class inequality) is seen by many, within a Marxist-structuralist tradition, as an injustice which has to be overcome (Lynch and O'Riordan, 1998).

perceive as 'failing' or flawed governmental policy (Ball et al, 2002; Reay, 2002; Leathwood and O'Connell, 2003); to raise awareness of oppressive practice (Bains, 2002); or as an attempt to hear the voices of the silent or marginalised, for example Tett's (2004) research with working-class students, wherein she writes that her rationale for interviewing only working-class students is that 'their experiences tended to be marginalised within the institution and this research would provide an opportunity for their voices to be heard' (p. 255).

However, whilst raising awareness of 'flawed' government policy, 'oppressive' practices and 'silent voices' is regarded as a 'legitimate' research activity when aimed at addressing gender, race and class inequality, the same researchers may feel very differently about conducting research with religious students. For some academics the practice of religion subjugates members of society and works against the free exercise of thought and thus the suppression of human liberty (see Elliott, 2008, for example, for a Feminist perspective). Conducting research with religious students would give a level of legitimacy to religion on the secular campus; instead, rather than investigating individual experiences, religious authority and ideas ought to be rejected outright, by academics, as a basis for society (Reber, 2006).

Regardless of the reasons for their absence, however, the dearth of studies into the experiences of religious students in higher education is a significant oversight. Not only because, as evidenced above, for many religious students their experiences of higher education may not be wholly positive; not only because it means that religious students' voices will continue to remain silent; but also because, for many students, religion is one of the strongest aspects of identity and of more importance to certain groups than any other aspect of identity, including gender, class and ethnicity. For example, in the UK, Modood et al (1997) found that many South Asians viewed religion as their primary identity; O'Beirne's (2004) research also highlighted the importance of religious identity to certain groups, most notably Muslim, Hindu, Sikh, Jewish and Buddhists, regardless of actual practice; whilst the Muslim women in Tyrer and Ahmad's (2006) study defined themselves not in terms of their ethnic identity but according to their 'Muslim' identities, which were 'highly subjective and felt to be more inclusive of other aspects to their identities' (p.25).

Where studies into the experiences of religious students do exist, it is perhaps unsurprising that they explore only the experiences of Muslim students (for example, Pickerden, 2002; FOSIS, 2005; Tyrer and Ahmad, 2006) and of Jewish students (Graham and Boyd, 2011). My review of the literature for this thesis found no academic studies investigating the experiences of Sikh, Buddhist, Hindu, or Christian students, other than studies looking at participation rates of Catholic and Protestant higher education students in Northern Ireland (such as Osborne and Smith, 2006).

The overall absence of studies means, however, that academics know little about whether, in an apparent age of 'secularity', religion and higher education are at odds with each other or how this plays out within the lives of religious students in 'secular' institutions; they know little about how the university experience affects students' religious, or other, beliefs or practices; they know little about how these students are accepted, or not, by their non-religious peers, or by those from religions different to their own. In addition, they also know little about how specific institutional contexts interact with the religious activities of such students and the effect this may have in terms of organisational policy and practice.

The research aims

My review of the literature has highlighted three areas of silence or omission within the discourses relating to widening participation, diversity and religious students in higher education: first, despite religion being a fundamental part of the identity of many students in higher education, this aspect of identity has been either overlooked, disregarded, or considered less significant than gender, race or class; second, whilst there is emerging evidence that religious students experience significant levels of discrimination, the voices of individual victims are, in the main, unheard and we know little about their personal experiences; and, third, whilst there is increasing interest in the role of religion in universities, policy-making is rarely based on evidence drawn from the experiences of individual students.

It is evident, therefore, that there is a need for more nuanced, contextualised, evidence-based research into the religious lives of students, in order for their individual voices to be heard and to provide a better understanding of their experiences.

The aims of my research are, therefore, to 'explore, and understand, the social and academic experiences of religious students in secular higher education in the UK'.

Summary

In this chapter I have provided a general overview of the 'massification' of higher education and the place that religious students inhabit within it. I have drawn attention to ways in which religious students are positioned within higher education and detailed their experiences of, at best, ignorance and indifference and, at worst, violence and intimidation. I have also highlighted that the focus on, and research into, their experiences is extremely limited, posited some reasons why this may be so, and established the need for greater research into the social and educational experiences of religious students.

To achieve my aims of understanding, and not just describing, the experiences of religious students, however, I needed to ensure that my research was grounded within a theoretical framework. In the next chapter I, therefore, describe some of the key theoretical and conceptual frameworks that have traditionally been used to make sense of student diversity and difference, before explaining my eventual decision to draw on Bourdieu's theories of social and cultural reproduction.

Chapter Three Developing a theoretical framework

Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to clarify my theoretical approach in relation to my research and explain why I came to take this position. To achieve this I, briefly, explore two widespread theoretical approaches that have frequently been used to make sense of 'difference' (Critical Race Theory and Intersectionality) before focussing on Bourdieu's theories of social and cultural reproduction. I then describe why I adopted habitus, field, capital, reflexivity, othering and strategy as useful 'thinking tools' (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992, p. 160) to help make sense of my data, and to realise the overall aims of my research.

Three considerations informed my search for a theoretical approach to my research: first, would it enable me to explore the individual experiences of religious students; second, would it afford me the opportunity to explore multiple forms of difference and not just religious difference; and, third, would it enable me to find a way to 'render[s] the 'taken-for-granted' problematic (Reay, 1995b, p. 369).

I recognise that I could have utilised a wide range of theoretical approaches. However, I chose to focus on selecting the most apposite from three approaches that have frequently been drawn on by other researchers theorising difference.

Theorising difference

Much diversity research, in both the UK and elsewhere, has been critiqued for locating individuals in a single identity, which is assumed to be both commonly understood and fixed, resulting in the 'miniaturization of people' (Sen, 2006, p. xvi), as well as disaggregating social problems into distinct challenges facing specific groups which have then been defined and analysed in mutually exclusive ways. Feminist theory, for example, which aims to understand the nature of gender inequality, has long been criticised for both over-simplifying and distorting women's experiences, for not disaggregating 'women' into sub-groups (based on class, ethnicity, sexual orientation etc.) and, in particular, for not acknowledging racial bias. The homogenising nature of this form of 'single-axis analysis' has not only created artificial distinctions and conflicting agendas but, more significantly, is essentialist since it:

Assumes that the experience of being a member of the group under discussion is a stable one, one with a clear meaning, a meaning constant through time, space and different historical, social, political and personal contexts (Grillo, 1995, p. 19).

Whilst Critical Race Theory (CRT), a theoretical framework which aims to 'interrogate the discourses, ideologies, and social structures that produce and maintain conditions of racial injustice' (Hatch, 2011, p. 101), has also been criticised for articulating individuals' experiences purely in Black vs. White terms, this tendency toward a Black/White binary has been progressively challenged (see for example, Collins 1990, 1998). Black feminists in the US, in particular, argued that 'their gendered, classed, sexual, immigrant and language experiences and histories were being silenced' (Yosso, 2005, p. 72) and that oppression could not be fully understood in terms of only Black and White. The increasing recognition that race and racism work with, and through, gender, ethnicity, class and sexuality as systems of power and in the production and maintenance of racial subordinations, has led to much contemporary CRT now drawing upon paradigms of intersectionality (see Yosso, 2005).

However, those few studies which have explored religion through the lens of CRT have, in the main, conflated religion with race – such as Kelley-Hollwell's (2008) study exploring women who wear the hijab. Other CRT studies which have explored religion have identified religion as the actual cause of racial discrimination, for example, Sanchez (1998, p.431) asserts that:

I do not think that we have looked far enough past the role of religion and churches to examine how it can be that churches and religions have often operated, implicitly or explicitly, against the social good of people of color and the poor.

In the post-9/11 period, contemporary CRT has, however, shown increased interest in the ways in which globalization is a racialised process that intersects with ethnicity and religion - see for example, Baynes' (2002) examination of religious profiling in the media post September 11th and Cole and Maisuria's (2007) analysis of the expressions of Islamophobia in post-7/7 Britain. However, whilst the strength of CRT is in its conception of race as a social construction, its weakness is that this is often done so only at the macro, and not the micro level. Consequently, whilst drawing on CRT offers theoretical possibilities, it would not provide me with the opportunity to

focus on individual experiences and, thus, not achieve my research aim. Intersectionality, in contrast, does operate at the individual/micro level (Patton et al, 2010).

Intersectionality refers to the idea that people have multiple identities and live within multiple and intersecting positions of privileges and oppressions. Coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989), Intersectionality was (originally and explicitly) intended to address the fact that the experiences and struggles of Black women fell between the cracks of feminist and anti-racist discourses, with Crenshaw arguing that theorists need to include both gender and race to show how they interact to shape the multiple dimensions of Black women's' experiences.

Intersectionality has been used to analyse the production of power, the social and cultural hierarchies within different discourses and institutions, and the ways in which certain individuals or groups are positioned as different (Yuval-Davis, 2006, 2007). From its inception, Intersectionality has therefore been of particular interest to feminist and anti-racist scholars interested in exploring the experiences of those who 'exist within the overlapping margins of race and gender discourse and in the empty spaces between' (Crenshaw, 1992, p. 403). Through such research, Intersectionality scholars are able to explain the way in which power, politics and identity intersect to maintain patterns and processes of inequality and discrimination (see, for example, Crenshaw, 1989, 1991). In particular,

Intersectional paradigms remind us that oppression cannot be reduced to one fundamental type, and that oppressions work together in producing injustice (Hill Collins, 2000, p. 180).

However, just as race is gendered and classed, and class is raced and gendered (Acker, 1999), religion is also raced, gendered and classed. Despite this, only rarely have studies undertaken through the lens of intersectionality considered religion. Indeed Barber (2010) reviewed all the papers within the 2000 to 2009 issues of *Sociology of Religion* and the *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* looking for examples of research that explored the intersectionality of religion with at least one other identity category and found only one paper.

This may be because, just as with CRT, many studies merge religion with race. For example Pickerden's (2002), Tyrer and Ahmad's (2006) and Modood's (2006) research exploring the experiences of Muslim students in

higher education all conflate 'Muslim' with race not religion, just as being Jewish is an ethnic not a religious identity in Reay's (1998) work. In addition, Intersectionality research invariably regards religion as a boundary object, with individuals maintaining the ability to define and shape religion within particular cultural contexts (Barber, 2010), ignoring the effect of, for example, intergroup politics and local conditions. In my research, however, exploring social practices and inter-group dynamics is critical if I am to understand why individual religious students are experiencing the things they are in higher education.

Thus, having considered, and rejected, two theoretical frameworks, I turned to Pierre Bourdieu's theories of social and cultural reproduction to explore whether Bourdieuan concepts of, for example, habitus and capital might be helpful to me. Whilst Bourdieu has been critiqued for his failure to address key social variables other than class, his 'thinking tools' (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992, p. 160) have been increasingly drawn on in studies relating to gender (Reay, 1995a; Reay, 1998b; Adkins and Skeggs, 2004) and ethnicity (Reay, 1995b; Archer and Francis, 2006), and thus appeared to offer broader possibilities.

Bourdieu's theories of social and cultural reproduction

Approaching the study of culture and sociology from a Marxist perspective, and conducting research within a critical-theorist framework, Bourdieu used the concepts of habitus, field, capital, strategy and, to a lesser extent, 'othering' to explain why dominant social structures and systems were able to reproduce or replicate themselves (Bourdieu 1984 and 1986; Bourdieu and Passeron, 1990). Whilst these concepts are relational it is useful to look each of them separately.

Habitus

The habitus, the lynchpin concept of Bourdieu's entire corpus, is a 'complex internalised core from which everyday experiences emanate' (Reay, 2004a, p. 435), an 'acquired system of generative schemes objectively adjusted to the particular conditions in which it is constituted' (Bourdieu, 1977, p. 95) which disposes the actor to act in certain ways, based on their background and experiences. Habitus is perhaps best summarised by James (2011, p. 2) who writes that:

The concept of habitus is not just another word for 'personality', but something more dynamic, fluid, and much

less deterministic. It is really a way of talking about the embodiment of previous social fields, whereby individuals acquire and carry ways of thinking and being and doing from one place to another. It is about how past social structures get into present action and how current actions confirm or reshape current structures.

These ways of thinking and being, or dispositions, are learnt during the formative years of socialisation, primarily within the family unit or close social groups. Via socialisation, social structures become internalised and these dispositions lead in turn to practices which then reproduce social structures (Bourdieu 1977a, 1990a). Thus the habitus transcends the objectivist-subjectivist divide in that it is both structured and structuring, 'structuring structured structure' (Swartz, 1997).

In addition, as Elder-Vass (2006, p. 327) explains:

All those who share a given social position are exposed to similar opportunities and necessities, and they tend to develop a similar habitus [that] encourages us to behave in ways that reproduce the existing practices and hence the existing structure of society.

Thus, not only does habitus arise from early socialisation, but it also operates as a limiting framework (Bourdieu, 1990a). Whilst the habitus does not strictly determine practices - indeed as Bourdieu frequently stated there is more than one way to 'play a game' (Bourdieu, 1984, 1993) - by confining possibilities only to those feasible for the social groups the individual belongs to, actions tend to be reproductive rather than transformative (Bourdieu, 1990a, Reay et al, 2001). Thus the habitus is also a 'system of durable, transposable dispositions, structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures...' (Bourdieu, 1990, p. 53) disposing actors to act in certain ways based on their background and experiences which, through the process of socialisation, become internalised.

Within much of the widening participation policy literature there is a prevailing view of the continuity of the habitus, as it relates to race, gender and, in particular, class, with individuals positioned in terms of an almost structural, deterministic inevitability of success or failure, such as working-class students having 'low aspirations' (see Spohrer, 2011 for an analysis of discursive strategies relating to 'aspiration' employed in policy documents). Middle-class habitus, in contrast, is believed to condition young people to regard higher education as an entitlement (Walkerdine et al, 2001), and

produces in them learned dispositions to fit the university context and to generate further habitus through social interactions (Crozier et al, 2008a).

The habitus, however, is not just how people think about the world but is an embodied phenomenon:

A way of walking, a tilt of the head, facial expressions, ways of sitting and using implements, always associated with a tone of voice, a style of speech...' (Bourdieu, 1977, p. 85).

Actors are not, however, fully aware of the reasoning behind their practices and actions. Rather people are predisposed to act based on the knowledge of the world they have acquired which serves to constrain the horizon of their agency and therefore their practice. The habitus, therefore, causes actors to view the habitual world in which they find themselves as 'natural' and 'normal': the 'illusion of immediate understanding' (Bourdieu 1990a, p. 20) created by the correspondence of objective structures and internalised structures. Thus the habitus is an amalgamation of embodied social structures internalised as mental schemes that guide all of an actor's thinking and acting. Consequently, the working-class habitus, for example, internalised during primary socialisation, leads such individuals to believe that certain things are 'not for them', including higher education (Hutchings and Archer, 2001; Archer and Leathwood 2003).

Whilst Bourdieu (in his later works in particular) attempted to find a place for the generative capacities of habitus, he maintained an excessively deterministic tendency in his work, regarding social actors as merely 'habitus carriers or structural vessels' (Kemp, 2010), acting solely on the basis of learnt dispositions and not on the basis of reflexivity or cognitive strategising (Elder-Vass, 2007), except during times of crisis. Since the habitus is enacted unthinkingly - 'principles embodied in this way are placed beyond the grasp of consciousness, and hence cannot be touched by voluntary, deliberate transformation' (Bourdieu, 1977, p. 94) - reflexive awareness is rare. Instead the habitus becomes 'a modus operandi of which he or she is not the producer and has no conscious mastery' (Bourdieu, 1977, p. 79).

The habitus can, however, only operate in relation to a social field (or *champ*), an arena wherein specific forms of valued resources (capital) are produced, accumulated or exchanged.

Capital and field

For Bourdieu (1986), a capital is any resource effective in a given field, that enables individuals to extract specific profits arising from participation and contest in it. Forms of capital include economic, for example money and command over other economic resources such as property rights; social, such as resources based on group membership, relationships, networks of influence and support; and cultural, namely the linguistic and cultural competence required to access dominant systems and structures and subsequent access to academic rewards and higher status in society (Bourdieu 1986). In addition, Bourdieu (1994) recognised that capital could also be 'symbolic', namely any form of capital 'which is perceived by social agents, endowed with categories of perception which cause them to know it and to recognize it, to give it value' (1994, p.8).

Whilst Bourdieu, originally (1988), regarded women principally as capital-bearing rather than capital-accumulating objects, the repositories of the different forms of capital acquired and deployed by men (Lovell, 2000), for both genders the diverse forms of capital are the primary factors defining the positions and possibilities of the various actors in any field, that is:

A space of play and competition in which social agents and institutions which all possess the determinate quantity of specific capital (economic and cultural capital in particular) sufficient to occupy the dominant positions within their respective fields... confront one another in strategies aimed at preserving or transforming this balance of forces' (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1996, p. 76).

Cultural capital theory (Bourdieu 1986, 1993, 1998a), for example, can therefore be used to explain how the social structures of a host society perpetuate themselves and how social class is reproduced through the acquisition, accumulation and inter-generational transmission of cultural capital, via the family, the school, and the state, making it possible to:

Explain the unequal scholastic achievement of children originating from different social classes by relating academic success, i.e., the specific profits which children from the different classes and class fractions can obtain in the academic market, to the distribution of cultural capital between the classes and class fractions' (Bourdieu 1986, p.243).

For Bourdieu, therefore, education is:

One of the most effective means of perpetuating the existing social pattern, as it both provides an apparent justification for social inequalities and gives recognition to the cultural heritage, that is, to a social gift treated as a natural one (1974, p. 32).

Thus, rather than fostering mobility, the education system reproduces social inequality (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1990). Indeed, the field of higher education, in particular, is conceptualised by Bourdieu as:

A sorting machine that selects students according to an implicit social classification and reproduces the same students according to an explicit academic classification, which in reality is very similar to the implicit social classification (Naidoo, 2004, p. 459).

Although each field has properties peculiar to each specific field, there are 'universal mechanisms' characteristic of all fields (Bourdieu 1993). The field

Contains people who dominate and people who are dominated. Constant, permanent relationships of inequality operate inside this space (Bourdieu, 1998b, p. 40).

In particular, fields are arenas of struggle for control of capital, 'through which agents and institutions seek to preserve or overturn the existing distribution of capital' (Wacquant, 2006, p. 268). Fields impose on actors specific forms of struggle, but the struggle invariably pits those in subordinate positions against those in super-ordinate/dominant positions in order to 'seek to preserve or overturn the existing distribution of capital... a battlefield wherein the bases of identity and hierarchy are endlessly disputed over' (Wacquant, 2006, p. 8).

Habitus and capital interact within a field of interaction to produce practice, namely the actions taken by individual actors in fields of interaction shaped by multiple forces interacting together. The position of the agents and institutions is made up by the interplay of their capitals and of their habitus.

Bourdieu offers the analogy of a game (Bourdieu, 1984, 1993) as a way of understanding his concept of field. Each field may be viewed as an independent game, with its own form of capital. Entry into the field requires both a tacit acceptance of the rules of the game and also that the field of struggle is worth pursuing in the first place (Swartz, 1997).

For Bourdieu, field and habitus are mutually constitutive of one another since 'there is no player without the game ... and no game without the player' (Rey, 2007, p. 47). The field shapes and directs the habitus whilst

the habitus gives the field meaning and value through the agency of the actor, placing a constraint upon how the individual actor is able to act in terms of their inherent dispositions and the demands of the field (Bourdieu, 2000). However, the extent to which individuals are able to effect change is determined largely by the shape and structure of the existing field and, thus, human agency is limited. In addition, practice is rooted in the habitus, and the habitus generates practice in an exclusively unconscious fashion. Consequently behaviour is not freely chosen but determined by the agent's social context (Bourdieu, 1984). Therefore, actors have limited freedom to act since they are constrained by their positions in the field (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992). However, actors exercise the limited freedom they do have by using 'unthinking' strategies that maintain or improve their positions in the field.

Reflexivity, strategising and othering

The habitus, for Bourdieu, functions without introspection, reflexivity or rational strategising since

The schemes of the habitus, the primary forms of classification, owe their specific efficacy to the fact that they function below the level of consciousness and language, beyond the reach of introspective scrutiny or control by the will (Bourdieu, 1984, p. 446).

It is, therefore, deemed to be beyond the ability of the vast majority of social actors (other than the academic elite) to develop reflexivity beyond these narrow limits except during times of crisis, when there is a lack of fit between dispositions and positions, or as a result of a lack of synchronicity between the field and habitus (Bourdieu, 1984). The social actor, therefore, in normal non-crisis conditions portrays a lack of voluntarism and a lack of reflexivity, and where strategies do occur they do not, as a rule, involve rational calculation and reflexive accounting. Instead, for Bourdieu, strategies are 'moves in the game', which stem from a 'feel for the game' (Bourdieu, 1998a) that is embodied in the habitus, and the habitus

Is the source of these series of moves which are... organized as strategies without being the product of a genuine strategic intention (Bourdieu, 1977a, p. 73).

Strategies are therefore exemplars of the habitus in action.

Whilst fields develop corps of specialists who define, maintain, and transmit the interests of the field, opposition, within any field, is acted out through

conservation, succession, or subversion of the existing distribution of capital (Bourdieu, 1975). Conservation strategies tend to be pursued by those who occupy the dominant or established positions in a field; those in newer or subordinate positions are more liable to deploy strategies of succession; whilst those who challenge the legitimacy established or enforced by the dominant group may engage in subversion (Bourdieu 1975, 1993; Swartz 1997). However, although individuals strategise, these strategies are only employed when the habitus 'commands this option' (Wacquant, 1989, p. 45).

Bourdieu later refined his 'logic of practice' (Bourdieu, 1990a), offering an explanation of practice as something which was neither wholly unconscious nor simply the result of rational calculation; rather the logic of practice is to play a game in that the player does what the game demands of him, but the rules can be manipulated or subverted to suit the individual's needs. Thus, there is more than one way to play a game (Bourdieu, 1984), and the actor possesses a level of the autonomy to choose how to act. However, for Bourdieu, the field still constrains the choices available and actors have limited freedom to be strategic. In addition, this limited autonomy does not include 'reflexivity', conscious self-consideration of action in a particular social context (Archer, M. 2007). Instead actors behave entirely on the basis of learnt habitus and not on the basis of either recent experience or a reflexive consciousness since:

The schemes of the habitus, the primary forms of classification, owe their specific efficacy to the fact that they function below the level of consciousness and language, beyond the reach of introspective scrutiny or control by the will (Bourdieu, 1984, p.446).

In addition to strategising, individuals within any field also 'other', that is they differentiate between social groups by looking for differences between the self and 'others', and then placing any individual who displays features of 'otherness' into that group and outside the boundaries of the self (Bourdieu, 1984). Thus the social identity of any group is based on difference, whilst the subsequent maintenance of difference accounts for the struggle for hierarchical positioning within the field, predominantly through the acquisition of capital.

'Othering' is thus a way of defining and securing one's own positive identity through the denigration of, distancing from, and stigmatization of the 'other' and can occur at the personal, institutional and/or cultural levels. 'Othering',

therefore, relies on a dualism that defines the self or the 'us' as superior, and the 'other' as inferior, identifying differences as deficit. Individuals draw on indicators of social differentiation to shape the meaning of 'us' and 'them' (Bourdieu, 1984), and the subordination of those who are less powerful is reproduced through discourse(s) that constructs the 'other'. As Creutz-Kämpfi (2008, p. 297) argues:

The distinction between difference and otherness is that difference is descriptive, whereas otherness is strategic. Otherness describes the distribution of power...othering always refers to the other party being repressed in a relation. When the Other is being judged, the emphasis is on what differentiates instead of what connects.

Using Bourdieu in diversity and widening participation research

Bourdieu's direct contributions to the socio-scientific study of religion are modest, and are rarely a focal concern in any of his writings - exceptions being essays on rural Algerian Islam (Bourdieu 1979, 1990a) and the French Catholic episcopate (Bourdieu, 1991). This said, Dianteill (2002) argues that the whole of Bourdieu's work might be understood as 'a generalised sociology of religion' (p. 5), since Bourdieu argued that all powerful social institutions in effect behave like religions in producing in people a belief that they are powerless and that power is 'divinely' invested in the few. Indeed much of Bourdieu's work can be compared to the ways he critiqued the monopolisation of power by a single institution, the Catholic Church (Dianteill, 2002).

In addition, for Bourdieu, religious affiliation is not so much freely chosen as determined by geographical and cultural surroundings and is part of the wider social process of the formation and maintenance of the habitus (Verter 2003, p.165). So, for Bourdieu (1988), religious choice (or rejection) can be regarded as a position-taking (*prise de position*) within a field. However, Bourdieu perceived religion almost purely in organisational terms, as a system of symbolic meaning serving to create social distinction and reproduce and perpetuate social domination.

It is somewhat, therefore, surprising that Bourdieu's theories have so rarely been drawn on in relation to religion, particularly religious discrimination. However, his theories of habitus, field, capital and 'othering' have been

extensively drawn on in academic research relating to educational access, participation and success.

Reay and Lucy (2003), for example, have identified ways in which parents who wish to 'buy' into good state schools use cultural capital to decode the local housing market, making judgements about the state of the market often five or even ten years into the future, whilst Ball and Vincent's (1998) research has shown how parents use the 'grapevine' - information from friends, neighbours and relatives - in selecting schools for their children. Parents also make use of their cultural capital once their children are at school. Reay (1998b) has identified ways in which cultural capital affects how mothers relate to their children's school, particularly the more subjective aspects of cultural capital - lack of confidence, sense of inadequacy, and aggression or timidity - which characterised the women's approaches to teaching staff. The possession of a degree of cultural capital can also enable the further acquisition of cultural capital. Archer and Francis, (2006) have shown how British Chinese families employ particular forms of family capital to promote educational achievement and, through education, 'escape' from the family's current, usually working-class, position.

Cultural capital is not just activated by individuals, however. UK educational policy, including parental involvement schemes and initiatives such as the Aimhigher Gifted and Talented programme, also mobilise cultural capital to perpetuate educational inequalities (Reay 2004c) so that:

Whereas before in Bourdieuan terms all that was required was for the school to recognize the cultural capital of its middle-class pupils ... the under-funded, high stakes, standards driven field of state schooling seems to have shifted the rules of the game pushing more and more 'school work' into the home (p. 76).

Within higher education, Bourdieu's theories have also been drawn on, to evidence how, for example, working-class students lack the requisite (middle-class) capital to enable them to access higher-status universities (Ball et al, 2002), enable them to be successful in higher education (Reay et al, 2002; Thomas, 2002; Leathwood and O'Connell, 2003; Merrill, 2004) and/or enable them to remain in higher education (Ball et al, 2002, Longden, 2004).

In addition, within the literature there is a significant body of research which indicates how students from diverse gender, class and racial groups are positioned as the 'other' of higher education: research by Archer et al (2000)

with ethnically diverse, working-class men identifies how they negotiate higher education participation 'largely in terms of discourses of classed masculinity, in which higher education was associated with Otherness' (p. 435); whilst her research (Archer et al, 2007) with urban working-class young people draws attention to how 'othering' and 'being othered' contributes to shaping young people's post-16 'choices'; Ahmad's (2007) research with Muslim women in higher education describes how expectations of what being a mainstream student means contributes to a noted sense of 'othering', whilst Holdsworth and Patiniotis (2002) highlight the 'othering' of local students within the university with some students commenting that they were 'made to feel like strangers in their own town, and that the 'student' identity was adopted and monopolised by 'outsiders' (p.9).

Choosing Bourdieu's 'thinking tools'

As evidenced by the number of researchers who have drawn on his work, Bourdieu's 'thinking tools' (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992, p. 160) appear to be useful in helping make sense of the experiences of students in education. Indeed, as Jenkins states, (2002), Bourdieu is 'enormously good to think with' (p. 11). However, there are four particular reasons why I concluded that using Bourdieuan thinking tools would help me to understand the social and academic experiences of religious students in secular higher education in the UK.

First, whilst Bourdieu did not specifically use habitus as a tool for thinking about religion or religious affiliation, habitus as a method for analysing the dominance of certain groups in society and the domination of subordinate groups (Reay, 2004a), 'can easily be applied to the analysis of gender (or racial and ethnic) disadvantage as well' (McClelland, 1990, p. 105) and thus is also likely to have applicability to religion. In addition, as Reay (1995b, p. 369) argues, drawing on the concept of habitus is likely to afford me:

A way of looking at data which renders the 'taken-for-granted' problematic. It suggests a whole range of questions not necessarily addressed in empirical research; How well adapted is the individual to the context they find themselves in? How does personal history shape their responses to the contemporary setting?

Thus drawing on habitus will enable me to focus on the individual students and their particular experiences.

Second, since the habitus is an amalgamation of embodied social structures internalised as mental schemes that guide all of an actor's actions (Bourdieu, 1977), using habitus should help me to theorise what possibilities religious students believe are open to them, and why, as well as their subsequent actions, practices and strategies. In addition, since the habitus is always in the process of completion, and 'is no more fixed than the practices which it helps to structure' (Bourdieu, 1984, p. 466) drawing on habitus should also afford me the possibility of identifying how such strategies shape the further development of the habitus.

Third, drawing on the concept of field should provide me with opportunities to 'seek out sources of conflict in a given domain, relate that conflict to the broader areas of class and power, and identify underlying shared assumptions by opposing parties' (Swartz, 1997, p. 81). It will thus present me with possibilities for understanding what informs their experiences.

And, finally, drawing on habitus, capital and field should provide me with the possibility of understanding the extent to which religious students are 'othered' in higher education as well as the strategies they adopt, if at all, to resist being 'othered'.

Thus, it appears that Bourdieu's conceptual tools could be enormously helpful to me. In the end, however, the only way I would be able to judge whether they would be useful was to adopt Dyke's oft-cited dictum, namely that 'the best way to praise and appraise Bourdieu's work is also the most straightforward: use it' (1999, p.192).

The research questions

As stated in Chapter Two, my research aims are to explore, and understand, the social and academic experiences of religious students in secular higher education in the UK. To achieve these aims, and having elected to draw on Bourdieu's concepts of habitus, capital, field, reflexivity, strategy and 'otherness', I established my research questions as:

- What are the social and academic experiences of religious students during their first year in higher education?
- What sense can be made of why they experience the things they do?
- What are the students' responses to these experiences and why do they respond in these particular ways?
- What are the individual and institutional implications of these responses?

Summary

In this chapter I have provided a general overview of some of the key theoretical frameworks which other researchers have drawn on to make sense of 'difference' and I have established why drawing on Bourdieu's thinking tools of habitus, capital, field, reflexivity, strategy and otherness will help me to understand and explain the experiences of religious students in higher education. I have also established my research questions.

In the next chapter I identify the research methodology and data collection methods which will help me achieve my research aims and answer my research questions, within my chosen theoretical framework.

Chapter Four The research methodology

Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to describe how I established a research methodology (Narrative Inquiry), data collection methods (narrative interviews) and approach to analysis (thematic), which would enable me to achieve my overall research aims and answer my research questions, within my theoretical framework.

To further contextualise my research I also present the research site and introduce the fifteen students who participated in the study; I explore the tensions and challenges I faced in developing my research methodology, highlight the ethical and methodological issues arising from the research, including ways in which I dealt with issues of subjectivity, 'truth' and representation to ensure that my students 'voices' could be heard. I conclude the chapter by describing my approach to analysing the students' stories.

Exploring research methodologies

Two considerations informed my selection of a particular research methodology: first I needed to find a way to understand and not just describe events; second I needed to ensure that my selected research methodology would enable me to draw on my Bourdieuan 'thinking tools'.

I, therefore, started by excluding those methodologies which would allow me only to describe and not to understand students' experiences, for example statistical approaches used simply to describe the basic features of the data in a study. I also excluded action research despite it being a commonly used 'qualitative' approach since such research aims to contribute 'to the practical concerns of people in an immediate problematic situation' (Rapoport, 1970, p. 499) which was not the purpose of my study. I then carefully evaluated three possible methods, each of which I felt might enable me to describe, interpret and theorise: ethnography, phenomenology and narrative inquiry (NI).

These three methods of inquiry all have certain common qualities: they are all qualitative in approach; they all focus on the 'wholeness' of experience rather than its component parts; they all search for the meanings of experience rather than the measurements; they all elicit descriptions of experience through first-person accounts; and they all regard the data of

experience as imperative in understanding human behaviour (Moustakas, 1994). However, they are also all different in approach and emphasis and each one raises both ethical and methodological issues and challenges.

Most ethnographic research is concerned with producing descriptions or explanations of phenomena or producing theories. The result of ethnographic research is a cultural description, which involves not just studying but learning from people (Spradley, 1979). Clearly this appears to be methodologically apposite for my intended study. However, fieldwork is a fundamental part of an ethnographic study, with 'the researcher participating, overtly or covertly, in peoples' daily lives for an extended period of time, watching what happens, listening to what is said' (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1983, p.3). I was not confident that I would either be able, or want, to participate in the daily lives of my students' since this would likely involve participation in religious practices which are highly personal and private. I also had some ethical concerns relating to the level of immersion of the researcher in the study, as well as particular issues around the power and positionality of the researcher which I have highlighted in previous research (Stevenson and Willott, 2007b). In addition, not only is ethnographic research extremely time consuming but, unlike in, for example, primary education, the university is an extremely fragmented setting with students, in general, taught in modules, changing teachers and classrooms frequently and spending considerable amounts of time off-campus. Therefore, whilst there are some undergraduate ethnographic research studies, such as Holland and Eisenhart's (1990) study following a group of Black and White women attending universities in the US, it is unsurprising that ethnographic research in higher education is still relatively uncommon. These practical and ethical issues combined were sufficient for me to look elsewhere for a methodology and I, next, explored phenomenology.

A phenomenological study can be described as an attempt to gain insight into participants' 'lifeworlds', or *lebenswelt* (Husserl, 1936/1970), typically through in-depth interviewing and observation. The language I have used throughout the preceding sections might indicate that the natural framework for my study would be phenomenology since it is:

A low-hovering, in-dwelling, meditative philosophy that glories in the concreteness of person-world relations and accords lived experience, with all its indeterminacy and ambiguity, primacy over the known (Wertz, 2005, p.175).

In analysing the data the phenomenological researcher searches for 'significant statements' that have particular meaning to the participants and for themes within these. The researcher then attempts to construct a statement of the fundamental structure of the experience that will create a vicarious experience in the reader of the description.

Not only are there numerous phenomenological studies of students in higher education but, of particular interest to me, is that there is a specific genre within the field, namely the 'phenomenology of religion' wherein:

By suspending all personal preconceptions as to what is real and insisting on the irreducibility of the religious, phenomenologists attempt sympathetically to place themselves within the religious 'life-world' of others and to grasp the religious meaning of the experienced phenomena (Allen, 2005, p. 198).

However, having elected to draw on Bourdieuan concepts, I was faced with substantial challenges to using a phenomenological approach since Bourdieu was both highly critical and dismissive of phenomenology. As presented in both 'Outline of a Theory of Practice' (1977a) and 'The Logic of Practice' (1990a), Bourdieu's critique is couched within his broader critique of 'subjectivism' more generally. In particular he argues that phenomenology is limited to regarding 'the world as self-evident' or 'taken-for granted' (1977a, p. 3), over-emphasises agency, and does not explore how lived experience is produced through 'the dialectic of internalization of previously externalized structures' (Throop and Murphy, 2002, p. 190). In contrast, using habitus allows researchers 'to break away from the structuralist paradigm without falling back into the old philosophy of the subject or of consciousness' (Bourdieu, 1985, p. 13).

Thus, having turned away from two possible methodologies I returned to an existent interest in story telling (Stevenson and Willott, 2007a, 2010; 2010; Stevenson, 2010b) and in NI in particular.

Narrative Inquiry

The gathering and using of stories as research data has a long history, particularly in historical research, cultural studies, ethnography and cultural anthropology (Cresswell 2007). Data collected has included recordings of oral stories and folklore, field notes, photographs, cultural artefacts, historical documents and letters, and has been used to increase

understanding of individuals, cultures, communities, and of the past, to enable individual voices to be heard.

Until the 1980s, however, the use of story as data had been little used in the social sciences, including educational research. Concerns over how qualitative research in general could be considered valid, generalisable or trustworthy (Lincoln and Guba 1985) largely consigned the use of story, with its associated connotations of 'fiction', 'untruth', 'untrustworthiness' and 'lack of rigour', to the margins of educational research.

Over the last thirty years, however, there has been a sharp increase in educational research involving the collecting and telling of stories, to the extent that in the early 21st century a great deal of qualitative research is grounded in the collection of personal narrative (Atkinson and Delamont 2006). This transformation may be attributed to 'four turns': 'a change in the relationship between the researcher and the researched; a move from the use of number toward the use of words as data; a change from a focus on the general and universal toward the local and specific; and a widening acceptance of alternative epistemologies or ways of knowing' (Clandinin 2006, p.1). Examples of the use of stories and personal biographies can now readily be seen in phenomenology, hermeneutics, action research, case study, participative and collaborative inquiry, grounded theory, and NI, drawing on data from interview transcripts, field notes, journal records, letter writing, and autobiographies amongst others.

For narrative researchers, however, there is clear difference between a story and a narrative: a story is a 'first-person oral telling or retelling of events related to the personal or social experiences of an individual' (Ollerenshaw and Creswell 2002, p.332), but it is only in the transformation of data that story becomes narrative (Riley and Hawe 2005). In other words, story and narrative are analytically different: people tell stories, but narratives come from the analysis of stories (Frank 2000). To preserve this distinction Connelly and Clandinin (1990, p.2) call the phenomenon under study 'story' and the inquiry 'narrative'.

If analysis is the process by which the researcher expands and extends data beyond a descriptive account (Coffey and Atkinson 1996) in NI the 'data emerges from the relationship between the teller, the listener and the context of the telling of the story' (Riley and Hawe 2005, p.227) so that stories only become narratives when the data is not only analysed but also interpreted or re-storied - the process of:

Gathering stories, analyzing them for key elements of the story (e.g. time, place, plot, and scene), and then rewriting the story to place it within a chronological sequence' (Ollerenshaw and Creswell 2002, p.332).

Thus, NI is a process of gathering information 'over time, in a place or a series of places, and in social interaction with milieus' (Clandinin and Connelly 2000, p.20), which is then re-storied by the researcher into a narrative which can capture and investigate people's individual, social, and cultural identities 'as they live them' (Connelly and Clandinin, 2000). Thus NI, 'elicit[s] not only what happened, but also how people experienced events, and how they make sense of them. Individual stories are, therefore, an important vantage point for exploring the links between subjectivity and social structures' (Erel, 2007, para 3.3). However, NI is more than simply the re-storying of the research participant's life alone rather it is:

A process of collaboration involving mutual storytelling and re-storying as the research proceeds ... [a] shared relationship in which both voices are heard (Connelly and Clandinin, 1990, p.4).

Whilst NI can, and does, adopt a wide range of data collection techniques, the most commonly used are semi-structured interviews, which draw on the stories of individuals to understand the individual life within its social context (Roberts, 2002). Not only do individuals gain understandings of the situations they experience through the stories they tell, but the narrative interview is particularly suited to the analysis of social phenomena since it is concerned with understanding 'the individual's unique and changing perspective as it is mediated by context', (Miller, 2000, p. 12). Through this process, NI focuses on the individual's subjective interpretations and the meanings they make of their lives.

Rationale for choosing narrative inquiry

With regard to my research aims NI can, therefore, help me not just describe but make sense of *why* religious students experience the things they do and why they respond in particular ways. The stories told by religious students should also provide me with an invaluable way of 'understand[ing] how people create meanings out of events in their lives' (Chase, 2005, p. 651). NI can thus help me understand individual's lives from their (emic) perspective rather than from the viewpoint of the external observer (Goodson and Sikes, 2001).

NI should also help me make sense of students' responses to their particular experiences and why they respond in these particular ways since, not only is NI well suited to expressing the 'complexity and contradiction of life' (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000, p. 181), but it involves an 'analytic examination of the underlying insights and assumptions that the story illustrates' (Bell, 2002, p. 208): through story people make sense of their lives, thus affording me the opportunity to emphasise subjective experiences within historical and social contexts.

Bourdieu's 'thinking tools' also fit well with NI since, in NI, the person or institution in the study is seen as an unfolding story, with people, places, and events in transition rather than a fixed entity in time and space. Narrative researchers are concerned with 'life as it is experienced on a continuum - people's lives, institutional lives, lives of things' (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000, p.19), and with multiple layers of time - past, present, future, expected, remembered (Hayhoe 2004). Using NI to explore habitus is, therefore, highly relevant since habitus is a complex amalgam of past and present that is always on-going (Bourdieu 1990a), 'a dynamic concept, a rich interlacing of past and present, individual and collective, interiorized and permeating both body and psyche' (Reay, 1998a, p. 521). Indeed, Bourdieu argued that forms of narrative research can identify the 'dispositions' of habitus (1996, p. 264-5) since the presence of the self is influenced by the habitus (Bourdieu, 1990a).

In addition, since NI also draws attention to multiple and complex realities of lived experiences, and often describes a predicament, conflict or struggle, this form of research is pertinent to Bourdieu's field theory research which foregrounds social actors and their struggles over capital. (Bourdieu, 1992, 1993; Bourdieu and Wacquant 1996). NI is also concerned with sociality, that is the relationship between the individual being studied and his or her family, colleagues or institution in terms of both social conditions, such as 'feelings, hopes, desires, aesthetic reactions, and moral dispositions' (Connelly and Clandinin 2006, p.480) and the personal conditions of the inquirer and research participants:

The existential conditions, the environment, surrounding factors and forces, people and otherwise, that form each individual's context (Clandinin et al. 2007, p.23).

Thus NI, which 're-stories', can help to draw attention to positioning and 'othering' on an individual scale. Indeed, as West et al (2007) argue:

Life history and biography are not simply a set of technical procedures to be applied but contain a range of assumptions about human beings, the social world, the nature of knowledge, as well as values to do with what research is for and how we should engage with the 'other' (p. 27).

Furthermore, narratives are constructed through interaction with other people within institutions and organisations and so, as Monrouxe (2009) points out, NI draws attention to positioning and 'othering' through 'the language we use (e.g. pronouns that suggest a level of commitment, such as we, and difference, such as they)' (p. 42).

It was clear to me, therefore, that NI afforded me the best opportunities to achieve my research aims and answer my research questions and, in so doing, draw on my chosen conceptual tools. I, therefore, proceeded to conduct a NI, beginning with collecting my data.

Collecting the data

Collecting the data involved establishing a research site, developing a data collection tool (semi-structured interviews), piloting the research, recruiting and selecting research participants, and conducting the research interviews.

Establishing a research site

I chose to locate my research within a post-1992 higher education institution since the post-1992 sector has a more 'diverse' student population, with respect to age, ethnicity, social and cultural background (ECU, 2008; Reay et al, 2010) than other sectors of higher education and, thus, it may be hypothesised, religion. I chose the research site university (which will remain anonymous throughout this thesis) because it has a strong commitment to equity, inclusion and widening participation and a track record in attracting students from a wide range of diverse and groups. In addition, the University's website draws attention to ways in which the university aims to recognise and, in particular, 'celebrate' diversity: staff are advised to 'Celebrate diversity!' when leading and working in teams; 'celebrate the diversity of our students' when developing approaches to teaching and learning; and 'celebrate diversity' when creating an inclusive work and study environment (unreferenced to maintain anonymity).

In common with many other universities, however, the institution makes little recognition of the presence, or needs, of religious students. Religious students are not recognised as a specific group in either the institution's

Office for Fair Access (OFFA) agreement (a mandatory agreement for any English university that wishes to charge fees) or its Widening Participation Strategic Assessment (the statement submitted to the Higher Education Funding Council for England that outlines the institution's overarching commitment to widening participation). In addition whilst the institution's Equality and Diversity policy acknowledges that religion and belief are protected characteristics, it makes no mention of the needs of such students. On a practical level, there are two prayer rooms but no Kosher or Halal food is available. There is, however, an active chaplaincy, as well as diverse student societies representing religious groups.

The data collection tool

Whilst NI research can draw on diverse forms of data (diaries, letters, interview transcripts, observations etc.) to elicit stories, I elected to use semi-structured, narrative interviews for two reasons. First, because as Kvale (1983) indicates, the qualitative research interview is 'an interview, whose purpose is to gather descriptions of the life-world of the interviewee with respect to interpretation of the meaning of the described phenomena' (p.174) which should help me meet my research aim and answer my research questions; and second because, conceptually, the idea of narrative interviewing is 'motivated by a critique of the question-response-schema of most interviews' (Bauer, 1996, p.2). I considered this to be significant since, as my previous research has emphasised, interview respondents are not epistemologically passive (Stevenson and Clegg, 2010b). However, narrative interviewing allows for the joint construction of the story between story teller and listener, with the interview not only a site for the production of data but also an opportunity to explore the meaning of the research for the respondent. In addition, the narrative interview presents opportunities to listen to the ways in which students construct their narratives and the forms of reflexivity displayed. In my previous research I have found that this form of research interview seems to be particularly powerful, with some students commenting that they are articulating their narratives for the first time (Stevenson and Clegg, 2010b).

Having, therefore, elected to use semi-structured narrative interviews, I designed an interview schedule which would allow me to explore all the areas I wanted to but which flowed loosely in the form of a research conversation. I was particularly interested in 'episodic', rather than 'whole life', interviews (Harding, 2006), a particular narrative interview technique

that elicits descriptions of particular episodes or stories in an individuals' daily life and enables the researcher to gain an insight into the everyday experiences and how individuals make sense of their experiences and their wider environment (Flick, 2000). The criteria for episodic interviews are that they:

Should combine invitations to recount concrete events (which are relevant to the issue under study) with more general questions aiming at more general answers... mention concrete situations in which interviewees assumedly have made certain experiences...[and] be open enough to allow the interviewee to select the episodes or situations he or she wants to recount (Flick, 1997, p. 4).

I therefore started with questions which would draw out students' descriptions of what was happening in their lives, before moving on to questions that might help me develop an understanding of why things were happening. The first set of interview questions are presented in appendix E.

Since my research was, from the outset, designed to explore the students' experiences across the whole of their first year in higher education, I interviewed my students three times. I therefore returned to the same question schedule twice more, using the initial basic questions (aside from questions 1 and 2) as a framework but changing the timeframes of the questions, for example asking about the first semester, or first year rather than the first few weeks. I also asked specific questions of particular students following up themes and/or events which had arisen during the previous interview(s). I did not, however, maintain a chronological approach to the order of the questions rather I set out to:

Elicit strands of narrative, and shifting and overlapping plateaux of chronological text, which do not link up in a unified linear sequence, but which are nevertheless full of rich description, detailed interpretations and biographical significance' (Harding, 2006, para 3.10).

Piloting the research

After careful consideration, I chose not to pilot my research. While I recognise that undertaking a pilot study can help reveal any potential deficiencies in the design of the proposed research, I had already used a similar approach over a number of years. In previous research projects I had conducted and analysed over eighty narrative interviews, including with refugees (Stevenson Willott, 2008b, 2010), asylum seekers (Stevenson and

Willott, 2007a), and Asian women from Sikh backgrounds (Stevenson, 2010b), as well as students from a range of different ethnic and social groups (Stevenson, 2010a, 2010c, 2011b), genders and ages (Stevenson and Clegg, 2010a, 2010b, 2011). In addition I had used Bourdieu's concepts of habitus and capital to analyse previous data (Stevenson and Willott, 2008b; Clegg et al, 2010) and felt comfortable working with these conceptual tools. The timing of my research also made it difficult to pilot the research as I wanted to interview students within the first semester of their first year. If I had conducted a pilot I would not have been able to conduct the full study until the following year. I therefore chose to recruit students directly to the actual study.

Recruiting the research participants

In advance of recruiting my research participants and collecting any data, I gained ethical approval from both the research site university and from Leeds University. Having chosen to focus on home students (international students not only have very different experiences and support needs but they are, in general, researched separately to home students, and do not appear within the widening participation literature), I then contacted, via email, all full time 'home' students at the research site. Course leaders of those courses known to have a highly diverse composition were also asked to advertise the research; contact was made with relevant student societies (the Christian Union, the Jewish Society, the Islamic Society, the African Caribbean Society, the Friends of India, the Indonesian Society, the Saudi Club and the Sikh Society); and posters were put up in the Students Union, and the cafeterias and advice centres of the university. The criteria for selection were that: first, the students were first year 'home' undergraduates; second, that they were willing to commit to three interviews and, finally, that they regarded themselves as 'religious'.

For the reasons already outlined in Chapter Two, being 'religious' is not an easy concept to define. It is also a multi-dimensional concept (Smart, 1993) and each dimension may have more significance to one person than another. Thus, when a person describes him or herself as 'religious' it is invariably a 'self-described identity', since it will mean different things to different groups and individuals within those groups, and will be determined by multi-dimensional phenomena such as affiliation to a community, membership of a church or other place of worship, beliefs, practice, and religious orientation etc. (Purdam et al, 2007). This has been evidenced, for

example, by the ways in which many Jews declare a strong Jewish cultural identity but have little or no contact with a synagogue (Coyle and Rafalin, 2000), or the ways in which the 1st Gulf War resulted in an up-swelling of pro-Iraqi sentiment and strengthened the Muslim cultural identity of many, particularly young men, but was not reflected in an increase in attendance at Mosques (Lewis, 1994).

Therefore the students in my study were asked simply to self-declare as religious rather than being defined by me as such. However, since I recognised that it was important to have some form of definitional framework, all publicity and information material stated that:

Religious refers to both having a faith and undertaking some form of action related to that faith. The term 'religious students' is used to refer to those students who self-identify as being religious.

Selecting the participants

Through my diverse recruitment strategies, twenty two students made contact of whom fifteen were selected. The students who were not selected either did not meet my criteria or did not get back in touch once the research had been explained to them.

I recognise that only students who feel they have 'a story to tell' may put themselves forward to take part in research interviews and that purposeful sampling might have produced different narratives. However, this form of sampling was not possible since I did not know which students in the university were religious and therefore could not purposefully sample. Instead I needed to rely on students self-selecting.

Having recruited my participants, I carefully explained the research to them, including what it would be used for. The students were asked to agree to participate in three interviews, each of which would be approximately one hour long, and which would take place during semesters one and two of their first year and in semester one of their second year. I outlined the purpose of the interviews, namely to explore their social and academic experiences during their first year, and how I would be subsequently using the data - for my thesis and for other academic purposes, such as conference presentations. I explained that the interviews would be taped, but that I would also take notes, and that they would be fully transcribed. They were informed that they could see copies of their transcripts and that, if they chose to, they could edit them - taking out sections they did not wish

to be used but not amending the remaining text. The students were also told that their names would remain anonymous and confidential, and that they retained the right to withdraw from the research at any point without giving a reason and that, if they did so, they could ask for the data already collated not to be used. The students were then given information sheets (appendix C) and asked to sign consent forms (appendix D).

Full demographics are detailed in appendix A but, in summary, the cohort comprised: eight men and seven women, aged between eighteen and forty five, of whom nine were Christian, one Sikh, two Jewish and three Muslim; eleven described themselves as White British, two as British Pakistani, one as British Indian and one as British Black African; the students were also asked to describe their 'class' (with no prompts): eight described themselves as working-class, five as middle-class, one was unsure as they had one parent they regarded as working and one as middle-class, and the final student commented that he 'used to be middle-class but now I'm not sure' (this student is a former refugee).

In more detail, the fifteen students (all names are pseudonyms⁷) were:

AISHA: an eighteen year old, British Pakistani woman studying for a degree in Law and living at home with her parents and siblings. She describes herself as a 'strict' practising Muslim. In her mid-teens she made a deliberate choice to start wearing a headscarf (unlike other members of her family). She also prays five times a day and abstains from places where drinking or smoking takes places. She is planning to get engaged to her Muslim boyfriend in the near future.

ALEX: a White British, Christian, eighteen year old man studying for a degree in Forensic Computing. He was brought up 'loosely' within the Christian faith and believes in God but is currently unsure about the extent to which he wishes to practise his faith. He has moved to the city with his girlfriend and they are living together. He also lives with a devout Catholic and a Muslim who spends a 'great deal' of time in prayer.

AMNEET: a thirty two year old, British Asian, Sikh woman studying for a Youth and Community degree. She is married and lives at home with her husband and two school age children. She was born in India where she

⁷ I selected the pseudonyms by identifying a name which started with the same letter as each student's real name, but which were also appropriate to their country of origin, ethnicity and religious affiliation.

completed high school and started studying for a degree but she had to leave at the end of her first year when she moved to the UK to marry her husband. Following her marriage she worked for a few years in the family business then, once her children had gone to school, she applied for university.

ANDY: a 24 year old White British, male, Christian student from a 'strongly working-class' background, studying for a degree in Tourism Management. He came to university as a mature student having worked and travelled for several years and hopes to find a job which will allow him to continue travelling. He is from a 'strongly Catholic' background and was brought up attending church regularly. Both his parents are lay ministers, as was he when he lived at home.

ANNA: a forty five year old, White British, Christian woman studying for a degree in History. She is separated from her husband, in the process of getting divorced, and lives with her three children in her own house. She works part time in the same job she has held for several years and is a member of her local church, worships there on a regular basis and is involved in social activities through the church. She also has a close circle of friends whom she has known for many years.

DAVINA: an eighteen year old, White British, Jewish woman studying for a degree in Criminology. She describes herself as religiously 'stricter' than her parents, but nonetheless her choice of institution was heavily influenced by the fact that they would only let her leave home to go to university if she was able to live in a Jewish hall of residence. She keeps the Shabbat and all major festivals and joined the Jewish Society as soon as she arrived.

DINAH: an eighteen year old, female, White British, Jewish student studying for a degree in Primary Education. She grew up in North London and is part of both a large extended family and a strongly Jewish community. Despite considering herself 'religious' Dinah does not keep to all the rituals; for example, she only fasts on certain fast days. She is, however, kosher, keeps the Shabbat and keeps all the major festivals. Dinah also describes herself as very Zionistic.

EL-FEDA-Feda: a thirty three year old, Black British-African, Muslim male studying for a degree in Politics. He was born in East Africa but came to the United Kingdom as a young child. He left school to work in industry and worked for the next ten years, supporting both his brother and sister through university. He returned to his home country four years ago and now travels

there on a regular basis. He initially enrolled in a different university but dropped out after less than a year.

GARY: a White British, twenty one year old, Christian male studying for a degree in Creative Music. He chose not to come into higher education for three years after completing his 'A' levels as he did not feel ready. He spent a year studying in a Christian music school before switching to working for local radio where he found his 'niche'. He was brought up in a strongly practising Christian family and has attended church all his life.

IMRAN: an eighteen year old, Muslim man studying for a degree in Business Management. He is originally from Pakistan but came to the UK as a refugee several years ago. He now has British citizenship and speaks fluent English. He is strongly committed to his faith, prays regularly, and abstains from alcohol, smoking and certain foods. He lives with his family and commutes for two hours each way on a daily basis.

MANDY: a thirty eight year old, White British, Christian woman studying for a degree in Criminology. She has been married twice – her first husband committed suicide and the second left her. She has four children: two live at home, one is at university and the other lives with his grandmother. She has mental health problems which she informed the university about before she commenced her studies and for which she is receiving support

RUTH: a nineteen year old, White British, Christian studying for a degree in Childhood Studies. She chose to come to the research site university because it enabled her to stay living at 'home'. She was brought up in care in the second half of her childhood but now lives with a family who attend the same church she does. She has been going to church for the last five years, and started going in order to find a place she could feel she 'belonged'.

SEAN: a twenty six year old White British, Christian student studying for a two-year degree in Business Management. He spent some time in the army after leaving school at sixteen and was on active service when the events of 9/11 occurred. He then left the army as he knew he would be sent to Afghanistan to fight. He is married with a young child and has come to university in the hope of 'bettering' himself.

SIMON: an eighteen year old, White British, Christian student studying Film and Television Production and living in student halls of residence. His mother is Christian, his father an atheist. He did not attend church until he

was nearly ten when he started attending on a regular basis and became actively involved in Christian based extra-curricular activities at school, playing in a Christian Church band and taking an active role within his church.

TONY: an eighteen year old, White British, Christian, from a family of committed Christians, studying for a combined PE and Teacher Training degree. He spent his summer working for a Christian organisation overseas and joined a church as soon as he arrived at university. He has made a large number of friends through the church and is actively involved in church-related events and activities.

Conducting the interviews

The interviews took place mid-semester 1 (late October- end November) and mid-semester 2 (late March-end April) of the students' first year and mid-semester 1 (late October- end November) of their second year. I elected to conduct interview three in their second year in part because I wanted to see whether the students would 'make it' through their first year or withdraw, and also because it provide an opportunity for them to reflect back on their experiences.

The students were offered a choice of venue in which the interviews could take place. Both Jewish students chose to have all their interviews in their Jewish hall of residence; the remaining students were interviewed either in a meeting room at the university, in the library or in the canteen.

The interviews were recorded but notes were also taken at particular points of interest during the interview. Each interview lasted between forty and ninety minutes, with the average being just over an hour. In all 41 out of a hoped for 45 interviews were conducted: one student left the university after just one interview, another left at the end of his first year having completed two interviews, and I was unable to get hold of one student for their third interview. The interviews were fully transcribed and, rather than using a commercial transcription service, I transcribed the interviews myself which allowed me to re-listen to the interviews (often several times) and to make notes as well as transcripts, forming the first part of my analysis.

Ethical and methodological considerations

I did not simply rely on gaining ethical approval at the outset of the project, Instead, throughout my research I complied with the requisite ethical

principles of beneficence, ensuring autonomy, and avoiding harm as laid down by the codes of practice of the research site and Leeds University, as well as the British Educational Research Association (BERA, 2004) and the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC, 2010). As referred to above I ensured that the students had the research fully explained to them. I also spent considerable time reflecting on the questions I intended to ask of each participant, conscious of their different circumstances and cultural context (single parent, refugee, care leaver, history of depression etc.) to try and avoid any psychological harm, as well as remaining alert to any possible tensions during the actual interviews. I recognised from the outset, however, that NI as a methodology also engenders its own ethical concerns.

Whilst Connelly and Clandinin (1990, p. 7) argue that it is important 'not to squeeze the language of narrative criteria into a language created for other forms of research', the 'post-modern' critique of NI is concerned primarily with three issues: subjectivity, 'truth' and representation, each of which I needed to address during my study.

In terms of subjectivity, for many critics of NI it is the interaction between researcher and research participant, with its potential to cause distortion, which is most problematic. However, in NI, subjectivity is not only assumed but, in many cases required, since the researcher needs to build up a sufficiently close relationship with the research participant to develop requisite trust, empathy and rapport to facilitate the telling of the story. Nonetheless, during the planning, data collection and analysis stages of the study I tried to remain alert as to how my own values, experiences, beliefs, political commitments, and social identities (McDonald and Nijhof, 1999) might be shaping the stories I was both asking for and being told.

A second criticism of narrative inquiry is centred on the issue of 'truth' and the legitimacy of research (Denzin 1997), in particular that participants can and will lie, distort or fabricate their stories or, because so much has been forgotten or is chosen not to be told, provide a story that is 'incomplete' (Alvermann 2002). Such concerns have caused critics to argue that narrative research is, therefore, inherently unreliable unless it can be checked, triangulated, or verified (Lincoln and Guba 1985). However, I would argue that the stories that people tell are the stories they choose to tell and, rather than attempting to triangulate or cross-check these stories, they should be taken in good faith. Indeed, within narrative research, the very process of verification would actually distort and alter the story and run

the risk of imposing the researcher's own narrative. Therefore whilst I offered the research participants the opportunity to review their stories⁸, I did not elect to verify the stories in any other way.

The final criticism of NI centres on representation, that is whether the researcher can ever directly capture and present 'lived experience'.

Narrative inquirers argue that stories are the closest we can come to shared experience. However, (some) other researchers believe that there can never be a final accurate representation of what was meant or said because, first, investigators do not have direct access to another's experience and, second, because descriptions of experience are created in the social texts written by the researcher. In other words:

Language and speech do not mirror experience: They create experience and in the process of creation constantly transform and defer that which is being described. The meanings of a subject's statements are, therefore, always in motion (Denzin 1997, p.5).

Nevertheless, I constantly referred back to the actual transcripts when crafting the narratives, looking for examples of where I may have imposed my own 'voice' over that of the student's. For example, in Chapter Six I describe a particular incident involving Imran. The full text that his story was drawn from is as follows:

I get really frustrated by the way other people behave around me. At first I thought it was because they didn't like me but then I realised it was something to do with being Muslim. Like I'll give you an example of just the other day when I walked into XXX [the canteen] and saw some of my friends. I just went over to sit with them like automatically, didn't think twice about it, but as soon as I did it was like they just stopped talking and there was this sort of silence and then they changed the subject and started talking about something else and I knew straight away that they'd been talking about something that they didn't want to talk about in front of me. And it really upset me because I thought that if you left religion outside, then character, personality and behaviour would impact on how people view you. I made sure that I wasn't rude so they didn't think all Muslims were rude, I behave well so I am not letting my religion down and I hoped that people would want to be with me. But it's just becoming so clear that religion stands in the way of me making friends with other people. Like on one level you are

⁸ Only one student took up this offer and made no changes.

friends but it's not really friendship, not like I would like. But they don't want to cross a line that they seem to have drawn. And afterwards when everyone else but this one other student had gone I asked why they'd stopped talking and he said it was because they thought that whatever it was might offend me.

In my first attempt at describing this story I wrote:

He describes feeling immensely disappointed that he is not easily accepted by his peers and believes that being Muslim gets in the ways of his ability to makes friends. He cites an instance of a conversation taking place between several of his student peers but when he tries to join in they stop talking. Afterwards he asks one of them why they did that and is told that it's because they worry they may offend him. This upsets him since, as he explains...

I realised that this was not reflective of the actual language Imran used and I therefore re-crafted this as follows. I have italicised where I have used terms that appear in the full transcript but which do not appear as a direct quote:

He describes feeling immensely *frustrated* that he is not easily accepted by his peers and believes that his *religion stands in the way all the time*. He cites an instance of a conversation taking place between several of his student peers and when he tries to join in they *change the subject*. Afterwards he asks one of them why they did, and is told that it's because they worry they may *offend* him. This *upsets* him since, as he explains...

Despite these best efforts, however, I do recognise that I have been highly involved in the research process, not only in selecting the questions to ask but also in choosing what stories to re-story. I also recognise that in re-ordering the sequence of particular events I have done so deliberately, either to make a point or for the sake of a more coherent narrative. Thus, whilst the narratives in the following five chapters are drawn from the stories told by the students, they have been selected, re-storied and presented by me.

Analysing the data

In advance of analysing the transcripts in detail I wrote both short sketches (see above) and long vignettes (appendix F) of each of my participants. The longer vignette drew a 'picture' of the person (background and demographics); their journey into higher education and their experiences during their first fifteen months. I then returned to the transcripts and coded

the text and broke it down into manageable sections. I initially used Nvivo but found that, in doing so, I lost sight of the 'whole person'. I, therefore, returned to paper-based analysis which, as Thompson and Barrett argue, retains the context of qualitative data, and

Facilitates actually 'hearing' what the data have to say rather than splicing them into arbitrary units before searching for topics, themes or meanings' (1997, p.60).

These combined techniques allowed me to keep the whole person in mind rather than seeing them as simply a series of quotations - which can occur at the point where transcripts start to be analysed line by line.

I then combed through the transcripts to identify broad codes/themes, pinpointed stories or 'epiphanies' (Cresswell, 2007), and micro-analysed individual text segments, with my analysis taking two forms: first, a thematic analysis, bringing out the key messages and giving meaning to what was being expressed by the narrator (Ellis, 2004), followed by a functional analysis to identify what the story is 'doing' (Schwandt, 2007). I then used these themes to re-story the participant's meta-stories into a framework that I felt made sense, by emphasising the students' subjectivities and contextual circumstances, as well as the ways in which the events they describe were causally linked (Cresswell, 2007).

Unlike many NI studies, I elected not to place the stories within a strict chronological sequence, but to focus on individual experiences of conflict or struggle taking place at particular times and in particular places, and have drawn on first, second or third interviews in the best order to make sense of the students' experiences. In doing so I have been able to give meaning to these connections and thus explore and address my research questions.

Presenting the data

Narrative inquiry is a literary form of qualitative research (Creswell, 2008) that places a special emphasis on writing. I had initially toyed with the idea of presenting my data in the form of a play with the major and minor characters identified at the beginning and the students' experiences described via a prologue, acts, scenes and an epilogue. However, having played with this form of textual representation, I found that I was unable to sustain it and reverted to using the more commonly used device of story (Connelly and Clandinin, 1990). In writing the narratives I have used the students' own language as much as possible so, for example, on page 73 I

write that 'Amneet arrives at university expecting be successful'. This is drawn from the actual transcript which states:

You see I had been to university in India before I came here. I was studying for a degree which I wasn't able to complete because I came here to get married. But I loved it. I made so many friends and just felt it was such a wonderful place to be. I just loved learning and being in a place where so many other people wanted to learn. So when I got the chance to go to university here I thought it would be the same. I had visions of myself being successful and gaining my degree.....

A fuller example of how I have done this is referred to above. This was important to me since, as Bauer (1996) argues, the 'perspective of the interviewee is best revealed in stories where the informant is using his or her own spontaneous language in the narration of events' (p.3). In addition, direct quotations from research participants have been added to enable the research participants to 'speak for themselves', and thus facilitate voice.

I recognise, however, that there may be a disjunction between each student's actual experienced meaning and the storied descriptions I present in the following chapters, as a consequence of:

The limits of language to capture the complexity and depth of experienced meaning ... the limits of reflection to bring notice to the layers of meaning that are present outside of awareness ... the resistance of people because of social desirability to reveal fully the entire complexities of the felt meanings of which they are aware, and ... the complexity caused by the fact that texts are often a co-creation of the interviewer and participant (Polkinghorne, 2007, p. 481).

However, I have tried to tell a story that the students would recognise. Nonetheless I recognise that the sense I have made of the students' stories is mine and not theirs.

My thematic analysis offered me the possibility of presenting my data in multiple ways. However, I have chosen to present it in chapters which cover gender, race, class and religion but which also focus on the intersectionality between each of these social groupings, and have done so for two reasons. First, as I have outlined in Chapter Two, this is one of the traditional ways in which studies on widening participation and diversity have been conducted, thus making it relatively easy to compare my findings with that of other researchers; and, second, because, as recent studies have highlighted,

there is a need for research that seeks to understand the intersections of 'classed, gendered, and racialised identity formations... in order to expose the complex operations of inequality within sites of lifelong learning' (Burke, 2011, p. 38).

During the students' interviews it was clear that they positioned themselves as belonging to particular social groups, such as race, gender, class and religion, as well as other social categories which have not been explored within the thesis, for example age, dis/ability, sexuality etc. When analysing the students' stories I was, therefore, constantly alert to the social categories that they themselves regarded as significant. Whilst being affiliated to a particular religious group was the reason for the students putting themselves forward for the study in the first place, during their interviews they also foregrounded other aspects of social categorisation. For example, as evidenced in Chapter Five, throughout her interviews Mandy constantly talks about aspects of gender (as woman/mother/daughter/wife) as does Amneet. Therefore their stories are included in Chapter Five. In contrast, neither Davina nor Dinah talk in any great detail about their gender. Therefore they are absent from the Chapter. In selecting which chapter to place the students' stories in, therefore, I drew on interviews wherein particular social category(ies) appeared of most significance to the narrator. In appendix B I have included a table indicating which students' stories appear in which particular chapters.

However, I recognise that no social category exists in isolation; rather each of these categories affect each other by supporting or competing with each other in a dynamic interplay, in both uneven and contradictory ways. Thus, as evidenced in Chapters Five and Six El-Feda describes himself in terms of both his gender (male/brother/son), as well as his race (Black/Black African/Black British), with his positioning of himself in terms of his gender, at times in conflict with his racial affiliation. Whilst I could have chosen to describe his experiences in terms of being a Black British-African Muslim man I believe that, whilst it would have made sense of his experiences, it limited my possibilities to compare his experiences with other students as he was the only Black British-African Muslim man. He was not, however, the only male, the only non-White, nor the only Muslim student. Presenting these social categories (gender, race, religion) separately, therefore, allowed me to draw broader comparisons of experiences across all the students.

In each of the following chapters, therefore, I present the stories told by the students before pulling together the threads and drawing comparisons between their experiences. I have, however, only presented the stories of thirteen students in this thesis, choosing not to draw on the stories told by Alex or Anna. Not only were their experiences relatively similar to Sean and Mandy's (presented in Chapters Five and Eight) but they also both described themselves as 'lapsed' in terms of their religion and did not have any particular sense of being 'religious'. I included them in the study because they were keen to participate. However, when I came to analysing their stories, unlike the other students, they did not particularly describe their experiences in relation to their race, gender or class, which also made including their stories problematic. The irony of not affording them the same voice as other students is not, however, lost on me and I recognise that I am somewhat guilty of the same poor practice of subjugating voice that I have accused others of.

Summary

In this chapter I have explored the different ways in which I could have approached my research and justified how my choices of NI and semi-structured interviews have enabled me to achieve my research aims and answer my research questions. I have also outlined some of the ethical and methodological challenges that I faced in conducting the research and, finally, I have provided a rationale for why I have chosen to analyse and present the students' stories in the ways that I have. In the next chapter I begin my analysis by using gender as a lens through which I explore the ways in which some religious students are 'positioned', or resist being positioned, as the 'other'.

Chapter Five Gender

Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to provide, from a gendered perspective, a more nuanced understanding of who fits in to higher education, and why some students may struggle to do so. In so doing, I draw attention to issues of caring, masculinity and the intersection between gender and familial responsibility, to highlight some of the complexities faced by religious students. I also highlight the capital accumulation strategies some students adopt in an attempt to position themselves, or resist being positioned, in relation to the 'other' (Bourdieu, 1984).

I begin by describing how Mandy, a working-class, mature mother who might be expected - in line with much of the widening participation literature - to struggle in higher education, succeeds in fitting in. I contrast Mandy's experiences with those of Amneet who, despite being middle-class, finds it impossible to fit in, and leaves at the end of her first semester. I then describe the strategies that working-class Sean adopts to negotiate what he regards as his 'rightful' place within higher education before, finally, exploring Tony's struggles to fit in despite being a White, middle-class male.

Mandy

Mandy is a 38 year old White, British, working-class, Christian woman studying for a degree in Criminology. She has been married twice and, since her second husband left her two years ago, she has been bringing up her four children, aged between nine and twenty, on her own. Mandy left school at 16 and, following in her father's footsteps, studied horticulture at FE College. However, after the birth of her children she undertook a series of low paid semi-skilled jobs simply to bring money into the household. At the point when she was less 'tied' to the home Mandy returned to college and took three 'A' levels, including 'A' level Law. She knew she did not want to become a lawyer but she 'wanted more' from life, and so, when she read about a degree course in Criminology being offered at the research site university, she enrolled in higher education. Mandy suffers with depression and other mental health illnesses which she notified the university about before commencing her studies and for which she is receiving support.

Mandy's first husband committed suicide when her second child was only a few weeks old; her second husband was an abusive alcoholic, and she had

not only to nurse him through various crises but also bring up her four children, developing in the process what might be termed a caring disposition towards others, which has informed her thinking, reflecting and acting over the last twenty years:

It's the first thing you think about in the morning, and then through the day, and you worry if they are not home when it's night and...because that's the most important thing. Are they ok, are they safe...and, even in lectures and stuff, part of your head isn't there.

Of late, however, Mandy's relationship with her eldest son has deteriorated to the point where she is unable to have him living at home. The 'failure' of her relationships with both her husbands and her son has caused Mandy to question her role as a wife, mother and carer and, whilst she is grateful that her own mother is now caring for her son, she feels a sense of loss that she is no longer able to do so:

You can't help but always wonder whether it was because of me that he did it [husband committed suicide] and whether I had done something wrong. And it was just two weeks after [son] was born. He was in my arms when I found out. I think he also feels maybe he was to blame too. It's been a terrible load for him to bear, his dad killing himself just after he was born. I think [son] blames himself and he blames me too and he has so much anger inside him which I haven't been able to deal with.

He [second husband] was always shouting at the children and though he was never violent to them he was to me and they saw that and I also think that was highly damaging. Eventually I got the strength to make him leave but...I do feel I let them down.

Part of Mandy's motivation for studying for a degree is not only to try and make her son realise there are alternatives other than unemployment open to him, but also to 'reclaim' a place in his life, act as a positive role model and, in her words 'make amends':

I had to make him move out because the atmosphere was so awful. He is now living with my mum but I see him most days. He doesn't work, he doesn't even sign on [for unemployment benefits]. He just lies in bed all day then gets up and goes out with his mates. He is just wasting his life. I want to make our relationship OK again. I want him to realise that it's possible to change your life, however late you leave it... I feel a tremendous sense of responsibility

towards him and I will keep trying but at the same time I also know that I've got to build my own life and it's now my time.

Mandy's loss of role as a mother to her son, despite maintaining a good relationship with her two daughters, has left 'a gap' in her life which she needed to fill. Her rationale for accessing university was that it would 'give me a goal and something to aim for'. Therefore, unlike the students in Reay's (2003) study for whom 'any sort of social life was invariably sacrificed...a paucity of time for 'care of the self' (p. 308), being a university student *is* Mandy's time for care of the self. Thus, whilst participation in higher education is a risky and uncertain 'choice' for many working-class students and frames their decisions whether to access higher education or not (Reay, 2003; Tett, 2004; Reay et al, 2005), for Mandy the risk is in *not* going to university:

However scary I am finding it at the moment it would be a lot worse if I hadn't come here. I was losing myself. My oldest daughter is at uni, my son is a mess, my two youngest are growing up. I was stuck in a dead-end job feeling like I had nothing to look forward to...I thought it [the course] was interesting, had so many possibilities, it was new start. Getting divorced, this was the way I wanted to go.

For Mandy, like Burke's (2004) White, working-class women undertaking Access courses, education is, therefore, not primarily a functional and utilitarian bridge into work, rather it is an opportunity to 'become'. Consequently Mandy is determined to concentrate on simply 'being' a university student, commenting that:

At the moment I'm not looking towards the future. Eventually I may work for the Probation Service but for the moment I just want to concentrate on the 'now', on being me, on enjoying every single second of being a student.

Finding time to study, is not a significant issue for Mandy, unlike for many other mature women students (Bowl, 2001; Reay et al, 2002), perhaps because her children are older and less demanding of her time. However, she does strip away as many other aspects of her life as she can to find the time and space to study: she commandeers an area of her house formerly used by her children to become her study, takes over ownership of the family's sole computer and gives up her part time job, moving the family on to benefits to free up time.

Despite these strategies, Mandy initially struggles to find what she describes as 'her niche' at university, not because she finds it difficult to fit into a

context that still 'privileges' male ways of thinking and knowing (Bowl, 2003) but because she struggles to form relationships with the other, much younger, women on the course:

I speak to quite a lot of the girls but outside or in lectures and seminars I'm finding I'm on my own. I don't mind that in some ways because I can go to the library and work and not get distracted. But at the same time it's sort of lonely.

As time progresses, however, Mandy begins to take on the role of a mentor to several of the younger students in her class. Drawing on her caring disposition, she begins to 'mother' them, and describes several incidences where the younger students have turned to her for both academic and personal support. She explains that:

I was in an environment with lots of younger people and I thought I would stick out like a sore thumb. But I don't and I've settled down now. The younger ones look after the older ones, there are some other mature students on the course, and we look after them. I feel like I am a mum to twenty new children and I love it when they look at me when the tutor asks a question, like they think I know all the answers. It's hilarious.

It is clear that Mandy possesses limited economic, cultural and social capital: she is on means tested benefits, she is 'first generation' into higher education, and bringing up her children alone has allowed her little time to develop social relationships or networks. However, as she builds her emotional attachment to the young students in her class, Mandy begins to build up 'emotional capital' (Nowotny, 1981; Reay, 2000) which she trades for social capital in the form of friendships, lunch meetings, invitations out in the evenings etc. as well as cultural capital, including help with academic activities, such as writing essays:

I've realised now that they can do more than grunt and they have realised I am more than just old. I can have a conversation with them, they are able to help me with the academic side of things which sometimes I am completely out of my depth with, like plagiarism stuff and then can get help from me. Like boyfriend advice: 'don't get married!'

It is clear that Mandy is far removed from being simply a repository for the different forms of capital acquired and deployed by men (Bourdieu 1988). Rather she is an accumulator of capital, albeit in a very specific form, in her own right and for her own purposes. As Mandy develops a closer

relationship with her fellow students, her relationships with her own children also begins to change:

My younger children think it's fantastic. They can really see a change in me. The younger ones ask me about what I'm learning. My 18 year old was having lots of problems, drinking and borrowing money, but since I started this he's started appreciating things more and maybe it's influencing him.

By the beginning of her second year Mandy has settled into university life, established strong relationships with her peers and re-established (to some degree) her relationship with her son. She talks about feeling 'settled', 'comfortable' and having a greater recognition of what she is able to 'contribute' to the university rather than simply take. She ends her final interview describing how she feels:

Sort of like things are in place. It's taken time and it certainly hasn't been easy but I'm there now, settled, stronger, secure and feeling like everything is behind me and everything is in front.

Finding that things are 'in place', however, is the exact opposite of Amneet's experiences of higher education.

Amneet

Amneet is a thirty two year old, middle-class, Sikh woman studying for a Youth and Community degree. She is married and lives at home with her husband and two school age children, and has many extended members of her family living either with or close to her. Amneet was born in India into a relatively wealthy family where she completed high school and started studying for a degree, which she describes as a 'wonderful' experience. She left at the end of her first year, however, when she moved to the UK to marry her husband.

Following her arranged marriage she worked for a few years in the family business but, with the birth of her first child, she stopped work to be at home, since, as she described, 'they [her children] are the most important things' in her life.

Once her children had gone to school, however, Amneet decided that she wanted to do more with her life and began to consider the idea of studying for a degree. She commented that she has always felt she 'missed out' on

her education and although she is happy in her marriage she does not feel she has achieved all that she has wanted to.

Like Mandy, through her relationships with her children, husband, mother-in-law and other members of her extensive extended family, Amneet has developed a habitus which disposes her to care for others, and which is integrally bound up in the complex amalgam of her past and present as a wife, mother and daughter-in-law:

My children are still young and need me; also my mother-in-law lives with us and she is elderly now and needs care. So I need to be nearby. I thought a lot about whether I could manage everything but I think I can cope. But I want to do this course. I think I have a lot to offer, not just to my family but also to my community, which is very important to me.

Feminist researchers have highlighted the ways in which the (female) 'self' is both connected to, and dependent on, others, frequently women, including the work performed 'back stage' by mothers, partners, secretaries, researchers etc. (Reay 2004b). Indeed, as Skeggs writes, 'the caring self is produced through care for others. It is generated through both self-production and self-denial. The selflessness required to be a caring self is a gendered disposition' (1997, p.64). Because of her ability, and willingness, to care for others in all aspects of her life to date, Amneet had been successful. In India, she was an academically successful, middle-class student with a wide circle of friends; in her time in the UK she has built up a significant network of friends and relatives, and has formed a close relationship with her husband who, she believes, respects and values her. Therefore, unlike Mandy who was concerned that she might find becoming a mature student 'challenging', Amneet arrives at university expecting to succeed and to form friendships. She enters higher education believing, based on her previous experiences, that she has sufficient social, cultural and emotional capital to be successful with her new milieu. However, she quickly finds that she has 'capital in a different currency' (Reay, 2002, p.406). Whilst her privileged position in India had ensured that she was both respected and included, within just a few days of arriving at university Amneet feels 'anxious', out of place, isolated, lonely and friendless:

I think part of the problem was arriving for Fresher's Week⁹ which was just bewildering. It just seemed like everyone was trying to arrange to go out drinking with as many people as they could, as often as they could, and I just couldn't join in.

Unlike Mandy who is similar to many of her female class-mates, with only her age marking her out as different, Amneet is unlike most of the other students on her course - in terms not only of age but also of race, class, dress, accent and educational background. She explains that:

When I was at university in India I was like everyone else.... clothes, language, customs, I fitted in. But here it is different. It's partly because I'm older although there are some other older students on the course and partly because I'm not from India but mainly it's because of how people behave...they are all really nice but I feel like they drink and party all the time rather than studying and they wear clothes that I don't really like. It would be ok if there was anyone else here like me but there isn't.

It is clear from the beginning that Amneet's language, accent, mannerisms, dress, ways of walking and non-verbal communication mark her out as different, functioning as negative symbolic capital (Bourdieu 1998, p.104). She comments that:

I have nothing to say to them. I sit by myself during lectures; I sit by myself during the breaks. No one is horrible to me but I feel they look at me as if I was from a different planet... I just feel different, in the wrong place, it isn't for me.

Amneet is bewildered that she faces such indifference from other women as she had assumed that shared gender would establish some form of connection with her peers. She has a close network of women in her life, including her mother-in-law, sisters-in-law, and other female members of her extended family and it is clear that she had expected her female student peers would also be part of an informal support network. She believes, however, that wearing a headscarf sets her apart from the other women; 'as if wearing a headscarf means I am an alien'. She also believes that her peers see her solely in terms of 'difference' and that this difference means she is regarded as 'of less value'.

⁹ Freshers' Week usually begins the week before the official term starts and before 2nd and 3rd year students arrive back. The week is designed to slowly introduce students to their new environment through a week of introductions and entertainment.

Amneet is acutely aware that she will be involved in group work activities in the near future and is worried that she will either hold the group back or that they won't want to join her:

I just have that horrible vision of being the last person to be chosen to be part of a group, or worse, being put into a group where no one wants me, of being forced on them.

Unlike Mandy who, initially, was not sure what she had to offer other students, Amneet arrived at university believing that she had 'lots to offer', particularly as the course she is studying for 'talks about diversity and multiculturalism and working with children from different ethnic backgrounds'. It appears, however, that neither Amneet's peers, nor her tutors, 'accept' the particular forms of community cultural wealth (Yosso, 2005) that she brings with her, for example her ability to speak multiple languages (linguistic capital), to successfully move between countries (navigational capital) and build a successful life in a new country (resilient capital). She comments that:

I speak three different languages, I've been brought up in another country...but it just seems that what they [the tutors] say and what they do are completely different things.

In consequence, Amneet is unable to '...wield the power, and influence, and thus to exist, in the field under consideration' (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992, p. 98).

Whilst, as Mandy's story evidences, different forms of capital can be acquired or transformed as a consequence of new experiences (Bourdieu 1986; Longden 2004; Reay 2004c), this not only takes time but is also dependent on those 'defenders' of existing cultural capital neither circumscribing the extent to which capital can be transformed, nor undermining the conditions for its formation (Olneck, 2000). Unlike Mandy's peers who come to see her as a useful resource and are willing to 'trade' capital with her, Amneet's, however, do not.

One of the major differences between the two women is that Mandy is able to socialise with her fellow students and enjoys doing so. Amneet, in contrast, cannot since, as a Sikh, she cannot socialise in places where alcohol is served. It may be that, had Amneet remained at the university, she would have gained 'new' or other forms of capital which might have made her more 'acceptable' to the other women on the course. However, instead, she chooses leave the university at the end of her first semester.

Sean, in contrast who also faces challenges, does not allow himself to be 'othered'; rather he positions his peers as the 'other' and himself as the 'worthy inheritor' (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1990) of higher education.

Sean

Sean is a 26 year old, White, British, working-class Christian man brought up in a 'run down, dump' of an inner city area. He left school at 16 with few qualifications and joined the army, serving for four years. In many ways, Sean is similar to those white working-class young men in a study by Quinn et al (2006) study who:

Live in areas of low opportunity, low confidence and low expectations, where they are still being channelled into conventional, masculine occupations even when this may lead nowhere (p. 748).

However, Sean is unequivocal that his decision to leave school was based on his 'laziness. I couldn't be bothered to work for my exams or to stay on. I wanted to see the world' and not because of either a lack of confidence or of opportunities. After serving his time, Sean left the army, took a low paid job in banking, married and had a child. Frustrated with his inability to progress in his career without formal qualifications, and concerned about his need to provide for his family, he decided to study for a degree in the hope of 'bettering' himself. Since he lives locally and did not have 'A' levels, he regarded the research site university as his only realistic place to study and, after consideration, enrolled for a two-year Higher National Diploma (HND) in Business Management.

Sean shares his daughter's childcare with his wife and this commitment prevents him from accessing many of the social activities provided by the university. Once his lectures are completed, he needs to return home so that his wife can go to work. However, unlike many other students with caring responsibilities who arrive, sit in lectures and go home without participating in any social aspects of university life (Redmond, 2006), Sean decides from the outset that if he can't participate in activities within the university he will 'bring the university to me'. He therefore encourages other students he has met to visit him at home and at his local pub, and to join the same Sunday League football team that he plays in. Thus, whilst unable to have some of the opportunities his peers have, Sean works around and through the structural exigencies of his life, and in so doing ensures that the sites of higher education and home both overlap and complement each other.

Whilst Sean's decision to share childcare with his wife makes him somewhat unusual in his working-class neighbourhood, he rationalises this in purely economic terms and is comfortable with his working-class masculinity (Burke, 2007). In this he is helped by the fact that he is older than many of his peers, has proved himself in another life (as a soldier), and because he socialises through sport and drinking. Thus his masculinity is fairly secure.

Sean is aided by his experiences of serving in the armed forces, which have developed in him an ability to move more easily between different fields (home, active overseas service, UK postings) than others might do, managing formal and informal relationships depending on context:

To be honest I never think much about it [where he is]. I just get on with it, talk to everyone, try to just muck in, get on.

Although both Sean and his wife work, he sees it as his responsibility to financially support his family. He describes his father as having worked hard all his life (his mother did not work) and feels a strong sense of pride in being part of a working-class cultural narrative of the 'hard-working' male provider:

My role as a father and a husband; I take that really importantly. I have responsibilities to them. My wife works and we share childcare so it's not like everything falls to me but I have commitments. I see it as my role to provide for them.

Thus, despite having considered himself academically lazy at school, and unlike some working-class men who find even the notion of university a challenge to their working-class masculinity (Quinn et al, 2006), Sean is determined to work hard and get good results. The apparent contradiction between his attitude towards school and university can be explained by his failure to progress in his career and his subsequent recognition of university as a route to economic success. Contrary to those working-class male students in Burke's (2007) study, however, who connected being a student to being 'higher class' and having social status, Sean has no sense of higher education being a route to social mobility. He has no intention of moving away from his working-class community, nor does he regard gaining a university qualification as offering a route to 'respectability' (Burke, 2007). Instead, gaining a degree offers him a significantly better opportunity to provide economically for his family.

Unlike those students, therefore, for whom undertaking a degree is a form of self-development, and who regard getting a 'lower' degree as akin to 'failure' (Redmond, 2006), Sean regards the gaining of a 'good degree' as positional - the higher degree classification he achieves, the better his chances of getting a well-paid job. To accomplish this, from the outset Sean becomes an 'exam hound' (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1990), seeking out strategies that will help him achieve his goals and building the academic capital which he recognises he 'lacks' by, for example, drawing on the resources of the university to help develop his academic writing skills. However, he also makes an appointment with his academic tutor to discuss how to achieve the best possible marks in one particular module, only to be told:

He said, 'what's the point, Sean? It's a pass/fail module so you might as well just enough to pass'. I couldn't believe it. I want to get a First and how is that going to be possible if I am not given the right guidance to get good marks now? What does it matter if it's a pass/fail module? I still want to pass well.

Sean's notion of himself as a 'hard-working' male and as a 'provider' is deeply affected by the comments made by his tutor and engenders in him a dislocation between his individual habitus and what he regards as the habitus of the institution, embodied in one particular member of staff.

Sean also feels a sense of dis-identification with some of his student peers, not because he is 'struggling' to integrate his notions of class and masculinity within his identity as a participant in higher education, but because he considers (many of) the other students to be immature, bigoted or ignorant. In particular, Sean regards the middle-class, 'privileged', students in his class to be extremely 'lazy' and he is frustrated by how many of them turn up late or produce work of a low standard. He considers being at university a 'privileged' opportunity and finds it difficult to understand how some students are 'simply squandering their time away'. He is particularly condemnatory of those 'middle-class' students who have 'found everything in life easy' but who still 'can't be bothered to work'. He finds their 'laziness' 'immature and pointless':

I just don't understand them. I don't get it. Why are they there? What is the point? It's like they couldn't think of anything else to do except go to university. They are lazy and mindless.

Sean also dislikes some of the younger students on his course; he regards them not only as timewasters but also as highly disrespectful towards the lecturers. He recognises that serving in the army has drilled a sense of respect for authority and discipline into him which he is aware that others may not have; nonetheless he regards their behaviour as wholly unacceptable:

It's like they just don't feel the need to bother. There's this one lad, he just never turns up, and when he does he just sits at the back just messing around with him mates, texting and laughing.

Sean also has an extremely strong dis-identification with many of his international student peers, particularly the male Black African students. He views himself as being 'a very tolerant open minded' person; however, some of these students hold beliefs which are antithetical to his and which make him deeply uncomfortable. He describes their 'male posturing' and talks about their sexist and homophobic attitudes, including discussions about 'the evils of' homosexuality which he finds repellent and distasteful. He has been involved in group work activity with some of these students and is deeply critical of their views:

They are ignorant people who don't understand what they are being taught, and they relate everything to their experiences which is often as a poor villager in Africa and so they can't see the bigger picture at all.

On occasion Sean has challenged these students' views on race, religion or gender which has caused him to be regarded, by some, as a 'racist'. He also recognises that some of his views are also out of kilter with those of his working-class male friends, particularly his distaste of sexist jokes, which has led on occasions to accusations of prudishness. However, whilst Sean's dispositions have the potential to position him as the 'outsider', he considers that his maturity and hard-working attitude position him instead as the worthy 'inheritor of higher education' (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1990). Thus, his classed and gendered identities remain secure and he feels little sense of the struggle to remain, and belong, in higher education that might have been expected. Tony, in contrast, both struggles and feels insecure throughout his first year.

Tony

Tony is a White, middle-class, eighteen year old male, passionate about sport and training to be a PE teacher, who might be expected to fit easily into higher education. However, Tony has never assumed that he would do anything other than struggle. He was brought up in a household in which his parents were not active church goers but he started attending Church as a teenager and then became a 'committed' Christian towards the end of secondary school. This 'conversion' created significant conflicts with his friends as he 'changed from being Tony, to Tony 'the Christian'.. [and] they couldn't accept it'. The difficulties he encountered with his friends led him to believe, from the outset, that the transition into higher education might not be an easy one:

I read a book before I came about going to university... coping strategies...you have to draw your guidelines straight away, wear your colours on your sleeve, state what you're comfortable with, don't get involved.

Like Sean, Tony finds it difficult to integrate with his peers. He is living in student accommodation which he finds particularly difficult. Although all the other students in his flat are male, and many are interested in sport, he feels he has nothing in common with them, and feels a strong sense of distaste towards their behaviour:

I'm struggling in terms of one flat mate who is sleeping around a lot with the girls in the block. I just have really strong views about that and it makes me feel really uncomfortable.

Tony explains that, because he rarely drinks, never smokes and does not wish to have sex before marriage he is regarded as 'peculiar'. Whilst he considers himself to be 'flexible...able to fit in', he feels that his flatmates constantly position him as the 'other' by refusing to change their own behaviour:

There's lots of waking me up in the morning coming in drunk. I've tried to explain that I have early morning lectures but they just don't seem to care. They bang around the flat and smoke even though they aren't supposed to and there's loud music.

Although he, initially at least, continues to try and join in with male-oriented activities he finds it frustrating that he is continually pressurised to 'act the lad'. He, therefore, increasingly, chooses to distance himself from the other

students on his course, or, when required to join in, takes part only in those social occasions which he feels comfortable with:

Sometimes I've been in social situations where I don't feel comfortable, like we went on a climbing weekend and they mixed up the dorms so they were male and female and there was a big party where everyone got drunk. I try and avoid those situations.

Tony believes that his fellow students feel 'threatened by being with someone who seems like them [male, sporty] but isn't'. However, he remains adamant that he will not change his own behaviour to 'go out and get drunk and act more like them'. Instead he joins a group who:

Go out on a Saturday night where students are doing the XXX [long pub crawl] and we hand out burgers and water and try and talk to people, sometimes even when they are face down in the gutter and try and explain that they don't have to behave like this, that there are other ways to live your life than getting drunk all the time.

Summary

Each of the individuals whose stories are presented above is actively engaged in creating, or trying to create, their social worlds. However, the ways in which the male students experience higher education is significantly different to the female students.

For the male students, issues of masculinity arise continually, centred on sex, drinking and sport. Whilst Sean is, to some extent, positioned as different because of his willingness to work hard and behave 'responsibly', through his participation in football and drinking he remains part of a highly masculine student culture. In addition, rather than trying to 'fit in' with those he disdains, he positions himself as superior, and in so doing reinforces his own sense of working-class masculinity. Tony, on the other hand, who eschews the types of socialising that his younger male peers are involved in, finds himself firmly positioned as 'different', and, rather than building the forms of capital which might have enabled him to fit in, but which he regards as 'unacceptable' he eventually chooses to form social relationships away from the university.

Issues of familial responsibility are also played out in different ways depending on gender. Whilst Sean sees himself very much as the working-class male provider, caring stays firmly located within the home; thus he is able to keep the two parts of his life separate. For Mandy and Amneet,

however, caring is 'part of who they are', reflecting Bourdieu's belief in the absolute naturalisation of caring (Bourdieu, 2001). Therefore, whilst Mandy initially struggles to fit in because of her age, over time she draws on her caring disposition to form more equal relationships with her peers, offering them emotional capital and in return gaining social and academic capital and thus equality of status. In so doing she revalidates her sense of value as a mother and thus her gendered identity is strengthened.

Amneet, in contrast, does not possess the forms of capital which are of value within the institution. She is therefore unable to use the cultural and community capital that she does possess as currency within the field. Consequently she remains isolated and 'othered', eventually choosing to withdraw from the university. For Amneet, her failure to integrate also leads her to question her relationships with other women and the ways in which women do, or do not, choose to care for and support each other.

It is clear, however, that gendered relations and gendered identities are only part of what is being 'played out' here; the students' stories also highlight the ways in which gender intersects with class and race. In the next two chapters I, therefore, focus on race and then class, to explore in particular the importance of both individual and institutional habitus in positioning students as the 'other'.

Chapter Six Race

Introduction

The aim of this Chapter is to explore how the habituses of students from different racial, and gendered, backgrounds already shaped by an amalgam of racism, familial demands, trauma and intolerance continue to be shaped by their experiences in higher education. In particular I highlight the ways in which the habitus can be 'fractured' (Bourdieu, 1979), and the implications this can have for students trying to 'fit in'. I also focus on the ways in which some students 'other', or are 'othered' by their peers, as well as the tension that can exist between students and an institutional habitus (Thomas, 2002) which may appear not to embrace diversity.

I begin by describing the experiences of El-Feda, a mature student originally from East Africa, who struggles to integrate his African and British identities, and his familial responsibilities, with his desire to be a student. I compare his experiences with those of Imran, a young refugee from Pakistan, who also feels that he belongs 'between two worlds'. Finally, I highlight how Aisha, a young British-Pakistani woman educated in the UK and living at home with her family, struggles to form friendships at the university.

El-Feda

El-Feda is a 33 year old Black British-African Muslim male studying for a degree in Politics. He was born in East Africa but came to the United Kingdom as a young child. His father became heavily involved with his local mosque but left the UK after clashing with the Imam over the conduct of the 1st UK-Iraq war, leaving the family behind without any financial support. El-Feda was forced to leave school and take on financial responsibility for his family, and for the last decade he has worked extremely long hours for a local company, the staff of which he describes as both 'racist' and 'bigoted' and who he clearly resents:

At work most people are White. I am Black and am different...I have to dumb down my language and make sexist jokes and talk in a broad Yorkshire accent to be able to take part in any conversation at all. And at work like if someone asks me a politics question I'll start to answer and they'll say 'oh El's off again' and a couple of my friends will say 'why are you trying to explain?' They haven't got the intelligence.

Through his hard work El-Feda has supported both his brother and older sister through university, including funding his brother's Master's degree. However, whilst he has an extremely pronounced sense of familial obligation, he has also developed what he describes as a 'deep resentment' towards his family, in particular his father and his brother:

I had no choice. There was only me to do it...my brother thinks that everything will just come to him in life. He isn't like me, he hasn't had to struggle. I would have loved someone to have paid for me to go to university at 18 but there was no choice. I'm 33 years old and I should have my own family. But it is still all down to me until my little sister has been married...but I will still have to take care of my mother.

It's up to me to support them...I've paid for my brother and my sister to go to university and I supported them throughout because I didn't want them to have to work part time and struggle...my mum I drive her everywhere she needs to go because she is afraid of the buses. And I translate for her because she can't speak English, so like if there's a parents evening at my little sister's school I have to go there too because she wouldn't understand.

Unlike Sean, therefore, El-Feda does not have a particular sense of pride in being a 'working-class', male provider. Rather he knows that had his father remained in the UK he would have been brought up in a significantly more affluent, middle-class environment and the 'burden' of financial responsibility would not have fallen to him alone. Instead, caring for others is something that has been imposed on El-Feda and remains a source of great resentment. He is frustrated by his mother's refusal to integrate and learn English and his brother's laissez-faire attitude towards life. His inclination is to abandon them to 'get on with it' but his sense of duty and obligation, integral parts of his habitus, over-ride such desires.

An additional complexity, however, is that five years ago El-Feda's father re-made contact and the following year El-Feda was reunited with him at his home in East Africa. There he found that his father had become extremely successful and, as his father's son, El-Feda was expected to be equally so. His father was highly critical of many of the choices El-Feda had made, particularly his 'failure' to get a degree and El-Feda realised that gaining his father's approval (and that of his East African extended family) would only be possible if he did so:

If I went back [to live] it would be 'what have you been doing for the last thirty years?'...so I felt I couldn't have any self-worth if I didn't get a degree...[my father is] tolerant and open and as long as I pray and get my degree well he says the rest can come afterwards.

In El-Feda the two 'clashing' worlds which he subsequently attempts to navigate between, give rise to what Bourdieu calls a 'fractured habitus' (Bourdieu, 1979), a form of cultural dualism in which the 'dispositions and ideologies corresponding to different economic structures...coexist... in the same individuals' (Bourdieu, 1979, p. 3). Caught between two opposing sets of parental expectations - to get a degree and become successful (middle-class, highly educated father) and to continue to provide socially and economically for his family (working-class, uneducated mother) - he makes the decision to enrol in higher education whilst continuing to work as many hours as he can. Whilst he is aware of the structural limitations (such as timetables, assessment deadlines, family imperatives and student loan requirements) which inhibit his choices and his possibilities, he has:

Worked it all out, going part time, going back to live at home [he previously had his own flat] so I can afford university and still support my mum, working weekends so I can make lectures...I would love to stay living by myself but I can't afford it. But living back home, well, it wasn't what I wanted.

Thus, El-Feda continues to work to fulfil his financial obligations whilst following an educational path which he believes will satisfy his father and 'make him proud'. However, he is constantly reflecting both on his actions (to work or study) and his identity (as a Black British man, Black-African, son, brother etc.), referring on multiple occasions to the struggle this causes him and the sense of 'failure' this engenders:

I get torn between doing the right thing all the time. I just feel whatever I do I am failing. If I'm working I'm not studying but I can't study and not support my family. If I go out drinking I feel like I'm doing things my father wouldn't want.

On arrival at the University, El-Feda believes that he has found a place where 'I can be myself'. He initially describes the university as 'inclusive' and 'tolerant', commenting that he feels a sense of alignment between his own views, values and orientation and that of the university; that is, between his individual habitus and the habitus of the institution. He is particularly enthusiastic that the university appears willing to challenge racism, citing an

example of how, in one particular, lecture the tutor confronted a group of students who were endorsing only employing white people:

He [the tutor] was willing to challenge openly and in front of the group ... and others in the group really stood up for me and my views, even though I couldn't say anything in case people thought I was 'playing the race card'. The way he stood up for me, well I have felt comfortable here from the beginning as a Black person, but that made me really happy.

Over time, however, El-Feda becomes increasingly disillusioned. He comes to believe that what he had regarded as an institutional habitus of tolerance, respect and a desire to effect social change is actually limited to only some individuals. He criticises other academic staff for providing little room for debate on some of the politics modules, and for allowing a 'very westernised' perspective on politics to prevail. He also regards many of the White students on his course as lazy, and 'un-political' (despite studying politics), and, like Sean, he develops a particular disdain for the Black African students he has met. He had expected to form close relationships with such students because of their shared cultural heritage; however, he quickly categorises them into three types:

The kind who have hassled their way into the country and are putting themselves through university. They are single minded and opinionated; rich Africans whose parents are part of the elite and part of the problem; and the ones sent by their government. The political philosophy is ingrained in them. They are part of the problem since the African way is 'if you're not with us then you are against us'. They don't really have any consideration of any other perspectives.

In particular, El-Feda feels 'disillusioned' and 'disappointed' that he is unable to effect any change in either other students' political outlooks or engender more political activism across his peer group. He plans to set up a Black Politics group but changes his mind.

By semester two, El-Feda has fallen behind with his academic work, failing some of his assessments, and increasingly comes to believe that, despite the diversity rhetoric of the institution, only certain forms of capital are valorised, such as high-level academic literacy:

It's like nothing I've done before I came here counts for anything. It's like no-one [staff] can get their heads round the fact that I'm in my thirties, that I've had a life before I came here. Ok, I might not be able to write like an academic

but it doesn't mean I can't think, or that I have nothing to contribute.

Within a year El-Feda is also no longer sure that he wants to study Politics. He has come to believe that his father may actually be part of the same 'problem' that he had hoped to change:

My dad knows the president of [X] who has been indicted by the international criminal court. Do I want to work with that sort of regime or work to change it? [and] if I do try and change things, well how safe would I be?...Corruption is the main thing I want to change but if you want to make changes in Africa you might be seen as a trouble maker.

By his second year, therefore, El-Feda's desire to achieve a degree in Politics to make his father 'proud' has disintegrated. However, unlike Imran, El-Feda decides to remain in higher education to complete his degree.

Imran

Imran became a refugee when he was 12, fleeing from his native Pakistan to the UK with his mother and five siblings. He has been in the UK for five years, where he has attended both secondary school and FE College. His brother and sister are both at university in the city where he lives and Imran had hoped to follow them. However, the only institution that would offer him a place is the research site institution which is sixty miles from his home. Although the university is willing to offer him accommodation his mother refuses to let him move away.

Imran describes his feelings of being 'pulled' in different directions and trying to please 'everyone'. It is evident that he hasn't felt a clear sense of identity since he left Pakistan. He talks about not belonging anywhere, being divided and having spilt loyalties, explaining that:

It's like I am made of all these different pieces, I'm Pakistani, living in England, I'm studying [here] and living in Manchester, I have my family there, friends here, there is home, there is the course.... it's as if I am torn into lots of pieces and although all of it is me, none of it is.

Imran's habitus is marked by both his Pakistani and his British identity and, although he is adamant that he will never return to Pakistan, at the same time he does not feel British, so he does not feel he has a country to call 'home'.

I am still feeling a level of confusion, it all happened so quickly. I was a Pakistani boy and now I am here in England. And I can't go back there ever but my heart isn't here. So I am here but not here. It's like being pulled back to a place you can never go.

It is clear that Imran adores his mother, feels protective towards her and wants to support both her and his younger siblings. At the same time he would like to move away and begin a new life. Caught between being the dutiful son and having a 'proper' university experience, Imran describes his sense of being 'torn':

I think she's afraid that something bad will happen. She wants all of us nearby.... And I understand that but it means that I'm not like the other students here. I wanted so much to be a student and I am. But I'm also not a proper one.

When Imran started at university it was with high expectations of the friends he would make. He had studied at a multicultural FE college, where he had made friends with people from many different backgrounds and expected that it would be the same at university:

I've never looked at faith or race to make friends – otherwise I'd only make friends with Pakistani Muslims. I want to make friends with all sorts of people ... I've always been in multicultural groups. I like making friends with different groups and I've never had problems fitting in.

From the outset, however, Imran describes the 'struggle' he has trying to make friends. He does not regard himself as an international student despite having grown up in Pakistan. However, he complains that he is being pushed into socialising only with other 'foreign' students and is frustrated at his failure to integrate. Although some of the difficulties he has in making friends with UK students are because, as a Muslim, he cannot socialise through drinking, he also describes feeling 'foreign' and 'different', and consequently excluded and rejected. Since Imran speaks fluent English he does not feel this can be the cause of his lack of integration, rather he believes that his race, religion and experiences of being a refugee create a distance between him and his peers. He describes feeling immensely frustrated that he is not easily accepted by his peers and believes that his religion 'stands in the way' all the time. He cites an instance of a conversation taking place between several of his student peers and, when he tries to join in, they change the subject. Afterwards he asks one of them

why they did, and is told that it's because they worry they may offend him. This upsets him since, as he explains:

I don't want to feel different. I am Pakistani but I'm also British and I want to fit in. I wish people would just accept me for who I am, look past my skin colour, see the real me. I wish people would stop seeing the barriers.

Imran is increasingly, reflexively, aware that his dress, his accent, his opinions and his beliefs are at odds with his peers and that he does not fit in to the field in which he has chosen to be. Consequently his habitus is no longer operating at an unconscious level, rather it has become:

A habitus divided against itself, in constant negotiation with itself and its ambivalence, and therefore doomed to a kind of duplication, to a double perception of self, to successive allegiances and multiple identities (Bourdieu, 1999, p. 511).

In addition, unlike El-Feda who (initially at least) believes that the university is willing to tackle racism, Imran believes that it is not. Indeed he feels that some of the reasons he is being kept at a distance relate to racism, which he feels is all around him but never discussed. He is particularly critical that there is little room for dialogue and discussion of race across the university, commenting that:

When the situation with Jonathan Ross¹⁰ happened so many people complained but when something happens to people like us no one complains. The only time it's really been talked about a lot is all the stuff about Shilpa Shetty and Big Brother¹¹. I was glad then that people were talking about racism... [here] it's just never talked about. It's like everyone thinks that if it isn't talked about then it isn't happening.

Within a few months of arrival at the University, Imran has 'given up' on the idea of trying to make friends with White students and is socialising predominantly with other Pakistanis and Muslims who, he believes, are more accepting of the forms of community cultural capital (Yosso, 2005) that he brings with him to the university:

In the end you just want to be with people who accept you for what you are, so that you don't have to pretend any

¹⁰ Along with Russell Brand, Jonathan Ross was suspended by the BBC for making 'lewd' phone calls to the granddaughter of the actor Andrew Sachs live on air.

¹¹ Shilpa Shetty is an Indian film actress and model who, during her time on the television programme 'Celebrity Big Brother', was allegedly a target of racism.

more. I haven't been through everything I've been through just to end up being someone else than who I really am. And they [my friends] know that I've lots to offer because of what I've been through and they like me for that.

At the end of his first year, having finally been accepted at a university closer to his family home, Imran decides to leave the university. Aisha, in contrast remains at the university, despite experiencing very similar struggles to Imran.

Aisha

Aisha is an 18 year old British Pakistani woman studying for a degree in Law and living at home with her parents and siblings. She has a wide circle of friends in her local neighbourhood, from many different religious and ethnic backgrounds; she has also been actively involved in a range of extra-curricular activities at school and, through her family, is heavily involved in faith and community-based activities. She describes herself as 'constantly on the go' and, like Imran, she arrives at the university with an extremely keen sense of wanting to experience all aspects of university life. However, just a few weeks into her course she describes her frustration with her failure to make friends:

People want to make friends quickly. They live in halls and go off drinking and clubbing but I can't do that. And there's no other way for us to socialise or meet each other. There's no way to make friends.

Like Amneet in the previous chapter, Aisha also feels positioned by the other students as different, primarily because of her appearance - she wears a headscarf and the shalwar kameez¹² - although as she comments, this did not prevent her making friends with White students at school. She also believes that her failure to form friendships with White students is because she rarely encounters them outside the classroom and she is frustrated that the university does not actively intervene to support the development of such relationships:

The tutors don't do much to develop social relations; they should do a lot more. I expected so much more. It's such a big university and I thought there'd be staff setting up things for all sorts of students and not just to go clubbing or to balls. I knew it would take a long time to settle in but I have

¹² Traditionally worn in Pakistan, the Shalwar is a loosely-fit pyjama-like pair of trousers; the kameez is a long shirt.

to make such a lot of effort to find things to do and make friends and I keep ringing round and trying and maybe people like me just give up and go away. I just don't belong.

At the end of her first year, Aisha becomes engaged to her boyfriend. Her decision to get engaged is arises from a familial habitus which places marriage above career and she describes how:

You know it's like that's what we want, my family and me. It's important to get married, be secure. It's not like I'm not going to work, it's just that work isn't always going to be the most important thing. Family is. And one day we want our own.

However, Aisha's choice to get engaged is also driven by the fact that, through his large, extended family, she extends her social networks significantly, as well as gaining a greater level of freedom that she believes will come with being first a fiancée and then a wife. She comments that:

The main thing is that we can't be boy and girl friends. The point of getting married is so that we can be together. We don't want to settle down and have kids but we do want to stop being secretive. Having [a] religious ceremony will allow that.

In response to her failure to build social capital within the institution, Aisha, therefore, turns further away from the university, socialising either with her fiancé, at the city's other university which is much larger and provides significantly more non-alcohol related opportunities, or with her friends from school, commenting that:

I feel disappointed that the university has let me down...I'm just tending to stay with my friends from X, the friends I went to school with; people at uni socialise more with people in their halls, and also my friends at home are much more accepting of me and who I am.

Aisha is also critical of the university's attitude towards her as a student lawyer. Her decision to study Law was driven by a desire to effect change since she believes that:

The people participating in the legal system are a certain type of person and it should be more diverse. It affects how we are governed and it shouldn't just be a certain type of people of a certain ethnicity and social class.

However, from the outset, she describes what she considers to be the 'hypocrisy' of staff who encourage students from different backgrounds to come to the university but then treat them badly:

In one seminar I had a really horrible tutor and even if you made an effort to go she made you feel awful if you needed help and I thought 'why should I come if you are just going to be horrible'...it's like they feel they are doing you this great big favour just by being there. You shouldn't have to feel bad. I was making an effort but I wasn't understanding things so I stopped going for a month 'cos I felt stupid.

Unlike Amneet and Imran, Aisha remains on her course. However by the end of her first year she is attending the university almost solely for her lectures.

Summary

The students' stories I have told in this chapter highlight the ways in which the habitus continues to be shaped by experiences and, for some, may result in their habitus becoming 'fractured' (Bourdieu, 1979), which can have significant implications for students trying to 'fit in'.

Their stories also highlight the ways in which students may be 'othered' both by their peers and by an institutional habitus (Thomas, 2002) perceived to be unaccepting of difference. Both Aisha and Amneet (whose story was told in the previous chapter) are 'othered' by their student peers because, they believe, of the way they dress, and they are 'othered' by the institution which does not provide opportunities for them to integrate. However, their stories also illustrate the complexity of 'othering', by drawing attention to the ways in which El-Feda, for example, as with Sean in the previous chapter, positions some students as racially 'other' and thus not 'us'.

For all three of these students in this chapter, gender is also significant: Aisha, and Amneet, make choices (career, marriage) which are highly informed by their 'duties' and responsibilities as Asian women; El-Feda and Imran are torn between being the 'dutiful' son (and brother) and male provider and making the break from home and responsibilities. They both have fathers who are absent, and both feel the weight of familial responsibility, which detracts from their ability to study. This, along with their sense that they do not fully fit into either their home countries or the UK, results in a 'destabilized habitus' (Bourdieu 2000, p. 160).

In addition, the complexities of class positioning are also evident, for example in the ways in which El-Feda resents being a 'working-class' male provider and feels a sense of loss of his position as the son of a respected, middle-class community leader. In the next chapter, therefore, I focus more specifically on class, re-visiting Tony's 'struggle' from Chapter Five, as well highlighting the experiences of three further students.

Chapter Seven Class

Introduction

In this Chapter I use class as a lens through which to highlight how some White, middle-class students, rather than being 'fish in water' Bourdieu (1990a, p.163), are 'othered' by their peers, whilst some working-class students, who might be expected to 'feel the weight of the water' (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992, p. 127), find it significantly easier to fit in. In doing so, I re-emphasise the role that both capital and individual and institutional habitus can play in 'othering' students.

I start by comparing Gary's experiences as a White middle-class male who succeeds in fitting in, with Tony, previously described in Chapter Five, who does not. I then draw attention to the experiences of working-class Alex, whose is able to transcend issues of class through shared participation in a particular interest, but then chooses a lifestyle which separates him from his friends. I conclude by highlighting the ways in which middle-class Davina finds belonging through 'mattering', but outside of the institution and not as a mainstream higher education student.

Gary

Gary is a 22 year old, Christian man who spent two years at a music college before entering higher education. He is an only child brought up in a close, middle-class family and had what he called a 'typical' middle-class upbringing, which revolved around playing music and being part of a range of clubs and societies. He originally intended to follow in his parents' footsteps and become a teacher but changed his mind whilst volunteering at a radio station and is now 'pursuing his passion'.

As with the middle-class students in research by Crozier et al (2008a), Gary had been well prepared for university, brought up in a culture of certainty and entitlement (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1990) to access higher education. Both Gary's family and his school set the expectation in him that he would go to university, and thus his decision to do so is part of a normal middle-class biography (Reay, 2010). Although Gary takes some time deciding what to study and ultimately has two 'gap years' post-music college, he never doubted that he would go. As he explains:

It was sort of just assumed, by them [parents] and school and by me, mostly, although I didn't let anyone push me into

doing anything I didn't want to. But it's the only real way to get to where you want to go isn't it.

Thus Gary who makes no secret of his desire to be successful is, like many of his middle-class peers, in the 'pursuit of advantage and the defence of distinction' (Reay, 2010, p. 77).

Once at university, Gary's experiences of higher education are also similar to many other White middle-class males. He settles quickly into university life, making friends, joining a couple of societies and starting to play in a band, commenting that he makes friends:

Really easily, always have done and here was no different. I get on with everyone. I think I'm easy to get on with too because I'm very open and honest.

For Gary the transition into higher education is relatively seamless. This is not only because he possesses requisite social and cultural capital, but also because there is both harmony and continuity between his middle-class habitus, the middle-class goals of his family and friends, and the habitus of the institution and thus he 'fits in'. As he explains:

I feel completely comfortable that I could express my views. I'm comfortable with who I am, comfortable with myself. I really feel that I can be me here.

Consequently, by being in higher education, Gary's habitus, the product of his social conditioning and of his history, is reinforced and augmented. He gets on well with the academic staff and although he has found the workload onerous at times he has comfortably passed all his assessed work and is aiming for a First. He considers that his studies:

Have made me more organised, more motivated, more driven; I know exactly what I want to do now, and how to get what I want, and I'm driven to find every opportunity which will help me achieve.

In addition, in line with many other middle-class students (see for example research by Crozier et al, 2008a and b), Gary also understands the academic rules of 'the game' (Bourdieu 1990b). He describes how he approaches his academic work, by writing what he believes the lecturers want to hear rather than what he might necessarily choose to write were 'the game' different:

You have to quickly work out what it is they [the lecturers] want. It's, like, there are rules that you have to understand

about what counts, and then make sure you do what's needed. Like getting a good mark for an assignment, you sit with the marking sheet [criteria] and work out 'what will get me a First?'

To all intents and purposes therefore, Gary is indeed akin to Bourdieu's 'fish in water', fitting in, being both socially and academically successful and, as he puts it, 'thriving' at university. However, as highlighted in Chapter Five, this could not be further from how Tony, also a White, middle-class male, experiences higher education.

Tony

Like Gary, Tony grew up in a family of high achievers and assumed from a relatively young age that he would go to university. Like many other middle-class students (Crozier et al, 2008a and b), getting a degree is part of Tony's life plan:

My parents are teachers, my sister is a teacher and from an early age I knew that I wanted to teach. And you can't teach unless you get a degree.

Whilst Bourdieu acknowledged the potentially destabilising effect that movement across or between fields can bring (see McNay, 2000), the overarching supposition is that moving from one middle-class field to another will be relatively seamless, as indeed other research with middle-class students has suggested (Reay et al, 2001; Thomas, 2002,; Crozier et al, 2008 a and b). Unlike Gary, however, Tony never expected that he would fit in at university, since he recognised that his individual habitus was likely to be at odds with the habituses of other students as well as that of the institution. He states that:

I knew I would be tested here at university. You only have to look at the culture – alcohol, sex, peer pressure. I was expecting it.

On arrival there is immediately a disjuncture between Tony's habitus and the field of middle-class higher education that he finds himself in and he feels destabilised:

I feel sort of out of it really sometimes, half like I fit and half like I don't and there are bits I feel really comfortable with and bits I don't. But I knew it would be like that. I was never going to be easy.

Unlike many other middle-class students, therefore, at no point does Tony take the world 'for granted' (Wacquant, 2006), rather he is constantly alert to what he perceives to be 'threats' to his beliefs and convictions and he has to develop strategies in order to cope. He comments that:

I feel tested all the time, tested and challenged and it is a struggle to be true to myself and my beliefs.

To 'stay true' Tony keeps his distance from his many of his male peers and chooses to only rarely socialise with them. He finds much of their behaviour 'shocking' (for example, drunkenness and bringing girlfriends back to their shared flat) and distances himself from them as much as possible:

I got really, really upset one night. They'd come back drunk again and in the morning the place was just a mess, rubbish everywhere and people sleeping in the living room and I had lectures to go to. So we had a confrontation and we agreed that they would tone it down. So now we keep out of each other's way completely.

Like Gary, Tony is firmly focused on achieving academic success and achieving his desired goal of becoming a teacher. He believes, however, that he is more committed to his academic studies than many of his middle-class peers, and is frustrated by what he regards as their 'casual' approach:

It's like some of them [other students] are totally uninterested in the course. They just want to stay out late, drinking and then they turn up hung over and just you think 'what are you doing here?'. And they are training to be teachers. What sort of example are they setting?

For Tony, therefore, his experiences of higher education are complex and uneven: although he enjoys much of what he encounters and finds the academic work enjoyably challenging, he continues to struggle to fit in. Alex, in contrast, a working-class student, finds the middle-class field of higher education significantly easier to navigate.

Alex

Alex is an 18 year old man studying Computing and living in a shared flat in university halls of residence. He was brought up in a 'hard-working' family with an older sister and a younger brother. Both his parents worked and he describes growing up in an environment where he was taught that, if you wanted anything, 'you had to work for it. It wasn't just going to be handed to you but if you worked really hard then things were possible'. In line with

much government discourse (BIS, 2010), Alex recognises the potential economic benefits of attending higher education and believes that, despite the major investments of time, money and effort, gaining a degree will increase his job prospects and future income.

From his early teens Alex has undertaken a series of part-time jobs and, like many working-class students in higher education, knows that he will have to work throughout his studies to support himself. He is concerned about the level of debt he might accrue and has chosen to study Computing because he feels it will offer him decent post-graduate employment prospects. He has also, like many of Callender and Jackson's (2008) working-class students, selected the university, in part, because it is located within a large city which offers relatively good term-time employment opportunities.

From arrival at university, Alex settles in well forming numerous friendship groups and socialising frequently. For example, describing a night out in the city centre he comments that:

I've made three or four good friends on my course...the course is full of geeks really, like me. We all like the same things, technology and stuff, so we just all get on really well. Like we speak the same language, are on the same wavelength.

In addition, Alex establishes good relationships with his flatmates, in part because they are an extremely diverse group so that no-one 'stands out' and also because they have shared interests:

We all get on really well in the flat, even though we are all really different. Like one of my flat mates is Muslim, and there are lots of people of different faiths on my course but we all just get on. So like we go out to the clubs and then one of the lads has organised paint-balling and we also play football against the other halls...and [play] football for a 5-aside team.

Thus, whilst Bourdieu (1984) argued that habitus coincides, almost exclusively, with class position, it is clear that, for Alex, an interest in particular activities transcends issues of class in terms of making friends and 'fitting in'. Therefore, whilst it might be expected that his working-class habitus might have made it difficult for him to fit in to the middle-class field of higher education, and cause him a level of disquiet, or uncertainty, it does not. Rather, as Alex comments 'I feel accepted and valued. I really fit in, definitely'.

Towards the end of his first year, however, Alex joins the police as a special constable. This causes significant tension amongst his flatmates, who are concerned that:

Like I will report them for having drugs in the flat and they've sort of said 'well we'll have to hide everything now from you' and so we had to sit down and sort out what I felt my responsibilities were and the sorts of things that I would ignore...and it's mostly ok now but like still a bit sort of tense.

Thus, Alex becomes divided from his peers not by dint of his class but through his newly, and deliberately, acquired 'status', gained by dissimulation from others and through the creation of a distinctive 'taste' (Bourdieu, 1979), albeit in a way which might be somewhat unrecognisable to Bourdieu. In Alex's case his status is gained through enrolment as a special constable which, from the perspective of his peers, moves him into a different 'class' (in its broadest sense), providing him with a form of symbolic capital (Bourdieu, 1994). However, whilst this symbolic capital sets Alex apart from his peers, it does not 'destabilise' or fracture his habitus, primarily because, although he describes himself as 'working-class', he actually regards himself transcending class:

Yes I'm working class... dad hasn't been to university and just works in an ordinary job and we live in a former council house and all that, but I get really [expletive] off when everything comes down to class, and whether you're middle-class or working class or from whatever class when really you're just yourself aren't you... What does it matter? I can just get on with anyone. If I like them.

Alex's ability to 'get on with anyone' is driven by his acceptance of difference, in ways which are completely at odds with Davina's beliefs and practices.

Davina

Davina is an eighteen year old, Jewish woman, also from a high achieving middle-class family, who grew up at home with two sisters. For Davina, going to university was also 'never in doubt' and the only question was where she should go and what she should study. Her decision to study criminology was motivated when:

Someone from my road was stabbed. You know it's a really nice, White middle-class area and someone my age died. I

don't like what society has become, the gang culture, and young people dying for nothing.

At school Davina was involved in a large number of extra-curricular activities, including playing a musical instrument and learning a second language. On arrival at university she quickly joins a range of clubs and societies, including the Jewish Society (J-Soc):

Apart from in my house, I do all my socialising through J-Soc. I'm on the committee, involved in getting people to join and putting on events. I joined in part because I wanted to be involved in something I wanted to be in the circle, I wanted instant acceptance. People know all about it and you have an instant social life.

For middle-class Davina, therefore, being at university offers her the opportunity to spend time building social capital which, in turn, provides her with:

The backing of the collectively-owned capital, a "credential" which entitles [her] to credit, in the various senses of the word (Bourdieu, 1986, p. 249).

Davina uses her opportunity at university to network extensively with other students, encouraging them to vote for her during SU elections and mobilising them to help her with union events and campaigns.

Of significance is that Davina also uses this social participation to become part of 'the circle', and to find belonging not only through group friendships and acceptance, but through individual 'mattering', that is:

The feeling of counting for others, being important for them, and therefore oneself and finding in the permanent plebiscite of testimonies of interest – requests, expectations, invitations – a kind of justification for existing (Bourdieu, 2000, p. 240).

Davina works hard and invests significant time in maintaining these social relations, constantly communicating with her peers to ensure that these connections are maintained.

In contrast, however, Davina has an ambivalent attitude to her studies; she enjoys them but does not feel she needs to take them too seriously, commenting that they are:

Important, yes really important but a bit of, like some time off in the future. So now I am just getting involved with other

things, keeping up with my work you know but knowing that I have time in the future to really get down to it.

In part, Davina's attitude towards her academic work is affected by the discord between her individual habitus, her religious practices and the habitus of the institution. Her decision to live, from the outset, in Jewish halls of residence was directly informed by her belief that the university would not be accepting of her religious difference and support her religious needs. These concerns are confirmed throughout Davina's first year and she consistently challenges the university's 'failure' to accommodate her need for time off to celebrate festivals or to be home in time for the beginning of Shabbat, commenting that:

They [the university] just don't get it. It is my right to have time off when I need it. They should be supporting me and fitting in round me and my needs and not the other way round. Well, like I've said over and over again, tough. I'm just going to go ahead and miss classes anyway.

Summary

The three students' stories highlighted in this chapter challenge much of the prevailing notion of who succeeds in higher education. Through their stories I have highlighted the complexities of social class positionings and the need for a more nuanced understanding of who 'fits in' in higher education and who does not.

Whilst all three of the middle-class students described in this chapter expected to go to university and thus had 'social class "in the head"' (Ball et al 2002, p. 52), not all of them believed they would be entering a space where their culture had capital. In addition, their stories highlight the ways in which it is not just the lack of fit between a habitus influenced by a working-class past and the middle-class field, or the discord between individual and institutional habitus (Longden, 2004; Thomas, 2002), that can generate a sense of alienation and 'otherness'. Middle-class Tony's experiences, for example, challenge Bourdieu's assertion that 'when habitus encounters a social world of which it is the product...it does not feel the weight of the water and it takes the world about itself for granted' (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992, p. 127). In contrast, unlike students in many other studies (Reay et al, 2002; Thomas, 2002; Leathwood and O'Connell, 2003; Merrill, 2004), working-class Alex does not lack the requisite social capital to enable him to be successful in higher education, nor is his working-class habitus

shaped by necessity and resignation (Bourdieu, 1984) rather he is able to actively 'transcend' his class to form multiple social networks.

Class is not the only aspect of identity at play in these narratives however. As Reay et al (2002) assert, 'class is always mediated by ethnicity, marital status and gender, and these mediations are played out in...students' negotiations of the higher education process' (p.17). Tony, for example does not fit in to a male student culture which is centred around drinking and sport, whilst Alex, like Sean in Chapter Six, fits in, in part, because he does. In addition, all four students are White and their stories may have been very different had they been from BME backgrounds.

For these students, however, as with those students described in Chapters Five and Six, religion is also a significant aspect of their identity and informs both their belonging and their 'otherness'. In the next chapter, therefore, I focus on the relational nature of religion, drawing attention to the ways in which students may be 'othered' not just because of their gender, race and class, but because of their religious affiliation. I also highlight how the 'reflexive habitus' (Mouzelis, 2007) of these students informs the strategies they adopt to resist being positioned as the 'other' of higher education, either by the institution or by their peers.

Chapter Eight Religion

Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to highlight the ways in which the students in this study are 'othered' by their peers and by the institution, and draw attention to the strategies they choose to adopt to resist being positioned as such.

I begin by summarising my findings from Chapters Five to Seven, focussing specifically on the concept of 'othering' as it relates to gender, race and class. I then explore how the students are 'othered' as a result of their religious identity, before focussing on the specific strategies they undertake, namely 'passing', avoidance, defiance, charm, and physical and emotional disengagement. In so doing, I draw attention to three particular areas of importance: first, the relational nature of religion and the ways in which this is played out on an individual and an institutional basis within the institution; second, the reasons why some students choose to hide their religious identity and why some do not; and, finally, the ways in which a 'reflexive habitus' (Mouzelis, 2007), born of struggle, intolerance and 'othering', and which continues to be shaped by students' experiences in higher education, informs the choices students make as to whether to try and fit in or not.

Othering and otherness

As described in Chapter Three, 'othering' is the process through which a dominant group defines into existence a subordinate group. Individuals (or groups) can be 'othered', or can be 'otherers', based on any number of social identities, including race, gender and class. In Chapter Five, for example, I described how Mandy prevents herself from being 'othered' by 'mothering' the younger female students; how Sean, by playing football and socialising with his male student peers, becomes part of the 'us'; whilst Tony is 'othered' because he chooses not to join in the male drinking culture or to sleep around. In Chapter Six I identified how El-Feda positions his fellow Black African students as the 'other'; how Imran is 'othered' both because of his race and, as he believes, because of the university's unwillingness to deal with racism; and how Aisha is 'othered', like Amneet, because of her appearance. In Chapter Seven I highlighted how the stories told by two particular students, Tony and Alex, challenge the assumption that within higher education all middle-class students are the 'us', whilst working-class students are always the 'other'.

Across all three chapters I also highlighted the ways in which the boundaries around 'us' and 'them' shift according to context, including shared social practices, orientations and values. I described how Mandy, for example, is initially 'othered' as different, but eventually becomes part of the group; whilst Alex is initially part of the 'us' but in electing to become a police special constable becomes (in part) one of 'them'. I also explored the ways in which the students are 'othered' not just by their peers but by the behaviour of individual staff and the wider practices of the institution.

However, exploring 'othering' as a consequence of gender, race or class makes only partial sense of why these students experience the things they do. They are also 'othered', or choose to 'other', because of their religion - which not only intersects but also, crucially, affects their gender, race and class (just as they affect each other).

Religious othering

As with gender, race and class, religion is also relational, acting as an identity marker, both in affirming the self and in marking the differentiation of the outsider. As already described, within the UK there is a currently a 'moral panic' relating to the threat posed by 'Muslim' young men, with discourses of the violence, threat and intolerance posed by Muslims manifest across the media (Allen, 2010); whilst modern anti-Semitism is predicated on the historical 'othering' of Jewish people (Firestone, 2010). Indeed, as Wilson (2011, p. 2) comments:

International conflicts are always about the self and other, however defined – nation, religion, ethnicity etc. The modern world system is built around framings of the other – the civilised self versus the savage other, the religious/spiritual self versus the pagan/superstitious other, the industrial self versus the undeveloped other.

However, despite this wider recognition of the ways in which religion both positions and 'others', this has not been explored within either the widening participation or diversity literature. Rather, it appears that there is a prevailing presumption, amongst both academics and policy makers, that 'otherness' in higher education relates solely to gender, race and class (and, to some extent, disability) and that outside of this there is uniaxiality of experience of everyone else. Thus, there are few, if any, examples of the ways in which 'othering' practices can affect religious students.

Most of the students in this study, however, are 'othered' predominantly, though not exclusively, because of their religious identity, through the processes of stereotyping, discrimination, and isolation/exclusion.

The issue of stereotyping is raised by several of the students in relation to their age, class or race: Mandy, for example, describes how, initially, the younger students treat her as knowing more because she is so much older than them; Sean complains that working-class students are perceived as less capable; and Imran describes how he is viewed with suspicion because he is Pakistani. However, it is religious stereotyping which has the most impact. Simon, for example, outlines an occasion of where he was talking about his faith and a fellow student, worse the wear for drink, started copying him in a 'stereotypical' manner saying: 'yeah, yeah, we all know, God and Simon are like that [makes a crossed-finger sign to show a close relationship]'. He also describes how:

Lots of the other students I've met make fun of Christianity ...that we [Christians] are all humourless and don't know how to have fun and are dull, dull, dull.

Ruth also complains about the ways in which she is stereotyped 'because I'm Christian and wear a cross and go to Church it's like I must also be a prude and have no sense of humour', whilst Gary observes that:

Students think 'many Christians, well they're geeks' and lots of students think 'what no sex before marriage?'lots of people have stereotypes about Christianity.

However, there is a difference between the stereotyping of the Christian students by their peers, which (may) rest on personal experiences of other Christians, and the stereotyping of the Muslim students which primarily rests on those preconceptions which are dependent on public representations (Creutz-Kämpfi, 2008), including by the media. Imran, El-Feda and Aisha all feel frustrated that the ways in which they are perceived and positioned as the 'other' is based on unknowing judgments - not of them as individuals but because of stereotypical views of Muslims: Aisha complains that people regard the headscarf as a symbol of 'male oppression'; and both Imran and El-Feda refer to the ways in which their religious identity is conflated with terrorism. When talking about his work place, El-Feda, for example, explains that 'most people are lovely to me but some say things like when I said I was going to Sudan, one woman said ' well don't come back as a terrorist'; whilst Imran comments that:

Everyone is blaming the Pakistanis and you are just seen as part of the same problem... You do your best but one person can't change anything. Ten men can't make a positive difference but ten men can destroy it. When something bad happens people never forget, but when something good happens, they never remember.

For many of the students, stereotyping also goes hand in hand with discrimination: Davina complains about not being given time off for religious festivals; and Tony describes how his complaints to the accommodation office about his flatmates not respecting his beliefs by smoking, getting drunk and bringing girls back to the flat are just ignored. He explains that:

I honestly don't think that if I was Muslim...[and] complained about them drinking and smoking and having sex where I was living they would be so dismissive. They would recognise that as a legitimate part of my faith...[they] just disregarded anything I said. I got the impression that I was supposed to be tolerant towards them and not the other way round.

For some of these students the consequences of stereotyping and discrimination are isolation and exclusion: Tony is socially excluded by his peers and also physically excluded from his flat; Imran describes about how conversations stop when he enters a room or tries to join in; and Aisha and Amneet sit by themselves in classes, the exclusionary 'othering' they experience heightened by the visibility of their 'otherness' – their clothes, their skin colour, and, in Amneet's case, her accent.

However, none of these students is simply a passive recipient of 'othering'. Rather they respond with a wide repertoire of strategies, a complicated combination of accommodation and resistance depending on their religious affiliation, as well as the interplay between the field, the capital they possess, their individual habitus and their levels of reflexivity.

The strategies undertaken by the students

'Passing': Sean and Mandy's stories

As described in Chapter Six, the difficulties Sean experiences in trying to integrate arise in part from his belief that the middle-class and international students on his course are lazy, disrespectful or bigoted as well as holding attitudes and beliefs which set him apart from his peers. However, what complicates Sean's situation, and his feelings of being out of kilter, is that

these views arise from his Christian habitus as much as they do from his working-class, or male habitus.

Sean describes himself not only as 'hardworking' but also as having been brought up in an atmosphere of 'Christian tolerance'; his decision to join the army was in part driven by a desire to help bring about peace. However, post-9/11 he knew that he would be sent to Afghanistan to fight the Taliban and 'kill Muslims'. Although at that point he had not killed anyone he believed that it was now inevitable. Therefore, after agonising over his decision, Sean resigned from the army, unable any longer to reconcile his Christian faith with being a soldier. His decision resulted in him facing both ridicule for his beliefs and condemnation for his decision and he found the decision to leave the army highly traumatic.

Unwilling to face such criticism again, when he enrolled at university Sean made the decision from the outset not to tell anyone about his religious beliefs:

....[got] my life back on track and I thought 'no chance I'm not going through that again, making public what I believe'...all that God squadder stuff and being laughed at ...so I kept schtum and I don't think anyone knows that I'm a Christian and I've no intention of them knowing that.

Thus, Sean makes a deliberate decision to 'pass' as non-religious. In doing so he is part of a sociological tradition of those who have chosen to be regarded as a member of social groups other than their own, for example, homosexual men and women pretending to be heterosexual to avoid social bigotry, or Jews passing as Christian during the Holocaust (Sanchez and Schlossberg, 2001). However, Sean chooses to 'pass' not only because of his previous experiences but also because he recognises that being a mature student at university makes him 'different enough' without introducing any other form of difference. In other words, he recognises that being religious in a predominantly secular environment has the potential to 'other' him further. Thus, in making the decision to 'pass', Sean is being highly reflexive, agentic and judicious.

Consequently, despite his habitus being born of a strong, long-standing, familial commitment to Christianity, and of his religion being present in the ways in which he behaves outside of the university (such as attending church), on campus Sean hides his religious convictions and is unwilling to reveal this aspect of his self. Instead, as he explains, at university 'I'm just

Sean...plays football, has a laugh'. Consequently, in 'passing' as non-religious Sean is more easily able to 'fit in' and belong.

In this Sean is similar to Mandy, who also elects not to reveal to her student peers that she is a Christian. As described in Chapter Six, Mandy married early but her first husband committed suicide when her second child was very young. She describes how:

I wasn't religious until my first husband died. He killed himself, when my second baby was just a few weeks old. Before that I wasn't interested in religion, I wasn't Christened, it was never discussed at home. But I was twenty with two babies and you look for answers and that seemed to be the route for me. I started going to church because I wanted support and I wanted answers. I went for years and was Baptised and had all the children Christened. But then my second husband was violent and he wouldn't let me go. And so I stopped going.

After divorcing her second husband, Mandy started to attend church again and now goes on a relatively regular basis. However, like Sean she also made the decision that she would keep her Christian beliefs to herself when she started at university:

I'm middle-aged, divorced, twice, got four children...depression...like it's how many more ways do you want to stand out Mandy...so I've just kept it quiet. I don't go there...I just hope they don't ask.

Although Mandy is different to Sean in that she became a practising Christian later in her life, she too recognises the relational nature of religion and the ways in which being 'religious' may 'other' her. Since, as described in Chapter Six, Mandy is already striving hard to build the caring capital to make her fit in, passing as non-religious is also a deliberate strategy to enable belonging.

Both Sean and Mandy, therefore, recognise the relational nature of religion and the power that religion has to 'other'. Both believe, even before they arrive at the university, that the institutional habitus will not be one that is accepting of religious difference and their early experiences do indeed confirm that the institution appears un-accepting of religion, in particular of Christianity. Mandy describes an incident where two students on her course had been discussing the difficulty the Christian Union (CU) has faced in attempting to run a coffee stall whilst a pro-Palestinian display had been allowed to set up next to the library. She comments that:

I think it's much easier to fit in at X [research site] if you aren't openly religious...you can be gay or lesbian or whatever but being Christian is just seen as a bit odd.

What makes Sean and Mandy different from many other students is that both have experience of 'hiding' their religious affiliation - Sean from his fellow soldiers until he decides to leave the army, and Mandy from her abusive second husband; thus the decision to 'pass' is not a new one for either of them. Both are experienced in changing their practices to enable them to fit in. Without visible signs (clothing, jewellery etc.) of their religious beliefs they are therefore able to:

Stow their (often vague) religious and spiritual identities in an identity lockbox well before entering college (Clydesdale, 2007, p. 2).

Neither Sean nor Mandy stop believing, however. Rather they elect not to be open about their beliefs whilst at university and thus stop behaving as religious. From the outset, both state that they intend to pick up the practice of their religion once they have left. Thus, rather than their experiences within the field of higher education resulting in either a 'fractured habitus' or 'a habitus divided against itself' (Bourdieu, 1999a), both students are able to successfully 'pass' without either significant angst or loss of identity.

Avoidance: Simon and Tony's stories

Simon is a middle-class, White male student, who is also a devout, practising Christian. He arrives at university already feeling an outsider, practising his faith as he does in the face of his atheistic father's 'bewilderment'. However, whilst this has engendered in him a sense of alienation from his family, maintaining his Christian identity at university is of fundamental importance to him.

Although he does not wish to hide his religious affiliation, Simon is cautious about how being openly religious will be regarded in higher education. However, the choice of whether to 'pass' or not is taken out of his hands when, on his first night at university, he is forced to admit to his beliefs after refusing to go into a nightclub which had once been a church:

I felt I should set an early boundary so that it would be easier to do similar things later. I told them I couldn't, I wouldn't, go in. They understood but they went in anyway.

Despite being 'outed', Simon continues to go out with his flat mates the first few nights of Freshers' Week but leaves early as his peers get very drunk

very quickly, swear a lot and make 'sexual comments' about women which he finds deeply distasteful. When he objects, he is told that he needs 'to loosen up' and 'not be so uptight'. Such comments leave him feeling uncomfortable and intimidated as well as lonely and isolated.

After Freshers' Week his flatmates rarely ask him out anymore. News of his commitment to his faith spreads and, within a very short time, Simon realises that his course mates are uneasy about him being such a devout Christian. He describes how they keep silent or do not tell him things that they are willing to tell or discuss with others, both for fear of offending him in some way and also because he may not understand or accept their perspective or behaviour:

It's not a complete silence when I walk into the room but it feels like it. Like they were all talking about something and then they stop and it's a horrible feeling, like you are deliberately being excluded from their lives; they change the subject and they try and pretend nothing happened but you know it did.

The more committed Simon is to his religious practice, however, the more he comes in to conflict with those around him who are non-Christian. He cites an example of how, when he was putting up posters for Faith Week, the warden in the hall of residence refuses to let him, since they have the CU logo on them. When Simon queries this refusal he is told that other people might be offended by the posters, even though, as Simon points out, they have been deliberately designed to try and avoid causing any offence. He comments that that 'in trying not to discriminate against others they are discriminating against us' and whilst he understands that 'the line of censorship is a difficult one to draw in a democracy', and so he hasn't challenged the decision, it does, for Simon, nonetheless mean that he feels 'the victim'. Simon's particular grievance is that he believes someone from the Islamic Society would not be treated in the same way, and he suspects that images of Christianity are less acceptable within the university than images from other religions. He also relates several incidences when:

The lecturers have used phrases which I could have taken offence at, things that have happened. I thought if I was someone from a Middle Eastern faith they might have been more careful.

Simon is also angry that both his fellow students and the university staff feel that they can either 'ridicule' or 'dismiss' his faith. He talks about the

negative attitude of (some of) the lecturers towards Christianity, commenting that they should be more thinking and considerate, and that 'they are letting their own discrimination show despite preaching words of respect and tolerance'. He gives an example of how an assignment he wrote relating to Christianity received 'mediocre feedback'. He remains convinced that this was because of the content rather than the competence of his work.

In response to what he sees as such derision, Simon spends as little time in his flat as possible, avoiding the other students in his house who continue to drink a lot and stay out late, often bringing girls back with them. He joins an evangelical church committed to 'spreading the faith to people who would never otherwise have heard of it', and becomes an active member of the CU, searching out those he feels confident will accept him. He describes how other students from the CU are on his 'wavelength', that he can talk about 'anything and everything' with them, that he does not need to 'pretend' when he is with them and that he can be:

An individual...the real you, when I talk about the worldview perhaps a better word would be your identity, yes, become more confident in your identity...to become more confident in sharing and being more open about it, more confident to not conform to what people want.

Whilst Simon's experiences of being isolated and rejected cause him a level of unhappiness, his experiences strengthen his religious identity in ways which he believes would not have happened if he hadn't gone through the things he has. He feels he has been 'tested' and is proud of sticking to his convictions. He knows 'lots' of other students who stop practising their faith at university in the face of such open disdain and is determined that he will, therefore, help new students maintain their faith, taking on the role at the beginning of his second year, of escorting new Freshers to different churches to help them decide which one to attend.

Like Simon, Tony, described in Chapters Five and Seven, is also a White, middle-class male who might be expected to fit in; however he, too, struggles. As with Simon, the strongest part of Tony's identity is not his gender, race or class but his religion, strengthened significantly during a trip to Africa in his gap year:

I was a believer before but not practising before I went to Africa. It was a defining moment for me...I was at a Christian music festival and was praying when I had a vision of myself teaching in an African school...I went for a month to Uganda

to do Christian missionary work teaching reception class in an orphanage and helping coach sport...throughout the trip, five times I was tested by God. Each time something difficult happened I prayed and was helped.

Tony's habitus thus arises not just from an amalgamation of long-term social and cultural conditioning but also of religious conversion. He arrives at university knowing that he will be 'tested'. He, therefore, immediately joins the CU as well as a sports organisation for practising Christians:

Where groups of Christians, who play sport, meet together to talk about their struggles, [such as] peer pressure, drinking, sleeping with people after matches and so on.

Tony is, from the outset, open with his flatmates about his religious convictions, but he finds that they ignore his needs and desires, 'othering' him by behaving in ways that set him apart. He explains that:

I told them I was church goer and said I didn't go out much and was quiet. They don't pressurise me but they are imposing their behaviour on me. I have spoken to them all individually. They're not really sympathetic to my request. They nod and smile at the time but do nothing about it... I am praying for help and to remain tolerant. At 3.30 in the morning I nearly lost it. It took a lot of praying to get me through that.

The 'othering' Tony experiences from his student peers is compounded by the academic staff behaving in ways which, he believes, are discriminatory and which make him feel excluded. For example, he explains how:

This lecturer was talking about Easter and was trying to be all friendly and said 'I can't believe they can't remember the day they nailed the guy up'. And there was this silence from the rest of the class, like an intake of breath. He didn't seem to pick up on it though the fact that he moved on so quickly, well maybe he did.

Both Simon and Tony, faced with such comments, feel that the university neither recognises nor values their religious identity, nor is it accepting of their religious difference. In consequence, both students end up avoiding the university and walking away from any confrontation, avoiding the field and refusing to accept the 'rules of the game', as this comment from Tony illustrates:

Sometimes what starts off as just people being together, like in the pub or something, turns into this massive party and

you know that everyone is going to get drunk and behave like idiots... I try and avoid those situations. Just leave.

Unlike Sean and Mandy, however, neither Simon nor Tony is prepared to behave in ways which would render their religious identity 'unauthentic'; that is they are not prepared to hide such a significant aspect of who they are. Their refusal to compromise their beliefs may in part be accounted for by the fact that both have been 'tested' during their gap years and have had, as Tony comments: 'to stand firm in the face of God's challenges'. Both arrived at university with their faith, and thus their religious identity, strengthened. Indeed, as Tony comments about his time in Africa:

I left as a young man who believed in God and returned as a young man who believed I needed to rely on God. That was the defining, changing moment. Since Africa faith has been my main identity, the most important thing to me. I have made it that way. I want it that way.

However, whilst their experiences do not undermine their religious identities they do result in both students experiencing isolation, discrimination and 'othering', severely affecting their first year experience. This is very different to Davina and Dinah who, primarily, face their struggle within the field through a combination of resistance and confrontation.

Resistance and confrontation: Davina and Dinah's stories

As described in Chapter Seven, Davina is an eighteen year old woman studying Criminology. She was brought up in the Jewish faith but, in her early teens, felt that she 'wasn't religious enough', commenting that 'I took the decision to be as Jewish as I could be....You have to do it for you, it's tough but it's worth it'.

Davina elected to live in a Jewish hall of residence where, straightaway, she is:

Completely content. It's got everything I need, a little synagogue, friends, a social life, everyone gets on with everyone. I never thought of living anywhere else but here. Being surrounded by other Jewish people was absolutely critical. I wouldn't have, couldn't have come here otherwise. It would have been unthinkable.

She quickly becomes an active member of the Jewish Society which, as described in Chapter Seven, not only ensures that she is 'in the circle' and gives her instant acceptance' but it also means she does not need to socialise with anyone who is not Jewish. She explains that this is:

Just the way I've been brought up, how we are. It's just the bubble we live in. I can see friends from other universities, and here and that's enough. I have been invited to things by other people in my class but I haven't been. I just wouldn't want to go on my own. I would get very scared. I've nothing against any other students I just wouldn't want to mix with them... All my friends are Jewish. It might sound stupid or naïve but that's how I like it. I am rejecting the wider world by living here but that's my choice. It's my life.

Davina 'practises' and reflects on her religion on a daily basis. She describes the struggles she faces in attempting to 'do the right thing [by God]', particularly during Shabbat when it is prohibited for Orthodox Jews to undertake work, including turning electric devices on or off:

Sometimes it's hard and sometimes I get it wrong. Like I went to the toilet and the light was on and so I turned it off when I left but I shouldn't have done. But people are very tolerant here and they wouldn't point it out because it's embarrassing.

However, whilst Davina does her utmost to ensure that she mixes only with other Jewish students, when faced with what she perceives as threats or challenges to her Jewish identity she is prepared, as she states:

To fight back, like if you want to attack me because I'm Jewish I'm not going to just sit back and take it.

She refuses to be positioned by those around her and is highly strategic in manoeuvring herself into situations where she is able to position other people. So, for example, she describes how she deliberately becomes involved with the university's student union in order to minimise any anti-Israeli sentiment deriving from there:

Like the students union had an anti-Israeli motion but it was defeated which was good; and the whole tone is always anti-Israel like they talk about Holocausts in Gaza and such. Now I've got myself elected onto the Student Union Council so I can make sure I can work against it from the inside and if there is going to be an anti-Israeli discussion or a motion against Israel I can get all my friends to come along and stop it being so anti-Semitic.

It is clear, therefore, that Davina is prepared to be highly judicious and strategic to ensure that she can resist, as far as possible, being 'othered' by either her peers or the institution. She is also highly agentic, willing to

challenge the institutional habitus, not just through organisational structures but directly with individuals. For example she describes an occasion when:

In class, the lecturer was going on about unemployment and crime and then some how it got on to concentration camps and he made some really offensive remarks. He might not have realised what he was saying but I was really angry and...I confronted him.

In her willingness to confront, Davina is similar to Dinah who lives in the same halls of residence.

Dinah is also an 18 year old Jewish woman, and is studying to be a primary school teacher. She regards herself as 'religious, but not very religious'. She does, however, describe herself as 'very Zionist'. In her gap year she went to Israel with a Jewish youth movement, spending time learning about Israeli politics and culture. She explains that:

It was the best year of my life. I was the most Jewish person who went but I still learned a lot. And I grew a lot...It's what I want to do at some point in my life, go back there again...it was life changing....I'm definitely going to go back there. It's inevitable. It's where I belong.

Through her Jewish hall of residence, Dinah quickly makes a wide circle of friends. She also joins the Jewish Society which she describes as 'amazing':

Our lives revolve around J-Soc. It's not just socialising it's also learning. So tonight we are at the chaplain's house and we'll have pizza and read the Torah, and we've got a graphologist coming in. And every week there's stuff in every city and once a year there's a thing called 'Booze for Jews' and tomorrow it's in Birmingham and we will get free booze all night. And on Friday night it's 'Friday Night Fever' and we'll have a Jewish meal...

Whilst she has made a few friends who aren't Jewish, Dinah has not, however, been out socialising with them since:

It sounds really bad. Don't take this the wrong way, but I just feel comfortable with people like me. I don't really want to socialise with others because we've been brought up with other rules and we act differently to others. Our lifestyle is very different and it's hard sometimes but it's who we are.

However, whilst Dinah is uninterested in socialising with other students, she is very open with them about her faith, at times confronting both staff and students 'head on' with her 'Jewishness'. For example, she comments that:

I love talking about it. Sometimes I use Israeli slang or Hebrew and people look at me. But I love talking about it because people don't really like us much so it's important to talk about the religion. I shouldn't hide it. All my clothes have Jewish or Hebrew signs on them and I thought why can't, why shouldn't, I wear them? I wear my Star of David necklace every day, but I'm not going to go around carrying the Jewish flag.

Like Davina, Dinah finds it hard to combine her faith with her studies; the major festivals take place on Tuesdays and Wednesdays during her main lectures, and she needs to leave early on a Friday so as to maintain the Shabbat. However, she refuses to change her practice to fit in with the university's academic requirements commenting that:

The teaching staff, at the end of the day there's nothing they can do about it. I'm not taking advantage, it's just who I am.

Both Davina and Dinah are, thus, highly resistant to being positioned either by the institution or by individual students. Whilst they face multiple attempts, on a daily basis, to position them as 'outside', even in the face of an institutional habitus which is neither particularly accepting of, nor accommodating towards, their religious differences, they remain obdurate and steadfast. This is made easier in that they live with Jewish students who hold similar views.

Living in a Jewish hall of residence means that Davina and Dinah are in a position to constantly reflect on their practices and keep themselves 'on track'. Dinah, for example, describes how each time she walks through a door she touches the mezuzah¹³ placed there as a constant reminder of God's presence. She also talks about her continual reflection on, and questioning of, herself:

You know like it's something you have to think about daily. What should I be doing? Am I making the right choices?...and it's just easier to be sure when you are surrounded by other people who think like you do.

It is clear, therefore, that whilst their commitment to the Jewish faith results in a degree of conflict with the institution, for both women their resultant strategising is both judicious and deliberate. They both move between confrontation and avoidance depending on the benefits each strategy might provide to them. Davina, for example, chooses a deliberate strategy of

¹³ Parchment inscribed with specified Hebrew verses from the Torah

confrontation through the SU to try and neutralise any possible 'threats' to their Jewish beliefs and practices, but avoids other non-Jewish students for the same reason. Ultimately, however, both women choose to 'other' themselves and 'other' the others through a process of distancing themselves so far from the university as to almost completely cease engagement.

For neither student, therefore, is their habitual disposition devoid of reflexive thought, 'the systematic exploration of the un-thought categories of thought that delimit the thinkable and predetermine the thought' (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992, p.40). Instead both Dinah and Davina are highly reflexive, fully-consciousness and deliberately strategic in their actions at all times. In their reflexivity, both Davina and Dinah are similar to Gary. However, their strategies are completely different.

'Charm and disarm': Gary's story

As described in Chapter Seven, Gary is a 22 year old, White, Christian man studying Sound Technology. Unlike Simon and Tony who did not practise their faith strongly until their teens, Gary was brought up to regularly attend church by his practising Christian parents. He has always played a significant role in his church, participating in a range of Christian-based music clubs and Bible societies. As soon as he arrives at university, Gary joins a range of music groups and is soon playing guitar and drums in his local church as well as in a band with some of his student peers. He also becomes involved in a Bible study group through his church and now spends two evenings a week reading and discussing the Bible. In addition, Gary becomes actively involved with the university radio station and spends much of his time helping behind the scenes and presenting, including fronting a short slot on religion on a Sunday.

From the outset, therefore, it appears that Gary is determined to interweave both his religious and his student identities and, whilst he faces challenges in managing these multiple aspects of the 'self', he is able to maintain what he describes as 'a balancing act':

There's Gary the student and Gary the flatmate and Gary the course mate and there's Gary the Christian Bible basher...but you just balance it all and it all works...though sometimes it's hard.

Gary describes several occasions where he has been on the receiving end, either directly or indirectly, of somewhat offensive remarks about Christians,

or other religious groups. However, he refuses to take offence. He gives an example of how he handled a potentially difficult situation when a fellow student launched into a 'tirade' about how religion:

Is nothing but bad you know...and that all wars and terrorism and the like are caused by religion, and religion, particularly Catholicism, is responsible for poverty and AIDS and families that can't support themselves...and he just went on and on and on....and I could have got offended but I just chose to remain friendly and talked about what my faith meant to me and put my case and the importance of God in my life and how He helps me to make the right decisions... we agreed to disagree.

Gary explains how important he feels it is to 'disarm' ignorance and bigotry but believes that this can only be done by remaining calm, by talking and by 'accepting that everyone has a right to their own opinion'. As a consequence he socialises with an extremely wide circle of students, including fellow Christians, those from other religious backgrounds, and non-believers.

It is clear that, unlike Simon and Tony whose Christian habitus has been born of familial conflict or conversion, being brought up in a close Christian family has enabled Gary to adopt a completely different strategy when faced with conflict. Whilst Simon and Tony adopt a strategy of avoidance, Gary approaches the challenges that he faces at university with humour and friendliness, electing to 'make a joke, laugh at myself' when dealing with difficult conversations or potentially discriminatory remarks. He explains that:

I'm open about my religion but I don't want to put barriers up. So I try to be as friendly as I can. I make friends with everyone and anyone... [and] try to win them over to my side through friendliness and charm.

In other words, Gary works to ensure that, despite the relational nature of religion, he is not 'othered' because of his religious identity. He is highly reflexive and strategic in the ways in which he neutralises, or tries to neutralise, religious bigotry through friendship and negotiation. He neither avoids nor confronts, accepting not only the struggle but also the 'rules of the game'.

Unlike Bourdieu's belief that there are few conscious intentions of social actors (1996), however, Gary is highly conscious of his actions, and undertakes a deliberate and purposeful strategy of friendliness and openness to enable him to be successful within the field. Consequently he is

highly emotionally committed to the university, unlike either El-Feda or Aisha.

Emotional disengagement: El-Feda and Aisha's stories

In Chapter Five I described how El-Feda's fractured and divided habitus had arisen from racism, his divided sense of his British and African identity, and his desire to both live independently and support his family. However, what makes El-Feda's struggles significantly more complicated is that he is also torn between being a practising and a non-practising Muslim.

It is clear that his father's strong commitment to his Muslim faith has heavily influenced El-Feda throughout his life and yet he has an 'uneasy' relationship with Islam, made particularly difficult because of his desire to please his father. He explains that he does not pray, or fast during Ramadan or on other occasions, and he drinks alcohol. He also chose to stop going to his local mosque because of the way his father was treated during the Iraq war. However, when asked whether he still believed, he comments:

I'm not sure. When I am over there I believe more. But when I watch the news and see Iraq and Sri Lanka and Ethiopia and so on I feel, if there's a God out there would he let this suffering happen to people who have done nothing wrong? If there is a God out there I've yet to experience it myself... I want to believe, I'm just struggling.

El-Feda arrives at the university hoping that he will develop a much greater sense of identity - African or British, practising or non-practising Muslim. However, whilst he initially settles in to the university, he finds it difficult to combine being a Muslim with socialising within a drinking culture. He veers between being what he describes as a 'good' and a 'bad' Muslim', commenting that:

I am not a bad Muslim. I don't pray or recite the Koran but my other actions – respecting others and trying to do the right thing all the time – and speaking to people back home, so called 'Muslims', well I think I'm a better Muslim than they are in my actions. They may pray five times a day but they will still gossip or lie. They pray five times a day but they don't change themselves whereas I try all the time to be a good person. I've reflected on it and I don't think I'm doing anything wrong in the eyes of God.

El-Feda describes how he is constantly reflecting on his actions:

Always thinking am I doing right by God, being a good son, a good brother? It's like I'm constantly thinking 'could I do better?'

He veers backwards and forwards towards his religion; he thinks about going to the mosque with his brother but does not go; he buys sixty-five CDs of the Koran read in Arabic but does not listen to them; he drinks and then stops drinking alcohol; he mixes with other Muslim Black Africans then grows disenchanted with them; he considers starting a politics society but he does not; he complains that the university provides little that will satisfy his religious identity but does not use the prayer room or join the Islamic Society; and he objects to the lack of debate about religion, race and politics but stops going to the politics society.

EI-Feda's fractured habitus means that he is unable to integrate the multiple aspects of himself and he remains divided. He blames the institution, other students, and the lecturers, arguing that the university is failing to help him find a sense of identity. He fails some of his semester two modules; he struggles and feels frustrated; and the less work he does the more his confidence falls. Like Archer's 'fractured reflexives' (M. Archer, 2003, p. 298) EI-Feda goes round in circles of 'ever-increasing distress' until, eventually, he detaches himself emotionally from the university. He considers taking a year out in the hope that he will be able to return with:

A greater understanding, of where I'm going, so I'm not going round in circles...confidence to be who I am and to make things go my way...be me.

In the end EI-Feda chooses to stay. His eventual emotional detachment from the university is, however, similar to how Aisha, described in Chapter Five, also comes to relate to the institution.

Aisha was born into a Muslim family but in her teens she grew concerned about 'the way her life was turning out', and that she was going to be 'led astray'. She therefore made a decision to become a more devout and practising Muslim, starting by choosing to wear a headscarf when she was fourteen, unlike other female members of her family. She now prays five times a day and abstains from places where drinking or smoking takes place. Despite these changes, however, she has remained close to her school friends, explaining that they accept her choices and are happy for her.

Aisha has a wide circle of friends, including Muslim, Sikh, Hindu and non-religious friends, and arrives at the university expecting that she would fit in, despite her particular religious needs. However she becomes disillusioned very quickly:

Like it's such a massive university and there's people here from all sorts of different backgrounds and stuff and you'd never know it...like there's nothing around the place that makes you think they've thought about who's here. Like there's just the bar, but if you don't drink...

She joins the university's Islamic Society but is frustrated by how few members there are and that there is little opportunity to get involved in social activities. She tries to make friends with other students on her course but feels rejected by them, in part because of the way she looks. She talks extensively about how her headscarf acts to distance her from other students, placing a barrier between them, and is frustrated that her peers appear to regard wearing the headscarf as a symbol of oppression and not as a personal choice:

I'm Muslim and I'm proud of being Muslim and this is one way of showing it. I know that people regard me with more suspicion because I wear a headscarf but I don't care. It's their problem not mine.

As a response to her failure to build social capital, Aisha emotionally 'switches off' from the institution, joining the Islamic Society at the city's other university which is much larger:

Like I've just given up now and do all my socialising though X University. They have got a massive Islamic Society, with loads going on all the time. There's this other girl from here and me, we go together and we've made loads of other friends.

However, whilst Aisha is clearly frustrated with the university, she continues to attend her lectures and classes and, unlike Amneet, whose story is told below, she persists with her degree.

Physical disengagement: Amneet, Ruth and Imran's stories

Amneet's story of disengagement with the university is described in Chapter Six. However, what helps to explain Amneet's struggles in full is that, before the birth of her children, she was baptised into the Khalsa order and, in so doing, became a highly devout and spiritual Sikh. Whilst Amneet has always closely followed the practices of her faith, baptism into the Khalsa order

requires her to wear the five religious symbols that are articles of faith (unshorn hair, turban, comb, steel bracelet, cotton drawers and a ceremonial sword) and to follow a specific code of conduct. Aside from meditation and praying at specific times of the day, she is required to engage in an 'honest' profession or course, promote a family way of life, undertake voluntary service and promote equality. Whilst, in part, Amneet chose to study at the research site university since she felt it would be accepting of her faith and religious practices, the opportunity to study a course that would enable her to put in place this code of conduct was also highly influential:

Two things were important in deciding what to study: my faith, and also the fact that I am a mother. My faith because being Khalsa requires me to behave in a way that is ethical and caring and to take responsibility for looking after others, and being a mother is the thing that I do best.

As a committed Sikh, Amneet is highly involved in her local Gurdwara (the Sikh place of worship), wherein all men, women and children are treated as equal and where she commands a respected position. Gender, and other, equality is central to Sikhism, and this, coupled with the fact that she was successful at university in India, means that Amneet expects not to be treated as the 'other'; therefore, the ways in which she is 'othered' within university takes Amneet by surprise:

I mean I didn't expect being at university to be easy, but I was thinking of going back to studying as a mature student, that would be difficult. I didn't expect to have difficulty with making friends. I just thought that everyone would get on.

For Amneet, the struggles she has in her first few weeks because of her religious identity are significant enough for her to leave even before the end of her first semester. Imran, described in Chapter Five, remains until the end of his first year.

Imran has a deep rooted and unwavering commitment to his Muslim faith. He avoids alcohol and tobacco and places where these are consumed, eats only halal meat and is committed to praying five times a day. As he explains:

To be honest, the way I behave in university, religion places a vital role in me being here. At eight everyone goes out drinking but it's forbidden in my religion. I'm sticking to my faith and not drinking.

For Imran his Muslim faith is 'who I am, the core of me'. He compares himself favourably to other Muslims, commenting that 'speaking to people

back home, so called 'Muslims', well I think I'm a better Muslim than they are in my actions'. However Imran is disappointed that his faith is not readily 'acknowledged' by the university. He feels that the university is both 'hypocritical' and 'tokenistic' in its attitude and approach towards people of different religions. He describes how, for example, for a long time he did not know that there was a prayer room, so he would miss prayers and then have to go home and read the Koran and catch up. He comments:

How can that be? How can they say 'yes come here we want people of all different faiths and religions and beliefs and we are happy to have you all' but then when you are here it's like there's nothing, So you can be a quiet Muslim, a silent Muslim, but please don't want us to support you being a real Muslim.

Imran is keen to talk about his faith with other people. However, rather than this being seen as a positive venture, leading to greater understanding, it appears that his fellow students are concerned they may offend him and do not know how to treat him. He describes feeling immensely frustrated that he is not easily accepted by his peers and he believes that his religion 'stands in the way' all the time. He explains:

I thought that if you left religion outside, then character, personality and behaviour would impact on how people view you. I made sure that I wasn't rude so they didn't think all Muslims were rude, I behave well so I am not letting my religion down and I hoped that people would want to be with me. But they don't.

Imran's struggles in higher education, however, strengthen his religious belief. His Muslim faith remains the one aspect of his life which is permanent and unchangeable and his experiences of religious, as well as racial, intolerance reinforce in him a need to act as a positive role model for his faith:

I set an example so others can follow. Some people I've seen who have converted to Islam are better followers than born Muslims. You need to set an example. Now we are in a difficult position and you can easily become an easy target for people if you say you are a Muslim. One dirty fish in the tank can spoil the whole tank. But we need to stick to our faith and set an example regardless of what's going on in the world.

Ultimately, however, as a direct consequence of feeling that his faith is being rejected, as well as the racism he experiences and the struggles he has in

making friends, Imran retreats into socialising solely with other Muslims before eventually deciding to leave the university. Clearly the long commute Imran has to undertake most days is significant in informing his decision to leave; however, in the end, Imran, like Amneet, simply gives up struggling. As he explains 'I need to go back home. This is not the place for me. I don't belong here'.

Unlike Amneet and Imran, Ruth also physically distances herself from the university, although she does not choose to leave.

Ruth is a nineteen year old, White British woman. Her parents' relationship broke down when she was very young. Her mother remarried but Ruth was taken in to care at the age of twelve after there were instances of domestic violence in the home. She keeps in touch with her sister but does not have any contact with either of her parents.

The first family Ruth was sent to live with were practising Christians and she started attending Church with them, which gave her the sense of an extended family which she had, until that date, lacked:

The church ran a youth club and that's why I started going, for something to do and to meet people. And then it just became like you were part of a family because everyone was friendly and interested in you and since I didn't really have a family then, well it became part of my life. And it has been ever since.

Ruth became particularly close to a family at Church, and when she made the decision to go to university she moved in with them for her first year as a way of making the transition to living on her own.

From the outset Ruth is 'anxious' about being a student in higher education, concerned that she might struggle to make friends as she has always been 'a bit of a loner'. She is also aware that as a practising Christian she might be regarded as 'odd'. She describes how she struggles with how to present herself to her fellow students - with her desire to form friendships in her first few weeks rubbing uncomfortably against her desire to challenge some of their 'unacceptable' behaviours, such as sleeping around, drinking and taking drugs. She comments that:

It's really difficult because you don't want to be someone you're not or pretend or do things you don't want to do but at the same time you know that people aren't really accepting of who you are. So in the end you just keep quiet.

Fairly quickly Ruth decides that she does not wish to mix with many of the other students at the university. She describes attending a compulsory residential at the beginning of her course which was:

Horrible, really uncomfortable, I mean I made friends and that but the conversations people would have about what they were doing and the drinking and it was just a chance for some girls to get off with as many boys, well maybe not but it seemed like it. I thought 'what am I doing here? This is not for people like me'.

However, whilst she finds much of their behaviour disturbing she does not feel confident to speak out. Consequently she forms just a small number of friends at the university, and conducts most of her social life through her Church:

I just keep myself to myself really. Like it's not that I don't mix in or have friends but I'm really selective. Some of the stuff that goes on is just not what I want to be around. And some of the people, well, like I mean they have a way of behaving that's just not me. I should say something but I don't. Like someone was sick on the floor right by me and that just put me off.

It is not just her fellow students, however, that 'other' Ruth. She is also exposed to what she considers 'offensive' behaviour by some staff. An example she cites is of entering a lecture hall to be confronted, without warning, by having to watch a film about abortion as part of her course. She explains how she felt 'sick, revolted, horrified' but did not feel able to stand up and walk out of the lecture hall. She comments that:

So like we were in this lecture hall and they started to show this film about abortion. Like we didn't know we were going to see it. It made me feel absolutely sick. And I just had to sit there and try not to watch it. It was horrific, disgusting. And at the end the lecturer says 'has anyone any comments or anything they want to say?' and I couldn't say anything. I wanted to object to being forced to watch the film. It went against everything I stood for but I didn't feel able to speak

Unlike Amneet and Imran, Ruth does not leave the university but she does distance herself both emotionally and physically from it. She negotiates her way through the field by becoming as self-effacing as possible and silently retreating into her own, small, social world when faced by threats:

Like now I just hang around with one or two others from my course. I feel like everything is a challenge and it's not one I

want to deal with so I would rather just say nothing and do nothing. Keep my head down. Just get on with it.

Consequently, by the end of her first year, for Ruth:

University is what I do for several hours in the day but church and the friends I have through church are my life, everything.

Summary

This chapter has focussed on the relational nature of religion, the ways in which religious students are 'othered', and the significance of institutional and individual habitus. Through the students narratives, I have drawn attention to why some students choose to hide their religious identity, and the implications for those who do not, or cannot; I have highlighted the strategies the students adopt in the light of these decisions, either to be 'successful' within higher education, or to find a sense of belonging outside of it; and I have drawn attention to the impact of adopting these strategies on their religious identity and on their habitus. For students like Simon and Tony, as well as El-Feda, Amneet, Aisha and Ruth, their narratives have highlighted how, when habitus encounters a field with which it is not familiar, 'the resulting disjunctures can generate not only change and transformation, but also disquiet, ambivalence, insecurity and uncertainty, (Reay, 2005, p. 1105). In illuminating their stories, this chapter has, therefore, drawn attention to the inequalities, inequities and disappointments faced by many religious students during their first year in higher education. In the next chapter I move on to summarising my overall results and draw further attention to some of the key findings and implications of my research.

Chapter Nine Key findings from the research

Introduction

The aims of this chapter are three-fold: first, to summarise how my results fulfil my research aims and questions; second, to draw together my findings relating to habitus, field, capital, otherness, reflexivity and strategy; and, finally, to draw attention to five, overall, highly significant findings from my research.

Understanding the experiences of religious students in higher education

As I stated at the beginning of this thesis, my research aims were to explore, and, crucially, to understand, the social and academic experiences of religious students in secular higher education in the UK. In particular I wanted to understand *why* they experienced the things that they did, what their responses were to these experiences and why they chose to respond in these particular ways. I also wanted to know, and understand, the individual and institutional implications of these responses.

The students whose stories I have presented in this thesis have described their stories of racism, tragedy, loss, trauma and marginalisation before entering higher education. They have also described their experiences of exclusion, isolation, 'othering', stereotyping and discrimination once there. They have told of how they have been ridiculed, ignored, challenged and isolated, and how they have had their social and religious needs unmet. They have also expressed their anger, frustration and sadness as a consequence of experiencing the things they have.

However, I have also listened to their stories of resilience and determination, of commitment and dedication, of happiness and satisfaction. I have heard about their successes, their achievements, their celebrations. They have made friends, built social lives, passed exams, achieved high marks in assignments. They have shared with me their honesty, humour, warmth and passion – for their religion, for their studies, for their lives, and for those around them. Despite the myriad of small, and sometimes not so small, difficulties they have faced in their daily lives the students have fought hard to be successful in higher education.

Some have battled, others retreated; some have remained unscathed, others have become scarred; some have found contentment, others have

not; and, whilst some have been successful, others have become disillusioned with the university and have left, or have emotionally disengaged.

Through their stories and my narratives, and by drawing on Bourdieu's concepts of habitus, capital, field, reflexivity, strategy and otherness, I have answered my research questions. In particular, I have highlighted how the habitus formation of religious students is highly complex, and can be fractured or dislocated by their experiences in higher education; how religion, as well as gender, race and class, positions people as 'them' or 'us' in ways that have often been ignored; how the interactions between individual habitus, field and capital are fundamental in informing the 'otherness' or 'fit' of religious students; how religious students are constantly reflecting on, and questioning, their practices, as well as the practices of those around them; and how, in order to avoid or resist being 'othered', religious students are highly strategic in negotiating their way through secular higher education.

Each of these findings is of fundamental significance, and each one merits closer analysis.

The habitus of religious students

The stories told by the students in this study have highlighted the need to expand Bourdieu's concept of habitus to take account of the highly individual habitus of religious students.

As outlined in Chapter Three, for Bourdieu 'the body is a mnemonic device upon and in which the very basics of culture, the practical taximonies of the habitus, are imprinted and encoded in a socialising or learning process which commences during early childhood' (Jenkins, 2002, p. 75) and it is undeniable that the early years of socialisation within the natal context are significant in forming the habitus of the students in my research. Sean, for example, has been brought up to have a strong work ethic, which permeates his approach to his studies; Aisha that her 'duty' is to put marriage above her career, which affects how she views her future career; whilst the ways in which Amneet has been brought up, to care for others and behave 'responsibly', informs her choice of degree course.

In addition, the ways in which the students' habituses have been internally socialised, can clearly be seen to inform their practices as they move into higher education: Gary, Davina and Dinah, who have developed a

disposition of participation, join clubs and societies immediately on arrival at university; Mandy, who has developed a disposition of care, mothers the younger students; and Gary, who has developed a disposition of openness and tolerance, makes friends with everyone who crosses his path.

However, for many of the students, their religious habitus has been formed contrary to their familial habitus. Simon, for example, became a practising Christian to the 'bewilderment' of his atheist father. For others their religious practices depart from those of their families: Aisha is the only member of her family who wears the headscarf; and Davina is the only one in her family to keep the Shabbat. Many of the students have also converted to religion, or become more religious, either late in life or not long before becoming a student, such as Mandy who becomes a practising Christian following the suicide of her husband, Amneet who becomes a Khalsa Sikh post-marriage, and Tony who becomes a devout Christian following a vision of himself as a missionary teaching in an African school.

It is clear, therefore, that the individual habituses of these particular students do not, in part at least, reflect a shared cultural context (Bourdieu, 1977a). It is also clear that for these students the habitus is not necessarily 'an acquired system of generative schemes objectively adjusted to the particular conditions in which it is constituted' (Bourdieu, 1977a, p. 95). In advance of entering university, therefore, these students are not only already 'different', but for some their 'habitus [is] divided against itself' (Bourdieu, 1999, p. 511).

It is also apparent from the students' narratives that the complex processes constitutive of habitus formation do not, for many of them, cease at the point of entering the university. Rather such dislocations and instabilities not only continue but, for some, are heightened, informing the further development of their habitus. Both El-Feda and Imran's experiences of higher education, for example, result in a 'destabilized habitus, torn by contradiction and internal division, generating suffering' (Bourdieu 2000, p. 160); whilst Ruth's disposition of being self-effacing further informs her 'habitus of silence'. In addition, for these students the habitus is neither developed unthinkingly, nor does it constrain their 'practice' (Bourdieu, 1977a).

Reflexivity in the students' daily lives

As evidenced in their narratives, reflexivity, conscious strategising, and rational calculation are both common place and a part of the daily routines

of these students. They are highly and constantly reflexive, both towards and away from the self, in ways directly contrary to Bourdieu's assertion that 'what they do has more meaning than they know' (Bourdieu, 1977a, p. 35).

Whilst entering higher education may, of course, lead to experiences that encourage all students to question their beliefs, aims and aspirations, giving rise to a level of 'ontological insecurity' (Giddens, 1991), the students in this study are constantly reflecting on, and questioning, their beliefs, thoughts, aims and thus their practices - what they wear, what they do, how they behave towards others, how they live. They hold continual 'internal dialogues' (M. Archer, 2007) with themselves, realigning and re-prioritising their own social positions, actions and thoughts in relation to others. Most are involved in a high level of self-critical introspection, questioning their behaviour and whether they are doing 'the right thing'. El-Feda, Imran and Gary, for example, all hold internal conversations with God, asking for affirmation of their actions and choices on a daily basis, with Gary, for example, describing how 'I read the Bible every evening, just to check, 'am I on the right path, am I doing what God wants me to do?''

However, the students are not just doing this 'in their heads': Tony is involved with a group of Christians with whom he can discuss his difficulties at university, whilst Simon finds that attending Church gives him the opportunity to 'reflect [with others] on the choices I am making, the ways I am behaving'. In addition, for many of the students, participating in religious rituals is a way to constantly remind themselves about God: Dinah touches the Mezuzah each time she walks through a door, Imran prays five times a day; and Amneet wears the symbols of her faith.

The students are not only reflexive towards the self, however, but also away from it, constantly taking into consideration the 'other' and reflecting on a 'moral' way of behaving. For example, Imran describes the importance of Muslims setting an example to others 'regardless of what's going on in the world'; El-Feda talks about being 'a good person' and Amneet's rationale for undertaking her course is so that she can engage in an 'honest' profession which promotes equality. They are also judging other people all the time, comparing themselves and their actions in either a favourable or negative light. So Davina is pleased that the last time she went to Israel she was the most religious person on the trip; Imran describes himself as 'better than' many other Muslims; El-Feda positions himself as superior to other Black

Africans; and Sean considers himself more worthy than the middle-class students on his course.

Living their lives in religious ways, therefore, has significant implications for these students: for them religion is lived, practical and rehearsed. It also positions them as the 'other' of higher education.

Othering through religious difference

Apart from Sean and Mandy, who elect to 'pass', and Gary who 'charms' his way through higher education, all the students in this study are 'othered', or choose to 'other others', because of their religion: El-Feda and Imran are not only racially othered, but 'othered' because they are Muslim; Amneet and Aisha are 'othered' because of their visible 'differences'; Davina and Dinah are 'othered' because the institution does not accommodate their religious practices; Ruth is 'othered' because she does not want to mix with many of the students at the university; and Tony and Simon are 'othered' because they do not conform to the dominant male practices of drinking and sleeping around.

As identified in Chapter Two, however, within much of the widening participation and diversity literature the 'othering' of the 'them' by the 'us', has, to date, primarily focussed on race, gender and, in particular, social class. The relational nature of religion and its capacity to 'other' has been largely overlooked. It is, however, recognised by all the students in this study. Sean and Mandy, for example, make the decision to pass based on a reflexive, judicious acknowledgement that they are already 'different enough', and that the institutional habitus will not be one that is accepting of religious difference; whilst Davina and Dinah choose to live in Jewish halls of residence because they believe that their 'difference' will not be accommodated within mainstream accommodation and, thus, they recognise themselves as 'other'.

The process of 'fitting-in' is not, however, simply a consequence of similarity and sameness, rather it arises from the complex interaction between individual habitus and the field, and the possession of social and cultural capital.

The interaction between habitus, field and capital

As evidenced in this research, regarding the field as operating as a network of social relations among the objective positions (Bourdieu and Wacquant,

1992) rather than as a set of interactions among individuals, is conceptually limiting.

As the students' narratives highlight, it is the nuanced interactions between individuals and the field which actually determine social positioning and, consequently, whether individuals fit in, or do not; and it is these individual interactions, and the ways in which the students are stereotyped, discriminated against and isolated, which cause many of them to feel that they do not belong in higher education.

When Alex initially arrives at university, for example, his shared interest in technology enables him to 'fit in' with other students. However, his decision to join the police as a special constable subsequently divides him from his peers; El-Feda's attempts to engender a 'more political' disposition amongst his peers creates conflict and frustration between them; Tony's refusal to get drunk with his flatmates sets him apart and isolates him; and Ruth becomes increasingly lonely as she is distanced from her peers and the institution by behaviour which she considers unacceptable.

In addition, whilst for Bourdieu, 'capital' is the symbolic currency that individuals must, and desire to, possess in order to participate within any given field, for students like Tony, Simon, Imran and El-Feda, building up the sort of capital that other male students do, such as drinking and sleeping around, is anathema to them, and runs contrary to the heart of their religious beliefs; for Ruth, Amneet and Aisha 'going off drinking and clubbing' is also untenable.

Furthermore, only some of these students believe that 'the game is "worth the candle," or, more simply, that playing is worth the effort' (Bourdieu 1998a, p. 76). Other students, such as Simon and Tony, not only regard the accumulation of the 'acceptable' forms of social and cultural capital, as unacceptable but they also do not consider that 'that the game is worth playing [or] that the stakes created in and through the fact of playing are worth pursuing' (Bourdieu 1998a, p. 77). Consequently, instead of undertaking the types of capital accumulation strategies which might enable them to 'fit in', many of the students adopt a range of alternate strategies, such as resistance and confrontation, or elect not to play the game at all and physically or emotionally disengage.

Dinah and Davina, for example, have a large amount of social and cultural capital (as they see it) and are well networked, especially through the Jewish Society. Since they feel no need to build further capital their response to 'the

field' is either to dismiss it by electing not to socialise with non-Jews; to change it by, for example, Davina getting herself elected onto the student union council; or to challenge it, as Dinah does when she misses the compulsory residential week and as Davina does when she walks out of one of her classes.

Ruth, in contrast, has little social and cultural capital. She has few friends and almost no family members to draw on when negotiating her way through the field of higher education. In addition, her habitus has been formed, in part, through a combination of parental rejection and dislocation and movement around the care system, and she thus also has little experience of being agentic. Therefore, unlike Dinah and Davina whose response to the field of higher education is to dismiss it or challenge it, Ruth retreats when faced by threats.

Simon and Tony as White, middle-class males might be expected to possess the requisite social and cultural capital to enable them to fit in and they might also be expected to want to. However, as a consequence of the dislocations they have already experienced, their dispositions are not well suited and there is a disjuncture between their habitus and the field. Unlike Davina and Dinah, however, Tony and Simon aren't committed to changing the field; rather they elect to avoid it as much as possible.

Gary, in contrast, neither avoids nor confronts, accepting not only the struggle but also the 'rules of the game' - but not without conscious intentions. Rather he is highly conscious of his actions and undertakes a deliberate strategy of friendliness and openness to enable him to be successful within the field.

Whilst some of these strategies are more particular to some religions, all the students are involved in finding ways to accommodate being religious within secular higher education, albeit some more successfully than others. What is significant, however, is not only that individual habitus, field and capital work together in the formation of these strategies, but that these decisions are not arrived at unconsciously. Rather, as has been described, the students' strategies are formed through a habitus that is both highly reflexive and self-aware.

Summary

All the students whose narratives are presented in this study respond to the risks, challenges and opportunities presented by the field of higher

education in different ways, according to race, gender, class and, in particular, religion, and depending on their individual habitus, their possession of social and cultural capital, and the interplay between their capital, their habitus and the field. Their stories are not just of innate interest, however, but have both theoretical and practical significance. In the next chapter I, therefore, conclude my thesis by drawing attention to the importance of my research and the consequent implications for widening participation and diversity policy and practice.

Chapter Ten Limitations, significance and further research

Introduction

For my doctoral study I set out to explore, and understand, the social and academic experiences of religious students in secular higher education in the UK. In particular, I wanted, to find out what sense I could make of why religious students experience the things they do, why they respond to these experiences in particular ways and the individual and institutional implications of these responses. I believe that I have achieved the aims of my research and answered my research questions.

My work is not an attempt to deny that students from working-class backgrounds may find fitting in to higher education a struggle. Nor am I claiming that the discrimination or isolation faced by some religious students is more significant than that faced by, for example, many Black or minority ethnic students, or by mature women. However, the experiences of the students I have described in this thesis only become fully meaningful when religion is also taken into account.

My thesis, however, has significance beyond simply understanding the experiences of individual students; it is clear from the students' narratives that institutional policies need to be better be attuned to the habitus, reflexivity and strategising of religious students, in order to address the ways in which they are 'othered' on campus. I, therefore, end my thesis by recognising the limitations of the research before drawing attention to the theoretical and practical significance of my findings, as well as the consequent implications for policy and practice and for further research.

Limitations of the research

I recognise that there are, quite clearly, limitations to this research. As I outlined in Chapter Four, there will always be those who will hold that narrative inquiry is methodologically flawed, because of the researcher's role in the collection, analysis and re-storying of data. In the same chapter, I laid out the criteria that govern my study and by which it may be judged. Nonetheless I recognise that others may choose to 'quite legitimately adopt other criteria in support of, or in criticism of, the work' (Connelly and Clandinin, 1999, p. 139).

I do recognise, however, that I have interviewed only fifteen students, and in only one research site and it would be naïve, therefore, to claim that these students' experiences can be deemed representative of the entire religious student population of higher education. Interviewing more students, including those from other universities, would, of course, have provided further data on which to base my claims. In addition, whilst I tracked my students over a period of fifteen months and, therefore, my research goes some way towards illuminating the temporal nature of the students' experiences, I recognise that their experiences of belonging or 'otherness' may shift over the course of their final year and a half at university. A longer study would have thrown further light on their experiences.

However, what my research does do is to draw attention to the ways in which fifteen particular students in one particular university experience higher education and presents their experiences holistically, in all their richness and complexity. Their narratives highlight the need to expand understanding and awareness of the relational nature of religion, the habitus formation of religious students, their levels of reflexivity and strategising and the ways in which they may be 'othered' in higher education. This small-scale, narrative inquiry, therefore, has considerable significance and, thus, implications for policy, practice and further research.

Significance of the research: expanding theoretical understanding

The relational nature of religion

The lack of recognition (not only from Bourdieu but more generally) of the relational nature of religion ignores the ways in which religion intersects with other relational systems and positions people as different or 'other'. As my research has evidenced, social locations such as class, race and gender do not just intersect but, critically, they affect each other: when El-Feda and Imran talk about issues of gender and race, they are doing so within the context of their Muslim identities, including the complexities of being Muslim at a time of heightened fears around terrorism; when Sean describes his relationships with his student peers he is doing so not just as a working-class, White male but also as a 'tolerant' Christian man experiencing difficulties relating to 'homophobic' Black African students; and when Amneet describes her experiences of racism, she is doing so as a Sikh woman, isolated and rejected within an institution that claims to celebrate diversity.

In addition, students and staff do not just draw on classed, raced or gendered differences to shape the meaning of 'us' and 'them'. Rather they also construct religious students as the 'other' in ways that have, to date, been largely ignored. If the relational nature of religion goes unrecognised, however, then so too does any recognition of its power to 'other', and to create conditions of power imbalances. The failure to include religion as a social category, therefore, means that flawed assumptions about who may fit in, and who may struggle in higher education, may continue to be made. Without greater understanding, strategies to support students will remain predicated on an imperfect view of who may need support, as well as a flawed understanding of who drops out of higher education and why.

It is, therefore, imperative that religion is recognised as a significant relational system, and brought into the fold of recognised social categories so that the exact reasons why some students fit when others do not can be understood and, therefore, addressed. Recognising the relational nature of religion is also essential if policy makers and practitioners are to recognise how, and why, some students are being discriminated against, stereotyped, marginalised and excluded.

The habitus of religious students

The students' narratives also evidence the need to expand Bourdieuan understandings of habitus, first to include the influence of religion, as well as race, gender and class, and, second, to take into account the reflexivity and strategising of religious students.

My research has highlighted that Bourdieu's notion of habitus takes insufficient account of the ways in which striving and self-awareness are constitutive of the habitus and thus fails to recognise the types of strategies which religious students elect, or are forced, to undertake to enable them to succeed in higher education. In addition, my research has evidenced that that the habituses of religious students may not dispose them to act in ways that will enable them to 'succeed' in higher education – not only because of the capital they possess, or do not possess, but also because of their past experiences.

As the students' narratives have illuminated, their habituses are a complex amalgam of class, race, gender and, critically, religion which may have been formed through religious conversion or conflict; they may possess little social or cultural capital; they may have little regard for the capital that might make

them successful within the field; and/or they may consider that the field is not worth playing for. Thus the normative idea of the struggle faced by social actors from particular social groups does not neatly play out when viewed through the lens of religion. As my research has highlighted, influences of gender, ethnicity, class and religion intersect in complex and multiple ways and can result in conflicting dispositions and, on occasion, in a fractured or divided habitus.

In addition, the practices of these students are highly complex and may run contrary to what might be expected of them, without any clear understanding from a policy or institutional perspective of why this might be so. Thus such students may be disregarded as simply anomalies within the higher education student population rather than as a broader cohort of students with distinct needs which need to be met.

It is imperative, therefore, that recognition is given to the complex, on-going formation of the habitus of religious students, both before they arrive at university as well as once there. Such recognition needs to inform institutional and sector-wide policy and practice. Policies need to be attuned to the complexities of habitus rather than assuming that the habitus of groups of students from particular backgrounds will be uniform. It is also important that higher education institutions recognise that the forms of capital they commonly valorise may not be regarded as 'of value' by some religious students. Thus a broader recognition of diverse forms of capital and community cultural wealth (Yosso, 2005) is also essential.

The reflexivity and self-awareness of religious students

My research has also highlighted how religious students maintain high levels of reflexivity throughout their daily lives, not just during times of crisis, and are constantly self-constructing - a continually 'reflexive project' (Giddens 1991, p.9). The students question every aspect of their actions, testing decisions, according to their religious beliefs, with Gods or congregations, against sacred texts or treatises. Consequently, many of them bring to the field the same 'dispositions of uncertainty, heightened self-awareness and self-consciousness' (Reay, 2010, p. 86) as Reay's working-class students in elite universities. For these students, however, these dispositions are not primarily linked to their class, race or gender but to their religion and their religious habitus.

It is imperative, therefore, that the levels of insecurity faced by (many) religious students are recognised within institutional policy and practice. Assumptions that all white, middle-class male students, for example, are swimming as 'as fish in water' (Bourdieu 1990a, p.163), or that meeting the needs of students from ethnic minority backgrounds can be done without consideration of their religious identities need to be carefully interrogated. Any failure to do so runs the risk of ignoring, and thus failing to meet, the individual needs of these students.

In addition, however, my thesis has also highlighted how it is not just working-class or ethnic minority students who adopt complex coping strategies in order to be successful within higher education. Rather all the students in this study have needed to develop strategies for managing the relationship between their gendered, racial, classed and religious identities within the secular field of higher education. Failing to recognise the interplay between religious students' habituses, the secular field of higher education, and levels of reflexivity, however, means that the strategising of these students remains unrecognised. Not understanding why these students make the strategic choices they do - to stay or to leave, or to stay but to disengage – means that universities may remain blind to the difficulties some of their students are experiencing and thus continue to fail to put strategies in place to support them. It is, therefore, critical that institutions develop a greater understanding of the highly individualised strategising of religious students.

Further implications for policy and practice

Inclusiveness is a matter of justice and equity for religious students in higher education. They need to be able to participate with authenticity and integrity rather than having to pass as non-religious, or to feel isolated and rejected by their peers or the institution.

However, there is also a business case for higher education institutions establishing good practice, not only for issues of legal compliance, but also because inclusive institutions may well be better recruiters of students (Weller, 2010). This will be particularly important as universities increasingly seek to recruit more students, in the face of competition provided by private universities in the UK and overseas universities delivering higher education in English.

In promoting UK higher education, in attracting and retaining both home and international students, in meeting their expectations, and in integrating them on campus, it is paramount, therefore, that that universities take specific account of the religious needs of their students. To date, however, the policies and practices developed by HEIs do not appear to reflect this. As identified in Chapter Two, where policies and practices relating to religion do exist they often merely address practical issues such as the provision of prayer rooms or halal food. Other policies simply state the institution's legal position and refer to other broader 'equality policies'. In addition, whilst there are numerous religion-based student societies and/or chaplaincies there appear to be few other regular mechanisms to enable good communication and engagement between students of different faiths. This is an important omission which needs to be addressed.

It is also imperative that religious 'othering' is conceptualised as exclusionary since it is only by doing so that academics and policy makers can understand how staff and students interact with those perceived as different. This will, in turn, enable them to analyse education policy and practice so that religious 'othering' is made visible, and put practical and dialogic strategies in place to ensure that institutional practice actively works against 'othering'. It is, therefore, critical that religion is considered within debates around diversity and widening participation so that issues of inequality and power imbalances can be addressed. To enable this to happen, there is a critical need to establish mechanisms through which the voices of religious students can be heard.

It is evident from my research that many HEIs have historically been tentative about establishing such spaces and places for discussions, often leaving this to the preserve of Student Union religious societies or university chaplaincies, perhaps for fear of endorsing 'oppressive practices'. Of late, however, there has been an emerging interest within HEIs towards faith and religion when linked specifically to spirituality and/or to student 'well-being'. The purpose of the University of Salford's Faith Centre is, for example, 'to support the spiritual wellbeing of students and staff and to increase our understanding of respect for religious beliefs and practices' (University of Salford, no date), whilst the University of Bolton (no date, a) refers to the Religion and Belief protected characteristic group by their preferred title of Faith and Spirituality. Such activity is clearly linked to issues of diversity and enhancing students' spirituality is, thus, becoming for some HEIs not only acceptable but highly desirable.

Enhancing students' spirituality is also linked to their retention and support, particularly though supporting students' mental wellness, an area of increasing concern, since 'spiritual wellbeing emphasises the wellbeing of one's inner self...a state in which one feels, in the words of the Christian mystic, Julian of Norwich; that "all shall be well, and all manner of things shall be well"' (University of Bolton, no date b.). Consequently, it is argued, spirituality 'can bring balance and context to our life experiences and can be particularly helpful in times of challenge, sorrow and celebration' (University of the West of England, 2011). Focussing on students' spirituality can help them to better understand the world they are living in, particularly the new and uncertain world of higher education, and enhance their intellectual and emotional development and cultural awareness.

Responding to this growing interest in spirituality there is, therefore, an emerging body of literature detailing how spirituality may be both taught and assessed within HE (e.g. Corrywright and Swarbrick, 2010; HEA Subject Centre for Philosophical and Religious Studies one day conference (January 2010) 'Teaching Spirituality in Higher Education: Opportunities and Challenges'¹⁴). However, as Carmichael (2010) identifies, there is a difference between 'post-modern liberal spirituality and spirituality as the inner exploration of a religious tradition' (p. 110). For many academics, spirituality and religion go hand in hand. Baker and Miles-Watson (2007), for example, argue that 'the adjective 'spiritual' ... is in close dialogue with formal, institutionalised religious activity' (p.4), whilst McGhee (2003) goes so far as to argue that 'any notion of "spirituality" that is conceived independently both of religion and of moral life is enfeebled and attenuated' (p.28). In contrast, whilst all those HEIs cited above, amongst others, recognise that spirituality may (or may not) be connected to a specific religious belief, for these institutions promoting 'spirituality' appears, perhaps, to have become a mechanism through which religious affiliation can be recognised but then subsumed within a broader and more liberal framework focussing on wider intellectual, ethical and moral concerns.

Linked to the discourse of spirituality is that of 'well-being', which has also become increasingly embedded in HE institutional discourses in recent years. As identified by the University of Cambridge (2008), 'well-being refers to positive and sustainable characteristics which enable individuals and

¹⁴ <http://prs.heacademy.ac.uk/view.html/prsevents/449>

organisations to thrive and flourish' and is, thus, closely linked to spirituality. Indeed the University of Nottingham Trent, for example, runs a Centre called 'The Place... for Spirituality and Well-Being'¹⁵. However, more so than discourses of spirituality, discourses relating to well-being focus little on religion. The University of Brighton, for example, is currently developing an integrated model of mental, physical, social, emotional, spiritual and academic wellbeing which will be embedded and enhanced via all the University's strategies, systems, policies and procedures, there is no explicit reference to religion in the institution's extensive and detailed analysis of how wellbeing can be taken forward within HE (University of Brighton, 2011).

Whilst these movements away from a specific focus on religion towards a broader focus on spirituality and well-being has significant benefits for many (other) students, it may also mean that the specific needs of *religious* students may be lost with HEIs feeling that they are doing all that they need to do to meet religious students' needs, but not actually doing so.

It is understandable that universities face significant and thorny challenges in attempting to implement the requisite policies and practices needed to support religious students. As identified by the Religious Literacy Leadership in Higher Education programme:

Faith is no more or less important an identity than any other. But there are factors which make faith hard to explore: it is often viewed with suspicion or distaste; there is a widespread public awareness of religion yet with a limited public vocabulary; and it has become more prominent as a line of debate and anxiety in recent years (RLLiHE website, 2012).

Developing strategies to support religious students, therefore, requires HEIs to negotiate and manage multiple and competing discourses: to welcome and recognise diversity within a mass higher education system; to rationalise the contested place of religion within what is assumed to be a largely secular institution; and to recognise and manage the (possible) role of HEIs in facilitating the growth of religion-based terrorism (UUK, 2011).

In response to these difficulties some HEIs are increasingly looking to develop 'religious literacy', that is 'the skills and knowledge required to engage in an informed and confident way with faith communities'

¹⁵ http://www.ntu.ac.uk/apps/news/115139-25/The_Place%E2%80%A6_for_Spirituality_and_Well-Being_is_now_open.aspx

(Department for Communities and Local Government, 2008, p. 33). Within the UK the Religious Literacy Leadership Programme¹⁶, funded by HEFCE, has taken the lead in assisting HE leaders 'to develop outlooks and strategies that engage positively with faith, promoting universities as places that can lead and shape informed responses to faith in wider society' (RLLP website, 2012). The website hosts a broad range of resources to help HEIs develop strategies that engage positively with faith including a range of religious literacy guides, and links to specific guidelines on making provisions for religious groups. The programme has also initiated Religious Literacy Leadership Champions¹⁷, comprising eight university vice-chancellors who stand as a collaborative resource for developing religious literacy leadership stances. In addition, the programme has developed a series of Case Studies (Dinham and Jones, 2010) designed to act as resources for Religious Literacy Leaders, outlining the 'challenges and dilemmas posed by religious faith in university settings... derived from examples encountered in primary research in three HEIs and in conversations with vice-chancellors students and staff' (ibid, p.1). The case studies address some of the more pragmatic and practical issues facing HEIs in developing specific support policies, for example managing admissions and registry, exams and timetabling, food and accommodation, and alcohol, bars and events. The guide also evidences good practice in relation to more challenging issues such as developing good campus relations, building issues of religion into the curricula, religious speech on campus, implementing religiously sensitive counselling and researching faith and sexuality.

As evidenced by the first stage evaluation of the programme, however, (Dinham and Jones, 2011) implementing such practice is highly dependent on both the type of institution, the student body and, in particular, whether policy and practice is being designed and implemented across the three leadership levels that are relevant to religious literacy strategy: Vice-Chancellor level (setting the tone and endorsing the efforts of other staff working on issues of religious faith); Pro Vice-Chancellor level (developing strategic leadership and promoting the mainstreaming of religious literacy policy and practice); and operational staff (who need to put the strategy into

¹⁶ <http://religiousliteracyhe.org/about/>

¹⁷ <http://religiousliteracyhe.org/about/champions/>

practice). Unless there is 'buy-in' at all levels then policy and practice will fail to become embedded and mainstreamed.

Recommendations for further research

As identified at the beginning of this thesis, the voices of religious students remain largely invisible in the academic literature and their individual experiences are almost wholly unknown to policy makers. Conducting the research for this thesis has, however, provided me with the privileged opportunity to glimpse into the lives of fifteen, highly individual, religious students. I feel honoured to have known them. I also feel a strong sense of responsibility that their voices are heard by academics and policy makers. Writing this thesis is, therefore, not the end but only the beginning.

The stories told by the students evidence the need for higher education institutions to develop effective policies and practices which not only meet their social and academic needs but also minimise the risk of students withdrawing. It is, therefore, imperative that such research is undertaken.

Whilst my study makes an important contribution to the current literature on religious students in UK higher education, the practical limitations of conducting a non-funded, time-bound doctoral research project prevented me from involving more students, or bringing other institutions in the study. It would, therefore, be helpful to identify whether the findings from this research are similar to the experiences of other groups of religious students in other research sites. As with much research in higher education, I have also focussed only on the lives of undergraduate students and it would be useful to draw comparisons with post-graduate students. In addition, despite being conducted over more than a year, this research still only represents a 'snap shot' of students' lives. Thus, there is also a need for further longitudinal research which identifies how specific institutional contexts interact with the religious activities of religious students and the effect this may have in terms of organisational policy and practice. Such research would also provide a rich seam for further research and comparison.

In particular, the ways in which religious students undertake distinct strategies to enable them to negotiate the field of HE warrants further investigation. Since the number of students who participated in this study is so small, in my analysis I was reluctant to draw attention to any possible link between affiliation to a specific religious group and strategy undertaken. However, it is apparent that those students who chose to pass are both

Christian, as are those who developed a strategy of avoidance of the field; in contrast the students who undertook strategies of resistance and confrontation are both Jewish; whilst those students who disengaged either physically or emotionally are, primarily, Muslim. This does suggest a tentative link between religious affiliation and choice of strategy.

However, as is apparent from their stories, all of the students are highly individual in terms of their backgrounds (e.g. care leaver, former refugee, ex-army, widowed single parent) and experiences (racism, abandonment, migration, violence). These experiences are highly influential in informing the students' strategising: in my analysis, I draw attention to how, for example, it is Sean's experiences of being ridiculed for being openly religious whilst serving in the army that informs his decision to pass at university; and whilst Ruth only talks briefly about her past experiences it is probably not unreasonable to infer that her experiences of growing up in a violent household and being moved around the care system might influence her strategy of emotional disengagement. In addition, not all the students from one religion undertake the same strategies: Sean and Mandy pass; Tony and Simon avoid the field; Gary adopts a charm offensive, and Ruth disengages. All are Christian but they adopt very different strategies.

It is, however, interesting to note that Sean and Mandy are both mature students, and Simon and Tony are both middle-class. Therefore, it may be that there is something in the intersectionality between religion and, for example class or age, that informs the strategies undertaken by particular groups of religious students.

Whilst teasing out any possible link between social identities, including religious affiliation, and strategising would, require a much larger study, and one undertaken across a range of HEIs, including those with religious foundations, such as York St John or Leeds Trinity University College, as well as Oxford or Cambridge, or Civic Universities such as Manchester or Liverpool, it is certainly an area of research which I intend to pursue.

Final reflections

The journey from commencement to completion of my Professional Doctorate in Education has been an extraordinary one, crammed with positive opportunities and experiences, but also filled with difficulties and frustrations. I have been in the privileged position of crafting a piece of work from scratch and developing new skills and techniques along the way.

However, during the doctoral journey I have also found my research skills and capabilities tested and stretched and there have been moments, particularly during the writing of the thesis, when I felt overwhelmed and uncertain about the choices I had made. There have also been many times when I doubted both my commitment and my ability to complete the journey I had embarked on so enthusiastically five years earlier. Four particular challenges stretched and tested me during my journey.

My first major challenge was to establish what exactly my research project was about, and to create shape and form from the numerous possibilities floating around in my head. In the early days I toyed with researching BME students, refugees, mature refugees, middle-class BME students...and I went backwards and forwards, settling on one and then the other. It was a seminal moment, therefore, when, for my upgrade preparation paper, I finally wrote down the phrase 'for my research project I intend to explore the social and educational experiences of religious students during their first year in a post-1992 UK HEI'. It was at that point that I couldn't help but wonder why it had taken me so long to recognise what suddenly seemed so clear and so obvious.

My second significant challenge was to realise that I needed to own my EdD. Just a few weeks ago I heard a group of new doctoral students told that they should not 'bother trying to get in the passenger side. You are driving the car!' I wish I had heard that phrase at the start of my studies. Instead, accepting that it was my responsibility to define the research questions, articulate the research problem, and craft the thesis was a scary and unsettling process and one that took me some time to get used to. I kept trying to hide behind my supervisor but she did an excellent job of not letting me.

My third challenge was to listen to what my data was trying to say to me, to let it speak and to not try so hard to understand that I couldn't actually hear anything. For some reason the significance of the stories the students told me during their interviews got lost once they had been transcribed and turned in to black ink on paper. The data analysis stage of the journey was, therefore, particularly significant in my personal transformation: the point where I was able to step back from the transcripts and allow the students' stories to re-emerge was a sublime moment and the point at which I knew I would be able to complete my journey. I stopped being so hard on myself so much and started to relax.

My final challenge was to write a thesis which I felt gave justice not only to the stories told by the students but also the extensive and time-consuming work I had put into the EdD. It took time to recognise that what I was actually doing was creating a story about the stories that I had been told. I, therefore, needed to build a narrative, and then inform and persuade my readers that my argument was a convincing one. Consequently there was no point trying to put the end before the middle, or the beginning at the end. Instead the story needed to flow, and at this point critical reflection was paramount. I picked and picked at each paragraph, ensuring that my central themes and issues were clear and that I had developed my points and reinforced my arguments adequately. I read and re-read each chapter asking myself the question: 'am I convinced?' If the answer was 'no' then I knew that there was no chance that anyone else was going to be. I therefore spent much of the last year of my EdD pruning unnecessary words from my thesis, reorganising paragraphs, adding in references to back up arguments and including additional sentences or phrases for clarity. At the point when I knew I could defend my work against (pretty much) any criticism levelled at it, I knew that my thesis was ready to submit

Ultimately my transformation as a researcher finally came about when I accepted that the challenges and tensions I faced were part of the learning process and that, rather than being threatening, they provided me with an opportunity to stretch my intellectual capacities and to grow both personally and professionally. Working through these challenges has made me not only a more reflective and self-critical researcher, but also a stronger and more capable one.

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List of Abbreviations

A-PP Group	All-Party Parliamentary Group against Anti-Semitism
BERA	British Educational Research Association
BIS	Department for, Business, Innovation and Skills
BME	Black and Minority Ethnic
CPPR	Centre for Public Policy Research
CU	Christian Union
DfES	Department for Education and Skills
DIUS	Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills
DSA	Disabled Students' Allowance
ECU	The Equality Challenge Unit
ESRC	Economic and Social Research Council
FE	Further Education
FOSIS	Federation of Student Islamic Societies
HEA	Higher Education Academy
HEFCE	Higher Education Funding Council for England
HESA	Higher Education Statistics Agency
IRO	Islamist Related Offence
J-Soc	The Jewish Society
NAO	National Audit Office
NI	Narrative inquiry
NS-SEC	National Statistics Socio-Economic Classification
NUS	National Union of Students
OFFA	Office for Fair Access
PI	Performance Indicators
UCAS	Universities and Colleges Admissions Service
UUK	Universities UK
UJS	Union of Jewish Students

Appendices

Appendix A Student demographics

Name	Religion	Ethnicity	Age	Gender	Living	Class (self defined)	Course	No. of ints
Aisha	Muslim	British Pakistani	18	Female	Parental home	Working	Law LLB	3
Alex	Christian	White British	18	Male	Student halls	Working	Forensic Computing	3
Amneet	Sikh	British Indian	32	Female	Own home	Middle	Youth and Community	1
Andy	Christian	White British	24	Male	Student halls	Working	Tourism	3
Anna	Christian	White British	45	Female	Own home	Working	History	2
Davina	Jewish	White British	18	Female	Jewish halls	Middle	Criminology	3
Dinah	Jewish	White British	18	Female	Jewish halls	Middle	Primary Education	3
El-Feda	Muslim	British Black African	32	Male	Parental home	Mum working, Dad middle	Politics	3
Gary	Christian	White British	22	Male	Student halls	Working	Sound Technology	3
Imran	Muslim	British Pakistani	18	Male	Parental home	Was middle now 'unsure'	Business Management	2

Mandy	Christian	White British	38	Female	Own home	Working	Criminology	3
Ruth	Christian	White British	19	Female	Private house	Working	Childhood Studies	3
Sean	Christian	White British	26	Male	Own home	Working	Business Management	3
Simon	Christian	White British	18	Male	Student halls	Middle	Film and TV Production	3
Tony	Christian	White British	18	Male	Student halls	Middle	PE Teaching	3
Total number of interviews: 41								

Appendix B Presence of students in each of the chapters

Name	Gender	Race	Class	Religion
Aisha				
Alex				
Amneet				
Andy				
Anna				
Davina				
Dinah				
El-Feda				
Gary				
Imran				
Mandy				
Ruth				
Sean				
Simon				
Tony				

The shaded areas are where the students' stories have been included in each chapter.

Appendix C Information sheet for students

Exploring the Social and Educational Experiences of Religious* Students Information Sheet for Students

The aim of this research is to understand:

- The social and academic experiences of first year 'religious' students
- How participation in social and academic activities impacts on religious and other identity

The research will be conducted through semi-structured interviews and I am inviting you to take part in a series of three interviews, each of which is likely to last about one hour at an agreed location. These will take place over the next year and will focus on exploring your participation in curricular and extra-curricular activities and your perceptions of yourself as a student at [research site university]. The interview will be audio recorded and transcribed. I may also make notes during the interview. These transcripts and notes will be freely available for you to read in advance of each of our subsequent interviews.

Participation in this research study is voluntary and you are not obliged to take part. If you do decide to participate in an interview, you will be free to withdraw at any time without the need to give any reason or explanation. The recordings, subsequent transcripts and any notes taken will be given a numerical code and your name will not appear anywhere with the data. The data will be stored on password protected computer files. The contents of all interviews will be kept confidential and your name will be anonymised in all publications, reports and presentations arising from this research unless you specifically request otherwise.

Findings from the research will form the basis of my doctoral thesis and also appear in papers and articles written for academic and professional journals and in presentations at education conferences.

If you require further information about the project, please do not hesitate to contact me:

Jacqueline Stevenson, [Research Site University]

Email address: j.stevenson@XXX.ac.uk

* Religious refers to both having a faith and undertaking some form of action related to that faith. The term 'religious students' is used to refer to those students who self-identify as being religious.

Appendix D Consent form for students

Exploring the Social and Educational Experiences of Religious* Students

Consent form for students

I have read the Information Sheet relating to the research in which I have been asked to participate and I understand what I am being asked to do

Yes / No

I consent to take part in a series of interviews for this study

Yes / No

I consent to the interviews being audio recorded

Yes / No

I consent to the contents of the interviews being transcribed

Yes / No

I consent to notes being taken during the interviews

Yes / No

I understand that the contents of the interviews will be confidential

Yes / No

I consent to my words being quoted anonymously in any presentations, reports or publications arising from the research unless I specifically agree otherwise

Yes / No

I understand that all data collected from and about me will be kept safely and securely

Yes / No

I understand that I have the right to withdraw from the research at any time and that, if I choose, all information collected about and from me will be destroyed at that point

Yes / No

I understand that data will not be kept longer than is necessary to complete a full analysis. It will then be reviewed and securely archived or destroyed.

Yes / No

Participant's name (BLOCK CAPITALS)

Participant's signature

Date

Researcher's name (BLOCK CAPITALS)

Researcher's signature

Date

* Religious refers to both having a faith and undertaking some form of action related to that faith. The term 'religious students' is used to refer to those students who self-identify as being religious.

Appendix E Interview schedule: first interview

1. Let's start by you telling me a little about you, who you are, Give as much detail as you want to give me. Take as long as you like (probing questions: what are the things that are important to you, and the things that have made you the person you are today).
2. Describe your journey into higher education, start as far back as you like and give as much detail as you want to (probing questions: why you have made the decision to come to university and why here? Why now? Why this course? what was most critical in informing your choice?).
3. Describe your first few weeks at university concentrating on both the positive and the negative and the things that have pleasantly surprised or disappointed you (probing questions: how have you fitted in socially and academically in these first few weeks; how has this come about?).
4. Tell me a little about the people that have become important to you in these first few weeks, and whether this has arisen by choice or by circumstance (probing questions: who are you socialising with? what influenced your choice-making? what activities do you participate in? is this what you expected to happen).
5. Tell me about how you are 'fitting in' now you are here at university, giving examples of some of the more significant things that have happened to you (probing questions: how has this come about; is this what you expected; how could this change; what role has your religion played in this?).
6. Describe what, if anything, has affected your ability to participate in curricular or extra-curricular activities or other aspects of university life (probing questions: Has religion been influential? have there been negative effects, what (if anything) have you done to negotiate or challenge these? if you haven't challenged, why not? What have the consequences been?).

Appendix F Exemplar vignette

Mandy is a 38 year old, White, British Christian woman studying for a degree in Criminology. She has been married twice but is now divorced. She married her first husband when she was only eighteen but he committed suicide when her second child was a few weeks old, leaving her heavily in debt. Before this time Mandy wasn't religious but with the suicide of her husband she turned to Christianity because 'I was 20 with two babies and you look for answers and that seemed to be the route for me'. She subsequently became strongly and actively involved in her local church. Mandy remarried and had two more children but her second husband was both an alcoholic and abusive. He refused to let her go to church, although she continued to pray at home. Her second husband left her two years ago. She is now bringing up her four children (aged between nine and twenty) on her own and has started to attend church again. Two of her children live at home, one is at university and the other lives with his grandmother after his relationship with Mandy broke down a year ago.

Mandy left school at 16 and studied horticulture at FE College but with the birth of her children she undertook a series of low paid semi-skilled jobs which would bring in some money into the household. At the point when she was less 'tied' to the home she went back to college and took A levels including A level Law. She knew she did not want to become a lawyer but she 'wanted more' from life so when she saw the course in Criminology she felt it would offer her a new start. She lives about 15 miles away from the city and because her youngest children are only 11 and 14 she chose a university based solely on location.

Mandy has mental health problems (depression) which she informed the university about before she commenced her studies and for which she is receiving support. She is keen that the university gives her a goal and something to aim for. However, during her first interview she commented that she had found the first few weeks 'nerve-wracking' and was extremely nervous. Although things were starting to get better she still felt unsettled. She commented that although there are a few other more mature students she is in a minority and feels quite 'outside' and 'apart' from the other students. While she spoke to them during class time outside of the lectures and seminars she was on her own. Although this had some benefits, such as having plenty of time to go to the library, Mandy commented several times during the interview that she was 'alone' and 'felt lonely'. She had

found out about the Christian Union and was thinking about joining so that she would make friends but was worried that in doing so other students might consider her 'strange'.

During her second interview it was clear that Mandy had settled in to university life, bolstered in part by the fact that her children thought that it was 'fantastic. They can really see a change in me. The younger ones ask me about what I'm learning. My 18 year old was having lots of problems, drinking and borrowing money, but since I started this he's started appreciating things more an maybe it's influencing him'. She had also taken on the role of mentor to several of the younger students in her class, and discussed several incidents in her class where she had found the confidence to make contributes to class discussions, receiving praise and feedback from both her peers and her tutors. She commented that although she had been really keen to go to university she did not feel she would ever fit in but now she was 'loving it, such a buzz, which came from being around other people who she could have 'intelligent' conversations with. At the end of her second interview she commented that it was 'like I have come home'.

During interview three, Mandy discussed her faith and the role that religion had played at various points in her life, commenting that she had made a conscious decision not to join the Christian Union, as she felt that it would make her stand out at a point when she had just started to fit in. She continued to pray at home and felt that religion was still a part of her life but one that she did not want to make overt. She talked about hiding her Christian past from other students and being deliberately quiet on the few occasions that religion was discussed. She discussed how being at university had filled what had been a gap in her life. She also felt that, while she had turned to religion at critical points in her past, she now found that having 'intellectual' discussions made her feel 'fulfilled' and that whilst she was at university she would remain quiet about her religious beliefs.

Appendix G Working with the data

As described in Chapter Four, having transcribed each interview, I began my analysis by closely reading each transcript to identify themes (for example, race, class, habitus, otherness, belonging, struggle, agency, structural constraints) and stories (in the case of El-Feda's transcript, below, abandonment by father, taking responsibility for his family, being re-united with his father etc.). During this phase I took rough notes. I then re-read and annotated each transcript before developing a more structured chart which highlighted the students' key stories, gave a brief commentary on each story, identified codes/themes and also noted key parts of the text which I might later use to evidence the themes. I repeated this for each student and for each interview.

Once I had completed the annotations and charts for each student's interviews I used a mind-mapping software package called Freemind to develop theme trees relating to themes across all of the transcripts. The coding tree relating to habitus is included below.

Having established the key themes across the interviews, and having decided whose stories were being told in each chapter, I then crafted each chapter, using the students' stories to evidence the themes. As outlined in Chapter Four I returned to the transcripts to ensure that I had either used the students' words and/or phrased each section in a way that reflected their words and would therefore, I hoped, be recognisable to them. Two sections of prose which appear in Chapter Six and which are drawn from El-Feda's first interview transcript are as follows:

Caring for others is something that has been imposed on El-Feda and remains a source of great resentment. He is frustrated by his mother's refusal to integrate and learn English and his brother's laissez-faire attitude towards life. His inclination is to abandon them to 'get on with it' but his sense of duty and obligation, integral parts of his habitus, over-ride such desires (Chapter Six, p. 83).

Caught between two opposing sets of parental expectations - to get a degree and become successful (middle-class, highly educated father) and to continue to provide socially and economically for his family (working-class, uneducated mother) - he makes the decision to enrol in higher education whilst continuing to work as many hours as he can (Chapter Six, p.84).

Annotated transcript

1 **El-Feda: 1st Interview. 4th November. 11 am.**

2 Int: Ok thanks, I'll just put this nearer to you. Is that OK? I hope it's recording.

3 E: It's fine. It's flashing.

4 Int: Ok, I'll trust it. I'm never convinced it won't just stop in the middle of me
5 recording. That's happened before. Anyway, just to start us off, I know that

6 you're Muslim but can you tell me, if you don't mind, your age and your
7 *had already mentioned it in that email*
ethnicity. **RACE**

8 E: I'm 33 and Black British, Black African but British. I'm from Africa *Dual identity?*
9 originally but I'm now British. I have British citizenship. *how does he see his ethnic identity?*

10 Int: Ok thank you, and this might sound a bit of a strange question, but how
11 would you describe your class?

12 E: Oh. That's complicated. I don't, I suppose your class is what your parents'
13 *in the middle - habshim?*
class is but my parents are really different to each other. Like my dad he's

14 **CLASS.** middle class, you know well educated and successful; but my mum she's *link between education & success.*
15 just, well she has never been educated, she's just from a small village in

16 *think between class + education* Africa and so she's uneducated and I suppose you'd say she was working

17 class, but she doesn't work so I don't know. I think I'm both really. **Middle**
18 class and working class. *again duality? being between two words?*

19 Int: Thank you. That's really interesting. And if you had to make a decision?

20 E: I don't know. In the middle.

21 Int: OK, thank you. So now can I ask a little more about you, how you've come
22 to be studying Politics here at [research site]. Tell me as much as you want,

23 about what you were doing before, and how you made the choice to come
24 here. Your journey. *intensity that starts with his father?*

25 E: Well my dad was a religious leader in East Africa. He was working for a
26 Muslim charity, building schools. But he wanted to do a PhD. He'd been
27 working for the Saudi government from when he was eighteen and he's
28 done lots, you know he was recognised as an Islamic scholar, and he *again reference to academic success.*

29 wanted to turn it in to something more concrete, and so he came to the UK
30 in 1987 to do a PhD at X university in Koranic studies. So he brought us all

31 *again* over here, as he also wanted us to get a good education. So we came to
32 *imp. of education* school here. Then he [dad] became a local community leader, the Iman for

33 *fundamental* one of the main mosques here, and he fell out with other leaders in the

34 *habshim?* mosque when Iraq invaded Kuwait. Then he came under pressure to leave

35 the UK. You know he was really criticising them and so for his safety he
 36 had to leave. So he left us here and went abroad and we never had any
 37 contact with him for years. He just left us all here and went. I was the oldest
 38 so that was it then. I was responsible for the whole family from then.

39 Int: And the whole family was?...

40 E: I've got a younger sister and a younger brother, and my mum.

41 Int: OK, thank you. And so what happened then?

42 E: Well we had nothing. He left us with nothing. We had no money at all and
 43 it was a real struggle. ^{first use of term struggle - used again & again} I can honestly say that I grew up in poverty. And the
 44 worst thing was that when he went back to Africa he set up with a new
 45 family and it was like we just didn't exist anymore. That he'd just walked
 46 away from all of us and left me to cope and to deal with everything and just
 47 put it all on to me, the burden of coping with the rest of my family, of
 48 making sure they were ok.

49 Int: And how old were you when he left?

50 E: Fourteen. ^{very young for so much responsibility}

51 Int: And so then....?

52 E: I stayed at school until I was nearly 16 but then I left and went to college. I
 53 wanted to play basketball, I wanted to be a professional basketball player
 54 but I was seen as a foreign national then and I couldn't get on to the British
 55 ^{not fitting in?} team. So I had to stop and in the end I went to work for X [names
 56 company]. I ended up ^{no choice} having to go out to work to earn for us all. Because I
 57 was the oldest. I'd done Level 2 and 3 BTECs at College but I had to give
 58 up my studies and earn for the family. I didn't want my younger brother
 59 and sister to go through what I did. I wanted them to be able to go to
 60 university so I went to work at X so that I could pay for my brother and
 61 sister. I didn't have a choice. It was that or they would have the same
 62 chance that I did. That is no chance at all. And I wanted more for them than
 63 that. ^{taking forced responsibility} It's up to me to support them. I've paid for my brother and my sister to
 64 go to university and I supported them throughout because I didn't want
 65 them to have to work part time and struggle. And like, ^{not "want to" - feels the weight.} I have to support my
 66 mum too. My mum, I drive her everywhere she needs to go because she is
 67 afraid of the buses. And I translate for her because she can't speak English,
 68 so like if there's a parents evening at my little sister's school I have to go

69 there too because she wouldn't understand. My brother he graduated last
 70 year and now I'm paying for him to do a master's degree. I had no choice.
 71 There was only me to do it. I got stuck working. The money was good but it
 72 depressed me very much, but it was something I had to do, it got very
 73 stressful though. My brother thinks that everything will just come to him in
 74 life. He isn't like me, he hasn't had to struggle. I would have loved
 75 someone to have paid for me to go to university at 18 but there was no
 76 choice. I'm 33 years old and I should have my own family. But it is still all
 77 down to me until my little sister has been married. And then I will still have
 78 to take care of my mother. I get really frustrated by the fact that they just
 79 lean on me all the time but also, like because I've supported them for so
 80 long I've also struggled to let go of the reins and loose the control I have
 81 and let them blossom. It's like I really resent them but I can't stop myself
 82 looking after them. Does that make sense?

83 Int: Yes.
 84 E: Like I want to abandon them all and let them just get on with it but I can't.
 85 It's like I can't stop caring even though I want to.

86 Int: And are you still working now or have you stopped to come to uni?
 87 E: I'm still working but I've cut my hours back. I have to work because if I
 88 didn't I could afford to come here and I'm still paying for my brother and
 89 my mum and sister don't work so I have to.

90 Int: And thinking about that, about managing work and your studies, how do
 91 you think that's going to work out because obviously it's a big
 92 commitment?

93 E: Oh I've got it sorted now. It's not ideal but I've worked it all out, going part
 94 time, going back to live at home so I can afford university and still support
 95 my mum, working weekends so I can make lectures. I've just had to make
 96 well like changes you know sort of compromise, well organise everything
 97 to fit in. I would love to stay living by myself but I can't afford it. But
 98 living back home, well, it wasn't what I wanted. And I'd love to give up
 99 work but even moving back home well I can't you know because of the
 100 cost. And it does pay well. I've been there over ten years now. But I really
 101 don't like it. I'm there because it pays well but I don't like the organisation
 102 or the people, well not many of them. They are racist and bigoted.

RACISM

lack of agency
 opportunity
 Duality torn? what's happened?
 how he describes what's happened
 as he was?
 disposition? broken - divided!
 Anal.
 structural limitations again lack of limited choices
 lack of choice / agency / structural barriers
 very strong words

103 Int: In what ways?

RACE

other

lack of belonging / fit

104 E: Well, like at work most people are White. I am Black and am different.
105 And I stand out so from the rest of them you know not just in the way I
106 look, my skin, but in everything. In everyway I don't fit in. I stand out. So I
107 have to dumb down my language and make sexist jokes and talk in a broad
108 Yorkshire accent to be able to take part in any conversation at all. And at
109 work like if someone asks me a politics question I'll start to answer and
110 they'll say 'oh El's off again' and a couple of my friends will say 'why are
111 you trying to explain?' They haven't got the intelligence.

need to change to fit in

112 Int: And so why university and why now?

113 E: My dad wants me to get a degree. I'm in touch with him now. I went back
114 to see him four years ago and he had become really successful. I couldn't
115 remember much of my early life in Africa but you know over the years I've
116 heard all these stories of how successful my dad's become and I thought
117 when I go there I might also be successful there, but when I got there I
118 couldn't believe the amount of poverty. There's no hope, no future, nobody
119 my age has a job, no prospects, and everyone is really poor. But as my
120 fathers' son, I was expected to be equally as successful as him, and without
121 a degree I would never be considered successful. And if I went back again
122 without a degree it would be 'what have you been doing for the last thirty
123 years?'. So I felt I couldn't have any self-worth if I didn't get a degree. And
124 if you don't have a degree there you're nothing anyway. And the only thing
125 dad has ever asked of me is to get a degree.

again with
between
education
connect
family
structure

↳ inequality?

126 Int: Are you're studying Politics? Why Politics?

127 E: Like my dad is surrounded by ministers and politicians and one of the main
128 things, when I first when back, well we're not wealthy, but comfortable,
129 like my dad bought land there in the early 80s, and it's a really nice area
130 now. Anyway we landed at the airport and we didn't need to queue and
131 we're treated really well and I see all the Mercedes and in the next street
132 there are people living in the streets. [Capital] has the most number of
133 millionaires and yet the country is one of the poorest. The corruption, well
134 you can do anything you want if you have influence and power and maybe
135 it's idealistic and I'm fantasising but I want to make a little change to that.

Again
not sure
he fits -
no real
sense
of
belonging?

Episodic and thematic analysis

Interview one: El-Feda Stories	Commentary on the story	Codes/themes	Text
Initial discussion	Appear to be between two worlds in terms of race and class; familial habitus? Effect on habitus?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Race • Class • Familial habitus • Habitus: divided; dual; • Link between academic success and education 	<p><i>Black British, Black African but British. I'm from Africa originally but I'm now British.</i></p> <p><i>I suppose your class is what your parents' class is but my parents are really different to each other.... I think I'm both really. Middle class and working class</i></p>
His father returns to his home country leaving the family behind	Feeling of abandonment and rejection; has to adapt to being head of the house and in a relatively unknown country, mother speaks no English; feelings of alienation made worse by the fact that he is supporting his siblings to do what they want thus resentment;	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Otherness and alienation; difference • Abandonment; unwanted • Invisibility • Lack of belonging • Struggle • Burden of coping – not a disposition of care but forced on him • Lack of choice – structural constraints; lack of agency • Resentment towards family • Habitus – dispositions of obligation overcome desire to walk away 	<p><i>So he left us here and went abroad and we never had any contact with him for years. He just left us all here and went</i></p> <p><i>He left us with nothing. We had no money at all and it was a real struggle. I can honestly say that I grew up in poverty. And the worst thing was that when he went back to Africa he set up with a new family and it was like we just didn't exist anymore.</i></p> <p><i>Just put it all on to me, the burden of coping with the rest of my family, of making sure they were ok.</i></p> <p><i>I didn't have a choice....It's up to me to support them. I've paid for my brother and my sister to go to university and I supported them throughout because I didn't want them to have to work part time and struggle.</i></p> <p><i>I got stuck working. The money was good but it depressed me very much, but it was something I had to do, it got very</i></p>

			<p>stressful though. My brother thinks that everything will just come to him in life. He isn't like me, he hasn't had to struggle.</p> <p>But it is still all down to me until my little sister has been married. And then I will still have to take care of my mother. I get really frustrated by the fact that they just lean on me all the time but also, like because I've supported them for so long I've also struggled to let go of the reins and loose the control I have and let them blossom. It's like I really resent them but I can't stop myself looking after them. Does that make sense?</p> <p>It's like I can't stop caring even though I want to.</p>
Leaves college at 18 and goes to work in industry	Doesn't feel connected to his colleagues and is resentful of having to work; doesn't belong; isolated because of his colour, his class and his faith; needs to behave in an unauthentic way in order to fit in	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Doesn't fit in/belong • Has to change to fit in • Otherness • Importance of academic success- familial habitus 	<p>... at work most people are White. I am Black and am different. And I stand out so from the rest of them you know not just in the way I look, my skin, but in everything. In every way I don't fit in. I stand out. So I have to dumb down my language and make sexist jokes and talk in a broad Yorkshire accent to be able to take part in any conversation at all. And at work like if someone asks me a politics question I'll start to answer and they'll say 'oh EI's off again' and a couple of my friends will say 'why are you trying to explain?' They haven't got the intelligence.</p>
Father gets back in touch	Determination to please his father by getting a degree Constantly looking to please his father	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Familial habitus -importance of education; link with success 	<p>My dad wants me to get a degree.</p> <p>... really successful. ... I've heard all these stories of how successful my dad's become and I thought when I go there I might also be successful there, ...as my fathers' son, I was expected to be equally as successful as him, and without a degree I would never</p>

			<p>be considered successful.</p> <p><i>...if you don't have a degree there you're nothing anyway. And the only thing dad has ever asked of me is to get a degree.</i></p>
<p>Returns to his home country.</p>	<p>Thought he would feel a sense of belonging when goes back to Sudan but doesn't belong there either – between belonging.</p> <p>Wants to emulate his father but at the same time is not comfortable with the world he inhabits; caught between wanting to be like him and live in his world and also change it</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Divided habitus • Lack of belonging • Otherness • Torn again between two worlds 	<p><i>I couldn't believe the amount of poverty. There's no hope, no future, nobody my age has a job, no prospects, and everyone is really poor.</i></p> <p><i>Like my dad is surrounded by ministers and politicians and one of the main things, when I first when back, well we're not wealthy, but comfortable, like my dad bought land there in the early 80s, and it's a really nice area now. Anyway we landed at the airport and we didn't need to queue and we're treated really well and I see all the Mercedes and in the next street there are people living in the streets. [Capital] has the most number of millionaires and yet the country is one of the poorest. The corruption, well you can do anything you want if you have influence and power and maybe it's idealistic and I'm fantasising but I want to make a little change to that.</i></p>

Coding tree: habitus

