



An English study of social justice and student agency in the development of the capability to aspire: the role of capital, emotions and reflexivity.

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An English study of social justice and student agency in the development of the capability to aspire: the role of capital, emotions and reflexivity.

Abstract

This qualitative study considers individual agency in the development of the capability to aspire among nine female undergraduate students from working- and middle-class backgrounds studying in the management school of a Russell Group institution in Northern England. The study identifies the ways in which universities might better support female working-class students in the development of aspiration.

The capabilities approach provides a framework for the study which foregrounds issues of agency and social justice in the process of aspiration development. Within this framework Bourdieusian theory is deployed to undertake a thematic analysis of class-based differences in capital relevant to aspiration development, and techniques from narrative inquiry and life history are utilised to consider the ways in which emotions, capital and reflexivity, enhance or limit agency in the process of aspiration development.

The thesis brings together Bourdieusian theory and theories of reflexivity to provide new insights to individual agency in aspiration development. My analysis of participant stories indicates that class-based differences in capital influence the extent of agency in the development of aspirations, and that the accumulation of capital is important to the reflexive accommodation of change to personal biography and enhancement of individual agency. Social capital is of particular importance as informational support increases the range of visible possible futures and esteem, emotional and companionship support mitigate potential painful emotions as individuals move to new social fields. If individuals are unable to accumulate capital relevant to new social fields, reflexivity may be used to justify the status quo and limit individual agency.

Glossary

A Level - Advanced Level

AS Level – Advanced Subsidiary level

BAME - Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic

BBC - British Broadcasting Corporation

BPP - Brierley Price Prior

BTEC - British and Technology Education Council

DCC - Departmental Community Coordinators

GCSE - General Certificate of Secondary Education

HE - Higher Education

FCC - Faculty Community Coordinators

ICC - Inclusive Community Coordinators

KPMG - Klynveld Peat Marwick Goerdeler

LSE - The London School of Economics and Political Sciences

MC-FG Middle-Class, First-Generation

MC-NFG Middle-Class, Not First-Generation

NGO - Non-Governmental Organisation

NUS - National Union of Students

NVQ – National Vocational Qualification

POLAR - Participation of Local Areas

QAA - Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education

UK - United Kingdom

WC-FG Working-Class, First-Generation

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Chapter 1: Introduction and approach to the study

1.1 Introduction to the study

My study explores female undergraduate students' perceptions of the ways in which they develop their aspirations whilst in secondary and higher education (HE) in the context of what is important to them. It focuses on class as a social justice concern and compares aspiration development in students from the middle- and working classes. The research questions considered are:

1. To what extent do participant stories provide evidence of class differences in the capital available to participants relevant to the development of the capability to aspire?
2. To what extent do participant stories provide evidence of participant agency in the development of the capability to aspire?
3. What factors influence the extent of participant agency in the development of the capability to aspire?

This small-scale qualitative study of young women studying on an undergraduate programme in management at a Russell Group institution provides new insights into student agency and social justice in the process of aspiration development. Within this framework Bourdieusian theory (1986; 1990a) is deployed to examine class-based differences in capital relevant to aspiration development, and techniques from narrative inquiry (Horsdal, 2011) and life history (Goodson, 2016) are utilised to consider the ways in which emotions, capital and reflexivity enhance or limit agency in the process of aspiration development. The findings have enabled me to identify the ways in which universities might better support female students from all backgrounds in the development of aspiration.

This chapter outlines my motivations for and the contextual background to the study. It introduces alternative views of the importance of aspirations and explains why the capabilities approach provides a suitable framework for the study of aspiration.

1.2 Professional and personal motivation for the study

1.2.1 My interest in social justice and graduate careers

I was the first person in my family to go to university and place a high value on the opportunities education affords students. I studied at LSE (The London School of Economics and Political Sciences) and after six months in a variety of non-graduate roles, by chance secured a position with Klynveld Peat Marwick Goerdeler (KPMG) as a trainee Chartered Accountant. From a personal economic instrumental perspective, my degree was a success. However, accountancy was never a long-held ambition for me; I was reasonably good at it but did not feel fulfilled. I had no interest in business, found detailed work boring and despised the values and behaviours of many of my colleagues. However, this was not a case of frustrated ambition; I had little understanding of myself in the context of what might be important to me and of my strengths and still less of the opportunities an élite university had afforded me. Whilst I was successful at KPMG I found interaction with some colleagues and clients emotionally draining and damaging to my self-esteem. I suffered from anxiety and after five years, left KPMG for a career as a lecturer in HE. I had a hunch that the public sector might be suit me better and someone had told me that I was very good at presenting! I have worked as a lecturer in accounting for over twenty-five years, initially in a large city-based post-1992 institution and for the last nine years in a much smaller campus-based Russell Group University.

Whilst I was much happier and more fulfilled in HE, I continued to struggle to identify what I valued in my career and the possible futures I might pursue. I subscribed to a

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meritocratic view of the world and believed that reward would follow my ability and hard work. I was not future-oriented and wasted much time and energy on things that seemed important at the time but did not fulfil me or lead to something better. After many years in HE I can identify three factors which have given me greater insight into my personal experience and that of some of the students I taught. After 15 years in the sector, I completed a coaching qualification; this enabled me to identify my values and examine my life in the context of these values. This enhanced my understanding of what is important to me both personally and professionally; I wish I had had a fraction of this self-knowledge when I graduated. On reflection, I feel I had much potential but did not possess the tools to exploit that potential.

A few years later I moved from a post-1992 to a Russell Group institution. This felt like a much better personal fit as I shifted from mass market back (as I saw it) to élite. However, my observations of colleagues and students changed my views on meritocracy. I was recruited on a Teaching & Scholarship contract and felt marginalised by my colleagues. This was not only in the area of research but also in teaching organisation and I found it difficult to influence my colleagues. This was surprising as I understood that I had been recruited as a senior lecturer as a result of my experience and excellent track record in HE and my specialist expertise as a Chartered Accountant. This was the first time I had been aware of discrimination in the workplace, and it alerted me to my position as someone who did not possess the “right” credentials to be respected and valued. As Associate Dean for the Faculty, some senior, predominantly male colleagues initially dismiss me, and I often receive abusive emails from some of the professoriate in my department when I carry out my leadership responsibilities. My move to the Russell Group also alerted me to issues of social justice faced by students. I had assumed that my

initial struggles in securing a graduate position were my fault; I did not try hard enough. However, in observing students at Mount University my perception was that students from the middle classes found it easier to engage with employer networking events and careers provision. They were also more successful in securing placements and graduate jobs and were more likely to secure positions with elite employers than their peers from the working classes. I felt that as an institution, we should be doing something differently to address this differential between students from different economic backgrounds in terms of their access to and preparedness for graduate careers. In 2015, I enrolled on the Doctorate in Education at Sheffield University. This provided me with a new lens through which to view both my experiences and my perceptions of the student experience and a deeper insight into issues of social justice in HE and graduate careers.

1.2.2 My interest in the purpose of HE

As a professionally qualified accountant working in a post-1992 institution offering both professional training and undergraduate and postgraduate education, I did not question the purpose of HE as meeting employer needs and helping students enhance their potential earnings in the graduate marketplace. I have published on skills development; my work compares accounting trainees' perceptions of the extent to which university, the professional qualification and workplace training enhanced the development of skills considered important to a career in accounting (Webb and Chaffer, 2016; Chaffer and Webb, 2017).

The post-1992 institution where I spent the early part of my career was in fierce competition with local private sector providers in the market for professional accounting and legal practice training and every year the size and scope of our provision declined. It was therefore of personal and institutional concern when our main competitor Brierley

Price Prior (BPP) was one of the first companies to be granted degree-awarding powers in 2007 (BBC, 2007). This and further developments in the “market” focused my attention on the role of public sector universities. In 2011 professional bodies, employers and universities developed school-leaver degree programmes, which led to both a degree and a professional accountancy qualification (University of Durham, 2011; Manchester Metropolitan University, 2011) and in 2012, the government announced the planned introduction of graduate and postgraduate apprenticeships for the professions (DBIS, 2012). The subsequent introduction of degree apprenticeships (DBIS, 2014) and publication of the Green Paper *Fulfilling Our Potential: Teaching Excellence, Social Mobility and Student Choice* (DBIS, 2015) made clear the government’s focus on the instrumental economic purpose of HE and of increased private-sector competition in fulfilling this purpose. The post-1992 university in which I spent the early part of my career seemed well positioned to meet the needs of employers; the syllabus was closely aligned to that of the professional bodies and was delivered by professionally qualified accountants with extensive experience in industry or practice. However, we struggled to attract employers to campus, our students were not considered for the most prestigious positions and my perception was that many of them ended up in roles that did not require a degree.

From a professional perspective, I became increasingly concerned about the future of the sector and in particular that of post-1992 institutions which were not well positioned to compete with the private sector in delivering education narrowly focused on the skills demanded by accounting employers. I began to think about the nature and purpose of a degree and the opportunities public sector universities had to deliver a different type of education and to re-define the relationship between HE and graduate careers in a way

that went beyond the narrowly focused skills development approach. At the time, I viewed this through the lens of public-private sector competition and the difficulty state institutions might have in positioning themselves in a market designed to speak to the employability skills agenda. However, with the benefit of hindsight and my experience at the Russell Group institution, the difficulties experienced by the students I taught may have been partially attributable to their minority ethnic or socio-economic backgrounds. My personal experience and my observations of the difficulties experienced by students from the working classes, therefore led to an interest in the role of universities in supporting students to develop a better understanding of what is important to them and a broad knowledge of the opportunities that might be available to them.

1.3 Contextual background to the study

1.3.1 Introduction

The last section outlined my personal and professional motivation for a study. This section provides an overview of the literature, which examines the nature, and purpose of HE; this places my experience in the post-1992 institution within the context of a particular view of the purpose of HE and suggests that there is a space for alternative views of this purpose. This section also considers issues of social justice in HE as they relate to graduate careers. My personal experience and observations of my students have led to my focus on class and gender as issues of social justice but I recognise that ethnicity, disability and age are also important social justice concerns in HE.

1.3.2 The nature and purpose of HE

Universities have a long and complex history and have served different purposes at different times (Collini, 2012). The nature of the UK (United Kingdom) HE sector changed significantly during the twentieth century and early twenty-first century. Historically, UK

HE was elitist in nature, participation rates were extremely low (in 1950 - 3%) and the objective of HE was to “*shape the mind and character of the ruling class and to prepare them for elite roles*” (Trow, 2010, p.558). However, HE began to be seen as a right and participation significantly increased to meet demand¹ (Brennan, 2010). Trow (2010) outlines the evolution of HE to a mass system designed to prepare individuals for a range of technical and economic elite roles; for example, in the 1990s participation rates had increased from 19%, to one of near universal access², for example by 2016-17 participation rates had increased to 50%.

The current diversity of the sector, which encompasses a plethora of institutions serving many different functions, mirrors the sector’s complex history and it is almost impossible to develop an idea of a university that might apply to all institutions (Barnett, 2015). Barnett (2011) charts the course of the university across time and examines the ways in which the mission and values of universities have changed in response to differing economic and strategic needs and external pressures. He outlines a range of alternative ways of conceptualising the purpose of a university and suggests that government and universities themselves have at different times thought about this purpose in different ways. Early policy initiatives introduced the idea of employability (Robbins, 1963³) whilst acknowledging the broader benefits of HE to the individual and society. Barnett (2011) suggests that these broader benefits were conceptualised in the idea of a research university, which benefited society through the contribution of scientific knowledge and

¹ See appendix 1 for summary of participation rates.

² See appendix 2 for definition of the terms elite, mass and universal.

³ *The Robbins Report* (Robbins, 1963) was commissioned by the Heath Government to recommend principles for the long-term development of HE. One of its key recommendations was that places would be made available to all who were qualified. This was considered important to the long-term economic development of the UK in the context of international competition.

later, broader knowledge production to enhance the UK's position in the knowledge society.

UK universities have been subject to pervasive governmental and popular criticism over the past twenty years (Collini, 2012). Since Dearing⁴ (1997) policy initiatives (DBIS, 2011; DBIS, 2016) primarily emphasise the role of HE as a provider of skilled employees to meet economic needs but also highlight the opportunities HE offers for upward social mobility. UK government policy therefore primarily positioned the purpose of HE as instrumental at a societal and individual level (Robeyns, 2006). At a societal level, educational policy reflects dominant neo-liberal discourses in education; the importance of the economy and economic growth in ensuring the happiness and prosperity of the population (Hill and Kumar, 2009). Government policy positions such growth as dependent on prioritising the interests of capital (Giroux, 2014) and the free operation of markets (Hill and Kumar, 2009). It is therefore the responsibility of government to facilitate the operation of the market in human capital by ensuring that universities meet the needs of employers and the economy in terms of skills and knowledge (Dean, 2010). Whilst HE policy has been devolved since 1999, Gallacher and Raffe (2012) note that dominant discourses in both UK-wide and English HE policy highlight the skill needs of the knowledge economy and the importance of social mobility.

In the UK, there is a dominant discourse around the UK skills deficit, which it is argued, restricts the country's ability to compete in global markets (Olssen and Peters, 2005). The

⁴ The *Dearing Report* (Dearing, 1997) was commissioned by the Labour government to examine the long-term future of HE with a particular emphasis on funding. It introduced partial student funding for HE in the form of tuition fees. It was the first report into the future of HE since Robbins (1963) and has been followed by the *Browne Review* (DSIS, 2011) which further reformed university funding and *Success as a Knowledge of Economy* (DSIS, 2016) which widened student choice and initiated a link between teaching quality and funding.

expansion of HE can be seen in the context of the need to meet the perceived demand for skilled employees (DBIS, 2016) and the individual becomes a supplier of labour in this market. Self-interest can therefore be seen as an extension of market rationality; individuals are economic units free to “*use their own knowledge for their own purposes*” (Hayek, 1976,90). The government positions an individual’s skills and knowledge as income-generating capabilities which education enhances, bringing individual economic benefit (Robeyns, 2006). The market brings together the interests of employers and individuals and harmony is achieved at market equilibrium (Dean, 2010).

This literature helped me understand my experiences in a post-1992 institution, which considered the purpose of HE to be the development of market relevant skills and knowledge. However, it also alerted me to the potential for change. Universities have continually redefined their purpose in response to external factors and therefore the neo-liberal instrumental view of HE has the potential to be re-shaped. This reinforced my view that universities had the potential to offer more than just serving the needs of the market economy. The next two sections add to this contextual background by exploring issues of social justice in HE.

1.3.3 Social justice in HE

(a) Introduction

The concept of social justice is both contested and complex. There are several criteria that can be used to classify approaches to social justice although all conceptions are concerned in some way with fairness in society (Zajda et al.,2007). Sen (2009) classifies theorisation about social justice as transcendental institutionalism or comparative approaches. Transcendental institutionalism, also known as ideal theory (Valentini, 2012) is concerned with the extent to which the institutions and procedures for establishing

justice are fair or equitable - Hobbes, Kant, Locke and Rawls form part of this tradition. These approaches focus on some form of social contract, which establishes justice, and do not focus on the outcome of the procedure. In contrast, a comparative approach considers the extent to which a particular society is just - Marx, Mill and Bentham form part of this tradition. Traditionally theories of justice from both traditions focus on the distribution of resources (Young, 1990). This distributional focus can be criticised as injustices often arise from the nature of social structures and institutional contexts in society (Fraser, 1997). Relational approaches offer alternative ways of thinking about justice and are concerned with the nature and ordering of social relations and bring social structures and institutional contexts under scrutiny (Young, 1990). Young (1990) argues that justice should be concerned with the ability of all individuals from across society to participate in deliberation about the problems and issues which confront them, and that social and institutional structure should not create conditions of domination or oppression (Young, 1990). This approach therefore necessitates the recognition of different groups in society so that injustices can be identified – it can therefore be characterised as recognitional. The concept of social justice is therefore multi-faceted, and an analysis of justice can consider process, outcome, distribution, or recognition.

I am interested in understanding the different ways that students from different class backgrounds develop the capability to aspire. To an extent therefore my concerns are recognitional; I wish to consider the extent to which different groups in society are impacted differently by social and institutional structures, particularly HE. However, my concern is also process-focused; I wish to understand the extent of individual agency and the factors that influence individual agency. The next two sections introduce class and gender as social justice concerns in HE.

(b) Class as a social justice issue in HE

There is no single definition of class as a concept but broadly, “*class is utilised as a label to describe structures of inequality in modern societies*” or in Marxist thought as a “*term to describe a social force*” (Crompton, 2008, p.27). The structure of work and employment has changed significantly over the past fifty years, and the UK economy is no longer characterised by manufacturing, mining, ship building and steelmaking and is instead based on the service industry and the financial sector (Crompton, 2008). The decline of traditional working-class occupations led to the decline in working-class communities and Savage (2000) suggests that over the longer term a decline in working-class identity and caused some to question the relevance of class. However, there is much evidence that class-based inequalities are significant; the occupational class grouping to which an individual belongs is strongly associated with earnings security, short-term earnings stability, long-term earnings prospects (Goldthorpe, 2013) and life-expectancy (Office for National Statistics, 2015). Furthermore, there is evidence of significant inter-generational association between class positions (Bukodi et al., 2015). As Reay (2017) therefore suggests, a focus on class is still important as it makes us “*confront the issue of who has wealth and power*” (p.7).

Class groupings are conceptual tools used to cluster individuals on the basis that they have similar lifestyles, conditions of existence or life chances. However, as Bourdieu (1998) warns, the occupation of a similar position in social space does not engender identical lifestyles and life chances; conditions of existence are the product of a range of complex factors of which class is just one. There are two main approaches to the identification of class (Burke, 2015a): structural, which focuses on economic factors to determine class and cultural, which focuses on the importance of culture and ideology to

class reproduction. The studies cited below focus on an economic-structural approach to classification and provide evidence of a relationship between class, type of HE institution attended and graduate outcomes.

The limited supply of places at élite institutions provides graduates with a high value in the marketplace (Marginson, 2013) and access to élite employers (Brown, 2008). There is evidence to support this perceived market value. For example, two recent UK studies examining the relationship between earnings and family background (Crawford et. al. 2016), and earnings and type of qualification (Espinoza and Speckesser, 2019) suggest that attending an élite institution has a positive impact on earnings which persists long after graduation. However, students from the richest backgrounds are much more likely to apply to and secure a place at an élite institution (Crawford et al., 2016). The difference in earning and graduate prospects between different types of institution therefore disadvantages students from less well-off backgrounds who are more likely to apply to post-1992 institutions. Furthermore, several studies have highlighted how students from less well-off backgrounds who attend élite institutions are at a disadvantage when compared to their richer peers: in securing graduate employment and in the risk of unemployment (Crawford et al., 2016), in terms of average earnings (Britton et al ,2016) and in progressing to élite employers (Friedman and Laurison, 2020). For someone who taught across all three years of the accounting programme this was an observable difference.

I was interested in examining why such differences might occur and was unsettled by the framing of under-achievement by those from lower socio-economic groups in government policies, which foregrounded the role of education in social mobility. Recent English HE policy positions social mobility, defined as “*the relationship between class*

origins and destinations," (Brown, 2013, p.681) as an individual responsibility and frames social justice in terms of equality of opportunity (Grimaldi, 2012). If there is equal access to opportunity then by logical extension inequality can be positioned as the fault of lower classes who have failed to grasp the opportunities available to them or who are justifiably unequal on the grounds of meritocracy (Brennan and Naidoo, 2008); inequality is thus in some way seen as being fair. Reay (2013) argues that the promise of social mobility obscures issues of social justice in HE and broader issues of inequality in society as it individualises the responsibility for inequality.

My experience did not suggest that these differences were the result of a failure by students from less well-off backgrounds to take advantage of opportunities for social mobility. I was therefore interested in examining any class-based differences in the ways in which students developed their aspirations for HE and graduate careers. This might provide an insight into the extent to which students from lower socio-economic groups failed to grasp opportunities but would also help me understand how universities might better support all students in identifying what is important to them and in developing a broad knowledge of the opportunities that might be available to them.

(c) Gender as a social justice concern in HE

The literature on gender highlights social justice concerns of a different nature. Large scale quantitative studies suggest that in the UK more girls than boys aspire to HE and that the attainment of women surpasses that of men at all educational levels (House of Commons, 2016). Evidence suggests that both girls and boys consider that getting good qualifications and having a successful career is important (Tinklin et al., 2005) and that girls' higher levels of educational attainment engender aspirations for HE (Platt and Parsons, 2017).

Despite this, UK evidence suggests that gender is a significant factor affecting the likelihood of securing a graduate job (Cornell et al., 2020) and survey evidence suggests that women are more likely to continue their student job or accept a non-graduate job than men (Maxwell and Broadbridge, 2014). There is also a persistent and well-researched gender pay gap; in the UK the gender pay gap is estimated at 20%, of which only 5.7% can be explained by factors such as education and hours worked (Boll et al., 2016). In the UK this is a particular issue among higher earners; women are significantly under-represented in top income groups and constitute only 28% of those whose earnings are within the top 10% of salaries and this declines to 9.2% of those whose earnings are in the top 0.1% of salaries (Atkinson et al., 2018). Cornell et al. (2020) present evidence that women expect to be paid less than men.

The evidence therefore suggests that the ways in which women and men gain access to graduate careers differs. Initially I was interested in examining these differences alongside the study of class-based differences. However, it became clear that the sort of detailed work I wished to undertake would only be possible if I kept my sample size to a minimum. I therefore made the decision to focus on women.

1.3.4 Summary

My interest in the relationship between education and life after education motivated me to develop a broader understanding of how education can contribute to the lives of students and how as educators we can promote social justice. My personal experience and my observations of the difficulties experienced by my working-class students, led to an interest in how universities might help students better understand what is important to them and develop a broader knowledge of the opportunities that might be available to them. An examination of student aspiration considers how students might develop goals

for the future in the context of what is important to them. Therefore, my study explores students' perceptions of the ways in which they develop their aspirations whilst in secondary education and HE. My research focuses on class as a social justice concern and compares aspiration development in students from the middle and working classes. The next two sections introduce the fundamental ideas and frameworks underpinning my approach to the study: aspiration and the capabilities approach.

1.4 Aspirations

1.4.1 What is aspiration?

I suggested that the idea of aspiration incorporates how students might develop goals for the future in the context of what is important to them. This section will consider the view of aspiration embedded within government discourse and that explored in the literature. As discussed above, the government positions an individual's skills and knowledge as income-generating capabilities which education enhances, bringing individual economic benefit (Robeyns, 2006). An economic instrumental view of education leads to an instrumental, economic view of aspiration. The UK government therefore positions aspiration as an expression of freewill with a view to individual financial benefit (Spohrer at al., 2018) and considers choices to be rationally made (Hodkinson and Sparkes, 1997). Aspiration is linked to the ambition to achieve educationally, which government suggests will lead to positive economic outcomes and social mobility (Spohrer at al., 2018). The government positions a failure to aspire or a lack of ambition as the responsibility of the individual or their family and this is one of the ways in which, as discussed above, a responsibility for social mobility is placed with the individual (Spohrer, 2011).

However, aspirations are not the same as economic preferences, which are individualistic and usually relate to the present (Conradie and Robeyns, 2013). Aspirations concern the

future and an individual's navigational capacity in relation to that future (Appadurai, 2004). They have the capacity to change over a person's life and therefore connect the future with the past (Conradie and Robeyns, 2013). Aspirations develop consciously or unconsciously and suggest a commitment to a "*particular trajectory or endpoint*" (Hart, 2016, p.326).

Aspirations are not necessarily individualistic. There is a broad consensus among scholars from different traditions: anthropology (Appadurai, 2004), sociology (Burke, 2015a), capabilities (Hart, 2012) and mainstream economics (Genicot and Ray, 2020) that aspirations cannot be separated from social context and that they are formed in relationships with others (Appadurai, 2004; Hart, 2012). Furthermore, aspirations do not necessarily concern the maximisation of individual utility but may concern the welfare of others (Appadurai, 2004).

Finally, the literature makes clear that aspirations do not just concern the maximisation of economic utility or economic benefit (Appadurai, 2004). People hold a broad variety of aspirations relating to different aspects of their lives and it is difficult to argue that there is a normative hierarchy of aspirations (Hart, 2012). For example, the aspiration to go to university is not in general a better aspiration than the aspiration to be an electrician. A study of aspiration should therefore recognise what people really want for themselves in the future.

1.4.2 Aspirations and emerging adulthood

The theory of emerging adulthood (Arnett, 2000) highlighted the importance of studying the way in which aspiration is developed whilst at university. Whilst Arnett (2000) acknowledges that emerging adulthood is partially culturally constituted he argues that it is a distinct developmental stage, which takes place between the ages of eighteen and

twenty-five years and is neither adolescence nor adulthood. Studies indicate that there is significant cognitive development during this stage (King and Kitchener, 2015) and that changes in emerging adulthood can to some extent be explained by ongoing changes in brain structure and function (Taber-Thomas and Perez-Edgar, 2015). Arnett (2000) argues that during emerging adulthood, individuals explore possible identities in the areas of work, love and worldview and suggests that the period is “*experimental and exploratory*” (Arnett, 2000, p.471). Evidence also suggests that the processes underlying this exploration might differ as individuals progress through emerging adulthood. Kitchener and King (1981) suggest that the capacity for reflective thinking develops during emerging adulthood and, King and Baxter-Magolda (2005) and Kegan (1982) argue that complex, conceptual thinking emerges during this period. It seems reasonable to infer therefore that between the ages of eighteen and twenty-five years whilst studying for their undergraduate degrees, students will explore possibilities for future identities and that both their aspirations and the ways in which these aspirations are developed may change. This makes the ages eighteen to twenty-five years a particularly interesting period across which to study the development of aspiration.

1.4.3 Choice of an approach for my study

My aim is to study how students might develop goals for the future in the context of what is important to them, their aspirations. The section above indicates that aspirations are not merely individual concerns but that they are subject to the influence of society and develop in relationship. Furthermore, aspirations are not merely economic, and any study of aspiration should recognise that people hold a broad range of aspirations relating to different aspects of their lives. There are many studies which examine the nature and development of aspiration, which apply a range of theoretical approaches.

Finn (2015) examines aspiration development in girls whilst at secondary school and in HE from a relational and emotional perspective. There is a large body of literature, which examines the societal or structural influence on aspiration based on the work of Pierre Bourdieu. For example, Fuller (2009) examined the level of aspiration in girls at secondary school from different socio-economic backgrounds; Archer et al. (2014) undertook a longitudinal study examining societal influences on aspiration as pupils left primary school and moved into secondary education; Bok (2010) examined the career aspirations of primary school children, and Stahl (2015) the experiences, aspirations and identities of working-class boys. The recent publication *International perspectives on theorizing aspirations: applying Bourdieu's tools* edited by Stahl et al. (2018) brings together theoretical and empirical work, which examines structural influences on the nature of, level of or development of aspirations.

Some studies, which examine societal influence on aspirations, refer to the tension between societal influence and individual agency and both Atkinson (2010) and Burke (2015a) have made significant contributions in this area. Both authors examine theoretical claims (Giddens, 1976; Archer, 2007) of the potential of reflexivity to enhance individual agency and to free individuals from the influence of structure. The nature of reflexivity and its potential is explored extensively in the next chapter but a synthesis of Giddens's (1979) and Archer's (2003) definitions characterises it as follows - reflexivity entails the ability to abstract, consider alternative courses of action and provide reasons for action; action is therefore intentional. Giddens (1976) and Archer (2007) suggest that this ability to abstract and provide reasons raises awareness of societal constraints and thus helps individuals to overcome them (Giddens, 1979; Archer, 2003). Neither Atkinson (2010) nor Burke (2015a) finds much empirical evidence of an awareness of societal

constraints and still less of a critical awareness. They therefore reject the potential of reflexivity to enhance individual agency. However, my initial review of the literature relating to reflexivity indicated that there was scope to refine the definition of reflexivity and to consider *the extent* to which it had potential to enhance individual agency. I was motivated to explore the potential for a more nuanced account of the potential of reflexivity, which neither hailed it as a panacea nor rejected its potential outright

Hart (2012), Zipin et al. (2015), and Walker, and Fongwa (2017) have drawn on the capabilities approach to examine aspiration development. Hart's (2012) work has been particularly influential on the overall direction of my thesis. The capabilities approach and Hart's contribution which examines aspiration development is explored below. However, as an introduction, the capabilities approach was developed as a framework which could be used to consider issues of equality and social justice (Sen, 1979) and is concerned with the real opportunity we have to accomplish what we have "*reason to value*" (Sen, 1995, p.39). Hart (2012) demonstrates how the approach can be supplemented with other theories and draws on the work of Bourdieu to explore the nature and extent of societal influence on aspiration. Hart (2012) also examines the influence of relationships on aspiration and considers the ways in which emotions influence the development of an imagined future.

I selected the capabilities approach as an overall framework for my study for several reasons. My interest was in the process of aspiration development and not in the outcomes, the capabilities approach does not focus solely on outcomes but considers process to be important; well-being and agency are considered in the context of the range of opportunities from which they can choose and the freedom they have in choosing from different possibilities.

Hart's work provided an exemplar of how Bourdieu's thinking could be used to extend the capabilities approach; to consider societal and relational influence on aspiration development. Furthermore, the references to reason in the fundamental definitions underpinning the approach and the claims made about the potential of reflexivity to free individuals of societal influence indicated that I might be able to add to Hart's work and to examine individual agency and the role of reflexivity within the context of the capabilities approach. This thesis therefore draws on Hart's approach and enhances it with a close consideration of the role of reflexivity in the development of aspiration. The next section will introduce the capabilities approach in more detail.

1.5 The capabilities approach

1.5.1 What is the capabilities approach?

(a) Introduction

Amaryta Sen introduced the capabilities approach in the Tanner lecture in 1979; "Equality of What?" (Sen, 1979). The approach provides an evaluative space in which to consider the quality of life individuals are actually living, "*what people are able to do and what lives they are able to lead.*" (Robeyns, 2017, p.7). It emphasises well-being, freedom and justice and can be used to evaluate individual advantage or social arrangements (Robeyns, 2017). In the context of the development of aspirations for HE and graduate careers, this draws attention to a broad range of social justice concerns. For example, Hart (2012) explains how students who have a family history of HE may not feel that they have the choice of an alternative if it is expected that they aspire to HE. The capabilities approach focuses attention on the potential well-being and agency consequences of this lack of choice, whereas an approach based on economic utility would focus on the outcome. The discussion above suggests that students from low socioeconomic

backgrounds may be able to access the resource of HE but that they may have difficulty accessing graduate careers. The capabilities approach focuses attention on the extent to which students can convert the resource of HE into a valuable being or doing, in terms of a valued graduate career, and therefore draws attention away from a narrow view of social justice, which merely measures access to the resource of HE.

The capabilities approach can be applied in different contexts and from a range of disciplinary perspectives and can be supplemented with other theories and approaches. For example, it has been used by economists to evaluate development and by philosophers to develop ideas of justice. In the Tanner lecture, Sen criticises resource-based and utility-based views of justice and offers "*basic capability*" equality (Sen, 1979, p.217) as a way of considering equality, which focuses on the things that people are actually able to do. Martha Nussbaum made a significant contribution to the approach, initially by adding a philosophical perspective in a series of essays (1987) and then in dialogue with Sen. In her early work she compared Sen's approach to that of Aristotle (Nussbaum, 1987) and emphasised the importance of choice and practical reason in arriving at conceptions of "*a good human life*" (p.43).

The approach focuses on ends rather than means – the beings and doings the individual has reason to value as opposed to the resources to which they have access or their individual utility, and the freedom to achieve valued ways of living.

(b) Functionings and capabilities

Alkire et al. (2008) explains that the approach is built around three concepts: functionings, capability and agency. Sen describes functionings as "*the various things a person may value being and doing.*" (Sen, 1999, p.75), for example, being in good health, or taking part in the community. An individual's capability to function represents "*the*

various combinations of functionings (beings and doings) that the person can achieve.” (Sen, 1995, p.40). Capability is a set of different combinations of functionings, which reflect the person’s ability to live one life or another and which they have reason to value; sets of possible functionings from which the individual can choose. This represents the “*real opportunity*” to accomplish what we value and therefore individual advantage or social arrangements should be evaluated with reference to capabilities and not with reference to utility or resources (Sen, 1999, p.3). However, Sen acknowledges the important relationship between the availability of resources and capabilities but argues that individuals have different abilities to convert resources to capabilities and capabilities to functionings. Resources are therefore “*the instruments of achieving well-being and other objectives and can be seen also as the means to freedom. In contrast, functionings belong to the constitutive elements of well-being*” (Sen, 1995, p.42).

Robeyns (2005) sets out a model which demonstrates how a person’s capability set relates to individual attributes and to both social and environmental context. She therefore highlights those factors which are important to the conversion of resources to functionings (Figure 1). The diagram illustrates how goods and services or commodities - the means, enable functionings - the ends, but the relationship between the goods and the functionings is not direct. There exists the potential to convert goods into capability sets but this potential is dependent on a range of conversion factors. These are: personal for example, physical characteristics or intelligence, social for example, social norms, gender roles, societal hierarchies, power relations and, finally, environmental for example, climate or geographical location.

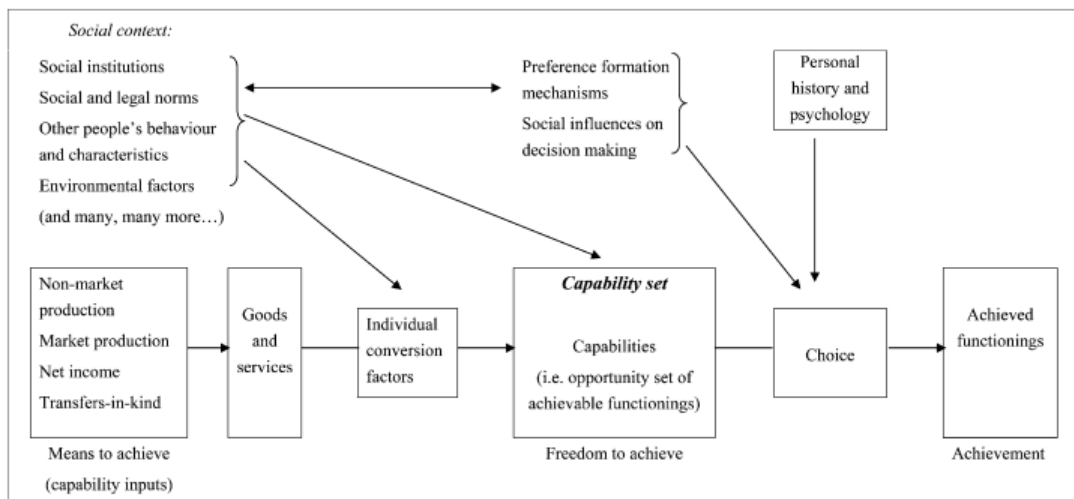


Figure 1: A stylised non-dynamic representation of a person's capability set and her social and personal context.

Source: Robeyns (2005, p.98)

(c) Agency and well-being

Sen (1985) distinguishes between well-being freedom and agency freedom and considers both these freedoms as central to the approach. A well-being-based approach to the evaluation of advantage is offered as an alternative to models based on rational choice, utility or desire (Sen, 1985). Sen (1985) defines well-being as personal to individuals: *“it is not something outside her that she commands, but something in her that she achieves”* (p. 28). Well-being freedom is *“a person's capability to have various functioning vectors and to enjoy the corresponding well-being achievements”* (Sen, 1985, p.203). Choice is therefore important and Sen (1995) suggests that *“choosing may itself be a valuable part of living, and a life of genuine choice with serious options may be seen to be—for that reason—richer”* (p.41). This concept of freedom, based on the well-being aspect of a person, must be clearly distinguished from a broader concept of freedom, related to the agency aspect of a person. A person's agency freedom refers to *“one's freedom to bring about achievements one values”* (Sen, 1985, p.206), which might not necessarily be achievements in pursuit of their own well-being. Agency freedom therefore may relate to

any objective the individual may have whilst well-being freedom relates only to objectives related to the individual’s well-being. An individual should therefore be free to choose a combination of functionings that do not result in a well-being achievement. This may be because the individual values a course of action, which has a negative impact on their well-being, for example fulfilling an obligation to another. The differences between the concepts are summarised in Table 1:

Table 1: Key concepts in the capabilities framework⁵

	Freedom	Achievement
Well-being	Well-being freedom: Measured in capability space. Functioning vectors from which an individual can choose and enjoy corresponding well-being achievement.	Well-being achievement: Measured in functioning space. Well-being consequences of choice of a particular functioning vector. The well-being achieved through the individual’s beings and doings.
Agency	Agency freedom: <i>“freedom to bring about achievements one values”</i> (1995, p.206). Recognition that not all potential functioning vectors will maximise well-being.	Agency achievement: combination of functioning vectors chosen. Will not always maximise well-being. Valued beings and doings chosen.

Sen (1995) argues that a consideration of both capabilities and functionings is important to an evaluation of human flourishing (Sen, 1995). A person’s capabilities provide us with information about the freedom they had to choose valued beings and doings and a person’s functionings are about the beings and doings chosen. Sen therefore makes two important distinctions; firstly, between well-being freedom and well-being achievement: freedom measured in the capabilities space and achievement measured in the functionings space. Secondly, between agency freedom and agency achievement; it is

⁵ Source not given as table design author’s own.

important that, if an individual values a being or doing that does not benefit themselves it is included in their capability set and they can achieve that being or doing, as a functioning, should they so wish.

As Robeyns (2017) suggests, the capability approach is not committed to one account of agency and it is important to consider some of the other aspects of agency foregrounded by the approach. An agent is *"someone who acts and brings about change"* (Sen, 1999, p.19). Alkire et al. (2008) suggests that the agency aspect is important in assessing *"what a person is free to do and achieve in pursuit of whatever goals or values he or she regards as important"* (Sen, 1985, p.203). Sen (2004) distinguishes between opportunity freedom which refers to what people can achieve – the alternative sets of functionings from which they can choose in their capability set – and process freedom which examines the way in which choices are made. Sen (2004) argues that rationality is an important part of freedom and that one's own reasoning in making choices is an important aspect of the self. He considers that goals and values should therefore be subject to *"reasoned scrutiny"* (Sen, 2004, p.46) and is clear that this is not a post-hoc justification of choices made based on instinct or gut reaction. This is not to say that Sen does not acknowledge the emotional nature of human life and the important part emotions might play in choice: *"the significant place of emotions in our deliberations can be illustrated by the reasons for taking them seriously"* (Sen, 2009, p.80). Nussbaum (1992) emphasises the importance of practical reason: the ability to *"participate (or try to) in the planning and managing of their own lives, asking and answering questions about what is good and how one should live"* (p.219). She considers that together with affiliation practical reason underpins the development of all other capabilities. Rationality or reasoning is therefore integral to the capabilities approach and an important part of both freedom and agency, but the

literature suggests that emotions play an important role in any deliberation. A consideration of agency might therefore consider both the agency freedom of the individual - the freedom to choose, and the process by which those choices are made – the extent to which they are subject to reasoned scrutiny.

(d) Other important features of the approach

The capabilities approach focuses on the individual as the unit of analysis. Robeyns (2017) explains that this does not mean that the approach assumes that individuals are independent of others – in fact the capabilities approach recognises the importance of relationships. It does however mean that each individual counts (Robeyns, 2017); functionings and capabilities relate to beings and doings at the level of the individual and not the family or any other group of individuals.

Alkire, et al. (2008) suggest that Sen’s approach is deliberately open-ended in several ways. Sen leaves open the relative importance of capabilities and functionings and does not produce a list of basic functionings essential to human flourishing or a good life or ascribe weights to different capabilities or functionings. He argues that this is context-dependent and therefore that different sets of functionings are relevant to different groups in different settings (Sen, 2004). In contrast, Nussbaum (1992) argues that it is important to specify a list of central capabilities⁶ without which a person could not live “*what we might consider a good human life*” (Nussbaum, 1992, p.221). Sen also suggests

⁶ These are: (i) life (ii) bodily health (iii) bodily integrity (iv) senses, imagination and thought (v) emotions (vi) practical reason (vii) affiliation (viii) living with concern for other species (ix) play and (x) political and material control over one’s environment. This list is from Nussbaum (2000) and has been developed from an initial list in Nussbaum (1992).

that the capabilities approach should be supplemented with other theories, systems and values (Sen, 1999).

1.5.2 Why is the approach useful for a consideration of education and social justice?

Sen (1995) describes education as a basic capability; a person must have the opportunity to be educated at some level to survive and escape poverty. However, education is also considered to be a resource or a capability input in terms of the goods and services offered as part of the education (Walker, 2006; Vaughan and Walker, 2012) or a conversion factor which plays a role in expanding or enhancing the capabilities (Saito, 2003; Vaughan and Walker, 2012). Education therefore expands capabilities and functionings and enlarges valuable choices (Walker, 2010). Furthermore, education has an important role to play in facilitating the identification of values in the exercise of capabilities and therefore in helping the individual identify valued functionings (Saito, 2003; Vaughan and Walker, 2012). Vaughan and Walker (2012) consider the role of education as central to value creation: in exercising the freedom to identify valued functionings an individual is using both reason and values. Education is never value neutral and therefore is instrumental to the development of values in its students (Brighouse and Swift, 2003).

Hart (2012) argues that it is wrong to assume that time spent in education will automatically expand capabilities and therefore well-being. A focus on measures of participation and access in HE is a resource view of social justice; consideration of social justice in education should focus on the ways in which it enables or limits individual capabilities and functionings or in other words the abilities of students to live a life they have reason to value. Much literature suggests that universities sometimes fail to fully exploit opportunities to expand the capabilities of some groups of students (Coulson et

al., 2018; Reay, 2018b); this is covered in the next chapter. However, in the context of the development of aspirations Hart (2012) argues that we cannot take for granted that universities will help students develop these aspirations. The next section explains how Hart (2012) applied the capabilities to the study of aspiration; this approach forms the theoretical approach underpinning my study.

1.5.3 Using the capabilities approach to consider the development of aspiration

Hart (2012) applies the capabilities approach to the development of aspirations and suggests that aspirations can be viewed in two different ways: the functioning of aspiring - an expressed aspiration, and the capability to aspire - which enables an individual to freely develop a set of valued aspirations. Individuals may have different freedoms and possibilities of aspiring and may be restricted from exploring some ways of being and doing by societal or family pressures (Hart, 2012). This can happen at three points in Robeyn's model (Page 37, Figure 1). Firstly, both the goods and services an individual possesses can directly affect an individual's capability to aspire. Hart (2012) conceptualises family capital as one of these resources and therefore an individual who has never heard of a particular occupation because their family do not have an awareness of it will not have the capability to aspire to so it is not something that they can choose. This occupation will not be in their aspiration set. Secondly, an individual's ability to convert these goods and services into the capability to aspire is influenced by several individual, social and environmental conversion factors, for example relationships with significant others or place in society. An individual will therefore develop a particular set of aspirations because of the way in which the goods and services they possess interact with these conversion factors. For example, their family may have knowledge of a particular occupation - possession of a good, but relationships in the family might mean

that this knowledge is not converted into an aspiration for the individual because it is not shared with them - impact of social conversion factor; this will limit the individual's capability to aspire. Finally, an individual chooses between the aspirations in their aspiration set and this choice is influenced by significant others and by society. The individual will only exercise the function of aspiring in relation to those aspirations that are chosen. For example, a young person might have aspiration for HE and the aspiration to join the army as part of their aspiration set. However, they might be encouraged to choose HE aspiration in preference to the army aspiration. This will prevent the young person from exercising the functioning of aspiring to join the army.

Hart (2012) argues that there is an important link between: an individual's capability set - the options from which they can choose, and an individual's aspiration set - the ways of being and doing they have reason to value, and the functioning of aspiring - the expressed aspiration which they have had the freedom to explore. Individuals cannot exercise individual agency in enhancing their own future well-being if they do not have: the freedom to develop an aspiration set which reflects the ways of being and doing they have reason to value (Conradie and Robeyns, 2013), the range of potential aspirations in their aspiration set, and the freedom to choose from those alternatives. Hart (2012) therefore suggests that the capability to aspire is a meta-capability. The capability to aspire develops within the context of the broader institutional and cultural structures of society and the university; it is concerned with the potential for student agency within the context of these structures. Individuals have less agency if structure limits the range of choices within their aspiration set or the freedom to choose from the alternatives. Aspiration underpins agency freedoms and is an important social justice concern.

1.6 Summary

This chapter explained my personal and professional motivations for the study. My personal experience sensitised me to issues of social justice faced by students and my experience as a professional caused me to reflect deeply on the nature and purpose of HE. The aim of my study is therefore to explore students' perceptions of the ways in which they develop their aspirations whilst in secondary and HE in the context of what is important to them. I will foreground issues of social justice by focusing on women in HE and by comparing the development of aspiration in students from the middle and working classes.

This also chapter introduced the theoretical underpinning for my study. I explored the nature of aspirations, introduced the capabilities approach and drew on Hart (2012) to explain why the capabilities approach is particularly useful as an approach underpinning the study of aspiration, and how the approach has been extended to consider the development of the capability to aspire and the functioning of aspiring. I explained that societal or cultural factors influence the development of aspiration and outlined the contested nature of reflexivity as a mechanism to free individuals from this influence. I also established that the individual relationships and emotions may be important to the development of aspiration. In considering student agency in the development of the capability to aspire I highlighted two aspects of agency: the importance of having the freedom to choose from a range of options, and the extent to which choices are subject to reasoned scrutiny. The next chapter will explain how I have drawn on existing work to build a theoretical account of how individuals develop their aspirations and will consider the ways in which societal or cultural factors influence the development of aspiration, the potential of reflexivity as a mechanism to lessen this influence and how individual

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relationships and emotions may also be important to the development of the capability to aspire.

Chapter 2: Theoretical Framework and review of the literature

2.1 Introduction

The previous chapter explained how the capabilities framework can be used to explore students' perceptions of the ways in which they develop their aspirations in the context of what is important to them. I suggested that consideration of an individual's capability to aspire would provide insight into the freedom students have to conceive of beings and doings they have reason to value. In considering the extent of agency in the development of the capability to aspire I highlighted two aspects of agency; the importance of having the freedom to choose from a range of options and the extent to which choices are subject to reasoned scrutiny. I argued that societal or cultural factors might influence the development of aspiration and may limit student agency by limiting the range of choices available to the individual or their freedom in making choices. Societal influences on individual agency and identity have frequently been examined with reference to the concept of structure (Dépelteau, 2008); the term is difficult to define (Sewell, 1992) but is commonly understood to refer to features of society (Archer, 2003):

"Whatever aspect of social life we designate as structure is posited as "structuring" some other aspect of social existence-whether it is class that structures politics, gender that structures employment opportunities, rhetorical conventions that structure texts or utterances, or modes of production that structure social formations" (Sewell, 1992, p.2).

I will draw on the work of Pierre Bourdieu to consider the influence of structure. Bourdieu (1990a) provides a framework for the way in which structure shapes identity and posits that people create structures and that these structures become objective facts internalised by individuals (Sayer, 2000). He uses the concept of capital to highlight

different resources available to the individual and I have drawn on this theoretical framework to examine the importance of capital as a conversion factor in the development of the capability to aspire, and class differences in the capital available to participants. In addition, Bourdieu considers the ways in which structures work through the individual to influence agency and therefore his theoretical framework is important to the exploration of participant agency in the development of the capability to aspire. Bourdieu uses the term *habitus* to describe the ways in which structures are unconsciously internalised and considers how *habitus* and capital combine to motivate action. He argues that many of our actions are unconscious or motivated by practical consciousness. These concepts can therefore be used to examine participant agency from two perspectives: the extent to which society limits the freedom to choose and the range of visible choices and the extent to which choices are made in the absence of reasoning. The chapter also draws on theory and empirical work which give greater weight to individual agency by considering reflexivity; this emphasises individual consciousness in the development of the capability to aspire. Sen (2004) argues that reasoning in making choices is an important part of agency. However, it is also claimed that reflexivity can lessen the impact of societal influence (Giddens, 1976; Archer, 2007) and therefore may increase freedom to choose and the range of visible choices available, enabling individuals to identify beings and doings they have reason to value outside their social field of origin.

The chapter initially explores the implications of work of Bourdieu in the development of the capability to aspire and then considers the potential of reflexivity. I suggested that emotions may have a role to play in the development of the capability to aspire and therefore throughout the chapter, I highlighted the role of emotions as they relate to the main theoretical concepts.

2.2 Societal influence on the capability to aspire

2.2.1 Introduction

This section considers different aspects of the way in which structure limits individual agency in the development of the capability to aspire by drawing Bourdieu's concepts of habitus and capital. I utilised relational theory and research to undertake a more detailed examination of how socialisation in habitus occurs than is typically offered in the literature.

2.2.2 Habitus

Bourdieu (1990a) contends that structures are unconsciously internalised through socialisation in a particular social field and reflected in the way the individual speaks, moves and reacts – habitus. *"The conditionings associated with a particular class of conditions of existence produce habitus, systems of durable, transposable dispositions, structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures"* (Bourdieu, 1990a, 53). Bourdieu therefore emphasises the socially, embedded nature of personal identity. The habitus forms through early experiences as part of a family, educational and peer group experiences as well as at a group level as part of the social class to which an individual belongs (Burke, 2015b) and underpins attitudes, beliefs and behaviours.

A focus on relationships facilitates an understanding of the mechanisms underlying the operation of structure and provides insight into the ways in which socialisation and conditioning take place in habitus (King, 2000). Relational theorists consider that the social world is comprised of dynamic groupings of people and that individual agency can only be understood in the context of interconnection and relationship. They view agency as *"to do with people producing particular effects in the world and on each other through their relational connections and joint actions"* (Burkitt, 2016, p.323) and reject the idea

that analysis of identity should take individuals or structures as a starting point; instead, identity is determined in relation (Emirbayer, 1997).

Habitus is therefore developed in relationship and is attuned to the requirements of the social field to which the individual initially belongs. A social field can be defined as a space within which social relations, interactions, transactions and events occur. Whilst the internalisation of structures as part of habitus are durable, they do not fully determine action. Instead, individuals act with agency and make choices but within the constraints of existing structures; "*improvisations*" are regulated (Bourdieu, 1977, p.21). Critics of Bourdieu have argued that the concept of habitus leaves no scope for the individual to change (Archer, 2010). However, Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992) suggest that habitus is not static but has the capacity to adapt to different circumstances operating differently in different social fields, for example school or work. As an individual moves into a new social field habitus may adapt to the requirements of this field as they may internalise its structures (Reay, 2004a). Over time, therefore habitus can accommodate change as an individual encounters different social fields during their life. Reay (2004a) therefore describes the habitus as permeable and argues that current circumstances form an "*additional layer*" (p.434) to an individual's earlier socialisation. Permeability of habitus is therefore important to understanding the development of the capability to aspire, the continued influence of habitus on choices and therefore trajectories indicates that structure limits the capability to aspire through habitus. However, permeability of habitus suggests that individuals have agency in the development of the capability to aspire, albeit perhaps within limits. The next section discusses Bourdieu's concept of capital and the importance of capital to the development of aspiration. This can facilitate an understanding of class differences in the development of the capability to aspire and is important to an understanding of the permeability of habitus.

2.2.3 Forms of Capital

(a) Introduction

Bourdieu utilises the definition of capital to emphasise the importance of a range of resources, in contrast to a narrow focus on economic resources (Moore, 2014) and describes four forms of capital (Bourdieu, 1986). Economic capital (money, savings, property etc.); social capital (family and community networks); cultural capital (forms of knowledge, taste and cultural preferences) and symbolic capital (the status which other forms of capital provide essentially giving other forms of capital enhanced value through collective recognition (Crossley, 2014)). The capital available to an individual differs across social fields and the concept of capital only applies as it is relevant to a particular field (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992).

Family capital is important to socialisation and formation of habitus in an individual's social field of origin and influences dispositions and attributes (Marjoribanks, 1992). However, capital is not static, and the volume and composition of capital can change over time (Bourdieu, 1984). The composition of capital can change as one form of capital can be converted into another for example, economic capital can be converted into cultural capital via an independent education (Atkinson, 2010). The volume of available capital can change with circumstances, as new relationships develop or there is movement into new social fields; individuals can therefore accumulate capital.

Hart's (2012) model of the development of the capability to aspire (Figure 2), captures the importance of family capital and the dynamic nature of capital and therefore of aspirations.

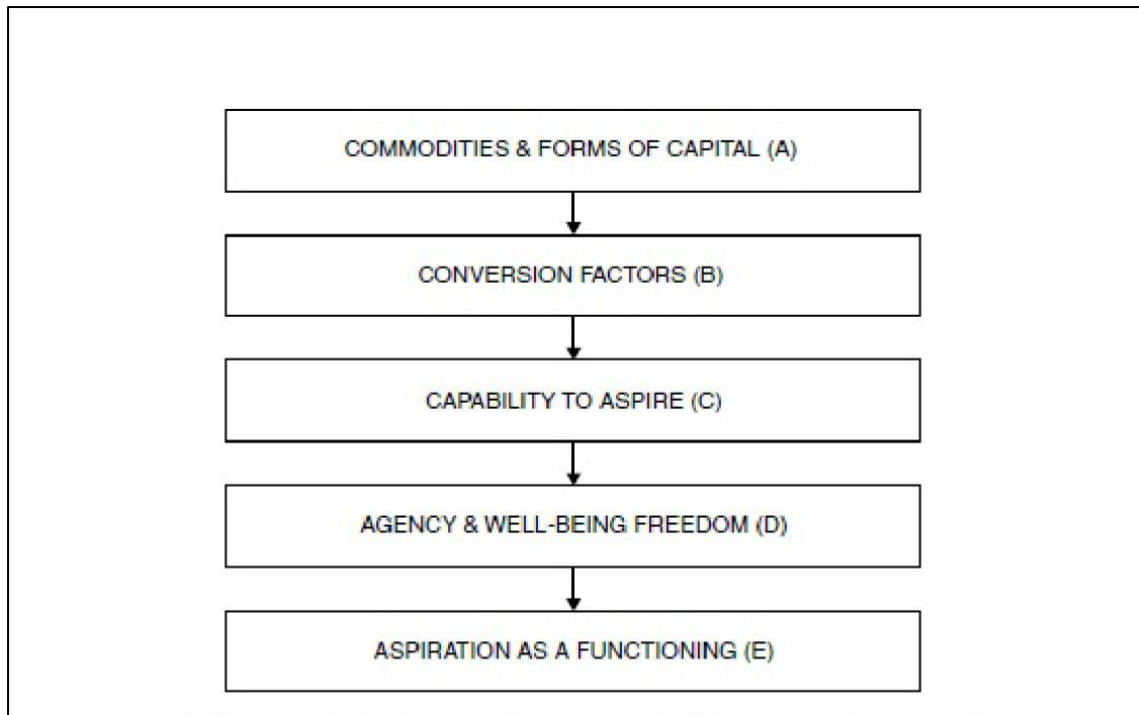


Figure 2: To show the capability to aspire and conversion to function of aspiring

Source: Hart (2012, p.98)

Hart (2012) draws on Robeyn's model (Figure 1) and treats capital as a positive conversion factor in the development of the capability to aspire. She suggests that many conversion factors affect this capability and influence whether an individual has the agency and well-being freedom to convert an aspiration into a functioning. Conversion factors include capital but the way in which they affect the capability to aspire is dependent on many other factors, for example the way they interact with an individual's dispositions, the social field to which they are relevant and the individual's social field of origin.

The potential to accumulate and convert capital underlies permeability of habitus; capital may be "*increasing, decreasing or stationary*" (Bourdieu 1986, p.120) and therefore the individual's position in social space is not fixed but can change. Whilst this potential to change might suggest that social mobility is inevitable, this is not the case. Hart (2012) identifies potential points of weakness in the transfer and accumulation of capital; the

individual has the potential to convert family capital commodities to individual capital commodities – for example, a family may transfer their cultural capital in the form of their own education to their child. However, this is dependent on individual and social factors. For example, transfer may not take place if relationships in the family are poor. Even if this transfer occurs, the individual may not choose to or be able to activate accumulated capital (Lareau and Horvat, 1999). For example, in the social field of education an individual may possess information about the best university to attend but may chose not to activate this social capital as their habitus is not well suited to an élite institution. Capital therefore has the potential to enhance the capability to aspire and individual agency but this might not always be the case as transfer, activation and conversion are not a given.

The next section examines each form of capital and considers how each may contribute to the capability to aspire. Class differences in family capital and the ability to accumulate and activate further capital in the development of the capability to aspire are considered.

(b) Economic capital

The economic capital an individual possesses may influence their capability to aspire. Evidence suggests that economic constraints discourage young people from aspiring to university (Gilchrist et al., 2005), to broader education and training (Atkinson, 2010) and partially influence working-class students to choose a university close to home (Reay et al., 2005). The evidence also suggests that career aspirations are directly and indirectly affected by economic constraints. Brooks and Everett (2009) argue that working-class students are often forced into hasty career decisions due to economic constraints and Atkinson (2010) suggests that this does not allow the time and space required for exploration of options. Greenbank and Hepworth (2008) argue that economic constraints influence career location and can result in a propensity to choose an employer close to

home. The availability of economic capital can also indirectly influence career aspirations by limiting the range of an individual's career-relevant experiences. Bathmaker et al. (2016) suggest that working-class students are unable to take unpaid internships or work experience due to economic constraints. Reay (2018a) and Coulson et al. (2018) suggest that these constraints also directly affect the range of extracurricular opportunities an individual can undertake partially due to the availability of time, as working-class students are more likely to have part-time jobs (Moreau and Leathwood, 2006) and partially due to the potential expense involved.

In contrast, middle-class families may be able to activate economic capital to facilitate the development of aspirations by paying for independent schools (Reay et al., 2005) or resit courses to improve A level grades (Devine, 2004). Atkinson (2010) and Brooks and Everett (2009) describe how economic capital can enable middle-class students to explore a broad variety of career options and wait for the right opportunity by utilising their parents' economic capital – for example financial help with relocation or the assurance of an economic safety net. This may enable middle-class students to live in London, which offers the “best” and most varied career opportunities (Bradley et al., 2017) and to undertake unpaid voluntary work which may be a necessity for some careers, for example medicine (Bathmaker et al., 2016). In terms of capabilities, this utilisation of economic capital enables the individual to include aspirations for elite universities and careers as part of their aspiration set. Economic intervention can overcome short-term setbacks and aspirations do not require adaptation to fit to economic circumstances or achieved outcomes. The availability of economic capital therefore can expand or limit the range of aspirations which form part of an individual's aspiration set and economic capital is a positive conversion factor in the development of the capability to aspire.

(c) Cultural capital

Bourdieu (1986) suggests that cultural capital has three forms; embodied cultural dispositions, objectified cultural capital and institutionalised cultural capital. Embodied cultural capital is the bodily manifestation of habitus and arises from habitus (Edgerton and Roberts, 2014). Therefore, cultural capital and habitus are not separate but different lenses through which embodied dispositions can be viewed (Moore, 2014). The concept of habitus recognises the existence of dispositions as properties of the actor, whilst the term capital foregrounds the ways in which these dispositions can be valuable resources capable of activation in particular fields (Edgerton and Roberts, 2014). The ease and confidence which an individual displays in a particular social field is part of embodied cultural capital (Snee and Devine, 2014). Drawing on Ball's (2003) research one can see that middle-class parents may build their children's confidence by considering them intelligent and expecting them to aspire to a good university and a professional career. Both independent schools (Forbes and Maxwell, 2018) and grammar schools (Atkinson, 2010) may reinforce these expectations. Devine (2004) suggests therefore that a good university and a professional career are part of normal transition into adulthood and Burke (2015a) argues that the middle classes have high levels of expectation relating to career.

Bathmaker et al. (2016) suggest that increased participation in HE has led academically successful working-class students to consider university as an option but argues that this is expressed as a hope and not as an expectation. This hope is reflected in working-class parents (Irwin and Elley, 2013) who in some cases encourage HE but discourage elite occupations or universities (Atkinson, 2010). Working-class students may therefore consider other options alongside HE, perhaps to manage the risk of failure (Reay et al., 2005). For working-class students fear of failure, anxiety (Reay et al., 2005) and a lack of

confidence in one's own ability (Atkinson, 2010) can be the emotional costs of an aspiration for university.

However, whilst working-class students may not always have the same expectations as their middle-class counterparts they may possess alternative forms of valuable cultural capital. Many studies comment on the work ethic, independence and resilience of academically successful working-class participants; both Atkinson (2010) and Walkerdine et al. (2001) refer to quiet determination and minimum of fuss and Bradley et al., (2017) and Reay et al. (2009) suggest that the adversity faced by some working-class students develops independence and resilience. Working-class participants in Lehmann's (2009) Canadian study felt that their families had instilled a strong work ethic and that the need to juggle the competing priorities of study and part-time work reinforced this. Bathmaker et al. (2016) and Bradley et al. (2013) suggest that once at university this can build a different form of confidence in academically successful working-class students who see themselves having more deserving of their place at university and more prepared to cope with the challenges of the "real world" than their middle-class counterparts.

In the context of career aspirations, Tomlinson (2017) argues that specific forms of embodied cultural capital are required in different career fields. Employer-focused studies in the UK (Brown et al., 2004) and the US (Rivera, 2011) suggest that employers screen for specific forms of embodied cultural capital when recruiting. Furthermore, in many elite graduate careers these forms of embodied cultural capital, for example accent (Brown et al., 2004) or forms of social and cultural competence (Hinchliffe and Jolly, 2011) favour middle-class applicants and influence levels of confidence and expectation around career (Tomlinson, 2017). Bathmaker et al. (2016) suggest that working-class students have more moderate ambitions than their middle-class counterparts and that

whilst for some university enhances confidence in career outcomes (Bathmaker et al., 2016), for others career confidence is damaged by social exclusion and a sense of not fitting in at university (Coulson et al., 2018). Overall, levels of confidence and expectation may limit or enhance the development of an individual's aspiration set. Whilst the work ethic and resilience of some working-class students enhances their capability to aspire, for others élite imagined futures may be excluded from their aspiration set. However, a lack of expectation and entitlement may mean that working-class students are free to pursue a broad variety of options, some of which may be unimaginable for middle-class students whose parents have created a narrow set of clear expectations.

The second form of cultural capital is objectified cultural capital; the possession of or exposure to cultural products. Sullivan (2007) argues that individuals attain information processing skills from participation in cultural activities such as reading and suggests that this enhances academic ability; parents who actively coach their children and encourage them to do homework, actively transfer objectified cultural capital. Burke (2015a) reports high levels of middle-class parental support and involvement with education, and Irwin and Elley (2011) suggest that the active transfer of cultural capital extends to broader opportunities enabling further capital accumulation, for example extracurricular involvement in music. Whilst this broader accumulation is not reported as a feature of working-class parenting (Bowers-Brown, 2015), support with schoolwork is not exclusively a middle-class phenomenon. Many working-class students report high levels of parental involvement in the form of positive attitudes to education (Walkerline et al., 2001) and support with schoolwork (Irwin and Elley, 2011). Irwin and Elley (2013) found that working-class parents recognise the importance of this involvement. However, some working-class participants in Atkinson's (2010) study reported low levels of parental involvement and expectation in respect of education and high levels of

involvement and expectation in the importance of obtaining a trade or a job. This focus on the importance of a job is also a feature of the upwardly-mobile working-class; working-class students in HE reported parental emphasis on a proper job or profession rather than fulfilment or enjoyment (Reay et al., 2005; Atkinson, 2010).

Objectified cultural capital is also passively transferred in the way in which the individual's environment is shaped by middle-class parents with high levels of cultural capital relevant to the field of education or professional occupations (Atkinson, 2010), for example debate as a form of conversation, the possession of books and other cultural artefacts. Familiarity with academic abstraction and a focus on education facilitates academic success, which in turn may facilitate the development of aspiration for HE. Passively transferred objectified cultural capital may influence the sense of belonging an individual feels in particular environments and therefore the likelihood that those environments are included within the individual's aspiration set. For example, one of Reay's (2018b) participants rejects Cambridge as the atmosphere felt too rarefied and formal and Bathmaker et al.'s (2016) participants prefer the less formal environment of a post-1992 institution to the more formal environment of a Russell Group institution.

This sense of belonging is also relevant in the context of the development of career aspiration (Morrison, 2014). Viewed through the lens of habitus this might be unconscious – a tacit sense that a career field is not a good match to preferences and dispositions. Evidence suggests that participation in internships and other career-relevant, work-related experiences (Tomlinson, 2017) facilitates the accumulation of career-relevant cultural capital, and that the expansion of social networks can also be beneficial in this regard (Holmes, 2015).

Finally, institutional cultural capital is access to officially accredited capital, for example a private education or a prestigious university. Tomlinson (2017) argues that from an

employer perspective the importance of institutionalised cultural capital in signalling elite achievement and knowledge formation has declined. Indeed, other forms of institutional cultural capital have increased in importance, for example participation in prestigious internships or placements is important to a career in medicine (Lindberg, 2013).

The transfer of objectified cultural capital may increase the likelihood that an aspiration for HE or a graduate career is included within an individual's aspiration set by actively encouraging educational and career aspirations and by facilitating a sense of belonging in the social fields of HE or elite graduate careers. The transfer of embodied cultural capital may limit or enhance the capability to aspire. Whilst the work ethic and resilience of some working-class students enhance their capability to aspire, for others elite imagined futures may be excluded from their aspiration set due to a lack of confidence. However, a lack of expectation and entitlement may mean that working-class students are free to pursue a broad variety of options, some of which may be unimaginable for middle-class students whose parents have created a narrow set of clear expectations.

(d) Social capital

Introduction

Social capital is "*the aggregate of actual or potential resources linked to possession of a durable network of essentially institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition*" (Bourdieu, 1986, p.51). Previous work has focused on the extent of social networks, on the way in which they provide support in relationship and on class differences in the support provided. Social capital is therefore concerned with the individual's relationships with others and relational theory can be utilised to offer a more nuanced account of its role in the development of the capability to aspire.

Drawing on relational theory, the social support literature looks closely at the way in which relationships provide support from a psychological perspective. It considers how relationships facilitate well-being and assist in the development of aspirations by allowing individuals to identify and explore opportunities for development and growth. Social support can be defined as *“the perception or experience that one is loved and cared for by others, esteemed and valued and part of a social network of mutual assistance and obligations”* (Taylor, 2011, p.192). Positivist psychological studies conclude that social support benefits health and well-being by helping individuals deal with stress (Cohen and Wills, 1985). There are various taxonomies of the support received (Gottlieb and Bergen, 2010; Taylor, 2011) which include: instrumental, informational, companionship, emotional and esteem support. Instrumental support forms part of economic capital and is the provision of tangible resources, for example, money. Informational support and companionship, emotional and esteem support can be viewed as the mechanisms underlying the accumulation of social capital.

The following two sections consider the ways in which informational support and emotional, esteem and companionship support lead to the accumulation of social capital. It is important to examine the accumulation of social capital, as new relationships outside the family facilitate permeability of habitus and add additional layers to socialisation (Reay, 2004a). The ability to convert these forms of capital into further capital resources, for example how social capital may be converted to cultural capital, to further enhance the development of the capability to aspire. The final section examines relationships as a restriction in the development of aspiration and draws on Hart (2012) to examine relationships as a negative conversion factor in the development of aspiration, as they have the potential to limit the capability to aspire.

Informational support

Foskett (2011) provides a typology of the sources of informational support available to individuals in making career and educational decisions summarised in Figure 3. The diagram categorises social influencers according to their position in a network and the extent to which their influence is formal or informal; Foskett (2011) uses Putnam's (2000) concepts of bonding and bridging social capital to classify these influencers according to the characteristics of their influence. Bonding is inward looking, supportive and reinforcing of existing social structures, whereas bridging capital is outward looking and can facilitate social mobility. Foskett (2011) therefore considers intra-network influencers to be part of bonding capital and extra-network influencers part of bridging capital.

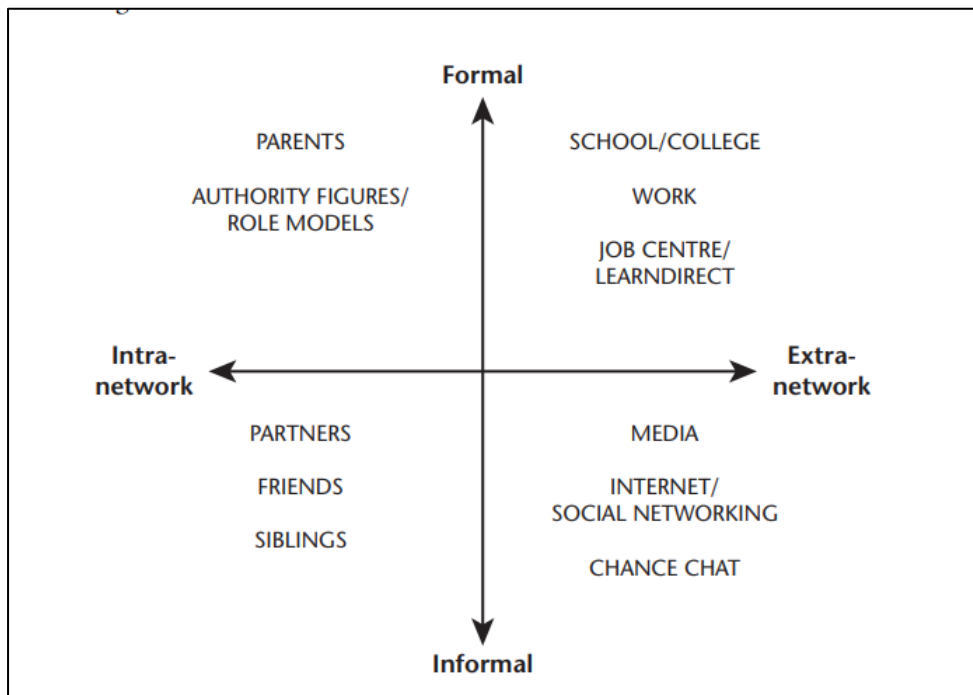


Figure 3: Decision making influencers

Source: Foskett (2011, p.100)

Characteristics of influence can also be categorised according to Ball and Vincent's (1998) typologies of hot and cold knowledge; hot knowledge, derived from an individual's

personal network and based on “*affective responses and direct experience*” (p.380), contrasts with cold knowledge derived from official sources of information. Slack et al. (2014) and Greenbank (2011) suggest that individuals have a strong preference for support provided by personal networks and a greater trust of hot knowledge. Smith (2011) suggests that this knowledge is needed to “*decode*” (p.168) information from cold sources, for example in the context of HE choices information provided from within an individual’s network is needed to decode information from the internet or that provided by careers advisors. Figure 4 categorises the influences summarised in Figure 3 in accordance with the typologies of bonding and bridging social capital and those of hot and cold knowledge and provides a useful framework in which to view the findings of previous studies.

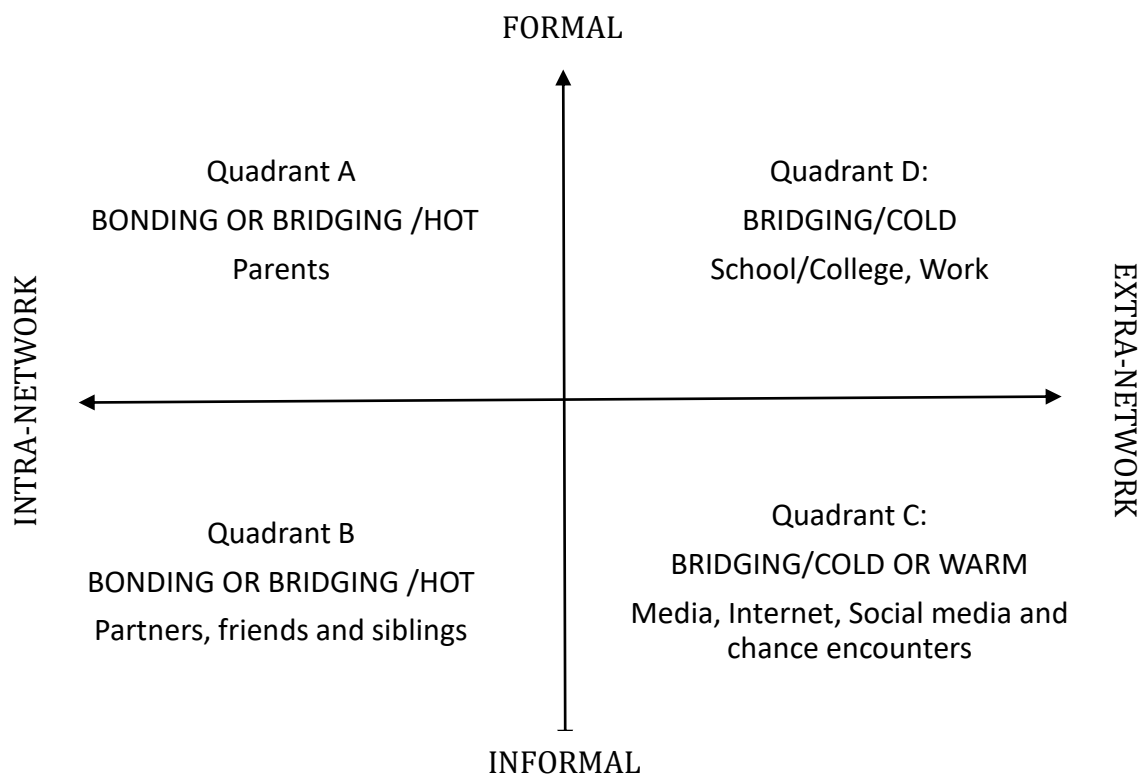


Figure 4: Categorisation of influencers adapted from Foskett (2011. p101)⁷

⁷ Source not given as figure is designed by author.

Foskett (2011) considers parents (Quadrant A) to be a formal traditional influence and a source of bonding social capital. Information supplied by parents is hot knowledge due to the close relationship between parents and their children. There is much literature to suggest that the information provided by parents influences career decision making. Parents from professional backgrounds who have attended HE can be a rich source of information for middle-class students around choice of university (Bathmaker et al., 2016) and graduate careers (Burke, 2015a; Walker and Fongwa, 2017). Bowers- Brown (2015) and Foskett (2011) suggests that working-class parents draw on their own experiences of work to provide information to their children who do not aspire to HE. However, Tate et al. (2015) suggest they may lack the experience necessary to support the development of aspirations for HE and graduate careers. Perhaps as a result, Reay et al., (2005) and Atkinson (2010) suggest that working-class students make decisions around choice of university and programme studied without parental input. Working-class parents may be unable to help with personal statements and job applications (Bradley, 2018) and may not understand their children's career ambitions (Christie and Burke, 2021). Whilst families might be ambitious for their children, the ambitions they hold may be less well formed than those of middle-class parents (Irwin and Elley, 2013) and they may be unable to provide the information necessary to support the refinement and realisation of those ambitions. Snee and Devine (2014) suggest that a lack of informational support relevant to the field of HE and graduate careers is not an exclusively working-class phenomenon. Middle-class parents who do not have a history of HE also lack information relevant to the field of HE and graduate careers. However, Brooks (2003) suggests that contacts with graduates in the workplace may enable upwardly-mobile parents to be a source of informational support in the development of aspirations.

Individuals may also have close relationships with partners, siblings, friends and family friends (Quadrant B) who can be reliable and trustworthy forms of hot knowledge. Evidence suggests that middle-class students have extensive networks who possess knowledge relevant to the field of HE (Slack et al., 2014) and that whilst these informal networks might not be cited as a source of influence, they are part of a collective influential process (Reay et al., 2005). Siblings (Davies, 2019) and friends (Brooks, 2003) provide informal information as to an individual's position relative to their peers, the set of feasible options available to them and the action they need to take to realise a particular ambition. This can contribute to the expectation for a particular educational route, for example A levels rather than a vocational qualification, or a Russell Group university rather than a post-1992 institution (Brooks, 2003). These networks can also be a valuable source of specific information relevant to the field of HE. Both Reay et al., (2005) and Smyth and Banks (2012) provide examples of the influence of knowledgeable contacts from broader family networks who facilitate decisions around choice of university and Bradley (2018) suggests that these contacts are also important to the provision of information around graduate career. Whilst Holland et al. (2007) argue that these networks and their influence provide evidence that middle-class students have higher levels of bridging social capital the evidence is consistent with Foskett's interpretation of siblings and friends as bonding social capital facilitating the reinforcement of group norms.

Working-class students may have extensive social networks, but these networks may not possess information relevant to the field of HE or graduate careers and therefore the influential collective process bonds the individual to routes other than HE. Foskett (2011) and Stahl (2015) provide evidence from individuals of the strong influence of broader family networks in emphasising the importance of getting a job following school. In the

case of upwardly-mobile, working-class students the provision of informational support may not be a collective process but reliance on a trustworthy source who can decode cold sources of information about HE and graduate careers (Smith, 2011). Whether these sources of individual influence act as sources of bonding or bridging social capital may be dependent upon their personal experiences of HE. Previous studies provide evidence of siblings with a negative experience of HE influencing subsequent generations not to participate due to difficulties in finding a graduate career (Heath et al., 2010) or the perceived workload of university study (Ball et al., 2000 and McGrath, 2018). Other studies suggest that siblings and friends can provide bridging social capital. Bathmaker et al. (2016) find evidence of siblings as positive role models for working-class students, Christie and Burke (2021) find that siblings provide information relevant to graduate careers and Snee and Devine (2014) present evidence which suggests that a friendship with someone in a slightly higher position in social space can be a valuable source of informational support.

Evidence suggests that working-class students in élite institutions find it difficult to socially integrate and therefore to extend their social networks whilst at university (Coulson et al., 2018; Reay, 2018b). Reay (2018b) contrasts the reserves of cultural, social capital available to middle-class students with those available to their working-class counterparts and, from a social perspective, characterises working-class students at élite universities as “*outsiders on the inside*” (p. 532) and highlights the part middle-class students play in this sense of social exclusion (Reay, 2021). Friedman (2015) makes a similar point when he examines the careers of individuals from working-class backgrounds in élite professions.

Middle-class students and professionals have cultural capital relevant to the field which can be converted into social capital in the form of an extended network. McLeod et al

(2009) suggest that middle-class professionals have the confidence to extend their social network proactively by leveraging this cultural capital. A failure to integrate may impact confidence however it might also limit the informational support available to working-class students and professionals. If career aspirations are developed informally through participation with a group of peers who are all aspiring to graduate careers, information pertaining to different careers is shared informally. Students who are socially excluded may lack this support. As mentioned on page 54, a lack of economic capital and the need to undertake part-time work may also limit opportunities to participate in career-relevant extracurricular activities, undertake unpaid internships and participate fully in social activities.

Sources of informational support from outside an individual's social network may also provide bridging social capital (Quadrant C) and may not always be considered cold sources of knowledge. Slack et al. (2014) refer to encounters with people from outside an individual's social network as warm social capital and comments that their trustworthiness may not be questioned. In the case of individuals who have limited informational support relevant to the field of education and graduate careers, undue reliance may be placed on encounters from outside social networks or on those who have some decision-relevant information from within a social network (Reay et al., 2005). Both Foskett (2011) and Burke (2015a) provide examples of chance encounters which have a positive impact on the career trajectories of upwardly-mobile participants. However, in the context of HE decisions Reay et al. (2005) suggest that information attained from both broader social networks and chance encounters can be unreliable, for example recommendations from family members to attend institutions which are not highly regarded.

Quadrant C also includes the media and social media as informal sources of informational support and Foskett (2011) suggests that the internet provides both formal and informal information but argues this information is of variable quality. Information provided by the internet, the availability of social media and the potential to develop networks of contacts from outside their normal social circle might enable individuals to develop an imagined future beyond their social field of origin. Reay et al. (2005) report that the TV Series *LA Law* influenced the career aspiration of one of their working-class participants and McLeod et al. (2009) suggest that the film *Star Wars* opened a new range of creative possibilities for a working-class participant with no access to creative professionals. Threadgold and Nilan (2009) found that popular culture contributed to working-class student's aspirations for careers in sport. However, Allen (2014) indicates that such aspirations may be seen as culturally deficient by those who have more experience in the relevant field.

The final source of informational support is formal support from school and college and, in the context of careers, from university, an internship or a placement (Quadrant D). Foskett (2011) suggests that support from careers guidance counsellors, teachers or lecturers has the potential to provide formal bridging capital as they are outside the individuals' network. However, the information provided by teachers may not always be regarded as formal; this will depend on the individual's relationship with the teacher. Smith (2011) and Reay et al. (2005) provide evidence to suggest that some working-class students develop close relationships with their teachers and when this is the case teachers might be regarded as another personal contact in Quadrant B. In this context, teachers, like any other personal contact, can provide information to decode cold knowledge (Smith, 2011) but the information provided may be dependent on their own personal experiences and may be over relied upon by working-class students who lack

other field-relevant information. Studies provide ample evidence of working-class students who have a close relationship with teachers and for whom teachers are a valuable source of information relating to HE (Heath et al., 2008; Burke, 2015a) and career (Devine, 2004).

However, in other circumstances, teachers and careers advisors may be regarded as cold sources of information and some evidence suggests that neither working-class (Hutchings, 2005) nor middle-class students (Reay et al., 2005) regard them as trusted sources of information. Hutchings (2005) argues that some working-class students feel that careers advisors and teachers underestimate their potential and provide information related to inappropriate paths. Reay et al. (2005) argue that middle-class students have a variety of other information available to them and may not need to rely on school as a source of information. Leathwood and Hutchings (2005), Bowers-Brown (2015) and McGrath, (2018) present evidence which suggests that some careers advisors and teachers have a weak understanding of the relationship between post-sixteen choices, university entrance requirements and possible careers and Foskett and Hemsley-Brown (2001) question their ability to provide reliable advice. State-school teachers and careers advisors provide information on a broad variety of possible post-sixteen routes including further education and apprenticeship (Ball et al., 2000; Bathmaker et al., 2016) and many emphasise the important of personal autonomy and choice. Several studies suggest that this is not the case in the independent sector; elite schools in the US (Stich and Cipollone, 2018) and the UK (Gamsu, 2018; Forbes and Maxwell, 2018) provide highly specialised information, which support application to elite universities.

In the context of careers, Tomlinson (2017) emphasises the importance of broader social networks as a source of bridging capital. University careers officers and contact with employers at careers fairs and during internships and placements provide informational

support. He argues that transition into employment depends on graduates' abilities to identify and exploit opportunities and argues that this is particularly important to graduates who do not have access to this information from other sources, for example family or friends. Devine (2004) provides evidence that in medicine and teaching, mentors and managers connected with placements, internships and periods of voluntary work experience are important sources of information and McLeod et al. (2009) provide similar evidence from the advertising industry.

Snee and Devine (2014) suggest that the lack of informational support and a fear of economic risk associated with university can result in the adaptation of aspiration in working-class students. Furthermore, even if adaptation does not occur, working-class students have a weak knowledge of the field of HE, for example the ranking of HE institution attended and the programme chosen (Bathmaker et al., 2016). This means that they may struggle to develop and to realise their aspirations (Burke, 2015a). In contrast, Ball (2003) argues that the social networks available to middle-class students can facilitate the development of well-formed and specific HE and career aspirations and a detailed knowledge of the steps that need to be taken to realise these aspirations. However, Bathmaker et al., (2016) suggest that information on alternatives is not provided. The importance of family and friends as a source of informational support in career decision may therefore affect working-class students' capability to aspire, as family and friends may not be able to provide career-relevant informational support, and time spent at university may not have broadened social networks, which also have the potential to provide this support.

Emotional support, esteem support and companionship support

Nussbaum (2006) highlights the importance of care to the development of capabilities. This section draws on the social support literature to provide a nuanced account of care and its potential role in the development of capabilities. Emotional support entails the expression of empathy, concern and the ability to turn to others for comfort and security (Schultheiss et al, 2001) and contributes to the development of emotional capital, “*a stock of emotional resources built up over time*” (Reay, 2004b, p.61). Hart (2012) argues that the provision of emotional support facilitates the development of aspirations by generating positive emotions, which may counter painful emotions such as anxiety. Esteem support facilitates personal growth positively and can be described as:

“feeling pushed to perform up to one’s potential, feeling another’s confidence in their abilities, experiencing freedom regarding exploration and decision making, being encouraged to be responsible for one’s decisions, and learning from one’s mistakes” (Schultheiss et al, 2001, p.218).

Feeney and Collins (2015) introduced the concept of relational catalyst support, which “*promotes engagement in life opportunities*” (p.119) and forms part of esteem support. There is to an extent an overlap with cultural capital whereby individuals are encouraged to engage with educational opportunities although the notion of esteem support does not relate to a specific opportunity. Family, teachers or friends may provide encouragement to reflect (Caetano, 2014) by raising awareness of personal dispositions (McAdams, 2019), enabling the individual to imagine a different future (Burke, 2015a) or to participate fully in opportunities for development and growth (Feeney and Collins, 2015). Others may provide the stimulus for the individual to explore opportunities facilitating the development of the individual’s own ideas and voice by helping them with what they find internally persuasive (Burkitt, 2010b). In this way, Hart (2012) argues that sharing

an aspiration may facilitate a mediated understanding of self and guide the development of aspiration.

Some studies focus on the ways in which relationships provide generalised support. For example, Kenny et al. (2007) emphasise the importance of feeling that someone is there to provide emotional support if needed; this is part of companionship support and concerns the availability of others creating a sense of belonging.

The availability of emotional, esteem and companionship support can be considered in the context of the groups of people who form an individual's network outlined in Figure 4. Quadrants A and B consist of groups with whom an individual might have a personal relationship and therefore might be sources of such support. There is much evidence to suggest that parents are an important source of emotional and esteem support in the development of an aspiration for HE. Snee and Devine (2014) argue that disruption in this support when parents divorce can disrupt an aspiration for HE. Bathmaker et al. (2016) and Reay et al. (2005) provide examples of the ways in which middle-class parents encourage and support their children when they are struggling at school or when they feel their children's aspirations are not sufficiently high. There is also evidence of the reassurance (Bathmaker et al., 2016) and encouragement (Smith, 2011) of working-class students in the development of an aspiration for HE and Burkitt (2014) argues that this may mitigate feelings of shame which are the result of an individual's position in society. Atkinson's (2010) findings suggest that parental encouragement is a factor which differentiates his upwardly and non-upwardly-mobile working-class participants.

There is much less literature which examines the importance of emotional, companionship and esteem support in the context of career aspirations. However, there are some positivist studies. Schultheiss et al., (2001; 2002) highlight the importance of parents (2001) and siblings (2002) in providing career-related encouragement and

Phillips et al. (2001) give a nuanced account of the way in which family is closely involved in career decisions.

Quadrant B includes partners, siblings and friends. The sociological literature which examines the transition to and aspiration for HE does not make much reference to the influence of partners. However, the social support literature indicates that they have the potential to play an important role in young adult decision-making (Domene et al., 2012) and can be a source of emotional support (Soons and Liefbroer, 2008). The literature also indicates that both siblings (Gillies and Lucey, 2006; Davies, 2019) and friends (Holland, et al., 2007) can be important sources of emotional support when making educational transitions. In my consideration of informational support, I argued that the generalised informal information provided by a broader network of contacts is an important source of support for middle-class students. Informal support and encouragement from a network of peers may also be an important source of emotional or esteem support. Devine (2004) argues that group solidarity and support is important to the development of aspiration for HE and careers in medicine and teaching. She suggests this is the case in both elite and state schools where students are part of a peer group of academically able students. However, Brooks (2003) suggests that this might not always be the case and that some students may seek to hide their aspirations from their friends when they do not plan to conform to group norms. Peer groups therefore have the potential to offer emotional support, but this is not always the case.

Devine (2004) suggests that the companionship support provided by peers continues throughout university and facilitates the transition to career. Several studies have found that relationships with friends are important to career decision making, both whilst at school (Phillips et al., 2001) and for women in mid-career (Motulsky, 2010). If working-class students struggle to develop strong peer networks at elite universities their access

to emotional, esteem and companionship support relevant to the social field of graduate careers may be compromised and this may limit the development of cultural capital in the form of career confidence.

Teachers, managers, and mentors also have the potential to provide emotional and esteem support. Devine (2004) and Smith (2011) suggest that teachers may be an important source of encouragement for upwardly-mobile and academically successful working-class students in developing an aspiration for HE. However, Devine (2004) argues that this emotional support and encouragement is contingent on academic success. In the context of career, Carter (2002) discusses the importance of colleagues and managers in the provision of esteem support and Amundson et al. (2010) and Devine (2004) describes how workplace mentors can facilitate personal growth.

Relationships as a restriction

In addition to enabling the development of the capability to aspire, relationships also have the potential to constrain this development; they can be viewed as negative social capital. Hart (2012) suggests that relationships have the potential to act as a negative conversion factor in the development of the capability to aspire and considers the ways in which the capability to aspire is subject to the influence of relationships. She classifies aspirations as independent, shared, guided, and conflicted. Sharing an aspiration might facilitate its development via the provision of social support but significant others may also guide aspirations or hold aspirations which conflict with those of the individual. The social support literature, Hart's own empirical work and work examining class provides evidence of the ways in which relationships can limit the capability to aspire.

In the context of class, the evidence cited above indicates that the expectations of middle-class parents guide their children away from post-eighteen choices that they might have reason to value, but which do not involve an élite institution or a prestigious career. Bathmaker et al. (2016) present evidence of parental guiding of middle-class school leaver who does not aspire to Cambridge. Hart (2012) also suggests that middle-class school leavers are guided toward HE by teachers and parents, sometimes despite holding other aspirations. Studies that consider working-class school leavers also contain evidence of parental guiding; Heath et al. (2008) suggest that some families with limited experience of HE manifest “*networked ambivalence*” (p.219) to HE and discourage participation. Both Hutchings (2005) and Reay (2005) suggest that teachers guide some working-class children away from pathways that are more academic; Reay (2005) suggests that this happens when children are streamed in primary school and Hutchings (2005) presents evidence that in secondary school working-class children are encouraged to consider vocational qualifications as an alternative to A levels. If parents or other significant relationships guide aspirations, this may limit the capability to aspire.

2.2.4 The relationship between capital and habitus

(a) The concept of practice: good fit between habitus and field

Bourdieu’s concept of practice (1984): brings together habitus and capital to consider the way in which action is motivated. Figure 5 shows how habitus and capital interact within a given field to motivate practice.

$$\text{(Habitus x Capital) + Field = Practice}$$

Figure 5: The motivation of action

Source: Bourdieu, 1984, p.101

This formula provides insight to how capital and habitus combine to enhance or to curtail the capability to aspire. Bourdieu (1990a) suggests that habitus generates unconscious strategies, which agents use to improve their position in social space; the unconscious is

the “*unchosen principle of all choices*” (Bourdieu, 1990a, p.61) and conceptualises this as a “*feel for the game*” Bourdieu (1990b, p.63).

Bourdieu (1990a) distinguishes between the unconscious, which underlies habitual action and conscious rational action but does not consider different states of consciousness (Noble and Watkins, 2003). Giddens (1979) presents a more nuanced view of consciousness and distinguishes between discursive and practical consciousness (Giddens, 1979). In practical consciousness can be thought of as tacit and incapable of articulation; Giddens (1979) suggests that most rules of social interaction are a part of practical consciousness. Individuals act with knowledge, but they may be unable to articulate this tacit knowledge and provide reasons for action which is habituated. Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992) get close to this concept when they describe how habitus captures “*the intentionality without intention, the knowledge without cognitive intent, the pre-reflective infra-conscious mastery that agents acquire in the social world*” (p.19). The concept of practical consciousness therefore facilitates a deeper understanding of habitual action; individuals may sometimes act unconsciously and on other occasions utilise tacit knowledge.

Burkitt (2014) provides further insight by considering the role of emotion in motivations for action and argues that there is no separation between thought and feeling; actions and thoughts are “*infused with emotion*” (Burkitt, 2014, p.101). Burkitt (2012) suggests that the individual’s interaction with the world produces self-feeling and argues that the voices of others may influence these feelings unconsciously in an internalising of the external. Nussbaum (2003) highlights the importance of these background emotion judgements of which we are unaware unless a particular situation brings them into consciousness, but which are important in explaining actions. These relate to the things that we have judged as being important to our flourishing and therefore are of emotional

importance to us. However, they form part of the *"fabric of one's life"* (p.71) and therefore we are unaware of them on an ongoing basis as they are so ubiquitous (Nussbaum, 2003, p.70). Background emotions, for example feelings of security, are of huge significance in our lives (Brownlie, 2014) and therefore may be important to the maintenance of habitual forms of action and the development of aspirations motivated unconsciously, or at the level of practical consciousness. If an individual has a *"feel for the game"* (Bourdieu, 1990b, p.63) and there is a good fit between habitus and field they may be experiencing feelings of contentment or happiness of which they are unaware. The work of Nussbaum (2003) and Burkitt (2014) suggests that the development of preferences in relationship are emotional and that an individual's preferences and expectations are of emotional importance to them. Some individuals may therefore aspire within the constraints of their social field of origin and may not be fully aware of how they developed an aspiration nor of feelings of contentment or happiness.

A closer examination of the studies, which examine class differences, uncovers the operation of practical consciousness and the unconscious rejection of potential aspirations. Atkinson (2010) argues that the *"taken for granted"* (p.59) assumptions of class shape the educational aspirations of both working- and middle-class students. Middle-class participants *always knew* they were going to do A levels and *never considered* leaving school and taking a vocational pathway. Attending a prestigious institution is just *"what people do"* (Reay et al., 2005, p.30) and middle-class participants *"never thought of doing anything other than going to university"* (Bathmaker et al., 2016, p.56). Working-class students may unconsciously rule out HE; *"[university] wasn't on their radar as it wasn't done"* (Bathmaker et al., 2016, p.59), is *"not for me"* (Archer et al., 2007, p.219) or in Atkinson's (2010) study *"[my parents' attitude was] I was to finish school and become a secretary cos that's what girls did"* (p.92).

(b) The concept of practice: poor fit between habitus and field

As an individual moves into an unfamiliar social field or imagines such a move, there may be a time lag between changes occurring and the individual adapting to the requirements of the new social field: *"hysteresis of habitus"* (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1990, p.78). Bourdieu (2000) outlines the potential emotional consequences of such hysteresis and suggests that social mobility might result in an identity *"torn by contradiction and internal division ... cleft habitus"* (p.16).

There is much evidence that social mobility is an emotional experience. Reay (2002) and Ingram (2011) suggest that educationally successful working-class boys experience painful emotions as they move between the social fields of the classroom, home and their peer group. Lawler (1999) examines the experiences of socially-mobile women and finds that considerable pain is associated with class movement. Reay (2015) examines the experience of an academically successful working-class boy and the emotional difficulties he experiences in *"reconciling white working-class masculinities with educational success"* (p.13). Friedman (2016) finds that a majority of his socially-mobile participants struggled to deal with painful emotions stimulated by variations between habitus and field. He suggests that the consequences of these emotions varied; some returned to a more familiar social field, some slowed their own mobility, and others continued their upward trajectory with lasting emotional effects. In a minority of cases where social mobility was gradual individuals did not experience painful emotions. A similar slowing of trajectories is found in other studies and evidence suggests that some working-class students unconsciously rule out more prestigious institutions and choose less prestigious ones. Reay et al. (2005) find that some of their working-class participants *"just knew"* and describe how they *"couldn't imagine going anywhere else"* (p.92) other than a post-1992 institution. These comments reflect the unconscious operation of habitus and slowing of

social mobility and a tacit understanding of normal and natural aspirations, “*that’s what you do*” or “*I just knew.*” As a result, working-class students are less likely to aspire to a prestigious institution (Greenbank, 2006), more likely to choose a local institution (Reay et al, 2001) and to reject a prestigious institution (Reay, 2018b: Bathmaker et al., 2016).

Bourdieu (1977) suggests that an analysis of changes in the volume, composition and accumulation of capital can clarify the way habitus adapts as it encounters a new social field. Friedman’s study (2016) provides evidence which supports this assertion – participants who experienced smoother transitions were able to activate social and cultural capital relevant to the new social field. They moved into closely adjacent occupational positions, which perhaps necessitated minor rather than major accumulations of capital and had friends who were similarly socially mobile, perhaps suggesting the availability of companionship support. Carrigan (2014) outlines a similar process in his analysis of the role of relationships in personal morphogenic change. He provides an account of the way in which relationships facilitate individual adaptation and change; identification with individuals from the social field of origin weakens and areas of commonality are found in new relationships. The literature therefore suggests that the availability of capital can lessen the emotional impact of social mobility and adaptation may take place unconsciously or tacitly.

(c) The implications for the development of the capability to aspire

It is important to recognise that an individual might achieve well-being and exercise freedoms without consciously reflecting on them; instead, the behaviour of the individual might be an indication that they value that course of action (Colburn, 2011). Burkitt, (2016) suggests that agency does not always depend on what we think but might also be expressed in what we do, and we may not be consciously aware of this. An individual’s

behaviour might be an expression of agency or a result of unconscious social conditioning in habitus (Sayer, 2009). In the context of the capabilities, the visibility of possible actions might be limited by an unconscious “*downgrading of accessible options - adaptive preference*” (Elster, 1983, p.119). Adaptive preference refers to the way in which individuals internalise the constraints on the choices they have available to them, sometimes to the extent that they fail to notice these constraints (Bridges, 2006). Bourdieu (1984) describes how individuals are socially assisted and encouraged to adjust their aspirations to their objective chances of success; they therefore make do with what they have even if this means self-deception. Significant others, structural influences or imagined painful emotions might lead the individual to adapt their preferences. Adaptation of preference suggests a limited awareness of valued achievements, agency and capability to aspire. An individual may therefore have a range of aspirations in her aspiration set and may choose the one that feels natural or normal; the range of aspirations from which to choose suggests that the individual has agency. However, the capability to aspire is limited in two ways: firstly, as Sen (2004) would suggest, process freedom is limited – this restricts agency because the individual has not subjected potential aspirations to reasoned scrutiny. Secondly, they are not free to identify a full range of possible alternative futures as they do not consider possible futures outside their social field of origin.

As suggested above, the availability of new capital may enhance agency by enabling an expansion of the individual’s capability set without conscious awareness. However, in these cases process freedom and therefore agency is restricted; the individual has less agency than if they had chosen consciously and been able give reasons for their choices. Burkitt (2016) suggests that it is useful to discuss degrees of agency rather than agency

as an absolute. The above discussion indicates that the degree of agency an individual might have might be measured on two scales: the extent to which an individual is conscious of constraints, and the extent to which habitus is permeable – the individual can add new aspirations to their aspiration set.

2.2.5 Summary

Class differences in the availability of family capital and the ability to accumulate further capital relevant to the social fields of HE and graduate careers provide insight into the ways in which structure limits individual agency by limiting the capability to aspire. Evidence presented in the literature indicates that some students aspire within the constraints of their social field of origin and that they are unaware of these constraints. Preferences are adapted and students from both the middle and working classes may unconsciously reject possible futures outside their social field of origin and tacitly develop aspirations within their existing social field. At an emotional level, this may feel natural and normal. For those who can activate sufficient capital to aspire outside their social field of origin, there is further evidence of adaptive preference; individuals appear to slow their own social mobility unconsciously, perhaps to avoid painful emotions. Imagined painful emotion may therefore limit the capability to aspire without conscious awareness.

The social support literature enhances the existing literature on social capital and provides further insight into the importance of relationships to capital accumulation. The ability to accumulate and activate capital relevant to a new social field, particularly social capital, may have an impact on the extent to which painful emotions are present and therefore need to be avoided. The ability to accumulate and activate capital relevant to the new social field may enable individuals to avoid associated painful emotions and

facilitate social mobility that feels natural and normal. The accumulation of capital can therefore enhance the capability to aspire and individual agency without conscious awareness although in these cases process agency is limited.

In this section I synthesised the literature to explore the relationship between capital, consciousness, emotion, the influence of structure, and the capability to aspire. The next section further considers consciousness by examining the potential of reflexivity to enhance the capability to aspire.

2.3 Personal emergent properties: the role of reflexivity

2.3.1 Introduction

In contrast to Bourdieu's focus on structure some theorists focus on the power of agents to resist structural conditioning. Archer makes a significant contribution to the structure/agency debate from a critical realist perspective and argues that whilst structural powers can constrain or enable the development of self, individuals can use personal emergent properties to diagnose their own situations, identify their own interests and design projects that they deem appropriate to attaining their ends. Archer (2003) therefore emphasises the power of agents to identify and realise their valued achievements. Sayer (2009) supports Archer's characterisation of individuals with personal emergent properties able to resist the impact of structural and cultural forces and argues that individuals have essential human properties which make them capable of socialisation but that these properties may also limit its influence, for example, individuals will resist abuse even if this abuse is normalised in habitus (Sayer, 2009). The ability to exercise agency in aspiration development therefore needs to consider both how structure influences the capability to aspire and the way in which individuals might

consciously resist structural conditioning. As discussed above, consciousness is also an important process freedom (Sen, 2004).

Both Giddens (1976) and Archer (2007) foreground reflexivity as a personal emergent property with the potential to enhance individual agency. Giddens (1979) suggests that reflexivity entails the ability to abstract from the continual monitoring of behaviour and provide reasons for action; action is reflexively monitored and intentional. Archer (2003) considers that a crucial feature of reflexivity is the ability of individuals to consciously abstract and consider alternative courses of action. She characterises reflexivity as an internal conversation whereby:

“we survey the constraints and enablements [of society] under our own descriptions; we consult our own projects which were deliberately defined to realise our concerns; and we strategically adjust them into those practices which we conclude internally (and always fallibly) will enable us to do (and to be) what we care about most in society.” (Archer, 2003, p.133).

Archer (2003) argues that individuals involuntarily acquire identity characteristics, which are a result of their relative privilege; this is similar to Bourdieu's formation of identity in habitus. However, she considers individuals as capable of reflecting on their experiences and characteristics via the internal conversation (Archer, 2000) and as a result of considering the influence of the cultural context in which they are situated. Both Giddens (1991) and Archer (2003) suggest that reflexivity is vital to the formation of identity and that reflexive monitoring of action enables the individual to resist structural conditioning and enhance agency. Reflexivity may therefore enable an expansion of the individual's capability set beyond their social field of origin by raising an individual's awareness of structural constraints and can thus be conceptualised as a conversion factor in the development of the capability to aspire.

Both Giddens (1976) and Archer (2003) argue that reflexivity is part of everyday experience; for Giddens *“nothing is more central to, and distinctive of, human life than the reflexive monitoring of behaviour, which is expected by all competent members of society”* (p.120). For Archer (2003) individuals are almost constantly engaged in an internal conversation, which includes this reflexive evaluation. For Giddens (1991) reflexivity is part of the formation of identity for all individuals irrespective of their position in society or of the nature of society itself; even in traditional societies reflexivity would play a part in identity formation. However, the rapid change which characterises late modernity (Giddens, 1991; Beck, 1992; Lash, 1999; Archer, 2012) extends the role of reflexivity in the formation of identity; individuals can no longer rely on tradition or habituated forms of action to make their way through the world. Instead, they are faced with the need to utilise a broad variety of information and make decisions in rapidly changing situations. Life is characterised by planning and goal-orientation and reflexivity is a necessity - the *“individualisation thesis”* (Farrugia, 2015, p.878). *“The self today is for everyone a reflexive project- a more or less continuous interrogation of past, present and future”* (Giddens, 1991, p.30).

A close examination of the different uses of the term reflexivity in the literature reveals that whilst there are elements of commonality in the way the term is understood there are also significant areas of difference. Consideration of the potential of reflexivity to enhance individual agency in aspiration development necessitates an exploration of the differing definitions of reflexivity. The definitions above and others used in the literature suggest that reflexivity entails a conscious ability to survey, diagnose, interrogate, evaluate and monitor. May and Perry (2017) capture this in their definition of reflexivity which suggests that reflexivity is *“an examination of the frameworks of thought*

themselves. A second order question concerning thinking itself and not taking things for granted" (p.3). Burkitt's (2012) definition of reflexivity also captures this distancing and evaluative element to reflexivity, which he argues involves some expert knowledge or mediated understanding. Noble and Watkins (2003) refer to this as the "*analytic mode*" (p.530). These definitions of reflexivity concern the past, which is surveyed, diagnosed, evaluated, interrogated or monitored. However, the definitions in the literature also imply that reflexivity concerns the future; suggesting that reflexivity entails acting strategically, with intent, forming goals or pursuing life's projects. Noble and Watkins (2003) refer to this as "*synthetic thinking*" (p.530) which involves an ability to imagine the future. Nussbaum (1992) suggests that practical reason or reflexivity has "*many concrete forms*" (p.219). Conceptualisations of reflexivity diverge across three areas: whether they are concerned with individualism or are relational (May and Perry, 2017), whether they focus on rationality or consider the role of emotions (May and Perry, 2017), and the focus of the reflexivity, for example behaviour or the nature of society itself.

2.3.2 Reflexivity as rational or as emotional

Reflexivity has been characterised as devoid of emotion (May and Perry, 2017). However, many accounts of reflexivity highlight relationship between reflexivity and emotion. Nussbaum (1992) argues that practical reason "*is related in complex ways to other capabilities, emotional, imaginative and intellectual*" (p.219). Adams (2006), Sayer (2009) and Burkitt (2012) criticise accounts of reflexivity which fail to account for the way in which thought is inherently fused with emotion. Adams (2006) considers that rationalistic accounts fail to capture essential elements of humanity and Sayer (2009) argues that emotions form part of intelligence, motivate us and provide us with cues about the things we value. Archer (2000) carefully considers emotions in her account of

reflexivity in which individuals evaluate and articulate their emotions on reflection and transform them into emotional commentaries on their concerns. However, Burkitt (2012) argues that her empirical work fails to fully explore participant emotions. He argues that not only are emotions integral to reflexivity but that they provide the stimulus for reflexivity; an intense emotion might cause us to be reflexive, to distance ourselves in some way and to consider its cause in the context of our concerns.

Giddens (1991) introduces the concept of fateful moments when an individual is forced to consider the consequences of choices and actions; such a consideration is reflexive. Thomson et al. (2002) adapted and applied this concept and coined the phrase critical moment, which is an event, which has *“important consequences for an individual’s life or identity”* (p.339) and present evidence which suggests that such moments are emotional and entail reflexivity. Building on these ideas, Hodkinson and Sparkes, (1997) introduce the idea of turning points; periods of substantial change where individuals understand something new about themselves when existing schemes for action embedded within habitus are challenged and stimulate *“transfers of knowledge between practical and discursive consciousness”* (p.34). They suggest that one such turning point might be when an individual encounters a new social field to which their habitus is not adapted. On page 78, I cited work which considered the potential of habitus to adapt without consciousness on encountering a new social field. However there also exists the potential for reflexivity. McNay (2013) argues that habitus may be destabilised by movement into a new social field and that this destabilisation can induce reflexivity. In some cases, the conflict of the field with habitus may provide a stimulus to reflexivity, perhaps because an individual experiences an intense or painful emotion. This movement can occur at structural

turning points in an individual's life, for example the transition to HE, or can be stimulated by other events, for example the end of a relationship.

A recognition of the role of emotions in reflexivity may enhance an understanding of the ways in which individuals exercise agency in aspiration development; agency entails a consideration of how one feels about something as well as a rational evaluation of alternatives. Zipin et al. (2015) foreground the role of emotion in the development of an imagined future and Hart (2012) provides empirical evidence to support the ways in which the "*emotional register of meaning*" (p.128) can have impact on an individual's imagined future in HE.

2.3.3 Reflexivity as individual or as relational

Traditionally reflexivity has been characterised as an individual pursuit and implies a withdrawal or distancing from others (May and Perry, 2017). Burkitt (2012) criticises both Archer (2000) and Giddens (1991) for their individualistic characterisations of reflexivity and suggests that the emotional aspect to reflexivity and reflexivity itself are inherently relational. For example, McNay (2013) defines reflexivity as "*the critical awareness that arises from self-conscious relation with the other*" (p.5) and May (2000) argues that reflexivity entails an understanding of one's own identity in interaction with others. Burkitt (2012) describes self-reflective dialogue as the mechanism via which sense-making and therefore reflexivity takes place; this may take place internally or in conversation with others. Burkitt (2010b) draws on Mead (2015) and argues that the individual has a sense of an inner voice, which is infused with the voices of others. The micro-dialogue can therefore be either, the self with the self, reflecting on past actions and dialogues, or speaking to the self as though to another. The individual imagines a conversation between different selves and voices, which Burkitt (2010b) labels micro-

dialogue. Conversations may be imagined with specific others or with a generalised other which may encapsulate multiple voices or reflect the views of society (Mead, 2015). This suggests that reflexivity is not just an internal conversation, which prioritises the cognitive and neutral; it is a juggling of emotions within imagined and real interactions (Holmes, 2010). Brownlie (2014) argues that emotions, relationships and the rationality are all part of reflexivity. Consideration of the relational aspect to reflexivity facilitates an understanding of the importance of others in the exercise of agency and in aspiration development. Relationships are more than external sources of social support or sources of guidance but form part of consciousness itself.

2.3.4 The focus of reflexivity: what are individuals reflexive about?

(a) Introduction

Reflexivity also differs according to its focus; everyday actions, an individual's behaviour, an individual's identity or biography and the structures of society itself have all been suggested to be the focus of reflexivity. This is an area where significant difference exists between theorists. Some (Giddens, 1976; Archer, 2003) seem to suggest that evidence of reflexivity in one context, for example in relation to everyday actions, also suggests reflexivity in others, for example in relation to the structures of society themselves. Atkinson's (2010) analysis suggests that the term reflexivity should be reserved for evaluation of the structural constraints of society. He argues that in Archer's and Giddens' accounts of reflexivity whilst *"there is intention, there is projection, and there is consciousness, but ... they all remain structured by and founded in the complexes of knowledge and perception constituting the habitus"* (p.54). Whilst Atkinson (2010) does not explicitly claim that only reflexivity concerning the structures of society constitutes reflexivity, this seems to be the implication. A consideration of the potential of reflexivity as a tool that might lessen the impact of structure on agency therefore requires

consideration of the focus of reflexivity. Each type of reflexivity is discussed, its role in aspiration development outlined and its potential to enhance or limit the capability to aspire is evaluated.

(b) Everyday reflexivity

As Archer and Giddens suggest, individuals have the capacity for abstract thought and this is necessary in many everyday situations, for example in planning a holiday or an encounter with someone (Lahire, 2011). Similarly, individuals also have the capacity to consider alternative courses of action, for example in deciding what to have for dinner (Lahire, 2011). In both cases, they are likely to be able to provide reasons for their actions and can be considered reflexive – the internal conversation is the mechanism by which this reflexive monitoring takes place (Archer, 2003). Nico and Caetano (2017) focus on the tasks to which this sort of reflexivity might relate, for example, household tasks, and classifies this as *pragmatic reflexivity* (p.677). This “*everyday lay reflexivity*” (Sayer, 2009, p.121) or “*ordinary reflection*” (Noble and Watkins, 2003, p.531) suggests that some actions are reflexively monitored and intentional although the preceding sections suggest that this cannot always be the case as some actions are unconscious or motivated by practical consciousness. Lahire (2011) suggests that were some actions not automatic we would not be able to function, for example, when we engage in conversation we do not always consciously consider our next utterance.

Lahire (2011) suggests that this type of everyday reflexivity can also be applied to more significant decisions, for example having identified an aspiration an individual will reflexively plan and evaluate how best to achieve that aspiration. Nico and Caetano (2017) define this as functional reflexivity, but I would argue it is an extension of everyday reflexivity to a different type of action and decision. Noble and Watkins (2003)

suggest that this type of thinking entails “*analytic deconstruction*” (p.531) of the past and “*synthetic thinking*” (p. 531). In the context of aspiration, the ability to imagine a future and project existing capabilities into that future is therefore important to goal orientation and planning.

Sweetman (2003) suggests that the extensive change that characterises late modernity necessitates this type of reflexivity and that for most reflexivity is part of habitus. Whilst this might be true to an extent, close inspection of the mechanisms underlying everyday reflexivity reveals that this might take place within limits. The possession of social capital and consequent knowledge of both HE and the graduate careers market facilitates the development of an imagined future (Ball et al. 2000) and therefore may enable middle-class students to be reflexive around their choice of career. Ball (2003) finds that middle-class parents are goal-oriented in relation to education and career on behalf of their children and Burke (2015a) suggests that for some this level of strategizing and career planning can become part of habitus. This is perhaps partly attributable to access to capital but also may be more prevalent because the middle classes “*have greater exposure to the pressures and processes of late modernity*” (Atkinson, 2010, p.38). In contrast, Burke (2015a) found that some working-class students did not appear goal-oriented with respect to either HE or career and attributed this to their lower levels of social and cultural capital. If an individual does not have the requisite social capital to form a clearly imagined future, then they may not be able to deploy everyday reflexivity to plan toward this goal.

The discussion above suggests that everyday reflexivity can be important to everyday action and to strategizing to realise an aspiration. However, the existence of the ability to abstract, to consider alternatives and to provide reasons for action does not suggest that

an individual is able to reflexively monitor their own behaviour (Giddens, 1979), to consider their own identity in the context of their personal biography (Giddens, 1991) or to survey the constraints and enablements of society itself (Archer, 2003). There is consensus that everyday reflexivity is ubiquitous; however there is much less consensus as to whether reflexivity in relation to one's own behaviour, one's personal biography or society itself is part of everyday experience. As discussed above, the literature suggests that change or conflict is necessary to stimulate such reflexivity. The next sections explore each of these: behaviour, personal biography and the nature of society as the foci of reflexivity and consider the ways in which change and emotion might play a role in stimulating reflexivity beyond the everyday.

(c) Behaviour as the focus of reflexivity

Giddens (1976) suggests, "*Nothing is more central to, and distinctive of, human life than the reflexive monitoring of behaviour, which is expected by all competent members of society*" (p.120). However, Bourdieu (2000) contends that those who are "*in the right place*" (p.132) in the social world do not need to reflexively monitor behaviour and those who occupy "*awkward positions*" (p.132) bring to consciousness behaviours which for others might be taken for granted. Evidence suggests that as individuals move into an unfamiliar social field, they become consciously aware of the differences between their own behaviours and the requirements of the new field (Ingram and Abrahams, 2015).

Lawler (1999) presents evidence of the ways in which the socially mobile adjust their behaviours to indicate that they possess the right type of cultural capital and their shame about the wrong type of behaviours, which stem from a past self. Current studies also provide evidence of a reflexive monitoring of behaviours. In Bowers-Brown's (2018) study of working-class girls, a participant became aware of the ways in which her accent

and did not fit with the sixth form field; she reflexively adjusted her behaviour to fit with the new field. One of Bathmaker et al.'s (2016) participants sums this up reflexively, "*So you learn to have a certain side of yourself that you present to a certain group of people, and certain discourses that you wouldn't have with others. So, you learn to be multi-faced*" (p.80). Reay et al. (2005) present evidence that an out of field experience can be an emotional experience; a participant comments on her Goldsmiths interview, "*It was awful. It was like they wanted me to have really strong views about things and I'm more maybe this, maybe that*" (p.102). This participant outlines the strong emotions she feels as she understands the difference between expected behaviours in her social field of origin and those of a prestigious institution.

The reflexive monitoring and adjustment of behaviour may enable an individual to convert an aspiration to a functioning and more easily navigate a new structural field. However, Friedman (2016) suggests that some individuals maintain their behaviours in a new field whilst conscious of being different. In some cases, this may limit the ability to realise aspirations or may lead the individual to withdraw from the new field or to slow their social mobility (Friedman, 2016).

(d) Personal biography or identity as the focus of reflexivity

Giddens (1991) suggests, "*the self today is for everyone a reflexive project – a more or less continuous interrogation of past, present and future*" (p.30) and there is support from other theorists that the construction of identity is conscious. McNay (2013) suggests, "*the coherence of the self is not conceived as an exogenously imposed effect, but as a result of an active process of configuration whereby individuals attempt to make sense of the temporality of existence*" (p.27). She argues that the concept of narrative is useful in capturing how the individual maintains a coherent sense of self over time. In this section

I refer to the term reflexivity in the context of personal biography to examine the ways in which an individual might consciously reflect on a choice or situation in the context of their life story (the individual's own narrated sense of self in the past, the present and imagined future) and adjust their personal identity (sense of present self) to maintain a coherent sense of self over time. This adjustment enables habitus to adjust to a new field, permeability of habitus.

There is much evidence to suggest that both working- and middle-class students are reflexive in the context of their personal biography. Archer (2003) finds most participants reflexive on their "*ultimate concerns*" (p.163) in the context of their own identity, utilising the internal conversation. The literature provides evidence of aspiration development based on reflexivity in the context of personal biography and suggests that students understand the generative mechanisms underlying their actions. Burke (2015a), Atkinson (2010) and Bathmaker et al. (2016) provide evidence that middle-class participants explain their decisions around career and university in the context of their personal biography. Burke's (2015a) participants consciously recognise a good fit between habitus and field and have a clear imagined future at a prestigious institution or a professional career. "*Both my parents were in the (firm), so I came from a (firm) background*" (p.68). Bathmaker et al. (2016) suggest that for middle-class participants university is "*...just what we do in our family*" (p.64) and argue that when middle-class students attend a post-1992 institution they recognise a poor fit between their habitus and the social field of the institution, "*I felt like there weren't many people like me*" (p.92) or "*I come from a very strong university background... I learned to look down on an ex-poly before I even knew what it was*" (p.90). These students are reflexive about

their position in social space in the context of their personal biography and consciously recognise the fit between habitus and field.

Evidence suggests however that such reflexivity is not just a feature of the middle classes, one of Farrugia's (2011) homeless participants reflexively recognises that her circumstances of homelessness are a better fit with her identity than her position in social space with her family; she comments that her homeless friends, "*just accepted me for who I was*" (p.366). In the context of aspirations, there is evidence that working-class participants are reflexive but make assessments of their futures in the context of their own experiences and values. Skeggs (1997) suggests that working-class female respectability and identity is associated with values of care and loyalty of which individuals are consciously aware. The working-class boys in Stahl's (2015) study acknowledge the benefits of education but struggle to reconcile requirements of the educational field, which privileges learner identities and aspirations for social mobility, with their habitus where communal values prevail. Stahl (2015) argues that to constitute themselves as subjects of value and avoid the potential shame and pain of a low achiever label they develop an egalitarian habitus based on their field of origin. They aspire to stay local, are loyal to their families and friends and seek attainable secure employment. Reflexivity in the context of personal biography may therefore lead the individual to aspire to an imagined future within a familiar social field. Individuals may therefore make choices in the context of their personal biography and aspire for continuity and contentment with a reflexive understanding of how these choices fit with personal biography. As Hart (2016) emphasises, people do not always aspire to change and some may aspire for continuity of how things are.

Atkinson (2010) refers to this type of reflexivity as "*mundane consciousness*" (p.55) and argues that whilst individuals act consciously, they are unaware of the generative structural mechanisms, which underlie their conscious acts. Burke (2015a) argues that reflection is part of practice and is one of the ways that habitus influences action. However, the literature cited above suggests that there is a greater awareness of generative mechanisms when individuals are reflexive in the context of their personal biography than when individuals develop aspirations at the level of practical consciousness. Bridges (2006) argues that such reflexivity does involve the "*kind of reflexive self-scrutiny which Sen is seeking*" (p.23) but argues that choice and therefore the capability to aspire are inherently adaptive; aspirations are formed with acknowledgement of structural influences as part of personal identity. As Sen (1999) acknowledges, "*it is perfectly obvious that one cannot reason from nowhere*" (p.23). Agency is limited in the sense that the range of aspirations from which the individual can choose is limited by structure. However, the individual is acting with greater process agency than in the case where aspirations are formed at the level of practical consciousness as there is an understanding of the reasons for action.

As discussed on page 50, Bourdieu (1977) suggests habitus has the capacity to accommodate change and Sen (1999) argues that reasoning does not always take place within the "*general attitudes and beliefs*" (p.25) of the respective groups to which an individual belongs. As discussed above, society is characterised by rapid change (Archer, 2012) and individuals themselves are in a state of organic change (Hart, 2016). McNay (2013) argues that in modern society individuals must negotiate multiple narratives according to the different roles they play; some of these are traditional and might therefore be influenced by social field of origin and some are associated with less familiar

fields of action. Whilst individuals may aspire to remain in their social field of origin there is also the possibility that they will change and add new aspirations to their aspiration set from outside this field. Narrative and therefore reflexivity in the context of personal biography may enable individuals to integrate conflicting elements into their life story (McNay, 2013) and accommodate change. Individuals are not free of structure but may move beyond their social field of origin in a way which makes sense to them in the context of their personal biography, at a speed which minimises painful emotion and which may involve reflexive self-scrutiny both within and beyond structural constraints. In this way reflexivity can be viewed as a positive conversion factor in the development of the capability to aspire. Reay's (2003) study of mature students finds that giving back and caring are the way in which some working-class women position an aspiration for HE and that this is consistent with discourses of working-class female identity (Skeggs, 1997). In another study one of Reay et al.'s (2005) participants explain how they feel about their imagined futures at less prestigious universities, "*... it seemed more of like a community feeling ... And being the type of person, I am I like the idea I am going to be part of the community*" (p.93). This may suggest a reflexive slowing of social mobility to enable adjustment of personal biography without painful emotion. Reflexivity in the context of personal biography can facilitate student agency by expanding the individual's capability set beyond their social field of origin.

As mentioned above, there is much evidence to suggest that the attempt to adjust personal biography to accommodate change comes at a high emotional cost. On page 78 I argued that individuals may only be tacitly aware of such emotions. Bourdieu et al. (1999) argue that the conflict between social fields means that the individual "*... is doomed to be ambivalent about himself. . . to produce a habitus divided against itself and doomed to a kind of double perception of self, to successive allegiances and multiple*

identities" (p.511). Evidence in the literature suggests that some participants are reflexively aware of the difficulties in moving between two misaligned social fields and of the need to accommodate both in their personal biography. Abrahams and Ingram (2013) refer to this as the "*chameleon habitus*" (p.1). Reay (2015) outlines the difficulties experienced by an academically successful working-class participant as he moves between the social fields of the classroom and the playground, "*... in the classroom, ... I am not myself, I'm totally different. I am hard working and everything. Out in the playground, yeah, I am back to my usual self, wanting to fight and everything, just being normal*" (p.13). This participant comments how difficult it is for him to work hard and maintain good relationships with his friends. Ingram (2011) presents similar evidence, which highlights the emotional difficulties some working-class children face in forging an identity as a successful pupil alongside habitus of origin. Both Reay (2005;2015) and Friedman (2016) highlight feelings of guilt and shame as individuals reflexively recognise the way their personal biography has changed when they compare this to their habitus of origin. Individuals are socially mobile; however, the emotional effort involved in accommodating reflexive adjustments to personal biography suggests that structural influence remains internalised and limits the capability to aspire and therefore the extent of individual agency.

Reflexivity in the context of personal biography can facilitate the development of the capability to aspire as it involves reflexive self-scrutiny and therefore enhances process agency. For some, social change involves movement into unfamiliar social fields and there is evidence from the literature that individuals make reflexive attempts to adjust personal biography to accommodate this change and add new aspirations to their aspiration sets. However, in other cases reflexivity in the context of personal biography may lead the

individual to consciously exclude aspirations from their aspiration set as they do not fit with personal biography; such exclusion may be attributable to the imagined painful emotions that social mobility might entail. Reflexivity in the context of personal biography can both limit and enhance agency and therefore enhance or limit permeability of habitus.

(e) Referential reflexivity

Referential reflexivity is *“a process of re-cognition in which the knowledge generated enables the agent to understand the conditions under and through which practices are enabled and constrained”* (May 2000, p.157); in the language of capabilities this is critical agency. Critical agency can be defined as *“the freedom and power to question prevailing norms and values”* (Dreze and Sen, 2002, p.258). Reflexivity in the context of personal biography can lead to referential reflexivity as an individual compares their personal biography and values with those of others in the new field.

Some working-class participants studying at elite institutions are critical of their university and consider it too segregated from the real world, for example, *“Southern needs to pull in lots more non-traditional students but also to actively discourage private and selective state school students.”* (Reay et al., 2009 p1114). Some working-class students are critical of middle-class values based on money and status and are aware that they have attained a place at a prestigious university without the social and economic capital afforded to their peers (Bathmaker et al., 2016). Referential reflexivity can continue following graduation: Friedman (2015) presents evidence that social mobility can entail a critical awareness of class culture. One participant acknowledges the value of his elite club for networking but is critical of the attitudes of members and culturally aligns himself with the staff; another recognises that her refusal to make further changes

to her own identity to meet the requirements of the social field of career limits her social mobility. Some individuals are critical of class advantage but re-position this as moral advantage; Lehmann (2009) presents evidence that working-class students at a Canadian university are aware of the relative privilege of their peers but consider that this puts hard working students who are in touch with the "*real world of work*" (p.639) at an advantage.

Evidence presented in the literature suggests that a critical awareness of structure does not necessarily enhance the capability to aspire beyond structural constraints. In some cases, internalised elements of structure lead individuals to consciously reject and criticise the requirements of new social fields. Furthermore, an individual may realise that they do not have the cultural or economic capital necessary to convert their aspiration into a functioning and therefore they may consciously adjust their aspiration whilst recognising that they are limited by habitus (Skeggs, 1997).

2.3.5 Summary

This section explored the nature of reflexivity - reflexivity has been characterised as an individualistic and rational pursuit; however, the literature suggests it may be both relational and emotional. I identified four different foci of reflexivity and explored the theoretical potential of each to enhance or limit the capability to aspire. Lahire (2011) argues, "*theories for action and the actor plunge us either into the realm of conscious strategy, calculation, rational decision, reflexivity or conscious intention or into the world of pre-reflexive, subconscious adjustment to practical situations*" (p.156). He suggests that action is motivated in different ways on different occasions. I would extend this argument to the development of the capability to aspire; the literature indicates that in some cases structure determines aspirations and in other cases influences them even when individuals are reflexive. Reflexivity has the potential to enhance agency by expanding

the range of aspirations in an individual's aspiration set and may enable the individual to aspire beyond their social field of origin and therefore lessen the influence of structural constraints. However, reflexivity can also limit the capability to aspire and can therefore act as a positive or negative conversion factor in the development of aspirations. An examination of the focus of reflexivity highlighted the important role of reflexivity in the context of personal biography in the development of the capability to aspire beyond the limits of social structures, as it can enable the adjustment of an individual's personal biography to accommodate change. Reflexivity in relation to other matters, for example behaviour also has a role to play in the development of aspirations. However, such reflexivity does not have the same potential to enhance individual agency, in the context of overcoming structural constraints, in aspiration development. The presence of reflexivity is also indicative of greater agency as individuals can give reasons for their actions in the context of their personal biography and therefore might be considered to have subjected their aspirations to reasoned scrutiny.

2.4 Conclusion

I synthesised theory and empirical work from a variety of sources to explore the development of capability to aspire. I have drawn on the work of Bourdieu to explore the ways in which structures are unconsciously internalised through socialisation in social field of origin to form habitus. I argued that when there is a good fit between habitus and field the literature indicates that aspirations may be formed unconsciously or at the level of practical consciousness and have drawn on Bridges (2006) to suggest that in these cases preferences are adapted as individuals are unaware of structural influence. However, I have also suggested that reflexivity in the context of personal biography also may have the potential to lead to adaptation of preference, albeit with greater agency as

individuals acknowledge the influence of structure on their personal biography and aspire to remain in their social field of origin.

I have also drawn on theory and literature to examine the capability to aspire outside social field of origin and suggested that this may have the potential to develop reflexively in the context of personal biography or tacitly and gradually in the presence of practical consciousness; the expansion of an individual's capability set beyond their social field of origin may not necessitate reflexivity. However, the literature suggests that preferences are inherently adaptive: all forms of reflexivity are undertaken from an identity position shaped by structure. I examined the role of capital in the development of the capability to aspire and examined class differences highlighted in the literature. Family capital is important to socialisation in habitus but the ability to accumulate and convert further capital can enhance the capability to aspire whether aspirations are developed reflexively or at the level of practical consciousness. The accumulation of capital may be important in minimising the painful emotions which may occur when an individual moves into a new social field and this may enhance the capability to aspire. The synthesis of the literature suggests that the interaction of consciousness, the activation and conversion of capital and emotion in the development of the capability to aspire are not well understood and there is the potential to add to the literature in this area.

Figure 6 summarises the different ways in which agency is conceptualised as part of this study and the relationship between consciousness, emotion, capital and agency.

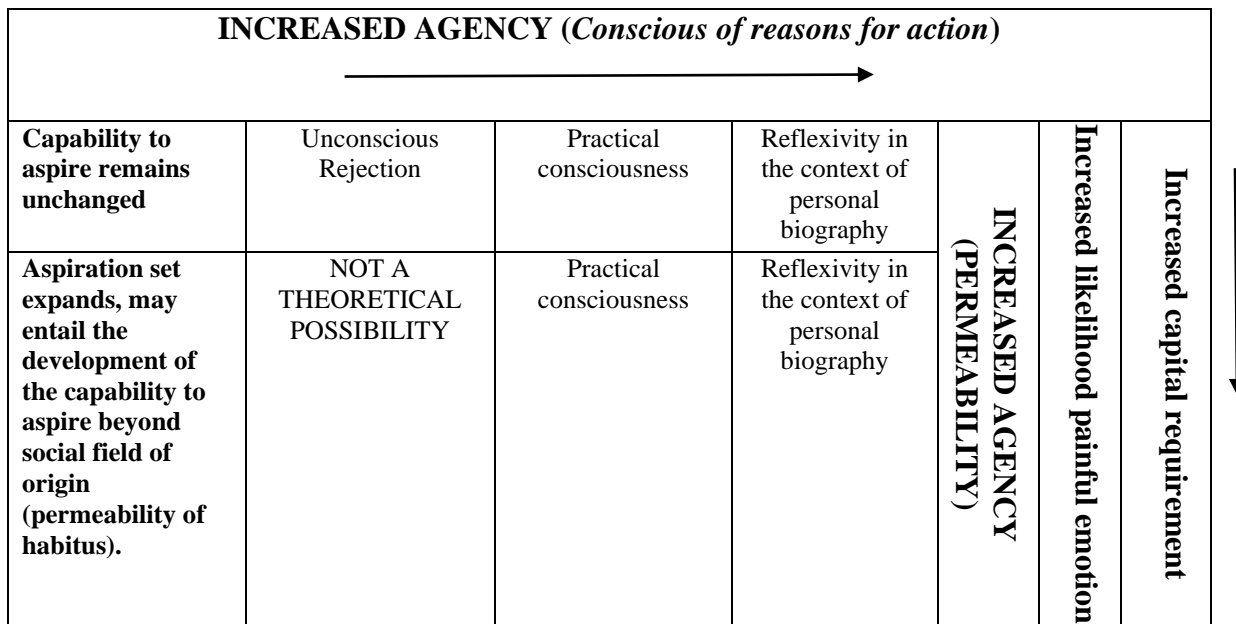


Figure 6: The relationship between agency and consciousness, emotion, capital⁸

I have argued that agency can be looked at from two perspectives; the presence of reflexivity is evidence that the individual is acting with agency. However, an expansion of an individual's aspiration set (an increased range of choices) also indicates enhanced agency and this may entail the development of the capability to aspire beyond social field of origin which indicates some freedom to decrease the influence of structural constraints.

⁸ Source not given as figure designed by author

Chapter 3: Methodology and research methods

3.1 Introduction and research questions

My study explores students' perceptions of the ways in which they develop their aspirations whilst in secondary education and HE and considers student agency in the development of the capability to aspire. It focuses on class as a social justice concern and compares aspiration development in students from the middle classes with those from the working classes. Whilst I acknowledge that participants have many aspirations, relating to different areas of their lives, I focused on the process of aspiration development as it related to the development of educational and career aspirations. This enabled me to identify the ways in which universities might better support students in the development of aspiration.

My research questions are as follows:

1. To what extent do participant stories provide evidence of class differences in the capital available to participants relevant to the development of the capability to aspire?
2. To what extent do participant stories provide evidence of participant agency in the development of the capability to aspire?
3. What factors influence the extent of participant agency in the development of the capability to aspire?

These questions focus on the ways in which aspirations develop over time and therefore consider aspirations from late secondary school to those held whilst at university. Both educational and career aspirations are considered.

3.2 Research paradigm and methodology

Ontology concerns assumptions about the nature of the natural and social world (Williams and May,1996). I argued in Chapter 2 that personal identity is central to aspiration development and drew on McNay (2013) to suggest that narrative is important to the maintenance of a coherent sense of personal identity in the face of change. Goodson (2016) suggests that we make sense of ourselves and of our experiences through stories and that we perceive our experiences through these stories. I therefore consider the storied nature of experience and personal identity to be important to a consideration of how aspirations are developed.

Within the narrative tradition there are various perspectives as to the role of language in narrative identity which informs the epistemological perspective of the researcher. A cognitive perspective suggests that narrative is a method of expressing real experience and that language does not have a role in the construction of meaning. Therefore, it is possible to design research which obtains knowledge of experience or of an individual's "real" identity. In contrast, a constructionist perspective holds that language is used to *produce* meaning and not to express "real" experience and therefore that narrative is a mechanism for the construction of identity (Brown, 2017). This suggests that the focus of knowledge should be on how language is used to construct meaning. Brown (2017) outlines how researchers also vary in terms of where they consider narratives to be located; a constructivist paradigm suggests narratives are in the minds of individuals whilst a constructionist paradigm suggests narratives are created in discursive practices. These positions are summarised in Table 2 although the position adopted by individual researchers is somewhere between the four approaches. This study is based on a constructionist/constructivist world view; narrative is considered to produce identity

which exists in the minds of individuals. I am therefore adopting the position that whilst individuals possess genetically influenced dispositions these are interwoven with the social in the mind and individuals use narrative as a mechanism to construct their identity in the context of structural influences. Language is important to the construction of narrative and therefore identity, but has an existence separate from discourse and is experienced as the life story.

Table 2: A summary of narrative perspectives⁹

	Where is narrative located? (In the mind or in discursive practice)	
Does narrative reflect reality, or does it constitute reality?	Cognitive/Constructivist Narrative expresses real identity, and this is located in the minds of individuals	Cognitive/Constructionist Narrative expresses real identity which is conveyed through discursive practice.
	Constructionist/Constructivist Narrative produces identity and this identity is located in the minds of individuals	Constructionist/Constructionist Narrative produces identity and is created in discursive practice

An interpretive epistemology is therefore appropriate for this study as identity is constituted through narrative, which reflects context. Whilst the individual's narrative identity is internal and unknowable, a narrative storied account of identity provides insight to this identity. I acknowledge that discursive practice is generative of identity and that the narrative account produced sometimes acts as a proxy for the individual's

⁹ Source not given as table design author's own.

narrative identity as it exists in the mind but is also constructed in the interview process. I recognise therefore that the interview itself is a productive, generative process and have taken steps to minimise my own influence on this construction.

Life stories have been analysed using many methodological approaches depending on the ontological position of the researcher and the nature of the research questions under investigation. Goodson (2016) makes the distinction between life history-based approaches and narrative inquiry. Life history research explores and interprets how individuals who share specific characteristics experience and make sense of the things that happen to them. Social and historical context and the researcher's interpretation of context are important to the study. In contrast, narrative inquiry focuses on the story as told by the participant and may be less concerned with social or historical context. For example, it may examine how the story emerges or the characteristics which define it. However, Goodson (2016) acknowledges that the two approaches have much in common, in that some contextualised narrative studies are not dissimilar to full life history approaches.

3.3 Method

3.3.1 Overall approach to the study

I am interested in the ways in which social structures are internalised and influence individual agency in aspiration development. My methodological approach therefore lies between life history and narrative inquiry and is a strongly contextualised narrative inquiry involving multiple participants. My interpretation is set in the context of the broader historical changes to HE outlined in Chapter 1, the theoretical framework identified in Chapter 2. Comparisons are made between the stories of different participants to identify important differences in the extent to which they can exercise

agency in the development of the capability to aspire. In the development of method, I have therefore drawn on both narrative inquiry and life history traditions.

I used a life story approach to collect data, the basis of which was a personal life story shared in a narrative interview. This is consistent with the constructivist element of my ontological position that narrative exists in the minds of individuals; people have a sense of their personal life story or biography. Miller (1999) summarises three approaches to biographical narrative interviews; realist or largely inductive; neo-positivist or largely deductive and narrative which is largely based on a constructionist ontology. My approach is to an extent theory driven and deductive, but I have left space for the inclusion of inductive elements as some of the areas I am seeking to explore are not well articulated by existing theories.

Some life histories focus on an individual as a typical or discrepant example and explore their subjective experience whilst others will focus on a group with specific characteristics (Goodson and Sikes, 2016). I analysed the data using a thematic approach; thematic analysis identifies, analyses, and interprets "*patterns of meaning (themes)*" within qualitative data (Braun and Clarke, 2012, p.57). I analysed themes across and within narratives to enable comparison across groups of participants and to facilitate a close examination of the ways individual participants developed their aspirations over time.

To examine the extent to which participant stories provide evidence of class differences in capital relevant to the development of the capability to aspire (RQ1), I have undertaken a thematic analysis of the capital available to participants from different class groupings. To examine the extent to which participant stories provide evidence of participant agency (RQ2) in the development of the capability to aspire and to identify factors that influence

the extent of participant agency (RQ3) in the development of the capability to aspire, I treated each participant as a single case, explored factors identified in the theory and literature and compared across cases.

To examine the extent to which participant stories provide evidence of participant agency (RQ2) I examined two aspects of agency in the development of the capability to aspire; the extent to which the individual is free to choose from a range of options and the extent to which choices are subject to reasoned scrutiny. To examine the freedom to choose I looked closely at aspiration development over time and considered the extent to which participants were able to accommodate change and were free to add new aspirations to their aspiration set whilst at secondary school and throughout HE. I also considered whether these new aspirations were within their social field of origin or necessitated a move into a new field; this is indicative of the extent to which an individual is free of structural constraints. I drew upon Bridges (2006) to consider the extent to which my findings suggested that preference was adaptive. To examine whether aspirations were subject to reasoned scrutiny I considered whether participant stories provided evidence of unconscious rejection of possible aspirations, the presence of practical consciousness or of reflexivity; the presence of reflexivity indicated greater agency.

To identify factors that influence the extent of participant agency (RQ3) I considered the extent to which my analysis suggested that emotions, capital and reflexivity enhanced or limited participants' ability to add new aspirations to their aspiration set and facilitated aspiration development beyond social field of origin.

In both life history and narrative inquiry data is often collected in multiple stages (Goodson, 2016). An unstructured, often uninterrupted initial interview encourages the flow of the story and allows the participant to make sense of their own life and

communicate their own concerns, values and experiences as they are constructed in the narrative. Subsequent interviews may be more structured, can be used to follow up on issues raised in the first session, examine key turning points or address the contextual concerns of the researcher. Burke (2014) suggests that this type of approach can be helpful in a study of change over time and argues that method has some of the advantages offered by a longitudinal study in enabling a researcher to examine attitudes and dispositions as they manifest at different points in time. I therefore supplemented a life story interview with a semi-structured interview, which allowed me to cover themes identified from the theory and literature and to further explore relevant issues from the life story stage of the interview.

3.3.2 Sampling and data collection

(a) Introduction

This section follows Robinson's (2014) four step approach to sampling and collecting qualitative data: define the sample universe; decide on the sample size; select a sampling strategy and collect the data.

(b) Sample universe

This is a small-scale study in a single institution which aims to develop practice within that institution and the sampling universe is female students studying an undergraduate degree with the Mount Management School who were in their first or final year of study as the data was collected (in March to July 2019). As outlined in the rationale section, my interest in the aspirations of young female students arises partly from the disparity between the aspirations and achievements of high achieving girls as they leave the school system and their achievements upon leaving university in terms of ability to secure graduate employment and representation in top earning groups. The sample universe is

therefore to an extent demographically homogenous (Robinson, 2014) in order to focus on my interest in the development of aspiration and to limit the number of factors which influence its development. I therefore excluded overseas students and male students from the sample so as to enhance demographic homogeneity.

(c) Sample size and sampling strategy

Introduction

My research has an idiographic aim (Robinson, 2014); it is important to me that individual cases have a locatable voice within the study and the research is exploratory. I have undertaken a detailed study of how participants form their aspirations in the context of their biographies to inform theory development in this area and to enhance practice at my own institution. My sample size is small in order that the individual nature of aspiration development is not lost in the scale of the study, and I am not attempting to ensure that my sample is representative more broadly, nor do I wish to generalise my findings.

Sample characteristics are summarised in Table 3. My sampling strategy is a convenience sample with a purposive element. I sampled students from the HE institution and department where I work; a Russell Group institution with an AAB entry criterion. This fits my sampling frame well as our students have all achieved good outcomes in the school system. Sourcing participants from my own institution has the benefits of my being able to easily locate participants and meet with them. I selected my sample based on three characteristics which are described and justified below. I wanted to compare aspiration development in participants from different class backgrounds and have included two objective measures of class, one based on occupational structure, which placed students into either a working-class or a middle-class category and another based on parents'

educational level. My synthesis of the literature around accumulation of capital in Chapter 2 led me to add two other characteristic groupings to my sample: year of study and work-based placement.

The sample broadly captured the characteristics I wished to identify but unfortunately, despite several communications to potential participants, I was unable include students from two of my nine sub-categories; potential participants from working-class backgrounds were far fewer than those from middle-class backgrounds and only two volunteers from the middle classes were first-generation university.

Table 3: Summary of sample characteristics

<u>Year 1</u>	<u>Final year</u>	
	<i><u>Not been on placement</u></i> (Y3)	<i><u>Been on placement</u></i> (Y4)
Working-class, first-generation: Lucy	Working-class, first-generation: NOT COVERED BY SAMPLE	Working-class, first-generation: Steph & Evie
Middle-class, first-generation: Alice	Middle-class, first-generation: Taylor	Middle-class, first-generation: NOT COVERED BY SAMPLE
Middle-class, not first-generation: Jade	Middle-class, not first-generation: Jaanavi	Middle-class, not first-generation: Pippa and Thalia
Sample size: 3; Interviews 6	Sample size: 2; Interviews 4	Sample size: 4; Interviews 8

Characteristic 1: Social class

The literature drawn upon in Chapter 2 indicates that class may have significant influence on both the nature of women's aspirations and the way in which these aspirations develop. There may therefore be significant differences in the aspirations of young middle- and working-class women and in the ways in which their aspirations have developed given the differing forms of capital available to them. To examine this, I included women from different class backgrounds in my sample. In the UK, occupational structure and parents' educational level have been used together to identify working- and middle -class students. For example, Croizer and Reay (2008) use this approach in their Economic and Social Research Council funded study, which underlies several seminal papers in this area, for example Reay et al. (2009; 2010). I therefore included two objective measures of class in identifying participants from the working and middle classes: parental occupation and parents' educational level. Croizer and Reay (2008) based their classification of occupational structure on the National Statistics Socio-economic Classification (NS-SEC) (Office for National Statistics, 2010). Their survey asked for the details of parental occupation and then focused on the following two groupings of occupational categories, defined as middle- and working-class: L7-L14 working-class, and L1-6 middle-class. I followed this approach to produce an objective structural measure of class based on parental occupation.

In considering parents' educational level I asked participants whether any member of their household held a degree and asked them to specify their relationship to this person. The initial classification was based on a participant indicating that neither of their parents had attended university; these participants were classified as "first-generation".

Whilst class can be measured objectively, it is also an individually experienced subjective construct (Skeggs, 2015). Subjective measures of class consider how individuals define themselves in class terms (Rubin et al., 2014). Rubin et al. (2014) argue that it is important to supplement objective measures of class with subjective measures. Self-identification as first-generation-university and working- or middle-class have been used to supplement the objective measures of class described above. The participant questionnaire therefore includes the following four measures of class:

Table 4: Summary of four measures of class

Objective	Subjective
NS-SEC Classification	Self-classification as working or middle-class
Parents did not participate in HE	Self-classification as first-generation

An examination of class differences in available capital relevant to the development of the capability to aspire necessitated the identification of clear groups of students. It was therefore my intention to select only participants for whom all four measures converged and to examine two clear groupings of students who were middle-class/not first-generation and working-class/first-generation according to both subjective and objective measures. I initially selected participants based on convergence of measures and my first two interviews were with participants who fully converged as first-generation-university and working-class. At interview, however it became clear that both were middle-class; Alice had said her father owned a bike shop, but his business positioned him as middle-class. Taylor’s mum was a farm labourer, but her grandmother was an accountant and played the role of stepparent. In both cases, however there was no parental experience of HE. I therefore identified three class categories: Working-class, first-generation (WC-

FG), Middle-class, first-generation (MC-FG) and Middle-class, Not first-generation (MC-NFG).

My second and third research questions to consider the extent of and factors influencing participant agency in the development of aspirations necessitated a more nuanced account of social field of origin beyond a simple class categorisation. I used a description of the family capital available to the participant relevant to the fields of HE and graduate career as my starting point in this analysis, drawing on the approaches taken by Burke (2015a) and Atkinson (2010), who include descriptions of forms of capital available to participants in considering class position. Burke (2015a) argues that this provides a “*measurable baseline*” (p.15) for class from which permeability of habitus or change beyond social field of origin can be measured. These descriptions are included in Chapter 5 where each participant forms a single case.

Characteristic 2: Year of study

The literature included in Chapter 1 on emerging adulthood suggests that individuals develop significantly between the ages of eighteen and twenty-five years; these developmental changes, coupled with the structural change of a move to university, may influence both the nature of women’s aspirations and the way in which these aspirations develop. I included final-year students in the sample as they provide an insight into how aspirations have evolved whilst they have been in HE and to better understand how capital accumulated whilst in part-time work or on work placement might be important to aspiration development. I also included first-year students in the sample as I wanted to capture students’ perceptions of their aspirations relatively soon after their transition to HE; this might provide an insight into issues around settling in at university and

facilitates a more detailed evaluation of the ways in which aspirations evolved whilst at school and sixth form than might be typically offered by a final-year student.

Characteristic 3: Undertaking a one-year work-based placement

Students have the option to undertake a placement year with an employer after completing the first two years of the programme. For some students, undertaking a placement might be a structural turning point in a student's biography as the student spends a year in an unfamiliar and possibly challenging environment. The literature reviewed in Chapter 2 indicates that work placements and internships provide social capital relevant to the development of career aspirations and therefore the final-year sample includes both students who undertook a placement and those who did not.

(d) Data Collection

Introduction

I attended lectures and invited students to complete the questionnaire at Appendix 4. The purpose of the questionnaire was to identify participants with the characteristics identified in Table 4. Participants were self-selecting, based on a brief introduction to the study included in the questionnaire and outlined at the session.

I sorted the questionnaires into my sample characteristics and selected an individual at random from each of the characteristic groupings. I invited these individuals to participate in the study by email and provided a participant information sheet (Appendix 2). Participants were interviewed in two phases which are described below. However, both interviews were designed to facilitate exploration of all three research questions.

Phase 1: Life story interview

The first phase of data capture is based on a life story narrative approach. The following questions were used to prompt participants to share their life story and aspirations:

- Tell me the story of your life, as you remember it, to where you are now
- What do you want for yourself in the future?

I gave participants advance warning of the questions and asked them to produce a schematic, which identified the chapters of their life. The prompt for production of the schematic is based on the McAdams (2007) instrument for prompting a life story. The two narrative prompts are broad and can be interpreted in multiple ways. They have therefore been designed to examine the participant's perspective of their own life story and to encourage each participant to consider the future in broad terms with minimal researcher influence.

The schematic provided momentum for the interview; Finn (2010) found that her pilot study interviews without a schematic did not flow well and that the provision of pre-work facilitated narrative flow. Brownlie (2014) also used a schematic to encourage people to talk about their lives. I gave participants a choice of a timeline or other schematic to enable them to consider their own life story as it exists in their mind; it therefore is consistent with my constructivist epistemology. This allowed individual space for reflection on life story; the theoretical section of my thesis suggests that this may be experienced unconsciously, and participants need time to bring their life story into conscious thought and reflect on how they want to represent it.

During the interview each participant was encouraged to tell the story of their life using the schematic as a prompt. Follow-up questions at this stage were in the form of

encouragement to continue or to elaborate, as the purpose of this interview was to view life story entirely from the participant's perspective. When the participant's life story had been shared the second question was asked.

The unstructured approach to interview foregrounded the inductive element of the study and was designed to uncover participant perceptions of the ways in which their identity had changed over time. I hoped that this would provide insight into processes underlying such change and the factors which may have enhanced or limited this change.

Phase 2: Semi-structured interview

The second interview was semi-structured and enabled me to explore the ways in which emotion, relationships and forms of consciousness might influence the capability to aspire. Appendix 4 contains a list of questions for the interview.

The four-to-five-week gap between the first and second interview provided time to identify additional follow-up questions. I tried to ensure that these were not leading, although I acknowledge co-construction is a characteristic of any interview. I designed questions to facilitate participant reflections on changes in their aspirations over time and therefore I considered the ways in which the capability to aspire changes over an individual's life course.

There are differences of opinion in narrative research as to whether narrative should focus on a whole life, individual episodes or everyday occurrences (Phoenix, 2008). Freeman (2006) argues that there is space for both in narrative work; narratives of a whole life allow space for reflection and provide some distance from everyday interactions and events and yield insight that cannot necessarily be gleaned from the analysis of an individual experience. In contrast, narratives of individual experiences are

adept at capturing the emotional and the social. Questions therefore examined specific episodes and the whole life story to help foreground emotion and the influence of relationships.

The interview considered key turning points in participants' lives in order to gain further insight into the ways in which aspirations have developed over time. Some turning points are structural (Hodkinson and Sparkes, 1997), for example the end of schooling and the start of HE, whilst others are unique to the individual and may be self-initiated or forced. The interview focused on structural turning points related to career but also explored those identified by the individual.

Participants were asked about important relationships which highlighted the range of influences and explored the ways in which they influenced aspiration development. Brownlie (2014) utilised turning points by asking participants to focus on times in their lives when they had to "*get through*" (p.211) and the emotional support they received from important relationships. I therefore asked about relationships at these key turning points. The focus on relationships provided insights into the availability of social, cultural and economic capital were identified at the analysis stage, as direct questioning around these areas may have been leading.

The nature of consciousness is difficult to examine (Burke, 2015a). Caetano (2015) argues that whilst the analysis of interview data can yield significant insights into the nature and extent of reflexivity it is important to supplement analytical work with questions explicitly addressing reflexivity. Carrigan (2014) and Archer (2003) also take this approach in studies examining the extent to which individuals are reflexive. In contrast, Burke (2015a), Atkinson (2010), Farrugia (2011) and Skeggs (1997) identify reflexivity or its absence at the analysis stage. I did not consider consciousness directly

but asked participants about their thoughts or feelings in relation to key decisions and events in their lives; I considered this more natural in the context of the other interview questions. The last question, which asks how decisions are made, is designed to provide further insight into the extent of consciousness and the role of relationships and emotion in decision making.

3.3.3 Analysis

(a) Introduction

I analysed the data using a thematic approach across and within narratives to examine class differences in capital and to closely examine the ways in which individual participants developed their aspirations over time; this enabled me to examine the extent of participant agency and factors influencing participant agency. The sections below describe each stage of analysis and explain how they relate to the research questions.

(b) Interview transcription

Interview transcription is the first stage of the analysis of data and the level of transcription must facilitate the analysis methods chosen (Squire, 2008). Whilst co-construction between the researcher and participant is not the focus of my study, both interviewer and participant input were transcribed. My interviews were professionally transcribed and therefore I did not undertake this initial stage of analysis. This was to manage the demands of my full-time role, my broader life and my doctorate. However, it meant that I had to compensate for this lack of familiarity with the transcripts at the analysis stage.

(c) Framework for analysis

Introduction

I found the analysis stage of the thesis the most challenging, and the techniques used evolved as I moved between my transcripts, the literature and theory. There were many false starts, approaches taken and then refined. For example, as I was interested in agency and change, I planned to keep each participant's story intact and analyse the ways in which aspirations developed for each participant. This resulted in an unwieldy set of "chapters" which contained too much detail to provide insight and made any sort of comparison impossible. This section therefore summarises the analysis underpinning the final write up rather than the entire journey. My analysis was carried out in four stages, each of which is described below.

Stage 1: "Opening up" and getting to know each participant

As I did not undertake transcription, it was important that I became familiar with the transcripts before I analysed them. To achieve a level of consistency in my initial reading of transcripts I adapted Horsdal's (2011) opening-up technique, which helps the researcher pay attention to important aspects of the narrative prior to thematic analysis. I used this technique as a reading device to help me notice aspects of the narrative that might otherwise be neglected, for example, important episodes, key turning points, places and relationships. The prompts are included at Appendix 7.

Stage 2: Thematic analysis of each transcript

I applied each theoretical lens to each transcript separately. When I first attempted to apply the constructs, it became clear to me that each paper included in my literature review examined the construct concerned partially – for example some researchers would interpret cultural capital as confidence, others as parental involvement in

education etc. Operationalising each construct necessitated a detailed review of the literature to identify the different ways in which the construct had been interpreted and to interpret that construct in a nuanced way in the analysis. I separated each form of capital into its components and examined transcripts for evidence of its presence (or noted specific evidence of its absence) by both re-reading transcripts and using key word searches. Appendix 10 provides the framework I used for thematic analysis of capital.

Analysis was more complex when it came to considering forms of consciousness. The account of reflexivity presented in Chapter 2 enabled me to identify its presence or absence in the analysis. Atkinson's (2010) consideration of the "*taken for granted*" (p.59) assumptions of class helped me notice evidence of practical consciousness in other literature and to identify a range of phrases that might indicate the presence of practical consciousness. Reflexivity was much more challenging; I first classified the foci of reflexivity, for example in relation to the everyday, to behaviour or to personal biography. As there were no such classifications in the literature, I then used participant quotes from previous studies to identify examples of reflexivity with different foci based on my classification. In my analysis, I compared and contrasted participant quotes with those from previous studies. Appendix 8 provides details of how I operationalised the constructs.

My synthesis of the literature suggested that emotions have an important role to aspiration development and play a part in all forms of consciousness. I therefore sought to "notice" emotions as they played into other elements of my analysis. I identified the presence of emotion using key words and phrases and focused on emotion at key turning points in the narrative.

Stage 3 The development of aspirations for HE and graduate career

To supplement thematic analysis, I analysed both interview transcripts for each participant to examine the ways in which aspirations changed or remained the same at key turning points in their lives. Appendix 8 provides a framework for this analysis and Appendix 9 provides details of key turning points for each participant.

Stage 4: Addressing the research questions

Research Question 1: To examine class differences, I grouped participants and compared the quotes within each form of capital based on the thematic analysis. For example, I first looked at quotes relating to expectations for HE in middle-class participants and then in working-class participants. I initially compared across two groupings; however, the middle-class, first-generation participants emerged inductively as a distinctive group.

Research Question 2: To examine the extent to which participant stories provided evidence of participant agency in the development of the capability to aspire, I examined the process of aspiration development for HE and graduate careers separately. I described each participant's social field of origin, identified the availability of family capital relevant to HE or graduate career and considered the extent to which each participant had been able to add aspirations to their aspiration set over time. Aspirations might be added within or beyond social field of origin and might require the accommodation of change to personal biography. Whilst both were evidence of increased agency, the addition of aspirations which pertained to social fields beyond those of origin was an indication of greater agency; the individual was able to accommodate change to personal biography and aspire to possible futures beyond societal constraints.

The analysis also considered the extent to which aspirations are subject to reasoned scrutiny; I considered whether participant stories provided evidence of unconscious

rejection of possible aspirations, the presence of practical consciousness or of reflexivity in the context of personal biography. The presence of reflexivity indicated greater agency as this indicated that aspirations had been subject to reasoned scrutiny. The analysis of these two aspects of agency enabled me to draw on Bridges (2006) to consider the extent to which the participant preferences were adaptive.

Research question 3: To identify the factors which influence the extent of participant agency in the development of the capability to aspire I drew on the literature which indicated that reflexivity, capital and emotion were important to aspiration development I therefore focused on three areas. Firstly, levels of consciousness at key turning points and the extent to which reflexivity in the context of personal biography limited or expanded the participant's aspiration set - the extent to which change was accommodated or rejected. I was however also open to reflexivity in the context of behaviour, referential reflexivity and everyday reflexivity as having the potential to enhance or limit the capability to aspire The second area was the accumulation of capital, the ways in which capital was activated to expand the participant's aspiration set and the potential of social capital to minimise painful emotions when an individual moved to a new social field. Finally, I considered the potential role painful emotion or imagined painful emotion in limiting the capability to aspire or in stimulating reflexivity.

3.3.4 Research quality

(a) Introduction

There is much debate as to whether it is possible to establish a set of criteria for the evaluation of qualitative research (Hammersley,2008). Smith and Deemer (2000) argue it is not possible to apply the sort of criteria that are used for the evaluation of quantitative research as this is incompatible with the assumptions about the nature of

knowledge underlying qualitative approaches. Instead, many alternative approaches have been developed; some try to mirror the approaches used in quantitative work (Guba and Lincoln, 1994) whilst others propose a list of considerations which are more flexible and fluid (Smith and Deemer, 2000). Morse et al. (2002) argue that the use of alternative criteria marginalises and undermines qualitative research. Traditional terms have been used below but I recognise that they do not transfer directly from a quantitative to a qualitative context. The section will examine validity and reliability as it applies to my study.

(b) External reliability and external validity

External reliability refers to the extent to which the study could be replicated (Seale, 1999). External validity is the extent to which the findings of the research hold true in other settings (Seale, 1999). There is some debate in the literature about the extent to which external validity and reliability are possible or desirable in the context of qualitative research as this research is context-specific. Therefore, the findings might not be representative of a particular population but are specific to the context in which they originate (Seale, 1999). It is also not appropriate or possible to attempt to replicate the study as the research is to an extent unique to a particular time, place, researcher and participant.

Larsson (2009) outlines three different ways in which findings might be generalised and external validity enhanced in qualitative research: enhancing generalisation potential by maximising variation, generalisation through context similarity and generalisation through recognition of patterns. To enhance generalisation through maximising variation the sample should include as wide a variety of cases as possible and should acknowledge what is already known, in order that cases can be selected to push understanding further

(Larsson, 2009). I have drawn on both theory and literature in developing my approach and have sought to vary my sample across class, years of study and placement experience to further develop understanding in this small-scale qualitative inquiry.

In the case of context similarity, the narrative case might shed light on other similar cases (Riessman, 2011). The researcher therefore should provide enough contextual information to allow readers to judge whether the findings are transferable from one narrative context to another (Kvale and Brinkmann, 2009). This enhances external reliability as if this sort of contextual detail would be necessary were the study to be replicated and enables others to consider whether the findings are relevant to the context in which they work. I have undertaken thematic analysis and have therefore been able to enhance generalisability through pattern recognition by comparing the themes identified in my study with those in the literature.

(c) Internal reliability and validity

Introduction

Internal reliability refers to different researchers producing the same findings. I acknowledge that my position as a researcher and my personal biography will influence the findings as there is an element of co-construction in the interviews. However, I have taken steps to minimise bias in the way my interviews are designed, conducted and interpreted. Internal validity represents the extent to which the narrative account represents the participant's realities of social phenomena and is credible (Creswell and Miller, 2000). Guba and Lincoln (1994) and Creswell and Miller (2000) refer to this as credibility and Riessman (2008) as trustworthiness. Both internal reliability and internal validity have been considered as they apply to each stage of the research process below.

Research design

I am aware that as a piece of insider research, my relationships with students may be impacted by undertaking this project (Sikes, 2006). Whilst this is an ethical consideration, it might also undermine internal validity and reliability by influencing my findings. I undertake a significant amount of teaching in the department where I work and therefore it was unavoidable that I would include participants whom I had taught. I openly discussed any potential conflict in roles with them, sought to manage the interviews in a way that makes students feel comfortable and ensured that timing did not coincide with periods of assessment or teaching.

There is a tension in life story work between structuring an interview to address the purpose of the research and the capturing the richness of a participant's story in a free-flowing narrative. A structured approach may impose the researcher's perspective (Goodson and Sikes 2016) and lead to the participant attempting to frame the response in the context of what the researcher is looking for. The two separate interviews are designed to achieve a balance between these two tensions. In the first interview based on life story the participant can reflect on life story prior to the interview and therefore without my influence. I acknowledge however that whilst the interview itself was free-flowing, comments and follow-up questions may have influenced the participant. The schedule for the second interview is to an extent pre-set and reduced the extent to which interaction between me and the participant determined the direction of the interview.

I piloted both research instruments with two participants and with critical friends in my department. The pilot phase resulted in my slightly rewording the prompt for the first interview so as to consider only the participant's view of their life story. I also restructured the second interview into specific sections; the pilots of the second

interview flowed badly prior to this restructuring. My reflections from the pilots and from the initial interviews have helped me refine my interview technique, ensuring that I cover all areas and minimise bias.

Conduct of interviews

Bron (2016) stresses the importance of interview location to put the participant at ease and to minimise power issues, which will exist between a lecturer researcher and a student participant. Participants were given a choice of locations for the interview.

The first interview was seeking the participant's version of their life story and allowed each participant to focus on areas that they considered important. Whilst the interview was not interspersed with specific structured questions, active listening and some note taking took place; notes were used as one mechanism to demonstrate active listening (Horsdal, 2011). Active listening is also important to minimise power issues in the interview, which too much silence can exacerbate (Squire, 2008). The second interview was semi-structured and used the same technique of active listening and limited note taking. Interviews were recorded to facilitate accurate transcription.

Interpretation of findings

I acknowledge that the nature of knowledge about an individual's aspirations in my narrative inquiry is not unitary or fixed. An individual will construct their life story and aspirations in the context of their identity and whilst elements of this identity are enduring, other elements will vary over time.

The interview context and my role as a researcher will also influence the story told and the identity presented (Sikes and Potts, 2008). Whilst there may be multiple truths, sufficient detail of the way in which I interpreted participant stories will enable others

to judge whether my findings can be trusted and will enhance the extent to which others can draw on my study.

My own reflexivity is important to ensuring that my study is trustworthy, and I therefore must consider my positionality in order that its influence on interpretation is both minimised and is visible. This cannot make the study bias-free but at least may bring bias to the attention of the reader. Skeggs (1997) discusses the significance of researcher positionality within the context of, for example, gender, class, race and age and describes how these factors influences research projects chosen, how they are undertaken and what it is possible for an individual to know. The researcher must carefully consider the relationship between themselves and the participant and the way in which the researcher's own subjective position influences the questions asked and the interpretations made (Adkins, 2002). It is important that I recognise and that readers are aware that I am a white, Northern, English, woman, with extensive life experiences which have shaped my values and beliefs. My occupation, income and education mean that I now self-define as middle-class, but I consider my background to be working-class. My parents left school at fourteen, my mam was a housewife and carer and my dad a foreman in a chemical factory. They are both Conservatives and evangelical believers in the benefits of hard work. I was born and lived in Billingham and grew up in the Thatcher years¹⁰. I saw my education partially as a means of escape from an imagined future in the crisp factory, on a Youth Training Scheme, as a single parent or dominated by an overbearing man. Instead, I got on Tebbit's¹¹ bike and went to university in London because I *knew* those

¹⁰ Margaret Thatcher, British Prime Minister 1979 – 1990, which was a period of unprecedented social change. See BBC (2013) for a summary.

¹¹ In 1981 Norman Tebbit, the then Secretary of State for Employment famously made a speech at the Conservative party conference during a period of very high unemployment. Tebbit told of his unemployed

things weren't for me and I wanted a different future. I therefore hold strong views about education shaped by my experiences as a student and academic. However, these are my views and I do not expect others to agree with them. I do not judge people based on the judgements they make, or the values they hold, and will listen to and interpret my participants' stories with an open mind, and with interest.

I checked transcript validity with participants and will provide them with access to the thesis. I have not however checked interpretation with participants, as my interpretation draws on theoretical principles and analytical techniques of which participants may not be aware (Riessman, 2008). I am conscious of the tension that this brings in terms of speaking for participants and claiming to "know" their experiences and speak on their behalf as a member of the academy.

3.3.5 Ethical considerations

The research was conducted in accordance with Sheffield University's code of ethics, and I attained ethical clearance from the University of Sheffield (Appendix 11). I produced a participant information sheet (Appendix 4), outlining the nature of the project and of informed consent. This makes clear a small potential risk of emotional distress and informs participants that they may withdraw from the study at any time without giving a reason. It also makes clear that support was available if participants felt they required it. We have an open-door practitioner within the school, and I made participants aware of this when appropriate.

3.6 Data storage and management

father getting on his bike to look for work in the 1930s. This speech was much mis-quoted and Tebbit became famous for suggesting that the unemployed get on their bike and relocate to seek work.

Since my attaining ethical approval new ethical guidance was issued following the implementation of the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR). My research conforms to the principle of transparency. My participant information sheet (Appendix 4) fully informs participants about how and why their data was collected and used as part of a research project, and by whom. It is also clear about when data will be destroyed. I amended the participant information sheet before commencing the research and after attaining ethical approval to explicitly state that my research project is in the public interest. The findings of my study will help identify the ways students can be supported in the development of aspirations at university. I also made clear, the University of Sheffield is the data controller for my work and provided details of participants' right to complain about handling of personal data to the University's Data Protection Officer.

All interview transcripts are anonymised and stored on a password-protected online file store and encrypted and backed up on a password protected laptop. The data does not contain identifiers although there is a small possibility that the nature of the participant's story may result in their identification, and this was explained as part of informed consent. I sought to mitigate this by not including superfluous detail as part of the write-up. The interviews will be kept no longer than they are required for the purpose of completion of my Doctorate.

3.3.6 Limitations to method and justification for proposed approach

I considered using a qualitative longitudinal approach for the study and therefore interviewing the same participants over a period, for example in each year of university study. This approach was used by Carrigan (2014) in his examination of reflexivity and personal change and by Finn (2015) in her study of working-class women entering HE. Whilst such an approach would have allowed me to gain a valuable insight into ways in

which aspiration is developed over time this was not practically possible within the time constraints of a doctoral study of this nature. I included a temporal aspect in the study by asking respondents to consider how their perceptions of both their aspirations and the influences on their aspirations have changed over time, but I recognise that this is reliant on the individual's own recollections.

A further limitation to the study is the extent to which it is centred on the individual's own perceptions and narrative. In positioning aspirations in the context of a broader personal life story I may be encouraging a very individualistic interpretation of aspiration development. I mitigated this risk firstly, by carefully considering the broader resources that the individual can draw on in terms of relationships and by considering the influence of class on aspiration development.

3.4 Summary and introduction to analysis and findings

The analysis and findings are split across two chapters. Chapter 4 focuses on the first research question and examines class differences in the capital available to participants relevant to the development of the capability to aspire. I analysed the stories of all participants to consider this research question. Chapter 5 examines my findings and compares them to those found in other studies. Chapter 5 focuses on the second two research questions and considers both the extent of and factors influencing participant agency in the development of the capability to aspire. Whilst I analysed every transcript for inclusion in Chapter 5, there was not the space to write up nine life stories. I therefore selected stories that enabled me to illustrate the different ways in which participants from different backgrounds developed their aspirations. I consider all participant stories as important and valuable and whilst there is not space here to write up a detailed

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analysis of all stories, I am planning a series of articles which will enable me to draw on those not included in this work.

In considering the development of an aspiration for HE, I analysed the stories of three first-generation participants to illustrate the ways in which an aspiration for HE is developed, and agency enhanced or limited when an individual moves or imagines moving outside their social field of origin. I contrasted these stories with those of four middle-class participants whose parents had attended university and who therefore remained in their social field of origin. In the context of the development of an aspiration for graduate career, I focused on three final-year participants, as their career aspirations were more developed than those of first-year participants. This provided insight to the ways in which their background and experiences enhanced or limited their agency in the development of the capability to aspire.

Chapter 4: Class, capital and the social fields of HE and graduate career

4.1 Introduction

This chapter focuses on the first of my research objectives and considers the extent to which my analysis of participant stories identifies class differences in available capital relevant to the development of aspirations. The analysis considers both the availability of family capital and opportunities for the further accumulation of capital. As Chapter 2 suggests, capital is a conversion factor in the development of the capability to aspire (Hart, 2012) and therefore class differences in capital availability may lead to differences in the nature and size of participant aspiration sets.

My study provides greater insight into the accumulation of capital relevant to the social field of graduate careers than has been provided in the literature. I used the themes identified in the literature relating to HE and applied them to the area of graduate career to consider class differences in capital relevant to the development of career aspiration.

Furthermore, in analysing the nature of capital, I have provided a more nuanced account than that typically provided in the literature, facilitating a deeper analysis of the nature of family and accumulated capital. In the case of cultural capital, most studies focus on a single form, for example embodied cultural capital. However, my analysis adds to the literature by examining class differences across all forms of cultural capital. In the case of social capital, I have added to the literature in two ways. Firstly, my synthesis of the social capital and social support literature enabled me to examine esteem, companionship and emotional support relevant to the social fields of HE and graduate careers. Secondly, I have drawn together literature based on network analysis, which examines the source of social capital – for example parents or friends – with more traditional Bourdieusian

studies. This has enabled me to consider the different ways in which participants from different class groupings accumulate and convert further capital.

Whilst this chapter focuses on class differences in capital, Chapter 5 examines process and change and explores the interaction of capital with emotion and forms of consciousness.

As outlined in Chapter 3, participants are from three groups: working-class, first-generation (WC-FG); middle-class, first-generation (MC-FG) and middle-class, not first-generation (MC-NFG). The sample includes students in their first and final years, some of whom had been on a placement year and others who had not; Table 5 summarises participant characteristics.

Table 5: Summary of participant characteristics

	Year 1	Final year (*year 3 on placement)
Group 1: Working-class, first-generation (WC-FG)	Lucy	Steph*, Evie*
Group 2: Middle-class, first-generation (MC-FG)	Alice	Taylor (Career-relevant work experience in Territorial Army)
Group 3: Middle-class, Not First-generation (MC-NFG)	Jade	Jaanavi, Pippa*, Thalia*

I recognise that a simple classification into class groupings is not without its difficulties; Appendix 9 provides a pen portrait of each participant to provide background to the analysis. Chapter 5 draws more extensively on these pen portraits, but they may be helpful in reading this chapter, which examines each form of capital and considers both family capital and opportunities for further accumulation and conversation of capital as

relevant to the social fields of HE and graduate career. Class differences are examined across the three groups identified in Table 5.

4.2 Cultural capital

4.2.1 Introduction

The literature review identifies three forms of cultural capital: embodied, passive-objectified and active-objectified. This section compares the possession of family embodied and objectified cultural capital – relevant to the social fields of HE, graduate careers and work placements – between participants across the three groupings identified in the introduction.

4.2.2 Embodied cultural capital

Embodied cultural capital can be defined as a sense of confidence and expectation for middle-class students and a work ethic and resilience for some working-class students. The stories of working-class participants (WC-FG) suggested that university was not the natural destination for others with whom they attended college and participants therefore considered alternative forms of post-eighteen education and careers. Steph (WC-FG) reported that at her sixth form college about 25-30% of students went on to HE, *“I’m not from an area where people go to uni, you just don’t do it.”* She aspired to a job rather than a career, *“Like I knew I wanted to do my A Levels, but I wasn’t sure about uni, and I was just happy with a job kind of thing.”* Evie (WC-FG) seriously considered an apprenticeship as a post-eighteen option and remarked that university was not a natural next step for students at her college, *“But with uni, it’s kind of — it’s a little bit more half and half, like not everybody goes, especially from Hull, not everybody goes at all.”* Lucy (WC-FG) contemplated a Wetherspoons apprenticeship and explained that whilst HE had been the norm for leavers at her prestigious grammar school, only a few of her classmates from

college aspired to university. Reay et al. (2005) suggest that a need to manage risk both in economic terms and in terms of fear of failure motivates working-class students to consider options other than university. Evie (WC-FG) articulated the importance of management of risk, *"Like a backup yeah, in case I fail at one thing, then at least I can fall back onto something. I think I'm quite risk-averse, is that what it is? When you're like kind of worried of failure?"* All working-class participants also demonstrated a lack of confidence; Steph (WC-FG) commented on how she felt stupid, Lucy (WC-FG) felt mediocre, *"I think it was more of a mediocre performance, it wasn't an underachievement, it was just steady"* and Evie (WC-FG) viewed herself as average, *"I was never one of the most stupid cos I had like common sense ...but I knew I wasn't one of the brightest of the bright."*

In contrast, except for Jade (MC-NFG), who performed poorly at school, the stories of middle-class participants suggested that school provided a clear expectation that university would naturally follow sixth form and contemplated careers that entailed HE. Pippa (MC-NFG), Jaanavi (MC-NFG) and Thalia, (MC-NFG) felt that school ruled out other options, *"I mean in my school, if you didn't go to uni, there was like what was your other option? Like they never — they never made me aware of any other options."* (Thalia, MC-NFG); *"...like school was kind of pushing me into it, into applying to university,"* (Jaanavi MC-NFG) and Pippa (MC-NFG) explained; school's position was that *"...you've got to go to a Russell Group university."* Middle-class parents who had attended university reinforced this expectation (Ball, 2003) and participants were therefore confident that they would attend. This confidence can be viewed as a resource which facilitates the development of an aspiration for university. Pippa (MC-NFG) explained how university was expected,

“Ever since I was little, I think the school I went to and ...I don't know why but I just grew up going, you've got to go to uni, there was never an option.”

However, as Irwin and Elley (2011) suggest although middle-class parents who had not attended university had high aspirations for their children, they did not reinforce the expectations of school and HE was not a foregone conclusion. Alice (MC-FG) explained the differing attitude of school where university was an expectation and home where it was not, *“So everyone would expect me to go to university, but then from home, I wasn't expected to go to university particularly.”* Parents who had not attended university sometimes encouraged their children to consider other options alongside or as an alternative to the possibility of university; see page 63 on the provision of informational support. Whilst middle-class, first-generation participants also expressed their doubts about university these seemed to be associated with a lack of family expectation. Alice (MC-FG) was confident in her abilities and comments on the importance of the esteem support provided by her parents, *“They've always told me that I'm intelligent and stuff, so she's always encouraged me to believe that I am. I think that's half the battle really; if you think you are then you tend to act like you are.”* However, she had little sense of an imagined future at university and commented that she had *“...no intention of going to university.”* Taylor (MC-FG) was less confident academically and her sense of belonging at boarding school and in cadets influenced her aspiration to join the army. Whilst her family persuaded her not to leave school at sixteen, it was not an expectation that she would aspire to university. This aspiration only developed as she reached the end of sixth form and this is consistent with literature cited on page 56. The stories of middle-class, first-generation participants therefore suggest that they may be subtly different from both working-class, first-generation participants and middle-class participants.

Class differences in embodied cultural capital relevant to the fields of work-based placements and graduate careers mirrored those in the field of HE. Four participants completed a placement year and whilst middle-class participants exhibited high levels of expectation and confidence around securing a placement, working-class participants demonstrated a lack of confidence and expectation. Pippa (MC-NFG) and Thalia (MC-NFG) were selective and strategic in their applications. Pippa (MC-NFG) applied to seven companies for placements in finance and Thalia (MC-NFG) to just five carefully selected consulting firms and large blue-chip companies. Neither indicated that they had any doubt that they would secure a placement in their chosen area. In contrast, Steph (WC-FG) positioned her aspiration for a placement in terms of her lack of confidence in her academic skills and commented, *"I think again it's still that doubt about academia. I know I'm good practically, so if I can get something practical in that four-year stint, it apparently makes it harder for people to turn you down."* Both Steph (WC-FG) and Evie (WC-FG) made many applications and received many rejections, and both demonstrated a lack of expectation that they would secure a placement. Steph (WC-FG) commented, *"I genuinely think I didn't expect to get one at this point, but I was still trying."* Evie (WC-FG) was surprised by her success at Nestlé and explained, *"every step I got through, I was like 'I'm surprised.'" Tomlinson (2017) suggests that in securing a graduate career the demonstration of "appropriate forms of embodied cultural capital via accent, body language, humour and overall personality package" (p.7) are important. It may be that working-class students are aware that they do not possess this package and that this diminishes their confidence. It may also be the case that a lack of social capital relevant to the social field of a work placement makes it more difficult to secure such a placement. Middle-class participants also exhibited higher levels of expectation and entitlement around their aspirations for a career following university. Of the four middle-class*

participants in their final year, Pippa (MC-NFG) and Thalia (MC-NFG) completed a placement year whilst Jaanavi (MC-NFG) and Taylor (MC-FG) did not. Jaanavi (MC-NFG) developed an ambition to work for a Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO) or to be a political consultant, which she considered, was *“very ambitious.”* Taylor (MC-FG) sustained her ambition to be an army officer throughout university but also recognised that she needed a broader plan which encompassed life after the army, *“I still want to join the army, but I’m looking at like stuff afterwards, cos a lot of people don’t and it’s a big mistake.”* Both Taylor (MC-FG) and Jaanavi (MC-NFG) aspired to postgraduate study to gain a qualification in a field-relevant to their future careers and were confident that they would secure a place.

Pippa (MC-NFG) and Thalia (MC-NFG) carefully evaluated the roles they had undertaken on placement, developed their aspirations accordingly and sought better roles. Thalia (MC-NFG) demonstrated the most confidence. Whilst on placement she worked for the prestigious sustainability strategy team and commented it *“...wasn’t like a normal service group for interns. And then when I got there, I really enjoyed it.”* When her placement was complete, the less prestigious technology consulting team offered her a position but she aspired to join the sustainability strategy team and was confident she would succeed. However, there was more competition for this role, and she was not successful at interview *“...because of a half an hour interview they’re like no you can’t have it. So that really frustrated me, so now I’m like looking for other things, cos yeah they’ve annoyed me basically.”* When asked about her ideal future, Thalia (MC-NFG) was confident that she would work in consulting in London and would live with friends. She felt that these expectations were *“...quite realistic.”* Thalia’s (MC-NFG) failure to secure a role did not damage her high levels of confidence and expectation relating to her imagined career.

Pippa's (MC-NFG) experience on placement led to a feeling that the placement role did not suit her preferences as she was bored, needed more challenge and wanted to be out of the office. She is taking steps to secure a more customer-facing, challenging role with a better salary than that offered by her placement employer she explained, *"I obviously want to be earning more what I was on when I was on placement, but quite a few of them are the same as what I was on placement."* When asked about her longer-term future Pippa (MC-NFG) says she expects to own her own home by the time she is thirty; she is undecided around moving to London to live with friends or living at home in Manchester. There is no sense of uncertainty as to whether she will be able to realise these aspirations. Steph (WC-FG) and Evie (WC-FG) demonstrated a much lower level of confidence and expectation around graduate careers. Steph (WC-FG) commented that she would take *"...anything"* and that her future looked *"bleak to be honest right now, ...I can't find anything, but ideally I'd be sat in a nice office. I don't care what level, ... where there is the opportunity to move up. In a year or two."* Steph's aspirations are modest and her expectations low. Evie (WC-FG) enjoyed her placement, emphasised the relaxed and supportive environment and applied for a graduate position with Nestlé. However, the company withdrew their finance graduate scheme, and her offer was for an entry-level position on a lower-than-expected salary. In explaining her decision to accept the position, Evie (WC-FG) highlighted the support she received for her anxiety whilst on placement and avoiding the stress of seeking an alternative graduate role whilst studying, *"I might get a better paid offer elsewhere, but whether I'm gonna be as happy as what I am here, and I went and it's also the feeling of I've got a job secured."* She also positions her decision in terms of a sense of belonging, *"And I like — I knew that if I stay in Mount, I'm gonna be comfortable here and like I've known it from uni, and I am comfy."* Evie's (WC-FG) story reveals a lack of confidence around her ability to cope and a need to be in her

comfort zone. Despite her disappointment, she opted for certainty and security over challenge and would like to work for Nestlé for the long term as she feels it's a good fit. She wants to keep progressing but recognises that she needs support. Like working-class participants in the Paired Peers Project (Bathmaker et al., 2016; Bradley et al., 2017), Evie and Steph's stories suggest that their ambitions were more modest than those of middle-class participants and that they had less confidence that they would secure a suitable role. In Chapter 2, I analysed literature which suggested that some working-class students have an alternative form of embodied cultural capital in the form of their work ethic (Lehmann, 2009), independence and resilience (Reay et al., 2009). Bathmaker et al. (2016) and Bradley et al. (2013) suggest that academically successful working-class students have the potential to build a different form of confidence at university. My analysis suggested differences in work ethic between middle-class participants whose parents had attended university and working-class participants. However, these differences were only observed in relation to academic study and there was no evidence of class difference in relation to careers or work. The stories of working-class participants provided evidence of a strong work ethic. Steph (WC-FG) and Evie's (WC-FG) lack of confidence appears to have driven them to work hard and, in both cases, this began at school. Steph (WC-FG) commented on her success at school and good relationship with teachers, which she attributes to her work ethic. In Evie's (WC-FG) case, she was in the bottom half of her year at primary school, which made her "*realise*" she was not as bright as others were. She explains that she feels that the development of a strong work ethic benefited her, "*I'm not as clever as the rest, but I always knew that I had to work a lot.*" When Evie (WC-FG) developed an aspiration to attend Mount University after poor results at AS level, her hard work and resilience made this possible. She took AS and A

levels simultaneously to get the grades she needed. For both Steph (WC-FG) and Evie (WC-FG) this work ethic continued throughout university.

Middle-class participants whose parents had attended university commented on their lack of work ethic at school, college or university. Thalia (MC-NFG), Jade (MC-NFG) and Jaanavi (MC-NFG) all indicated that they did not work hard at school. Thalia (MC-NFG) had been identified at school as bright but commented that she lacked application, *"I kind of expected that I'll get 10 A*s, but obviously I didn't because I didn't work for it."* A similar pattern continued at A Level, *"when I was at school I just — I didn't pay enough attention, yeah didn't work hard enough outside of school."* Jaanavi's (MC-NFG) grades were fine, but the example of her cousins meant that she *"...wasn't going to bother stressing out"* over schoolwork and Jade (MC-NFG) commented that she *"...didn't work as hard as she could have done"* at school. Pippa (MC-NFG) explained that she did not work hard until her final year at university, *"...like my flat, and not many of them seemed to do much work I suppose ... And then in second year, ...we were all a bit more work-focused then. But then I think to a degree I still wasn't."* Policy in the field of HE, for example *The National Strategy for Student Access and Success in Higher Education* (Department for Business Innovation and Skills, 2014), refers to disadvantaged backgrounds rather than to class and a recent Russell Group report (Turhan and Stevens, 2020) suggests that students from lower socio-economic backgrounds have a skills deficit, which educators need to address. My analysis of participant stories suggests that some working-class students possess valuable forms of embodied cultural capital, which students from other class groupings may not possess. This can enhance the capability to aspire and the ability to realise aspirations in relation to the social fields of HE and graduate career. Middle-class, first-generation participants were in some respects similar to other middle-class participants

and, in other respects, similar to working-class participants and it is difficult to make generalised comments in relation to this group.

4.2.3 Objectified cultural capital

The second form of cultural capital is objectified cultural capital and there are two forms relevant to the aspiration for HE: active in the form of help with schoolwork and passive in the form of parental attitudes to education more generally. The parents of all participants had positive attitudes to education and there were few class differences in this regard. Lucy's (WC-FG) dad mobilised family economic capital, which enabled Lucy (WC-FG) to attend a prestigious grammar school and her mum helped her identify college as an option when she did badly at AS level. Whilst Steph's (WC-FG) mum was less enthusiastic about HE, Steph's (WC-FG) dad supported her in this aspiration. Evie's (WC-FG) mum was actively involved in her educational choices, helped her explore alternatives at key turning points and promoted university as one of Evie's (WC-FG) options. This finding is consistent with those of other studies and echoes Atkinson's (2010) findings in relation to the upwardly-mobile working-class participants in his study. As the literature indicates (Burke, 2015a) middle-class parents also had positive attitudes to education, for example Alice's (MC-FG) parents carefully chose her state school. In some cases, middle-class parents were able to mobilise economic capital in the form of independent school fees (Pippa – MC-NFG and Taylor – MC-FG) or expensive A level resit courses (Thalia – MC-NFG). The expectation that their children would attend university was also indicative of a positive attitude to education.

Although there was no expectation that working-class participants would attend university, Lucy (WC-FG) and Evie (WC-FG) reported direct or indirect parental involvement with education. Evie's (WC-FG) mum helped her with homework, "*...if I was*

struggling with one thing, she'd kind of teach me, like she'd try and find out herself" and her Nana kept her on track, *"I'd get home from school and she always was like, 'right, have you got any homework? Get it done."* Steph (WC-FG) reported that her mum, *"...bought me tapes and things to try and do my times tables, cos I hated them."* Lucy's (WC-FG) parents did not help with homework, and she reported how difficult it was to study at home. Middle-class participants did not report direct involvement with homework, which could indicate a lack of involvement or might suggest that parents were actively involved but this was unremarkable. Only Alice (MC-FG) commented that her parents did not take a proactive approach to her schoolwork and compared herself to others at school whose parents were more involved, *"...like with revision, that was very down to me to take in from school, like I wasn't particularly encouraged at home."* Jade (MC-NFG) commented that she was out with friends when she should have been studying for GCSEs perhaps indicating that her parents were not actively involved.

In Chapter 2, I drew on literature which emphasised the concerted cultivation of middle-class children through involvement in extracurricular and other activities (Bowers-Brown, 2015). This concerted cultivation is a form of active-objectified cultural capital relevant to the social field of graduate career. Tomlinson (2017) suggests that, as educational credentials diminish in value, graduate employers rely on other marks of *"distinction"* (p.344) in terms of wider achievements – for example, extracurricular activities, work experience and volunteering. My analysis suggested that middle-class participants were able to demonstrate a richer and more career-relevant range of extracurricular activities than working-class participants. For example, when applying for work-based placements both Pippa (MC-NFG) and Thalia (MC-NFG) had undertaken work experience in a professional setting, Pippa (MC-NFG) with a financial advisor and Thalia (MC-NFG) in the oil and gas industry. Thalia (MC-NFG) had used her educational

setbacks to enrich her curriculum vitae. During her year out to retake A levels she travelled to Peru to volunteer, using, “...*this company that kind of arranges volunteers to go and stay somewhere.*” When Thalia (MC-NFG) dropped out of an economics degree she secured her first job, as an administrator. The experiences of middle-class participants are like some of the more well-off students in Walker and Fongwa’s (2017) study of South African students who were active in seeking opportunities to build their cultural capital. Steph (WC-FG) demonstrated her understanding of the importance of this concerted cultivation when she explained her interest in volunteering in her second year at Mount, “*I kind of figured that I can’t really get a job or a placement if I don’t do anything but study... And it sounds stupid, but I just don’t have any hobbies or anything, like volunteering is my hobby.*” This awareness of perceived shortcomings is very similar to that found by Bowers-Brown (2015) in her study of working-class girls completing their University College and Admission Service (UCAS) personal statements.

All participant stories suggested that their parents had positive attitudes to education, and I concur with Atkinson (2010), who suggests that upwardly-mobile working-class parents view education as important and seek to support their children. However, participant stories suggest that there are class differences in the concerted cultivation of career-relevant objectified cultural capital. This cultivation featured in the stories of middle-class participants but not in those from the working classes.

4.2.4 Cultural capital summary

My analysis of participant stories has added to the literature by applying a nuanced Bourdieusian lens to cultural capital relevant to the fields of HE, work placement and graduate career. My analysis indicates that there are class differences in both embodied and objectified cultural capital and that differences observed relevant to the field of HE

are mirrored in the fields of work placement and graduate career. These differences in capital may lead to differences in the development of the capability to aspire. Participant stories therefore suggest that HE providers can do more to address these differences and support working-class students to build their career-relevant cultural capital. The nature of objectified and embodied cultural capital is quite different, and it is important that they are considered separately if appropriate measures are to be taken to support working-class students.

Participant stories also identify important differences in cultural capital available to first-generation students who are not working-class. In the context of capital relevant to the social field of HE, middle-class participants who were the first-generation to attend university exhibited some characteristics similar to those of middle-class participants but others similar to working-class participants, for example lack of expectation that they would participate in HE. However, these differences were not mirrored in the social field of graduate career. My analysis of the stories of first-generation, middle-class participants suggested they had similar levels of cultural capital to middle-class participants whose parents had attended university. This suggests that social class might be a better measure of inequality in cultural capital relevant to the field of graduate career when identifying students who might need additional support.

4.3 Economic capital and economic constraints

The stories of working-class participants suggested that economic constraints played a part in the decision-making process around choice of university and that these constraints were a feature of university life. Participant stories are consistent with those of previous studies synthesised in Chapter 2. Working-class participants referred to the impact of financial constraints in the development or realisation of their aspiration for

HE. Steph (WC-FG) explained that her mum did not want her to pursue HE because *“she thought it was going to be a waste of my time, it was going to be a lot of money.”* Evie (WC-FG) was interested in accounting and considered an apprenticeship as an alternative to university, *“I thought oh, I’ll probably get to the same place, but I thought — and obviously without the debt.”* Lucy (WC-FG) made good progress at Wetherspoons and was tempted to stay for financial reasons, *“I was earning quite a lot. I liked our flat, I liked it in Carlisle.”* Financial constraints also played a part in the evaluation of where to study and planning was required to overcome them. Lucy (WC-FG) explained how she *“ruled out London because of the expense,”* and how the necessity of both her and her partner continuing to work at Wetherspoons was important to her choice of location, she explained, *“...we both worked at Wetherspoons in Carlisle, so I don’t wanna say like we were basing a whole uni choice on the Wetherspoons.”*

As reports commissioned by the government (Purcell and Elias, 2010), quantitative studies (Humphrey, 2006) and qualitative work (Moreau and Leathwood, 2006) suggest part-time – or in Lucy’s (WC-FG) case full-time work – was a feature of university life for working-class participants but less so for their middle-class counterparts, *“I got a job in the November, cos I couldn’t afford to live, and student loan just wasn’t enough and my mum and dad can’t afford to help me,”* Steph (WC-FG). Evie (WC-FG) explained how time-consuming she found her part-time job. *“...[Nisa] was working out more than a day and it was also a nightmare — like getting there was half an hour, getting back was half an hour.”* Section 4.3 identifies the consequences of work for the development of social networks whilst at university and Steph (WC-FG) commented on this as she summed up her experiences of HE:

“I really regret not spending as much time with friends maybe, there was a lot of things they’d say, ‘oh we’ll go out’ and I’d say ‘I’m working’ or ‘I haven’t got enough money,’ and that was because I was very much afraid, cos that had been instilled in me as well, be afraid of the negative bank balance.”

A paucity of economic capital and the need to manage financial risk can limit the ability to accumulate social capital.

Middle-class, first-generation participants also worked during term time, but their stories did not indicate that this was a result of economic necessity and or that this work affected their social life. In Alice’s (MC-FG) case, she maintained her part-time job in her hometown to maintain her strong connections with home. For Taylor’s (MC-FG), her part-time work with the Territorial Army was part of her longer-term career plan. Other middle-class participants did not undertake part-time work whilst at university nor did their stories suggest a need to plan around financial constraints. Instead, as discussed above, economic capital enabled the accumulation of cultural capital relevant to the social fields of HE and graduate career.

Three final-year participants aspired to postgraduate study and whilst Taylor (MC-FG) and Jaanavi (MC-NFG) did not refer to financial barriers, Steph (WC-FG) commented, *“I’d love to do my Masters but I’ve come to terms that I can’t afford it.”* Wakeling and Kyriacou (2010) report such class differences in postgraduate participation rates and the consequences for access to elite careers. As Brooks and Everett (2009) suggest, the stories of working-class participants also demonstrated a sense of urgency in relation to securing a job following university. Steph (WC-FG) was willing to *“take anything”* and Evie (WC-FG) was willing to accept a lower salary to secure a position. In contrast, as Atkinson (2010) suggests, middle-class participants were able to wait for the right opportunity. In

Pippa's (MC-NFG) case, she was planning to return home and take a non-graduate job until the right opportunity arose, "*...if I get a job with an immediate start date, I'll do it, but you know if I get a grad scheme, I'll go travelling.*" In addition to providing students with the time needed to secure a suitable position there is evidence (Burke et al., 2020) that this can be useful as a period during which to build a strong curriculum vitae. As discussed above, some middle-class participants had already been able to leverage their parents' economic capital to build curriculum vitae by engaging in volunteering opportunities and unpaid work experience.

Finally, none of the middle-class participants considered location to be a restriction for economic reasons. Bradley et al. (2017) refer to the increased likelihood of middle-class students considering a career in London and participant stories supported this finding. Jaanavi (MC-NFG), Pippa (MC-NFG), Jade (MC-NFG) and Thalia (MC-NFG) all aspired to spend a period in London to pursue career opportunities. Alice (MC-FG) would consider "*going anywhere*" for placement and Taylor (MC-FG) aspired to travel with the army. This is not to say that they ignored economic consequences but rather that this did not restrict choice. Pippa (MC-NFG) who is from the North West explained, "*One of the things that deters me from London is the prices.*" Jaanavi (MC-NFG), from the Midlands, also considered the financial implications of living in London, "*I'll need to be able to afford to live in London as well. ... if I live in London, then the housing prices are so high, and I'll never own a property.*" In contrast, Evie (WC-FG) expressed a strong preference to remain in Mount for financial reasons and both Steph (WC-FG) and Lucy (WC-FG) ruled out living in London based on cost, "*Like I feel like if I was in London — and it's so expensive and to get down there as well,*" Steph (WC-FG). Participant stories are consistent with those of the Social Mobility Commission (2019) that those from the middle classes are more likely to move region to take up opportunities and that London is less accessible to those from

less well-off backgrounds. Participant stories do not suggest that this is a failure of aspiration but a result of economic necessity, which restricts the capability to aspire.

The analysis of participant stories indicates that, as might be expected, there are differences in the economic capital available to working- and middle-class participants. Working-class participants considered economic constraints carefully in the development of aspirations for HE and graduate career and had not had some of the opportunities that economic capital can engender. This limited their capability to aspire in the sense both of the opportunities they were willing to consider and of those that were visible to them based on their more limited career-relevant experiences.

4.4 Social capital

4.4.1 Introduction and participant social networks

The literature review draws on Bourdieu's (1986) conceptualisation of social capital and adds to this in two ways. I used Foskett's (2011) characteristics of influence to examine class differences in the sources of support available to participants and the characteristics of these sources – for example, the extent to which support provides hot or cold knowledge (Ball and Vincent, 1998) and the extent to which a source of support can provide bonding or bridging capital (Putnam, 2000). Appendix 9 summarises the members of each participant's social network, who have been important to the development the development of the capability to aspire at different points in their lives. Furthermore, I used the social support literature to distinguish between informational support and esteem, emotional and companionship support.

My analysis facilitates an understanding of class differences in the family capital available to participants and differences in the ways in which their stories suggest that they have accumulated further capital from outside the family. Social capital is of particular

importance to the development of the capability to aspire as it is the accumulation of further social capital that facilitates change beyond social field of origin both directly and by enabling the accumulation of other forms of capital. For example, new relationships might build confidence (cultural capital) by providing esteem and emotional support. The analysis first examines sources of informational support and follows with an analysis of esteem, emotional and companionship support.

4.4.2 Informational support

(a) Introduction

Informational support is the provision of advice and other information. This section will examine class differences in the sources of informational support available to participants from different socio-economic backgrounds and relevant to the development of an aspiration for HE and to an aspiration for graduate career.

(b) Parents

Foskett (2011) considers parents to be important sources of bonding social capital; their influence reinforces existing social structures (Putnam, 2000). The close nature of the relationship also suggests that parents are a source of hot knowledge and therefore as Ball and Vincent (1998) suggest, may be preferred over other sources of information. In the context of the development of an aspiration for HE, both Reay et al. (2005) and Bathmaker et al. (2016) find that parents who have attended university provide information to their children and my analysis suggests that this is the case. Jade (MC-NFG) commented on the way in which her dad promoted the overall experience of university, he “...wanted me to come to uni so bad, cos he had such a good time.” As Burke (2015a) suggests, parents who had been to university also provided informational support about the perceived career benefits of HE. Thalia’s (MC-NFG) stepdad suggested university was

necessary, *"...you have to go to uni and get a good job,"* and Jaanavi (MC-NFG) *"...didn't think you could find a job without getting a degree."*

For the most part, the stories of first-generation participants suggested that their parents were not able to provide informational support around the decision to attend university. As Snee and Devine (2014) suggest, this was the case for both working- and middle-class parents who had not attended university. Taylor (MC-FG) explained that her *"...parents couldn't really offer an opinion,"*; Lucy's (WC-FG) parents were *"...not involved,"*; Steph (WC-FG) *"...had no one,"* and Alice's (MC-FG) dad *"...didn't know what it was about"* and her mum *"...didn't have a clue."*

Among parents who had not attended university, Evie's (WC-FG) mum was the exception and the involvement in Evie's (WC-FG) education described on page 143 extended to the provision of informational support around choice of university and choice of qualification at eighteen. Evie's (WC-FG) mum worked closely with graduate trainees, she encouraged Evie (WC-FG) to choose A levels over vocationally based alternatives and stressed that, *"A Levels are gonna be worth more in the future than what an NVQ¹²."* Evie's story is similar to those in the literature, Atkinson (2010) suggests that the experiences of children from upwardly-mobile families is subtly different from those of the non-upwardly-mobile and Brooks (2003) suggests that contact with graduates at work can influence the quality support first-generation parents can provide their children. However, like other parents who did not attend university, Evie's (WC-FG) mum also provided information relating to vocational alternatives to HE. This is consistent with evidence provided by Irwin and Elley (2011) that HE is not the only option considered in families who have no experience

¹² National Vocational Qualifications (NVQ) are a vocational alternative to A levels.

of HE. Evie (WC-FG) explained that her mum “...got me apprenticeship providers, like brochures, but she also said, go and look at unis” and encouraged her to “look at everything.” Whilst not providing informational support directly, Steph’s (WC-FG) mum also highlighted apprenticeship as a potential route and was opposed to Steph’s (WC-FG) decision to pursue HE. Steph (WC-FG) explained, “She wasn’t too enthusiastic about me going to uni rather than having an apprenticeship.” Although Pippa’s (MC-NFG) dad is a graduate, her mum is not. Pippa (MC-NFG) explained that they had differing views on the importance of HE, “When my mum was like, ‘do an apprenticeship’ ... I think my dad was more — like he just never encouraged it, ... Like he was more encouraging of uni.” Parents who had attended university and those who had not therefore drew on their own experiences and provided information that bonded participants to existing networks and social structures. The availability of informational support relevant to the social field of HE therefore differed across first-generation and non-first-generation participants rather according to class.

Parents also have the potential to be a source of informational support relevant to the development of career aspirations. In Thalia’s (MC-NFG) case her parents’ senior roles in a corporate environment provided informal information around working for a large company in London, “...both my parents work for massive companies doing like quite high-powered jobs, and I do like that environment.” Evie’s (WC-FG) mum’s corporate experience helped Evie develop her expectations around salary and career progression. However, in some cases, information provided by parents deterred participants from the pursuit of a particular graduate career path; Pippa’s (MC-NFG) parents both worked for the National Health Service and her perceptions of the stress involved deterred her from a career in medicine. Jade (MC-NFG) perceived her dad’s career as a banker in London as boring and

commented, “...like I don’t wanna do that, I want my own little thing.” Other participants commented on the lack of field-relevant informational support from parents: Jaanavi (MC-NFG), “...didn’t really hear that much about [her parents graduate] jobs really” and Lucy (WC-FG), Alice (MC-FG) and Steph’s (WC-FG) parents were not able to provide informational support relevant to the field of graduate careers in business. Steph (WC-FG) explained this most eloquently when she contrasted her knowledge of a career in a care home or in a machine shop with that of business:

“But I haven’t got anyone to rely on to say, ‘yeah this is what the job is,’ because I have no one that’s in management, which is where I’m wanting to be, or like doing an office job. I don’t know anyone with office jobs, so it’s kind of like — it is a bit of that curtain effect, like I really don’t know what I’ll be going in to, cos I don’t have anyone that’s been in it before. Like all my family and anyone in my life really have all gone into caring. I could tell you exactly how to go and manage a care home, I can go and do it. I wouldn’t want to, but I could. I have an idea what goes into it. I can walk into a factory floor, and I couldn’t fit a wheel, but I could tell you how the machine’s meant to be turned on, like I’ve seen that, I’ve seen me dad do it.”

Some parents were therefore able to provide their children with information relevant to the development of career aspiration but whilst my analysis suggested some class differences, the quality of support provided depended on the extent to which participants’ aspirations mapped to parental career path.

(c) Family, partners and peers

As Greenbank (2011) suggests informal relationships with the broader family and peers have the potential to supply informational support relevant to the development of aspirations. Relationships within the family or their broader network may act as bonding

social capital. However, relationships which develop outside a family's network, for example in the social field of school or at university, may provide bridging social capital by providing connections to new networks. All such relationships can provide hot knowledge relevant to the social fields of HE and graduate career.

In the case of middle-class participants whose parents had attended university, family members were a source of informational support. Four participants, whose parents had attended university, also had had older siblings or cousins who had attended. Thalia's (MC-NFG) sister advised her to study economics A level and provided informational support around choice of programme, "*...at Bath they have to do a placement year and she was looking for a placement and I really liked the idea of that, which you couldn't do in Economics.*" Jade (MC-NFG) also gained informational support from a sibling who had completed a placement year, "*My brother did a year in industry too, so I was very influenced by that.*" This echoes the experiences of some of Walker and Fongwa's (2017) more affluent participants who relied on the experiences of siblings. My analysis of Jaanavi (MC-NFG) and Pippa's (MC-NFG) stories suggest the collective influential process described by Reay et al. (2005); Pippa (MC-NFG) had visited her sister at Liverpool university and Jaanavi (MC-NFG) received information from her cousins, "*Yeah we would drop them off and then they would have so much fun and come back and tell us about it.*" Middle-class participants whose parents had attended university were therefore able to draw on informational support from within their network of extended family reinforcing the informational support provided by parents.

For first-generation participants, information provided in informal relationships outside the family were important to the development aspirations for HE. Friends, partners or the families of partners provided information, which related to the broader experience of

university. Taylor (MC-FG) attended boarding school and had a broad network of middle-class friends who were at university, *"a lot of people were like you know it's really your sort of thing, can't believe you're not going."* The informational support provided to Taylor (MC-FG) was like that provided by siblings and broader family networks to those participants whose parents had attended university; Taylor's (MC-FG) friends were in a similar position to her in social space and therefore bonded her to a typically middle-class trajectory.

My analysis of Steph (WC-FG), Lucy (WC-FG), Alice (MC-FG) and Evie's (WC-FG) stories suggests that individual trustworthy sources, who occupied a different position in social space, provided informational support. Steph (WC-FG) and Lucy (WC-FG) had long-term older partners who were students or graduates; in Alice's (MC-FG) case, her partner's family provided this information and for Evie, her mum's colleagues were a source of informational support. Smith (2011) explains the importance of these relationships, which enable students to decode information provided in formal settings and via official sources. Alice's partner's family suggested that university would be the *"best time of your life"* and whilst Alice (MC-FG) was *"...utterly convinced they were wrong,"* she decided to *"...give it a go."* Evie's (WC-FG) describes how, *"...if I've ever needed a little bit of advice in terms of am I choosing the right thing ... I spoke to my mum and my mum spoke to Alison [her mum's manager]."* The utilisation of broader networks by working-class parents is not typically found in the literature. However, Evie's (WC-FG) story supports Atkinson's (2010) view that the experiences of children from upwardly-mobile families are subtly different from those of the non-upwardly-mobile.

In the context of the development of career aspirations, participant stories did not suggest that broader family were a source of informational support, and the extent of peer influence was dependent on participants' experience at university. Bathmaker et al.

(2016) provide evidence that many students from the middle classes convert economic and cultural capital into social capital whilst at university by developing an extended social network. However, some working-class students at élite institutions find it difficult to integrate socially (Coulson et al., 2018; Reay, 2018b). In the literature review, I suggested that the size of an individual's social network might limit or enhance the availability of career-relevant informational support from peers. My analysis suggested that the extent of social integration and network building related to class. For the most part, my analysis suggested that middle-class participants integrated well and extended their network of friends whilst at university. Furthermore, social integration did not depend on a family history of HE; experiences were similar for all middle-class participants. Pippa (MC-NFG) reflected on how she found similar friends at Mount, *"I think I've gone towards people who have a very similar background to me."* Thalia (MC-NFG) explained how she *"really enjoyed uni life, made a really good group of friends,"* and Jade (MC-NFG) said her first-year experience was *"...crazy but I loved it."* Alice (MC-FG) commented that, *"...so many people are really similar to me,"* and described how she made *"loads and loads of friends."* Taylor (MC-FG) *"...loved it"* and described how she made *"some great friends."* In contrast, Jaanavi's (MC-NFG) initial experience at Warwick was not similar to that of other middle-class participants. She did not find it easy to make friends and had to make a conscious effort when she arrived at Mount, *"...so I just kind of stayed in my room, I wouldn't go out there and try and like make new friends ... So, when I got to Mount I thought ... I'll try and get out there a bit more."* There are many studies, for example, Read et al., (2003), Stuart, et al., (2011), Croizer et al. (2016) that provide evidence to suggest that many students from ethnic minority backgrounds face issues of social exclusion and racism at UK universities. In a recent report, Universities UK and the NUS (2019) provided evidence of issues of overt and covert racism faced by Black, Asian

and Minority Ethnic (BAME) students and suggest that fostering a sense of belonging and community is important in narrowing the BAME attainment gap. Unfortunately, there is much evidence from the literature

which suggests that Jaanavi's (MC-NFG) story reflects that of many BAME students across all socio-economic backgrounds.

Middle-class participants suggested that their peers and broader networks at university provided informational support relevant to graduate careers or placements. Friendships made through Officer Training Corps provided Taylor (MC-FG) with a rich source of informational support relevant to the development of an aspiration for a career in the army. Taylor (MC-FG) also considered that the people she met at university broadened her aspirations beyond the army; she aspires to study International Relations before applying for a place at Sandhurst. Thalia's (MC-NFG) friends directly influenced her career aspirations, *"...through friends doing internships and saying, oh this was a really good. I had a really fun summer at Deloitte doing consulting, you should look into it."* Alice (MC-FG) commented on how her friends had changed her perspective on a placement year, *"...cos everyone else is doing it and it's a good thing. It makes you more employable."*

Although Jaanavi's (MC-NFG) interest in politics developed during her year out, she was able to develop this interest further on her return to university with her friends as a member of societies, *"And yeah I think I went to Amnesty International with one person who was going in my year and I really enjoyed it."* She aspires to work for an NGO or to become a political consultant and was applying for a postgraduate programme at the time of her second interview. Jaanavi (MC-NFG) also cites her friends as a source of informal informational support in relation to the process of applying for postgraduate study, *"I had two friends that did Nursing, and they both applied ... so I kind of knew the process."* The literature does not examine the informational support peers provide in the development

of graduate career aspirations and participant stories demonstrate that peers have the potential to provide valuable information in this regard.

In contrast, for the most part the stories of working-class participants did not suggest that they had the same range of informational support available from friends at university. Evie (WC-FG) was the exception to this as she attended an accessibility Summer School designed for sixth form students from low-participation neighbourhoods and had a network of contacts from this programme. She commented that the decision to participate in HE was the *“Best decision I made, like I absolutely love Mount, I love uni, I’ve met the best friends.”* Evie’s (WC-FG) story suggests that she used her peers as a source of information about career by comparing her own experience of placement with that of her friends:

“I compared my placement to others — I saw placements that were a lot more paid than mine and probably had a lot more longer-term benefits than mine but were causing them all the stress in the world but mine was making me really happy.”

Participation in the summer school appears to have had an impact on Evie’s (WC-FG) ability to integrate at Mount and therefore has enhanced the career- and placement-related informational support available to her from peers.

However, both Lucy (WC-FG) and Steph’s (WC-FG) experiences were different. Lucy (WC-FG) found the transition to university difficult: she lived off campus with her boyfriend and whilst she made friends via social media, she found it difficult to maintain friendships with others living in university accommodation. In the following quote, she describes her experience of attempting to establish a friendship with someone she had met on social media over the Summer, *“I had the mindset, yeah I’ll buy a freshers ticket and go to all the events, it’ll be fun, and then I met up with the first girl that had messaged me, and it was just quite awkward.”* Lucy (WC-FG) has made few friends at university, found the work

difficult and made the decision to withdraw from Mount at the end of her first year. Her experience is consistent with the literature, which examines the experience of students from low socio-economic backgrounds but is exacerbated by commuting. The difficulties commuting students experience in establishing friendships and feeling a sense of belonging at university is also well established in the literature (Yorke and Longden, 2008; Pokorny et al., 2017).

During her first year, Steph (WC-FG) lived in university accommodation. She settled in well and her social life revolved around her boyfriend and flatmates, subject to the limitations of her part-time job which prevented involvement in some activities, *"Yeah, yeah, I went out with them, but I did work weekends, so there was some things I couldn't necessarily make."* However, towards the end of first term she discovered that her flatmates would be sharing a house together in second year without her. She was socially isolated in her second year although things have improved in final year. Steph's (WC-FG) story does not suggest that she was able to use social networks as a source of information about placement or career. Her applications for placement were a solitary experience characterised by rejection and self-doubt and whilst she is living with two of her friends in her final year, they are on different career paths. Steph's (WC-FG) experience is examined in more detail in Chapter 5.

For participants whose parents had attended university – broader family networks provided information relevant to the development of an aspiration for HE, whilst for first-generation participants – relationships outside the family were important in this regard. Participants who had good networks at university were able to utilise their friendships as a source of informational support relevant to the development of career aspirations. Participant stories therefore suggest that a failure to develop good friendships at university may limit the capability to aspire. Working-class students are more likely to

have trouble in developing friendships at university and this may have implications for their ability to develop an imagined future in a graduate career.

(d) Informal sources of information from outside an individual's network

In the literature review, I identified two potential sources of informational support from outside an individual's social network: chance or networked encounters, and the media, social media and the internet. Participant stories do not suggest that chance or networked encounters were significant to the development of an aspiration for HE. However, for Taylor (MC-FG) and Pippa (MC-NFG) they did play a role in the development of career aspirations. Taylor (MC-FG) referred to the value of her network in the development of career aspirations, *"...networking is very important. My dad's very much a networky person. ... I realised that it can be really beneficial to know people."* Networking within cadets and whilst travelling provided her with informational support relevant to the field of careers in the military or involving international travel; for example, whilst she was travelling, her ambition to study International Relations was inspired by a chance encounter with someone who worked for the United Nations. Pippa also gained information about graduate careers by networking; she spoke with a graduate financial advisor after a university careers talk and arranged a company visit. As discussed above, my analysis indicates that family is not an important source of career-relevant informational support and therefore networking activity may be important to the acquisition of career-relevant information. Students from the middle classes may be more confident and possess other forms of cultural capital which might facilitate such networking activity. Hodkinson and Sparkes (1997) suggest that working-class students might find networking more difficult and my analysis yielded little evidence of networking activity among participants from working-class backgrounds. Evie (WC-FG) was the exception and Chapter 5 examines how this enhanced her capability to aspire.

Some participants used the television, the media, social media, and the internet as sources of informational support relevant to HE and graduate careers. When Jaanavi (MC-NFG) was struggling with friendships at school she used stories of university from television as a source of information about HE:

“I saw on like maybe a TV programme or something, like the same sort of thing, like someone would be having a really hard time and then he would go off to university and it would be like different people and I would fit in with them instead.”

In the context of graduate careers, Lucy’s (WC-FG) early interest in a career in law was inspired by the film *Legally Blonde*¹³ and her initial interest in business by images of the corporate world portrayed in television programmes, “...on the telly you see like business-people and stuff and I just — that’s what I wanted to be, like a manager sort of thing.” Jade (MC-NFG) was also influenced by social media and television. “It’s just, a lot of stuff on TV actually influences me.” She listed *The Apprentice* and *Dragons Den*¹⁴ as influences and explained that she follows young entrepreneurs from these programmes, “And like Karen Brady and stuff. And actually, because Sian — like this girl, Sian, she won *Apprentice* and she’s like doing really well ... She’s like very on it with her business and — like that really influences me.” Evie (WC-FG) was also influenced by *The Apprentice*, “...and I started watching things like *The Apprentice* and getting more and more involved into it.” For some participants therefore television and social media provided an insight into careers beyond those they might encounter in their own network. This is consistent with the findings of Reay et al. (2005), Threadgold and Nilan (2009) and McLeod et al. (2009) who all noted the influence of popular culture on career aspirations. The quotes suggest that

¹³ *Legally Blonde* is a feature film about a “typical blond” succeeding at Harvard Law School, despite being judged by her more conformist peers.

¹⁴ *The Apprentice* and *Dragons Den* are reality TV shows featuring famous entrepreneurs.

the television is used a source of informal knowledge and facilitates the development of an imagined future in a particular field.

In developing the aspiration to attend Mount or to undertake a particular programme, some participants used the internet as a source of informational support. Participant stories did not suggest differences along class lines. There are competing explanations of class differences in the use of cold knowledge; some authors argue that working-class students are more dependent on such knowledge (Ball, et al., 2002), whilst others suggest that undertaking research is part of constructed middle-class identity (Hutchings, 2005). Some participants also used the internet as a source of informational support in developing an aspiration for graduate careers; Lucy (WC-FG) to refine her interest in child psychology, Pippa (MC-NFG) as a source of information on careers in business and Evie (WC-FG) to identify the financial sector as an area with “...*good job prospects.*” As might be expected, participants from all class backgrounds found the internet useful as a source of information relating to university league tables, salary prospects, availability of opportunities or qualifications required for a particular career but less useful in developing insight into the university experience or graduate careers. The internet was a useful form of cold knowledge in a particular context, supplemented by other forms of hot knowledge.

(e) School, university, and work

Foskett (2011) identifies school, college, university, and work as sources of formal informational support from outside an individual’s network and therefore as a potential source of bridging social capital. This section examines three sources of support: information from school including from both teachers and careers advisors; information from university including careers and placement advisors and information from work or placement experience.

The influence of teachers and careers advisors on post-sixteen choices was mixed. Except for Jade (MC-NFG), middle-class participants continued at school or transitioned to a local college to study A levels and did not report that alternative qualifications were considered. Lucy (WC-FG) who attended a prestigious, selective grammar school also initially continued at school to study for A levels without considering alternative pathways. Steph (WC-FG) and Evie (WC-FG) performed well at GCSE, but their stories do not indicate that the relative value of A levels when compared to other post-sixteen choices was discussed, or that A levels were a recommended path for those aspiring to HE. Both therefore had considerable choice around post-sixteen colleges and qualifications. Steph (WC-FG) made the decision to study a combination of BTEC¹⁵ and A levels based on her aspiration to attend catering college. Evie (WC-FG) commented that school were “...on the fence,” when she was making the choice between A level and NVQ. The promotion of vocational qualifications to academically strong working-class participants who aspire to HE suggests that some teachers have a weak knowledge of the field of HE and is consistent with the findings of several studies (Leathwood and Hutchings, 2005; Bowers-Brown, 2015; McGrath, 2018).

The stories of middle-class participants were on occasion critical of the information provided at school and college and did not suggest that teachers were an important source of informational support. This contrasted with the experiences of some working-class participants. Steph (WC-FG) had a close relationship with her teachers (Chapter 4, page 175) who became an important source of informational support. Steph reported that one of her teachers, a Durham alumnus, had advised, “*I love Durham and I think like*

¹⁵ British and Technology Education Council (BTEC) qualifications are a vocational alternative to A levels.

you'll love Mount, it's got this campus." As Reay et al. (2005) and Snee and Devine (2014) suggest, for some students personal connections with teachers can be a valuable source of information support although Heath et al. (2008) and Burke (2015a) suggest that this is not the case for all students. In Evie's (WC-FG) case, college provided informational support in a different way by promoting the Next Steps Mount programme. Many institutions offer summer schools, which provide insight into the university experience and widen access to HE (Doyle and Griffin, 2012) and Hatt et al. (2009) suggest that they are successful in supporting the development of aspirations for HE. Evie (WC-FG) attended the Next Steps residential at Mount University and commented, *"...I tret it a bit like a holiday to be honest."* However, she found that she enjoyed the lectures and the independence of staying in halls *"...we was doing the lectures and things, and then it's like kind of taking — you took your notes and they didn't tell you what to do."* Evie (WC-FG) gained a broad range of knowledge about university from the Next Steps programme, which was relevant to the development of an aspiration for HE and therefore enhanced her capability to aspire.

At university, careers and placement advisors provide informational support in the form of one-to-one sessions, employer networking opportunities and lectures led by careers advisors, employers, or alumni. The stories of some participants suggested that they engaged with these forms of support. Jade (MC-NFG) and Alice (MC-FG) used careers talks as a mechanism for ruling out areas in which they did not have an interest, for example Jade (MC-NFG) commented, *"Deloitte and they were going through some like risk stuff ... I wouldn't wanna do that either."* Alice's (MC-FG) comments on the utility of this support echoed Greenbank's (2011) findings that students want to consult with people who know them and whom they know, *"It feels, because you don't know them, it's kind of like reading*

something online about someone telling you how they experience something." Alice (MC-FG) demonstrated a strong preference for hot knowledge from within her social network rather than for formal support. Except for Pippa, who used a careers talk as an opportunity to network, other participants did not indicate that the university careers service provided information relevant to aspiration development.

All participants had undertaken some form of work experience. This varied from work experience undertaken whilst at school, part- and full-time jobs unrelated to career aspirations, volunteering, and career-relevant placements. Experiences of work were an important source of informal informational support for participants. Periods of formal work experience at school facilitated the development of career aspirations, however, these experiences often provided information about what participants did not want to do. Poor relationships at work had an impact on Steph's (WC-FG) perceptions of a career in catering, *"..going to catering college ... That sharply changed when I worked in a restaurant, and I hated it."* Lucy (WC-FG) was provided with inaccurate information about careers in law whilst on a two-week work placement in a solicitor's office, *"I went to do work experience at a law office, like a solicitor's, and they were like, 'don't do it, it's boring' and they said that there wasn't much money in it."* In Jade's (MC-NFG) case, a period of work experience in a nursery helped her understand that she would not enjoy the physical aspects of physiotherapy, she concluded, *"...there was like limited pay and stuff ... And also, the thought of having to do it, and I was like that just wouldn't be something I would enjoy."* These experiences demonstrate the potential over reliance on hot knowledge and personal encounters, which as Slack et al. (2014) suggest, are not always trustworthy. Steph (WC-FG) and Lucy (WC-FG) both lacked any broader contextual information about the industries in which they aspired to work and therefore negative experiences and poor advice had a significant impact on their career aspirations.

Six participants were in their final year of study, four of whom had undertaken a placement year and in addition, Taylor (MC-FG) had a significant period of career-relevant work experience in the Territorial Army. As Bridgstock et al. (2019) suggest, periods of work experience provided information about participants' own preferences and abilities and about how these mapped onto their experiences of work. Pippa's (MC-NFG) experience on placement supplemented her broader knowledge of careers in finance and led to her changing her aspiration to become an accountant. She found the work routine and lacking in challenge, and she did not enjoy an office-based role, *"...it just slowly got more and more boring, cos like there was nothing like new getting added to me."* She contrasted this experience with a two-week placement with a financial advisor and refined her aspiration accordingly, *"I am actually looking at that as a potential career, cos I enjoyed ...cos I enjoy the numbers in a way, and I remember that being very client-focused and chatting to people."* Whilst on placement, Thalia (MC-NFG) was able to compare her experiences in two different areas of consulting and consider how they aligned to her preferences. She found short-term strategic consulting projects interesting and her experience in the technology consulting team boring, *"I did this technology role for about two weeks where we — it was just horrible."* Thalia's (MC-NFG) placement refined her aspiration for a career in consulting to a more specific area as she enhanced her understanding of consulting. Taylor's (MC-FG) work experience in the Officer Training Corps of the Territorial Army, provided her with an insight into how her preferences aligned with a career in the army, *"I think it's like coming together with people through adversity, that's one of my favourite things to do"*. Steph's (WC-FG) work experience at Savers provided her with an insight into her preference for targets, goals and competition, *"Anything I can give a task and a goal and set a deadline to, I'm happy with."*

It's like at work we have targets to meet every day, sales wise and I lo— like I love the competition to get there."

Work experience also provided participants with an insight into how their abilities mapped onto the requirements of the workplace. Pippa's (MC-NFG) work experience confirmed her belief that she was *"good at the numbers and I enjoy the numbers in a way."* Evie (WC-FG) realised that her people skills were strong whilst working on placement at Nestlé, *"cos I know my boss compared me to her and said people skills, she was like, I'm up there compared to her."* In addition to undertaking a placement, Steph (WC-FG) volunteered whilst at university and commented, *"I work with a charity, I know I can run an event. I know for a fact I can deal with room management."*

As Brooks and Youngson (2016) suggest, periods of work experience also provided insight into business environments, industrial sectors or business functions. For example, Evie (WC-FG) was able to use her placement to gain insight into alternative careers in accounting, *"And there's so many different departments there, like sub-teams within their finance department and like, so I was like ah, I wanna be proactive and go do some shadowing."* Evie (WC-FG) also valued the supportive culture at Nestlé which she felt was a good fit for her, *"So they were really supportive of that and they kind of put an arm round us in a way and they always checked in and things."* Taylor (MC-FG) was passionate about the way in which her values aligned with those of the military, *"...the military is very much value orientated.... The army isn't about shooting people and fighting wars, it is about helping people, and most people don't see that. But it is — that's what it's all for."* In all cases, placements and other periods of work experience provided information which enabled participants to refine their career interests although my analysis suggested that

placements and other career-relevant periods of work experience were a better source of informational support than part-time, non-career-relevant work experience.

(f) Informational support summary

All participants used the internet as a source of statistical and factual informational support in the development of an aspiration for HE, but this was not the main source of information. Participants received further informational support from a broad range of sources and the relative importance of sources differed across participants. In the context of aspirations for HE first-generation participants placed greater reliance on relationships outside their family as sources of informational support when compared to those whose parents, siblings and cousins had attended university. Informational support provided by school was not sufficiently tailored to the development of an aspiration to study at an élite institution for some working-class participants although relationships with teachers and outreach programmes did provide valuable information, which enhanced participants' capability to aspire. In contrast, school provided middle-class participants with informational support relevant to the development of an aspiration to study at an élite institution, but individual relationships seemed less important perhaps because this information was already available from other sources.

For all participants parents and broader family were not an important source of informational support in the development of aspirations for a graduate career although family did provide some limited information to middle-class participants. Participants from across class groupings were therefore more reliant on the capital they could accumulate in the development of career aspirations. Friendships at university and relationships and experiences at work were the main sources of informational support relevant to graduate careers. Therefore, class differences in the ability to develop

friendships at university limits working-class participants' capability to aspire. No significant class differences were observed in the way in which periods of work experience provided informational support relevant to career aspirations and participant stories support the broader evidence that work experience has the capacity to be an important and rich source of informational support in the development of career aspirations, which enhances the capability to aspire.

4.4.3 Emotional, esteem and companionship support

(a) Introduction

This section will explore the extent of class differences in the emotional, esteem and companionship support available to participants from different class backgrounds in the development of the capability to aspire. As discussed in Chapter 2 emotional support entails – the expression of empathy and the ability to turn to others for comfort and security; esteem support – facilitates personal growth positively, for example feeling pushed to achieve one's potential, and companionship support concerns – the availability of others in creating a sense of belonging. The section follows the same structure as that for informational support; Foskett's (2011) classification of sources of support is used to examine the extent of social networks and the nature of support provided in different types of relationship.

(b) Parents

Some participants discussed emotional difficulties they had experienced in their broader lives or in relation to their education. The extent to which parents were a source of emotional support in these contexts differed significantly. Except for Jaanavi (MC-NFG), middle-class participants whose parents had attended university did not discuss their emotional lives in relation to specific sources of support. Jaanavi (MC-NFG) Evie (WC-FG)

and Alice (MC-FG) experienced emotional difficulties relevant to the field of education and their mothers were important sources of support. Evie (WC-FG) suffered from exam anxiety during her GCSEs and A levels and said her mum would “...*give me rescue remedy and she'd cook me a breakfast.*” and encouraged Evie (WC-FG) to “...*just keep going.*” In Alice (MC-FG)'s case, parents provided emotional support and reassurance when she was nervous about the transition to university.

In contrast, Steph (WC-FG) and Lucy (WC-FG) both suffered from depression and referred to a lack of emotional support from parents. Whilst Steph (WC-FG) considered herself to be close to her family and well supported by them, she was unable to confide in them about her depression and she “...*kept everything to myself, which probably stemmed the depression part of it.*” Lucy (WC-FG) referred to a lack of support from her parents and commented that she did not have “...*good relationships at home, so I couldn't really talk to anyone.*” Taylor (MC-FG) also reflected on times when she felt she lacked support from parents and struggled emotionally, “*I think family was an issue because my mum and my gran were just not getting on at all. ... I hated being at home.*” In the cases of Lucy (WC-FG) and Taylor (MC-FG), this lack of emotional support influenced their aspirations. Lucy (WC-FG) aspired to leave her prestigious grammar school where she was very unhappy but was unable to discuss the issue with her parents, despite having an alternative imagined future in a state school. Taylor (MC-FG) felt that problems at home had an impact on her ability to engage at boarding school, which affected her performance at school and the way she felt about continuing to sixth form, “...*obviously my grades dropped, and my GCSEs weren't as good as they could have been.*” Participants therefore varied significantly in terms of their perceptions of specific emotional support received and their stories did not suggest that there were class differences.

In Chapter 2, I suggested that esteem support facilitates the development of the capability to aspire by facilitating personal growth positively and encouraging exploration of options, or by building confidence. The stories of some participants provided examples of esteem support from parents, which facilitated the development of the capability to aspire. Evie's (WC-FG) mum was an important source of esteem support; she encouraged her to attend a prestigious sixth form college, to participate in the Next Steps programme, was supportive of her re-taking AS levels and encouraged her to live away from home. Evie explained that her mum suggested it was *"...a good idea if you do that [live in university accommodation away from home], so then you don't miss out on that uni experience."* Jade's (MC-NFG) story suggests her dad's encouragement and confidence in her abilities facilitated her aspirations for HE despite her struggling at school and college. She commented on how her *"...dad is always thinking about my future successes and stuff like that."*

My analysis suggests that field-relevant emotional and esteem support provided by parents has the potential to facilitate the development of aspirations for HE and therefore to enhance the capability to aspire. This is consistent with findings in the literature; Burkitt (2014) explains that parental emotional support can mitigate negative emotions, which might accompany social mobility, and Atkinson (2010) suggests parental encouragement as important to upward mobility. In the case of middle-class participants, the sense of parental expectation can be a source of esteem support, but Jade's (MC-NFG) story also highlights the potential of esteem support to facilitate aspiration in difficult circumstances. This supports the findings of Reay et al. (2005) and Bathmaker et al. (2016) which suggest that the encouragement of middle-class parents facilitates the ability to realise or maintain aspirations in the face of educational or other setbacks.

However, whilst my analysis suggests that parents have the potential to be an important source of emotional and esteem support in the development of an aspiration for HE, there were no examples of parental emotional or esteem support in relation to the social field of graduate career. The stories of participants suggest that they rely on different sources of support when they are seeking their first graduate role.

(c) Family, partners, and peers

In Chapter 4, page 156, I noted the importance of partners who occupied a different position in social space as a source of bridging social capital for some first-generation participants and discussed the ways in which partners were able to provide informational support relevant to the development of an aspiration for HE. Partners, and for Alice (MC-FG) her partner's family, were also important sources of esteem and emotional support. Lucy's (WC-FG) partner moved to Mount with her when she started university and she explained that this was important to her emotional well-being, "*...like living with strangers, not living with Matty, not seeing Matty as much, which I don't think would have been very good for me.*" Steph (WC-FG) described how her partner provided esteem support when she doubted her abilities, "*...he always said like, 'you can always do one better,' like he was pushing us, like 'you are very smart,' and he was kind of that emotional, that brick.*" Steph's (WC-FG) partner also lived with her and provided emotional support when she was having problems with friendship at university. In Alice's (MC-FG) case, her partner's family provided emotional support relevant to the social field of HE and explained to Alice, "*...you do just need to take the plunge for it cos a lot of people think they won't like it and you will, cos we know you.*"

In Chapter 4, page 157, I discussed the way in which the extension of social networks at university provides career-relevant informational support and suggested that the size of

networks and the support available is to an extent class related. Participation in such networks can also provide companionship and esteem support relevant to the development of career aspirations and therefore the availability of this support was limited for some working-class participants. As noted in Chapter 4, 157, for the most part middle-class participants built strong peer group networks who provided generalised companionship and emotional support relevant to the development of career aspirations. Pippa (MC-NFG), Alice (MC-FG) and Thalia (MC-NFG) made friends who were also applying for internships and placements. The following quote from Thalia (MC-NFG) indicates how her housemates encouraged her, *"I think being in such like close confinement with those same people for two years, I think you kind of egg each other on to do things like - oh yeah, you should apply for that internship."* Evie (WC-FG) and Taylor (MC-FG) also had a strong network of friends who provided career-relevant companionship, emotional or esteem support. Evie (WC-FG) found that comparing her experiences on application to that of her peers enhanced her self-esteem. She also suggested that her housemates were a source of emotional and esteem support whilst she was on placement, *"...she was like, 'if you wanna do it, just do it,' and she kind of pushed me to do it and I've never been so grateful, cos I was like, if she can do it, I can do it."* In Taylor's (MC-FG) case, it is difficult to select just one quote which captures the extent to which immersion in the Officer Training Corps community provided esteem and companionship support relevant to a career in the army; she attended camps every summer, commanded a unit of sixty and lived and travelled with friends in the Officer Training Corps who also studied at Mount. This community provided her with a base from which to explore and develop her aspiration to join the army as an officer.

In the context of the development of an aspiration for HE, those working-class participants who did not receive field-relevant emotional and esteem support from

parents cited partners as important sources of emotional and esteem support. Emotional and esteem support relevant to the development of placement and career aspirations whilst at university was dependent on the extent to which participants had developed field-relevant networks and experienced a sense of belonging at university. Some working-class participants found social integration difficult, and this limited the emotional, esteem and companionship support available to them relevant to the development of career aspirations and may have limited their capability to aspire.

(d) School, university, and work

In the literature review, I argued that teachers could be a source of informal or formal support, depending on the nature of the teacher-student relationship. The literature does not undertake an extensive examination of the emotional and esteem support provided by teachers although there is some limited evidence provided by Devine (2004) and Smith (2011) to suggest that relationships with teachers can be important to aspiration development. My analysis suggests that for some participants esteem and emotional support provided by teachers enhanced the capability to aspire. Steph (WC-FG) had close relationships with teachers who provided her with emotional support when she was self-harming and felt she could not confide in family; referring to her teacher, *“And she knew I was struggling with depression as well and she saw me through that.”* Steph’s (WC-FG) close relationships with teachers also enabled them to provide esteem support relevant to the development of an aspiration for HE, *“She very much like pushed for it. I think she could see I could manage here, and she knew I’d probably flower better here, like at uni.”* In Evie’s (WC-FG) case, teachers provided esteem support around her aspiration to study at Mount:

“My accounting teacher said how pleased she was that she’d seen that I was having this kind of focused stage, and that kind of—I had one bit of reassurance there that

she'd noticed what I was doing and that kind of pushed me on more, I was like ah, I can do it, I can do it."

This quote illustrates the importance of esteem support to the ability to realise an aspiration. For Taylor (MC-FG) Air Cadets was staffed by teachers and other staff from her boarding school who were important sources of esteem and companionship support in the development of her aspiration to join the army. She felt that one member of staff who *"took her seriously"* in her aspiration to join the army was particularly influential.

Participant stories did not refer to personal supervisors or university tutors as sources of emotional or esteem support; however, Alice (MC-FG) and Lucy (WC-FG) found participation in the research process itself a source of relational catalyst support facilitating reflexivity and a broader consideration of opportunities. Alice (MC-FG) commented, *"...it makes you think about it a lot more to be fair, cos it makes you reflect a lot more"* and cited this support as influential in the development of an aspiration for a placement. For Lucy (WC-FG) this support prompted reflection on her unhappiness at university and contributed to the development of an aspiration for a career as a child psychologist.

Placement employers and colleagues also provided emotional and esteem support for some participants. In Chapter 4, page 168, I discussed how Evie (WC-FG) gained information about the supportive culture at Nestlé whilst she was on placement. Her story suggests that the emotional support she received enabled her to continue despite issues with anxiety. Evie lived with other placement students who occupied a different position in social space:

"...like I lived with people —one from the Isle of Man, one from down south and one from Leamington Spa, ... I think these had quite a big impact on me cos they had such

an ethic where it was like they didn't — they travelled far and they still made it work, they still went and saw family."

Evie's story is indicative of the collective influential process described in an HE context by Reay, et al. (2005). She was able to convert social capital (information relating to her friends' lives) to cultural capital (enhanced confidence) in the development of her aspirations. In Pippa's (MC-NFG) case, a careers advisor at JD Sports provided relational catalyst support, which enabled her to explore different career options in finance. Participant stories therefore indicate that the provision of esteem support by teachers, university tutors and placement employers have the potential to enhance the capability to aspire.

(e) Emotional, esteem and companionship support summary

My analysis of middle- and working-class participant stories suggested that emotional and esteem support was important to the development of the capability to aspire when participants experienced setbacks or difficulties. First-generation, and working-class participants drew on emotional, companionship and esteem support from outside the family in the development of an aspiration for HE when they experienced difficulties or setbacks. In some cases, this supplemented support provided by family and in others compensated for a lack of family support. In contrast middle-class participants who were not first-generation did not report reliance on sources of support from outside the family in the development of an aspiration for HE. There were also class differences in the companionship and emotional support relevant to the development of career aspiration available to participants at university and these differences have the potential to limit the capability to aspire in working-class students.

4.5 Summary

Participant stories suggest that there are class differences in the family capital available to participants relevant to the social fields of HE and graduate careers and that these differences in the availability of capital, restricted or enhanced, participant aspiration sets in different ways. First-generation participants had lower levels of family cultural and social capital relevant to the social field of HE and were more reliant on social capital from outside the family. My analysis suggests that relationships with partners and teachers were important to the development of an aspiration for HE when family capital was not available. For first-generation participants, capital accumulated from outside family networks broadened the range of visible options and enhanced the capability to aspire. Participants whose parents had attended university had higher levels of family capital relevant to the development of an aspiration for HE and as a result a richer range of visible options relating to HE. However, these participants had less awareness of options outside the social field of HE and this restricted their aspiration set.

My analysis suggested fewer differences in the availability of family capital relevant to graduate career. However, middle-class participants did have higher levels of economic capital, had engaged in a broader range of extracurricular activities and had higher levels of confidence and expectation. Participants from all class backgrounds were more reliant on capital accumulated from outside the family in the development of career aspirations. Peer networks and work experiences, particularly on placement, were important sources of career-relevant social capital providing informational, emotional, esteem and companionship support. The extent of support available was therefore dependent on an ability to build social networks and the nature of work experiences. Lower levels of economic and cultural capital available to working-class participants had a negative

Jill Webb

impact on the size of social networks relevant to the development of aspirations for graduate career and therefore limited their capability to aspire by narrowing the range of visible options.

The next chapter will explore the ways in which different forms of capital combine and will examine the interaction of capital with emotion and forms of consciousness to provide insight into the extent to which preference is adaptive and the extent to which participants can exercise agency in the development of the capability to aspire.

Chapter 5: Exploring participant agency in the development of aspiration

5.1 Introduction

This chapter will consider the extent of participant agency and the factors influencing participant agency in the development of the capability to aspire to HE and graduate careers. Figure 6 (reproduced from Chapter 2) summarises the two ways in which I conceptualised agency in this study and identifies factors that may be important to agency.

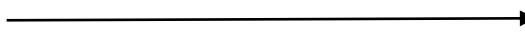
INCREASED AGENCY (<i>Conscious of reasons for action</i>)						
						
Capability to aspire remains unchanged	Unconscious Rejection	Practical consciousness	Reflexivity in the context of personal biography	INCREASED AGENCY (PERMEABILITY)	Increased likelihood painful emotion	Increased capital requirement
Aspiration set expands, may entail the development of the capability to aspire beyond social field of origin (permeability of habitus).	NOT A THEORETICAL POSSIBILITY	Practical consciousness	Reflexivity in the context of personal biography			

Figure 7: The relationship between agency and consciousness, emotion, capital¹⁶

The presence of reflexivity in the context of personal biography is evidence that the individual is acting with agency as it suggests that the individual can give reasons for their aspirations in the context of their personal biography. However, an expansion of an

¹⁶ Source not given as figure designed by author

individual's aspiration set also indicates enhanced agency and this may entail the development of the capability to aspire beyond social field of origin, which suggests a degree of freedom from the influence of structure. Figure 6 draws on my analysis of theory and literature and suggests that reflexivity in the context of personal biography may expand or limit an individual's aspiration set and therefore their agency; that the accumulation of capital has the potential to expand an individuals' aspiration set and that painful emotions or imagined painful emotions might limit the capability to aspire. In Chapter 2, I suggested that reflexivity in the context of behaviour, referential reflexivity and everyday reflexivity have the potential to enhance or limit the capability to aspire and these forms of reflexivity are also considered in the analysis.

Previous studies have examined the emotional impact of social mobility, the role of capital and emotion in the development of the capability to aspire or the extent to which reflexivity or reflection facilitates social mobility. This analysis contributes to the existing literature by bringing these factors together to examine how they influence aspiration development over time and to evaluate the extent to which individuals can exercise individual agency in aspiration development or the extent to which the participant preferences are adaptive.

The first section considers aspirations for HE and examines levels of consciousness, emotions, and the activation of capital in the development of aspirations. In this section, I firstly examine ways in which middle-class participants who were not first-generation developed aspirations for HE at the level of practical consciousness or by reflexively positioning their aspiration in the context of continuity of personal biography. I then examine the way three first-generation participants developed their aspiration for HE and explore the importance of capital and emotions to the reflexive accommodation of

change to personal biography, enhancement of the capability to aspire and therefore of agency. The second section considers aspirations for graduate career and examines levels of consciousness, emotions, and the activation of capital in the development of such aspirations. In this section, I selected one middle-class and two working-class participants with different levels of family and accumulated capital relevant to the social field of graduate careers. This enabled me to examine the factors underlying the reflexive positioning of aspiration in the context of continuity of personal biography, the reflexive accommodation of change to personal biography and the factors which might limit the extent of such a change and therefore limit the expansion of an individual's aspiration set. This enabled me to consider the factors influencing the extent of individual agency in the development of aspiration and therefore the extent to which participant preferences are adaptive. To support the analysis, I have included a summary of the ways in which each participant's aspirations changed over time, the important relationships and turning points in their life, and the periods in which they accommodated change to their personal biography. These are included where relevant below and Appendix 9 provides this detail for all participants.

5.2 Aspiration for HE

5.2.1 Cases which foreground the operation of the unconscious, practical consciousness, and reflexive awareness of continuity of personal biography (Thalia, Pippa, Jade and Jaanavi (MC-NFG))

(a) Introduction

This section examines the development of an aspiration for HE in four middle-class participants whose parents had attended university. These participants remained in a social field with which they were familiar where there was a good fit between habitus and field. In Chapter 2, I argued that when this is the case, aspiration might develop

unconsciously, at the level of practical consciousness or reflexively in the context of continuity of personal biography. I suggested that whilst emotions motivate actions (Burkitt, 2014) and aspirations, where there is a good fit between habitus and field unconscious emotion-judgements (Nussbaum, 2003) may be important to aspiration development. This section draws on Chapter 4 to explore transfer of family capital relevant to the social field of HE and explores the ways in which unconscious rejection of alternatives, practical consciousness and reflexivity in the context of continuity of personal biography influenced participants' capability to aspire.

(b) Social field of origin and transfer of family capital

As outlined in Chapter 4, middle-class participants whose parents had attended university had similar levels of family capital relevant to the development of an aspiration for HE. My analysis suggested that they did not face financial constraints in the development of an aspiration for HE and they provided examples of the ways in which their families were able to activate economic capital in support of the development of an aspiration for HE. Their parents provided cultural capital in the form of an expectation that their children would attend university and provided informational support relevant to the social field of HE. Participant stories therefore suggested that they were confident that they would attend university. The activation of family capital enhanced agency in the sense that participants were able to include a range of HE-related options in their aspiration set.

(c) Unconscious rejection of alternatives and practical consciousness

My analysis of participant stories suggests that in some cases participants were not consciously aware of available alternatives as they developed their aspirations at points of transition. There was no evidence to suggest that alternative options entered conscious

thought (Atkinson, 2010) and there was a sense of normality (Reay et al., 2005). Thalia, Pippa, Jade and Jaanavi's stories suggest that there was a clear expectation that university would naturally follow sixth form. The quote below from Thalia's (MC-NFG) story is typical of the comments made by middle-class participants whose parents had attended university, "*As in not even going to sixth form? Erm, no, it was always just expected that I would do A Levels, go to uni — there was never a question really.*" Thalia's quote highlights the unconscious rejection of alternative trajectories and an acceptance of HE; there was never a question of an alternative to university. Bourdieu (1990a) suggests the habitus motivates this sort of unconscious action; the lack of a question indicates pre-reflexive thought. However, the literature indicates that habitus also has the potential to operate through practical consciousness and reflexivity and therefore the capability to aspire might also be limited to social field of origin in the presence of conscious thought. For middle-class participants whose parents had attended university habitus included a shared family sense that they would aspire to HE held at the level of practical consciousness. The phrases "*always known*" or "*always going*" evidenced the operation of practical consciousness. Jade (MC-NFG) explained, "*...cos I was always going to go to university, but I didn't know what to do then.*" Jade's quote highlights a tacit knowledge of expectations; she was "*always going.*" There is intention in Jade's quote but no conscious articulation of the reasons underlying this intention. If an individual unconsciously rejects possible alternatives or aspires at the level of practical consciousness, individual agency is limited. This is because the number of aspirations included within their aspiration set is structurally constrained as possible alternatives from outside social field of origin are not reflexively scrutinised.

(d) Reflexivity in the context of continuity of personal biography

Some participant stories exhibited reflexivity in the context of continuity of their personal biography and therefore provided evidence of an increased level of consciousness in the context of aspiration development. However, aspirations were within participants' social fields of origin. Pippa (MC-NFG), Jaanavi (MC-NFG) and Jade (MC-NFG) explained the aspiration for HE in the context of continuity of personal biography. Jaanavi commented that, *"...everybody was going to university and everybody in my family had already been, so it was not even like a question, cos I had to go as well."* Jaanavi was conscious of the connection between her personal biography and her aspiration for university and therefore understood the reasons for her actions in the context of her family history. She appeared to be aware of and to accept the structural constraints on her freedom to aspire. If an individual is consciously aware of the way in which an aspiration is a good fit with personal biography, the number of aspirations included within the aspiration set remains limited by structure but the individual exhibits greater process freedom; reasons for actions can be explained.

(d) Conclusion

In summary, middle-class participants were able to activate family capital in the development of the capability to aspire. This enhanced individual agency, by providing a range of choices relating to HE. However, the nature of aspirations was limited to participants' social fields of origin; middle-class participants whose parents had attended university did not have the freedom to aspire to imagined futures which did not entail HE. Preferences were therefore adaptive (Bridges, 2006), the capability to aspire structurally constrained and individual agency restricted. Participants differed in their awareness of the extent to which they were aware of limits on their capability to aspire; some were reflexive in the context of continuity of their personal biography and

understood that an aspiration for HE was part of their identity in the context of their family history. Bridges (2006) would suggest that here preference is inherently adaptive but involves self-scrutiny, indicating greater process freedom. Other participants were unaware of structural constraints; they unconsciously rejected possible alternatives and “*always knew*” they would aspire to HE.

Whilst it is difficult to make analytical distinctions between levels of consciousness and there are no constant boundaries between consciousness and unconsciousness (Burkitt, 2010a), the distinction between aspirations developed reflexively in the context of continuity of personal biography and those developed unconsciously or at the level of practical consciousness is an important one. Sen (2009) argues that instinctive attitudes and emotional reactions can provide us with important information about what we value. However, he makes clear that reasoned scrutiny is a condition underlying the freedom to achieve the things one has reason to value (Sen, 2004). As discussed in Chapter 2, freedom is not just about achievement but also about the choices we make in arriving at that achievement and the way in which we make those choices. A person can be considered to have more agency and therefore a greater capability to aspire if they have developed their aspirations reflexively in the context of their personal biography even if their preferences are adaptive.

5.2.2 Cases which foreground the reflexive accommodation of change to personal biography

(a) Introduction

I selected three socially-mobile participants to examine the way in which individuals reflexively adjust personal biography to develop an aspiration for HE when this is not an expected trajectory. I chose these three participants as the availability of family capital,

the opportunities to accumulate further capital and their emotions in relation to the social field of origin differed between them. Their experiences provide insight into the different ways in which, family capital, emotion, the accumulation and activation of capital, and reflexivity influence the development of an aspiration for HE.

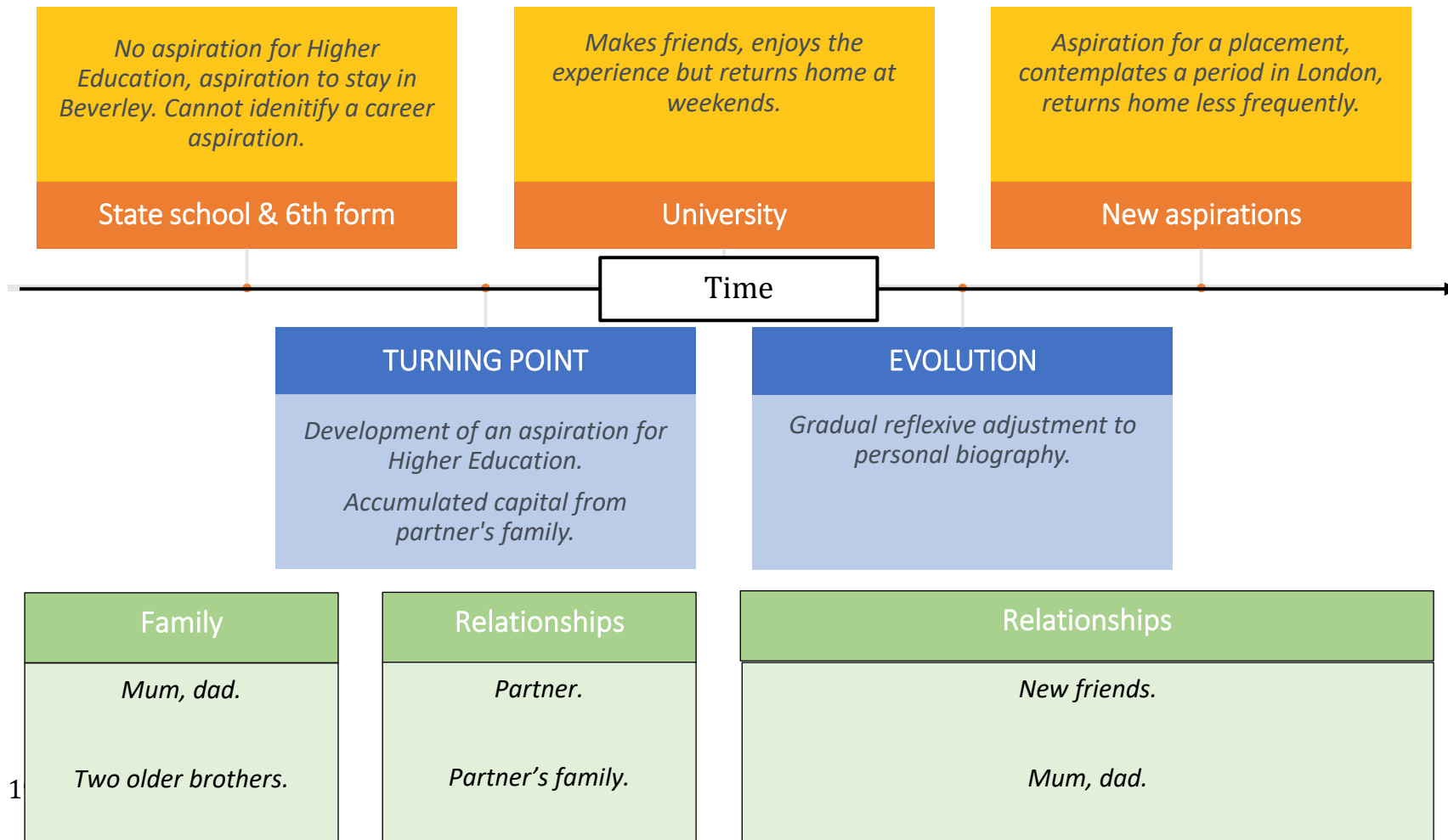
(b) Alice (MC-FG)

Social field of origin and transfer of family capital relevant to the social field of HE

Alice's dad owns two successful bike shops, and her mum, whose family had lived in the local area for generations, does not work. Alice's story suggests that she did not face economic constraints in the development of her aspirations and her family encouraged Alice to believe in her own abilities and intelligence. However, there was no expectation that Alice would attend university and her parents were unable to provide social capital in the form of informational support relevant to the social field of HE. A summary of the ways in which Alice's aspirations changed over time, the important relationships and turning points in her life, and periods in which she accommodated change to her personal biography is included on the next page.

Alice

Figure 8: Summary of aspirations, turning points and relationships as they change through time (Alice).



Alice had no aspiration for university and described herself as a “*family-oriented person.*” She positioned her decision to attend a local sixth form in this context and discussed how close she felt to her family, “*I absolutely love my family and staying — I was very comfortable at home.*” Her aspiration was for contentment and continuity in her existing social field. Whilst Alice had economic capital and esteem support relevant to the development of an aspiration for HE, she did not activate this. Instead, she demonstrated a reflexive understanding of her emotions and her identity as a “*...family-oriented person.*” She did not attempt to adjust her personal biography to enable her to see herself as someone who might aspire to HE. This suggests that Alice’s capability to aspire was initially limited to her social field of origin and whilst Alice was reflexive in the context of continuity of her personal biography, her preferences were adaptive, and her agency limited.

Accumulation and conversion of capital relevant to the field of HE

School provided informational support relating to the social field of HE, however, Alice imagined that she could not cope with the transition to HE and was angry with school when they failed to suggest alternatives that would enable her to maintain her position in her existing social field. Alice was in a state of organic or structural change, which she could not avoid as she completed school. As Archer (2012) suggests, rapid changes in society have meant that traditional options, which might have enabled Alice to remain in her social field of origin, were no longer available. She imagined the painful emotions associated with transition to an unfamiliar field, “*And so being from Beverley, which is quite sheltered, and very small and stuff, anything seemed quite big and different, and I was like, there’s too much going on for me to cope with that.*” Alice therefore aspired to remain in her social field of origin and chose not to activate accumulated capital to develop an

aspiration for HE. As Hart (2016) suggests, some may aspire for a continuation of how things are in the present but structural changes in society may mean that this is not always possible.

Alice developed a close relationship with her boyfriend's graduate parents in sixth form and as discussed in Chapter 4, this relationship enabled Alice to accumulate informational, esteem and emotional support relevant to the social field of HE. She explained, "*His family are probably the reason that I went to university ... well his dad and his step mum both went to university, and I've got very **close** with them.*" Alice's boyfriend's parents argued that Alice would "*...have the best time of her life.*" Their arguments were positioned emotionally rather than rationally and addressed how Alice would feel about being at university rather than the economic or other benefits she might accrue. Alice's story suggests that the activation of this social capital enabled her to build cultural capital in the form of enhanced confidence; she made the decision to, "*...give it a go and I did.*"

The reflexive accommodation of change to personal biography

Alice's story indicates that the activation of capital enabled Alice to reflexively adjust her personal biography to imagine a future in HE. She recognised the conflicting nature of her identity as a "*family-oriented person*" and the new information she had that she was the type of person who would enjoy university. Alice imagined feelings of homesickness at university, which led her to a decision to live in Mount during the week and return home at weekends:

"I was initially going to travel every day from Beverley to Mount and that was not going to work, so they were like you can still come home at the weekends. ... which I need I think, it's just a bit more grounding and I get to see my boyfriend, otherwise

I'd miss him a lot. You kind of like need a bit of an anchor there and I think that would help."

As the quote suggests. Alice placed some limits on the extent to which she was willing to change; her story suggests that Mount was the only university she was willing to consider enabling her to travel home at weekends.

(c) Steph (WC-FG)

Social field of origin and transfer of family capital relevant to the social field of HE

Steph's mum works in a care home and her dad is a metalworker. She has a large, close extended family, which she describes as stupid but hardworking, "*...the rest of the family are builders and sheeters, so it's kind of like they don't need an actual education. ... I sometimes, I look at them and I honestly think, youse are ridiculously stupid.*" A summary of the ways in which Steph's aspirations changed over time, the important relationships and turning points in her life, and periods in which she accommodated change to her personal biography is included on the next page.

Steph's family considered secondary education as important but there was no expectation for HE and her mum opposed university as she considered it "*...a waste of money.*" Steph had low levels of confidence and expectation around HE, "*I've always got it in the back of my head that I'm also stupid.*" However, her story suggests that her parents instilled a work ethic, "*My mum and dad heavily influenced the fact that you need to work hard to get anywhere,*" and she enjoyed studying. Steph was bullied at school and suffered from depression; her story does not suggest that she was content in her social field of origin. Despite this she consciously rejected the imagined possibility of a career in business despite her unhappiness. The quote below demonstrates a conscious awareness

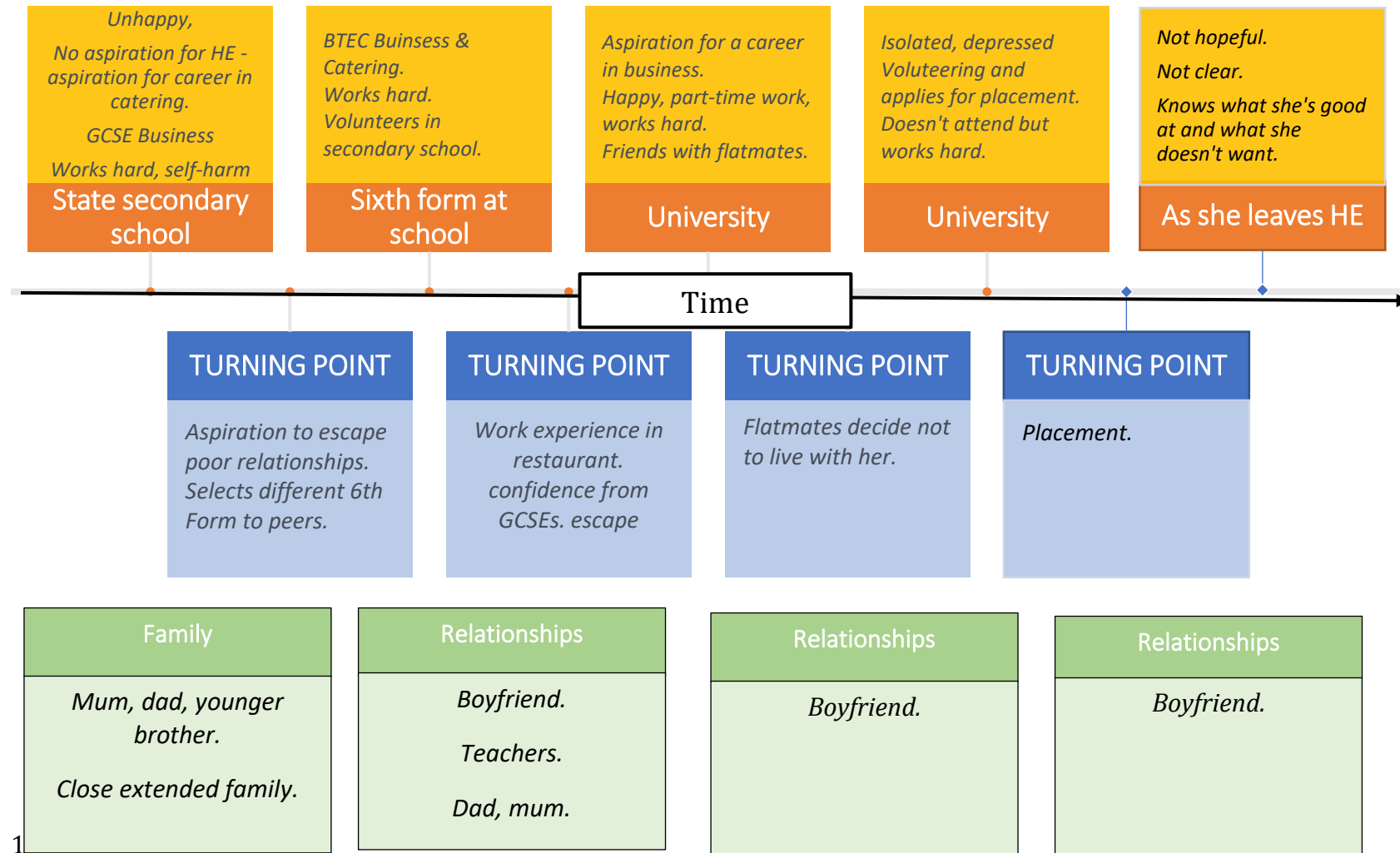
of a lack of cultural capital and of a lack of fit between Steph's own identity and her perception of the social requirements of the business world,

"So I never thought I'd fit into a business environment, which is probably what like pushed me more towards catering really, because I never thought I'd be clever enough to sit among people in a business environment, doing something important."

Instead, her initial aspirations were modest; she aspired to attend catering college and become a restaurant manager. Steph explained her aspiration for catering in the context of her personal biography as someone who "loved food" and who had happy memories of cooking with her Nana. Her story suggests that her close relationship with her Food Tech teacher enabled her to accumulate and activate informational, emotional and esteem support relevant to a career in catering. Steph's story therefore suggests that her capability to aspire was initially limited to her social field of origin and that she accumulated further capital relevant to that field. Whilst Steph was reflexive in the context of continuity of her personal biography, her preferences were adaptive, and her agency limited.

Steph

Figure 9: Summary of aspirations, turning points and relationships as they change through time (Steph).



Accumulation and conversion of capital relevant to the field of HE

Steph's unhappiness continued in sixth form, "...even at this point, I didn't have really much of a social life because I'd just go home and study and that's all I'd do." Although she continued to work hard, her emotions in relation to her academic work were mixed. She described how she "loved studying" but was "incredibly stressed" about it.

In dealing with her depression, Steph's story suggests that she relied on the emotional support of her sixth form teachers who offered a safe space and practical support. Once a week she volunteered as a classroom assistant at her secondary school and worked with a teacher with whom she had a close relationship. Steph described the importance of this support, "I enjoyed going back as well, it gave me a sense of purpose, it helped calm down things with like self-harm." In the context of the literature, Steph's painful emotions associated with social mobility while at school echo those in other studies. Reay (2002) and Ingram (2011) examined the emotional experiences of boys at school and explored the painful emotions of academically successful students as they moved between the social fields of the classroom, home, and their peer group. Steph's story suggests that her emotional difficulties and attitude to school facilitated the development of close relationship with her teachers.

Steph undertook a period of work experience in a restaurant and found she "hated it." This informational capital relevant to her chosen career seems to have opened Steph to the possibility of HE and the close relationship with her teachers enabled the accumulation of social capital relevant to HE. As detailed in Chapter 4, Steph's teachers provided informational, esteem and emotional support. Steph commented that she needed "...reassurance that I can actually go there, do you know what I mean? It was still that self-doubt, like, I cannot do uni, it's too clever, like it's for clever people and I'm not that

kind of person." Her teacher considered that university might enable a person like her to "*flower*" and personally recommended Mount. Steph's partner who occupied a slightly different position in social space provided further esteem support which encouraged her. When Steph said she would be happy working in a supermarket, her partner challenged this in the context of her identity, "*...no you need to stop being daft, you don't belong in a supermarket. If you do belong there, it's in management.*" Steph activated this social capital to develop an aspiration for HE.

The reflexive accommodation of change to personal biography

Steph's emotions played a part in the development of her aspiration for HE. Steph was unhappy in her social field of origin and when she explained her aspiration for university, she positioned it partially as an escape from her painful emotions in relation to her friendships, depression, and life in her hometown; explaining she "*...just wanted to be away.*" Steph's story suggests that did not have a clear imagined future at university and she commented she "*...had no clue —I still had no idea what I was actually doing and just knew I was coming to a new place to study Business.*" Steph contrasted this with an imagined future in her hometown:

"I would have been somewhere completely different. I would have already settled down and had a kid, do you know what I mean, like I'd have been working a supermarket job or something like that and been very unhappy, cos that's just the way of the world".

Steph deployed everyday reflexivity to evaluate the risk involved in going or staying, "*Like it wasn't — it was more of a risk to not come to uni, because I wasn't bettering myself in any way there.*" and explained, "*...if I don't go and end up staying, I'll end up stuck.*" Steph's story is like those of the working-class women in the Skeggs (1997) study who wish to "*improve*

upon their lives” but have “*less sense of what they want to be*” (p.82). It is also like the narratives of socially-mobile, middle-class women in Lawler’s (1999) study who wanted to “*get out and get away*” (p.12) and of the academically successful working-class students in Reay’s et al.’s (2009) study who felt that they did not fit in their social field of origin.

Steph was reflexive in the context of her personal biography and recognised the conflicting nature of her identity as a “*practical*” person who was not “*clever*” and the imagined requirements of the social field of HE. However, she activated emotional and esteem support, which suggested that there was a good fit between the “*type of person*” she was and the social field of HE. This enabled her to adjust her personal biography to accommodate the change. Her emotions and imagined emotions are integral to her reflexivity as her unhappiness and imagined future unhappiness in her social field of origin reduced the perceived risk of a move into the unknown and enabled her to develop an aspiration for HE.

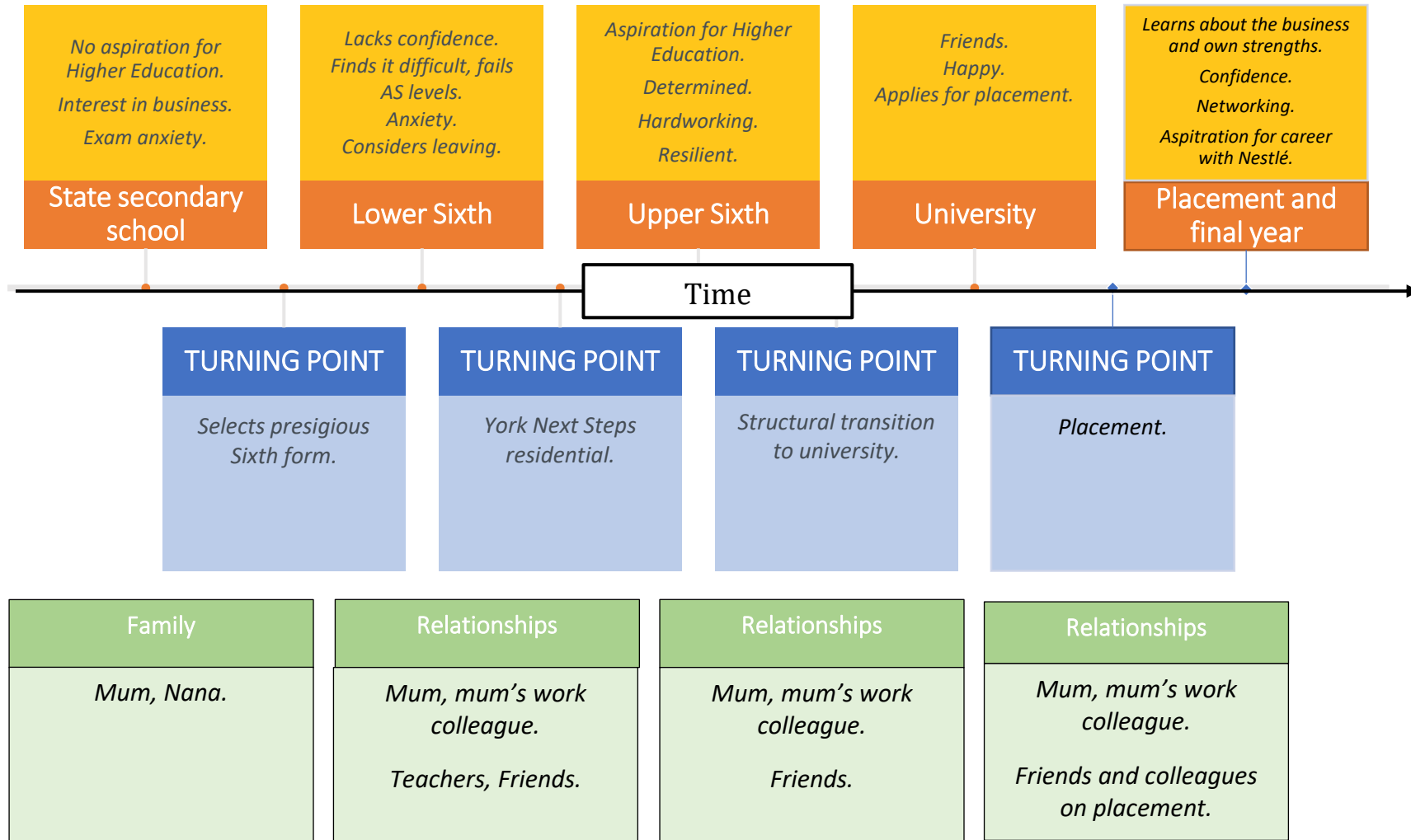
(d) Evie (WC-FG)

Social field of origin and transfer of family capital relevant to the social field of HE

Evie’s mum is a single parent and, whilst she is not a graduate, she is upwardly mobile and has worked full-time in Information Technology since Evie was born. She is a manager with graduates in her team. A summary of the ways in which Evie’s aspirations changed over time, the important relationships and turning points in her life, and periods in which she accommodated change to her personal biography is included on the next page. Chapter 4 provides evidence that the family experienced economic constraints but that her mum provided informational, esteem and emotional support relevant to the social fields of HE and graduate careers.

Evie

Figure 10: Summary of aspirations, turning points and relationships as they change through time (Evie).



Evie's story suggests that her mum considered education important, was a source of practical help, provided emotional and esteem support and instilled a work ethic in Evie. Whilst there was no family expectation for HE, Evie was encouraged to, "*consider everything.*" However, despite this support and encouragement, Evie considered herself average and had relatively low levels of confidence and expectation. Prior to her GCSEs she "*...felt like I'd be better off just going into a job. I always just thought oh, I've got a work ethic, I kinda wanna just work and earn money.*" She also described herself as content with an aspiration to remain in Hull, "*...like I just thought I don't wanna move away. I was like I'm content here.*" When Evie's GCSE results were better than expected her mum provided informational support relevant to the field of HE and field-relevant esteem support. Her mum commented that "*...these are really good results,*" and suggested Evie could "*...go on to college here.*" Her mum encouraged A levels rather than BTEC and was influential in the choice of college. Most of Evie's peers went to the local college which Evie considered "*more relaxed*" and "*less focused*" than the one Evie chose which was "*the best*" in the area. Evie described her visit to the college with her mum:

"And it came to doing the open days and I walked into Wyke, and it was like it felt really like — they're really focused and really academic, cos they try to make it like a university campus in there and I didn't realise it at the time, but now being in a campus, I realise what Wyke were trying to do. And it was really academic and my — you could see — my mum loved it, she was like, 'oh I can see you here.'"

Evie's mum transferred capital relevant to the social field of HE and whilst Evie considered a broad range of possible futures, HE was part of her aspiration set. Evie activated this capital to aspire to an academic sixth form and to study A levels. Evie's mum's comment that she "*can see*" Evie at the academic college speaks directly to Evie's

identity and the imagined good fit between Evie's habitus and the social field of an academic college. This may have required some adjustment of personal biography as Evie saw herself as "*average*" and initially aspired to work after school but in other respects fitted well with Evie's sense of herself as someone who worked hard and aspired to have "*choices*" in the future.

Accumulation and conversion of capital relevant to the field of HE

Evie moved to Wyke sixth form with a few people from school, "*So we became like really close, really close knit and got a really nice friendship.*" Despite this companionship support, Evie struggled with her confidence at college. She was reflexively aware of a lack of fit between the new social field of an academic college and her habitus, "*I thought oh maybe I'm not academic enough to be here and I thought oh maybe it's just not for me.*" She suffered from anxiety and considered leaving to take up an apprenticeship. This quote provides evidence of the painful emotions associated with social mobility. However, her story suggests that she was able to activate emotional and esteem support provided by her mum to enable her to stay at college, "*I spoke to my mum, she went, 'why don't you see how you do after your first year?' ... cos she went, 'you could — it could all turn round,' she was like, 'you haven't even give it much chance yet.'*"

In her first year at Wyke whilst "*giving it a chance*" Evie considered an apprenticeship on leaving college or the possibility of studying at Hull University. In the summer, she had the opportunity to attend the Mount University Next Steps programme. She felt she had "*...nothing to lose,*" and activated the esteem support of her mum who encouraged her to attend and the companionship support of her friends from college who attended the programme with her. As discussed in Chapter 4, the programme provided Evie with

informational support relevant to the social field of HE and her story suggests that she converted this social capital to cultural capital in terms of her confidence:

“And they kinda tret you like adults and I was like ah, this is — I was like I can deal with this, I quite like this. And then like seeing the kitchens and then we was — actually we was doing the lectures and things, and then it’s like kind of taking — you took your notes and they didn’t tell you what to do and I was like, oh this is — kinda got on board with it.”

The reflexive accommodation of change to personal biography

Evie activated this accumulated social and cultural capital to develop an aspiration for HE. Her story indicates that the activation of this social capital enabled her to reflexively adjust her personal biography to imagine a future at Mount. Evie did not consider herself academic and suffered from anxiety in her college. However, she felt that she could “*get on board*” and “*deal*” with university. “*I was like I can picture — I started to picture myself and started to feel a little bit like oh, this might be a good idea.*” Evie returned to upper sixth with a determination to secure a place at Mount: she reflected on how she “*...kept walking around in a Mount University hoody, cos I was like I’m motivated. I was like I really wanna get there.*” and therefore demonstrated her identification with the social field of HE.

Evie is not free of the influence of structure and her story suggests there are limits to the reflexive accommodation of change. Evie initially aspired to remain in Hull. However, her accumulated capital enabled her to reflexively adjust her personal biography to imagine a future in another area. However, she still aspired to remain close to her hometown and commented, “*I didn’t wanna move masses away from — like miles and miles away from my*

mum.” My analysis suggests that there were further limits on the extent to which she was able to reflexively accommodate change to her personal biography. Evie’s perception of Newcastle as elitist and her imagined emotions played a part in her reflexive rejection of a potential aspiration, *“I’m gonna be devastated and I didn’t wanna put myself out there for it, because I thought I’m probably not gonna get in, I’m probably not gonna achieve the grades.”* In contrast, she emphasised the relationships she had developed with student ambassadors and tutors at Mount and the supportive atmosphere; at an open day she was told, *“...we ease you into things by like making sure that you know how to write academically,”* and explained that she thought, *“oh they’re really supportive here. And I think I always felt like I belonged.”*

Evie’s story suggests that the extent to which change can be accommodated is partially dependent on the specific nature of capital accumulated and is partially dependent on the need to maintain important relationships. The quotes suggest that she had not accumulated sufficient capital in the form of confidence to aspire to an institution which she perceived to be elitist. In contrast, the social capital accumulated on the Next Steps programme appears to have addressed her concerns about HE and built her confidence.

5.2.3 Similarities and differences in participant stories relating to the reflexive accommodation of change to personal biography in the development of an aspiration for HE

My analysis suggests that the accumulation and activation of capital enhance the capability to aspire. The activation of accumulated capital appears to have enabled participants to reflexively accommodate changes to their personal biographies beyond their social fields of origin although there were limits to the extent to which change could be reflexively accommodated. As Hart (2012) suggests, capital acted as a conversion

factor in the development of the capability to aspire and enhanced participant agency by expanding aspiration sets and enhancing the freedom to aspire.

My analysis suggests that participants did not have sufficient family capital to develop an imagined future in HE and the accumulation and subsequent activation of capital from outside the family facilitated the development of an aspiration for HE. This capital was provided by individuals with whom participants had developed a relationship. The analysis above also suggests it is not just the provision of informational support that facilitates aspiration development but the emotional, esteem or companionship support, which accompanies the provision of information. These findings are consistent with those in the literature and are commented on in Chapter 4. However, the analysis above provides new insight into the ways in which emotional and esteem support enhance the capability to aspire. For Alice and Steph, esteem support provided them with reassurance that they were the “type of person” that would enjoy HE. The support provided therefore spoke directly to their perception of their personal biography and helped to alleviate painful emotions or imagined painful emotions associated with social mobility. In Evie’s case, companionship support on Summer School enabled her to develop a sense of belonging in relation to her imagined future in HE.

Participant stories provide evidence that, as Burkitt (2012) suggests, emotions and relationships can both motivate reflexive thought and provide the basis for reflexive thought; the analysis above suggests that reflexivity often relates to how participants felt about other people. In Steph’s case, reflexivity was partially a response to the painful emotions she experienced in her existing social field and her imagined future within that social field. In contrast, Alice and Evie were content in their social field of origin and their reflexivity concerned their imagined painful emotions on leaving that field. As Hart

(2016) suggests, whilst individuals may aspire to continuity and contentment this is not always possible. However, the analysis above suggests that whilst painful emotions do have a role to play in stimulating reflexivity and the accommodation of change to personal biography this is not a given. Steph's story suggests that both the availability of emotional and esteem support to alleviate painful emotions, and informational support to facilitate the development of an alternative imagined future, are important to the development of aspiration. Painful emotions have the potential both to enhance and limit the capability to aspire and the analysis suggests that the combination of capital and emotion is important to the enhancement of agency.

My findings are more complex as they relate to the extent to which reflexivity acts as a conversion factor in the development of the capability to aspire and therefore enhances student agency. As discussed above, the process of choice making or by extension aspiration development is important in itself; the reasoned evaluation implied by reflexivity in the context of personal biography therefore suggests greater process freedom in the development of the capability to aspire when compared to aspiration development without consciousness. My analysis also suggests that reflexivity acted as a conversion factor in the development of the capability to aspire and enhanced participant agency by expanding aspiration sets; participants activated accumulated capital to reflexively accommodate change to personal biography. However, reflexivity in the context of personal biography can also place limits on the extent of this change. The analysis above suggests that imagined emotions and the importance of relationships may lead participants to place limits on the extent of change they are prepared to accept; evidence of the slowing of social mobility observed by Friedman (2016). As Bridges

(2006) suggests preference is always adaptive and formed from a position shaped by structure.

5.3 Aspiration for career

5.3.1 Introduction

I selected three final-year participants to examine the development of career aspirations. I chose these participants as the availability of family capital, the opportunities to accumulate further capital and their emotions in relation to the social field of graduate career differed. Their experiences provide insight into the different ways in which family capital, emotion, the accumulation of further capital, and reflexivity influence the development of an aspiration for a graduate career.

5.3.2 Thalia

(a) Social field of origin and transfer of family capital relevant to the social field of graduate career

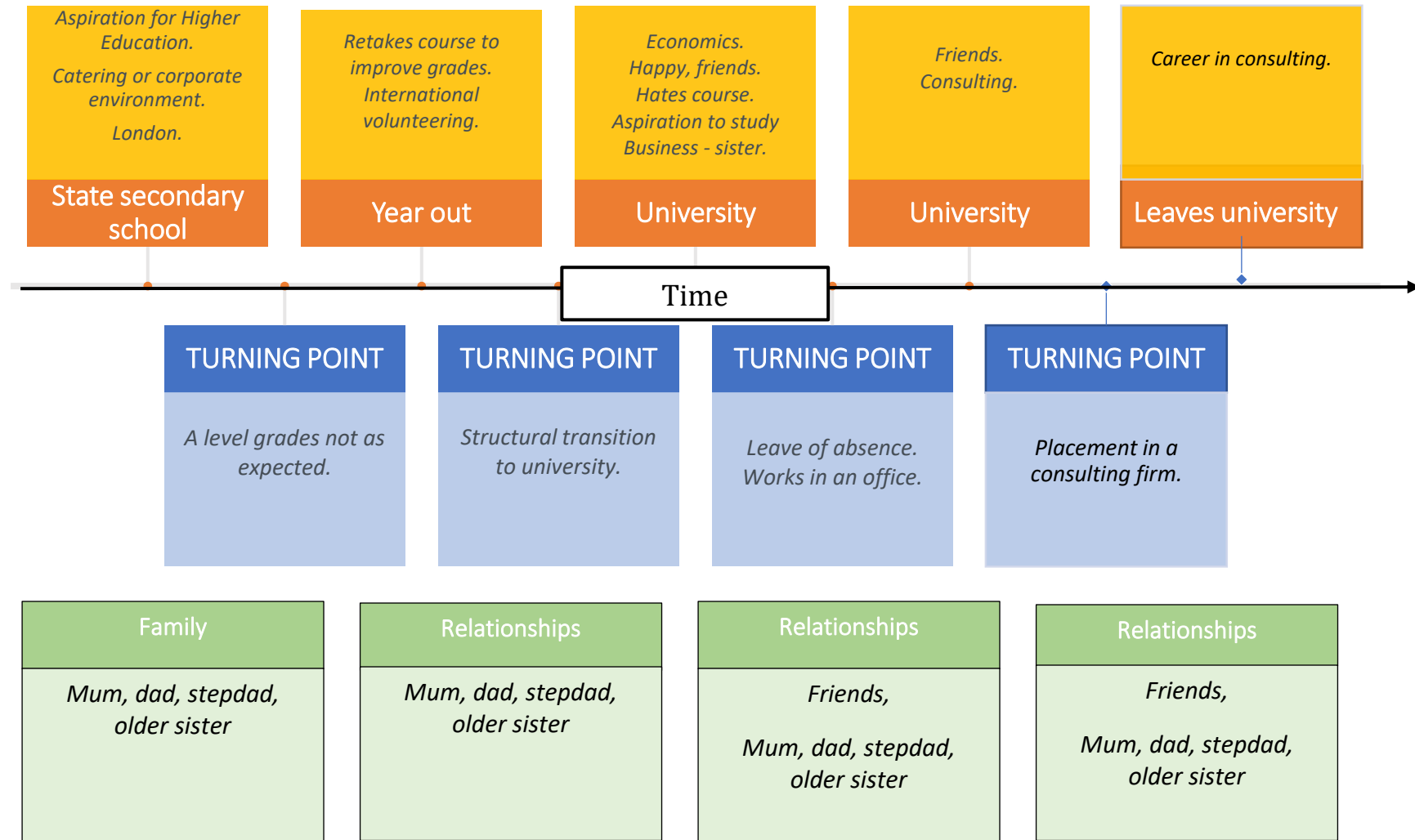
Thalia is from London and her parents both worked in senior positions in a corporate environment. A summary of the ways in which Thalia's aspirations changed over time, the important relationships and turning points in her life, and periods in which she accommodated change to her personal biography is included on the next page. Her parents provided informational support relevant to the social field of a graduate career informally, by enabling Thalia to undertake work experience in a corporate environment and by guiding her away from the less desirable alternative of a career in catering. Thalia's sister also provided career-relevant social capital; she was undertaking a placement at Bath University, and this was influential in Thalia's decision to undertake a placement. As discussed in Chapter 4, Thalia had also been able to build cultural capital relevant to the field of graduate career in undertaking a period of voluntary work

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overseas and had high levels of expectation and confidence in relation to her career, *“I do like a corporate environment and I like the idea of doing that, but only if I was like very senior.”* Although Thalia suggested, she had *“no clue”* as to possible career paths before coming to Mount, her social field of origin indicates that a natural trajectory might include a future in a corporate environment.

Thalia

Figure 11: Summary of aspirations, turning points and relationships as they change through time (Thalia).



(b) Accumulation and conversion of capital relevant to graduate career

In Chapter 4, I described how middle-class participants were able to convert cultural capital to social capital in the form of a network of friends at university. This enabled Thalia to accumulate further capital relevant to the fields of graduate career and work placement. Thalia's story provides evidence of a collective influential process, which Reay et al. (2005) describe in relation to the development of aspirations for HE but is evident here in the development of aspiration for graduate career. Thalia's friends provided informational support around alternative careers and generalised emotional support as they completed applications and prepared for interviews together. Thalia's work placement enabled the accumulation of further cultural capital (confidence and expectations relating to graduate careers) and informational capital (the nature of a career in consulting and Thalia's own strengths and preferences). Her story suggests that the activation of this capital enabled Thalia to develop an imagined future in a corporate environment and enhanced her capability to aspire.

(c) Reflexivity

Reflexivity in the context of personal biography

A future in a corporate environment is a trajectory consistent with Thalia's social field of origin. She accumulated and activated further capital relevant to this social field to develop an aspiration for a career in consulting however her personal biography did not require adjustment. She explained, "*...both my parents, well my mum and my stepdad, work for massive companies doing like quite high-powered jobs, and I do like that environment, like I do like a corporate environment, and I like the idea of doing that.*" Thalia reflexively positioned her aspiration to work in a corporate environment in the context of continuity of personal biography. This is like Burke's (2015a) participants, who consciously

recognise a good fit between habitus and field in the context of their own career aspirations and their parents' career histories.

However, as Hart (2012) suggests, young people may hold many aspirations simultaneously and Thalia aspired to a career in catering, in the longer term, "*...ten years doing like a normal office job, then maybe one day if I'd like settled down and have money in the bank, I would like open up, I don't know, a restaurant or a cafe or a bar.*" She could not imagine a long-term future in a corporate environment:

"I never have been able to picture myself at like 50 or 60 and still going into the office every day. Like I dunno, I don't know why, but — and obviously yeah, just cos I love food, I love cooking, I love baking, it's always just seemed like a natural progression."

Thalia was reflexive in the context of her personal biography in terms of someone who had always had an interest in and was passionate about cooking; she developed this aspiration in the context of her imagined emotions in relation to a career in catering and informational capital relating to the nature of a career working in catering; she frequently mentioned her love of cooking. The terms she uses highlight continuity; this was a "*...natural progression.*" However, in the short term, she did not consider it a suitable imagined future. This appears to be because of her expectations around salary created in her social field of origin; she does not consider it to be a well-paid career.

Everyday reflexivity

As Crossley (2001) and Sweetman (2003) suggest, the conditions of late modernity, which include changing career trajectories and greater insecurity, necessitate everyday reflexivity even if an individual aspires to a future within their social field of origin. Thalia's social capital enabled her to develop an imagined future in consulting and in a

similar way to Atkinson's (2010) participants she analysed the past and engaged in negotiation and planning to consider what was best for her. Thalia enjoyed her role in the strategy team and compared this experience to that in the technology consulting team. This comparison was possible as Thalia was able to activate the informational capital, accumulated on work placement. She imagined living in London, *"I really like London and my parents live in Surrey, so it's nice having people close by. My sister lives in London, all of my friends live in London."* Her emotions and relationships were part of this analysis. However, she also activated informational capital about the cost of living in London and in the short term rejected a career in catering, *"I think choosing to do something that isn't well paid is probably just not sensible, it's so expensive and I would like to stay in London."* Her story therefore suggests that she compared and evaluated alternative futures in the context of her preferences and that this enhanced her capability to aspire.

5.3.3 Evie

(a) Social field of origin and transfer of family capital relevant to the social field of graduate career

Evie occupied a slightly different position in social space to other working-class participants as her mum worked in a corporate environment (see page 197 for details). Her mum's ability to utilise her connections at work enabled the accumulation of informational support relating to a graduate career. For example, what Evie might expect in terms of salary, the value of A levels compared to alternative qualifications and the value of a placement year. In advocating a placement year her mum explained, *"...it's a really, really good idea to do it, because it gets your face known and gives you a good insight before you get a graduate job."* As discussed in Chapter 4, Evie's mum also provided her with emotional and esteem support and her story suggests that she converted this support into cultural capital in the form of a work ethic and resilience.

(b) Accumulation and conversion of capital relevant to graduate career

In Chapter 4, I described how Evie was happy and had a good network of friends at university. She applied for placements and graduate roles alongside others and compared her experiences on placement to those of her friends. Friends at university therefore provided informational support relevant to graduate careers alongside generalised emotional and esteem support. Her experience was like the middle-class participants in my study as she had the opportunity to make friends on the Next Steps programme.

As discussed in Chapter 4, Evie was also able to accumulate further field-relevant capital from two other sources: her mum's broader network at work and the placement itself. Evie's story suggests that her placement enabled the accumulation of social and cultural capital in two ways; the experience of working in a corporate environment and the participation in new networks of friends and colleagues. Work experience improved Evie's confidence relating to graduate careers and enabled her to accumulate career-related informational capital (the nature of a career at Nestlé and knowledge of her own strengths and preferences). As discussed in Chapter 4, Evie's colleagues provided emotional support when she was suffering from anxiety, esteem support in terms of positive feedback on her strengths as a "people person" and encouraged her to take opportunities. Evie activated her family social capital and accumulated social capital to develop her career aspirations.

(c) Reflexivity

The reflexive accommodation of change to personal biography

This section considers two aspects of the accommodation of change to Evie's personal biography; her willingness to consider further relocation and her willingness to proactively network and seek opportunities for development. These aspects of change enhanced Evie's capability to aspire by including new opportunities in her aspiration set.

When Evie started university, she saw herself as a person who wanted to be close to home. Her story indicates that the accumulation and activation of social capital provided by friends on placement enabled Evie to reflexively adjust her personal biography to imagine a future away from Hull, *"I never thought I would move away from Hull for a job and now I'm looking at like London for a year with the Nestlé grad scheme."* Evie described how her outlook changed, initially because of the experience of being away from home at university and then whilst on placement:

"I wasn't going home as often and I thought I'm fine, like I'm doing alright on my own. And I kinda was getting more mature and I was like — I felt more independent. And I thought I could make this work and I've got — actually, the more I think about it, the more like I've got nothing holding me back. I've got no commitments, other than family, which they're always gonna be there, it's not as if I'm gonna lose them if I travel far away, I can still come up and see them, cos they'll stand by me no matter what. I've got like friends that I'm — I don't know where they're gonna be, so I was like I might as well push myself."

Evie was reflexively aware of the changes to her personal biography and of her feelings of being *"fine."* She contrasted these feelings to how she felt when she stayed in Mount to work in the Christmas of her first year, *"I hated it, like I was like I wanna go home all the time, like I really missed my family."* The quotes provide evidence of the role Evie's emotions and imagined emotions play in the accommodation of change to personal biography, how painful emotions lessened, and the way in which her personal biography gradually adjusted over time. The quote provides evidence that Evie could imagine an alternative future partly because she was confident that her family and friends would remain a source of companionship support and were *"there"*. Her story suggests that she initially set limits on the extent to which she was willing to change by excluding

aspirations that might involve relocation from her aspiration set. The availability of social capital and the ability to adapt over time enabled her to reflexively adjust her personal biography.

Evie reflexively perceived changes in her personal biography in other ways for example, her confidence and willingness to seize opportunities improved as she activated the esteem, emotional and companionship support provided by colleagues and friends. She was proactive in seeking shadowing opportunities and in networking when the opportunity arose:

“... because it kind of made me put myself out there ...I would have never of gone up to people and I was going, ‘hi, I’m Evie, I’m the finance placement,’ and I’d never done that in my life, I’ve never had that confidence. But I didn’t care, I was like, you know what, this is my one chance to do it, and everybody was all in one place. And it got to that point where I was quite happy to kind of put myself out there.”

This quote illustrates the ways in which Evie was reflexively aware that she adjusted her behaviour to meet the requirements of the new social field. However, it also suggests reflexivity in the context of personal biography as Evie’s sense of herself changed; she began to see herself as a confident person willing to seize opportunity and contrasted this with how she would have felt prior to the accumulation of capital.

However, Evie is not free of the influence of structure and her story provides evidence of a reflexive perception of a poor fit between her habitus and some graduate careers. Her story suggests that she values a supportive, informal environment. This is evident both in how she felt about Nestlé and about an alternative imagined future in a large accounting firm, *“I’d probably look stupid, I’d probably be judged, I just feel like that wouldn’t be my environment”* and *“...because it’s so highly competitive, I feel like I’d be*

surrounded by people who are up here, and I'd be down here." This is similar to the way in which Reay et al. 's (2005) working-class participants feel about their imagined future at an élite university when compared to one at a less prestigious institution. There was a conscious recognition of a lack of fit between habitus and field and this suggests that Evie made as much change as her capital would allow at that time. Like Friedman's (2015) socially-mobile participants, Evie consciously recognised that she did not have sufficient capital in terms of confidence to aspire to a future in a "competitive" environment. In contrast, Evie commented on the good fit with Nestlé culture starting with the assessment centre:

"... but the way they spoke to you, they was like — they didn't try and put you under loads of pressure, they tried to make you as relaxed as possible, cos they realised that's how you get the best results. But that's kind of what the company's like as a whole, cos it's quite casual, like it's casual dress code, flexible working, they try to make it as much as what the company is like as possible, so it kind of fit me."

Evie consciously recognised the reasons for her actions and the perceived good fit between her habitus and Nestlé and the perceived poor fit with a large accounting firm. Morrison (2014) provides evidence of the importance of a sense of belonging and fit in relation to career aspiration and Rivera's (2011) US study suggests that élite employers structure opportunities to privilege those from certain classes and to exclude others. Evie's experience is consistent with these findings.

Everyday reflexivity

Evie's work experience and her increased willingness to seize opportunities to gain an insight into the business enabled her to develop a clear imagined future at Nestlé. She

was interviewed for a graduate role but was offered an entry-level position on a lower salary as Nestlé had withdrawn their graduate finance scheme. In a similar way to Atkinson's (2010) participants she analysed the past and engaged in negotiation and planning to consider what was best for her. She activated the broad range of social capital available to her based on her own experience, the experiences of her peers, her mum's experience of working with graduates and informational support relating to careers in accountancy provided by her mum's colleague. Evie valued the supportive culture and informal environment at Nestlé, she evaluated the benefits of this alongside the implications of a lower salary and her perceptions of the costs of seeking employment elsewhere. However, emotion and practical consciousness also played a part in the decision:

"I wrote the pros and cons list, but I still had kind of made my decision. And every time I spoke about the job, I was like — I spoke about it like I'd accepted it, so I was like oh, I keep thinking — I was like my decision's kind of been made."

The way Evie refers to the decision suggests it has been made sub-consciously. However, she also engaged in rational evaluation by making a list of pros and cons, perhaps to justify her choice.

5.3.4 Steph

(a) Social field of origin and transfer of family capital relevant to the social field of graduate career

Steph referred to her close, supportive, caring family on multiple occasions. Her mum works in a care home and cares for elderly relatives. Steph sees herself as "*nurturing*" and as a mother figure to her friends. In Chapter 4, I included Steph's description of her lack of knowledge of a career in business and her knowledge of a career as a carer or a metalworker.

(b) Accumulation and conversion of capital

In Chapter 4, I referred to the difficulties Steph experienced socially in both her first and second year at university. Her story suggests that her experience of HE was painful, and feelings of depression and anxiety resurfaced. As Friedman (2016) suggests, this may be attributable to the distance between her social field of origin and that of the new social field of a Russell Group university. She reflected on life in her student flat as a second year, *“Nobody ever spoke. I tried to be all friendly, and I actually ended up with quite a severe bout of depression.”* Steph summed up her experience of HE as follows, *“Like I’ve had a really bad four years really, like overall it’s just been — there’s been more negative than positive when you put it all together.”* Steph’s story suggests therefore that she had few opportunities to accumulate informational and companionship support from her peers to support the development of aspirations for graduate career or placements.

As discussed in Chapter 4, Steph’s placement year, her part-time job and experience of volunteering enabled her to accumulate cultural capital (confidence relating to and knowledge of, her abilities) and informational capital (the nature of a family business). Whilst her story suggests that she was able to activate this capital to develop her aspirations, she did not make friends whilst on placement and therefore did not have the opportunity to accumulate social capital in the form of companionship, emotional or esteem support.

(c) Reflexivity

Reflexivity in the context of personal biography and behaviour as the foci of reflexivity

Steph’s story suggests that she saw herself as different from her peers and was critical of her own behaviour. In commenting on some of the social difficulties she experienced Steph was reflexive about her behaviour and speculated that she might, *“...have come on*

as too much of a strong personality,” and commented that, *“I think I was just overbearing.”* This suggests that Steph’s experience of HE may have further damaged her confidence. When describing friends at university, there is a sense of inferiority and difference. She described a friend on her course as follows, *“...she was like one of the top of the class kind of kids and she very much hung around with — still, I’d still say they were the popular kids, they were the ones that were doing really well.”* Steph felt that after second year the friendship *“drifted,”* as they were, *“too different.”* In the following quote, she outlined the differences between her and one of her final-year flatmates:

“...the brows and the lashes and fake tan. And she works for [beauty bar in Topshop] and I work in Savers. ... — she’s fantastic and I love her, but she is a whole other world from me ... when she talks about things like in her everyday life, it’s kind of like I’ve never experienced that.”

Her other flatmate is *“...an electronic engineer. Very clever with Maths, she does it like that, honestly she’s phenomenal.”* Both flatmates had applied for graduate jobs or postgraduate study and Steph was self-critical about her own attempts to secure a graduate career explaining, *“...it’s my own fault.”* Steph was reflexively aware of the difference between her personal biography and that of her friends and of her own behaviours and those of her friends and this appears to have led to self-criticism. Steph was not critical of class structures nor of her lack of opportunity but of herself. Her comments echo those of the women in Lawler’s (1999) study of the socially mobile who are reflexively aware of the difference between the behavioural requirements of a new social field and those of their social field of origin. Reflexivity on her own behaviour, and a sense of inferiority may have limited Steph’s capability to aspire by damaging her confidence.

When I asked Steph about her aspirations for career, she was reflexively aware of the difference between her personal biography and her social field of origin:

“So, coming to uni gave me that kind of — it’d be wrong to say you’re better than this, but I think that’s probably what it is, you’re better than that, like you can do better for yourself than just be stuck at like minimum wage.”

She commented that, *“I just don’t wanna go back. Like I can deal with going back for a week or two weeks, but I find even then I struggle... Like I don’t really fit back into that family dynamic very well.”* This is like the narratives of *“getting out”* in Lawler’s (1999, p.12) study of socially-mobile, working-class women and of Reay et al.’s (2009) study of students at an élite university, who are aware of the differences between themselves and their families or friends.

However, despite the changes to her personal biography, my analysis suggests that Steph was reflexively aware of the ways in which her social field of origin and her emotions influenced her aspirations. Steph saw herself as a person who wanted to nurture and care for people and had a reflexive understanding of the way this influenced her aspirations, *“...being someone that can help a company or a direction or a person, just change direction or find a fault and fix it for them. I’m very much — I think it’s because I’m very nurturing.”* and *“Yeah. I love to see growth as well and I think that’s the only thing about people management I enjoy, like I love seeing people grow and flower and develop.”* These quotes position Steph’s aspirations in the context of her own understanding of herself as a *“nurturing person.”* My analysis suggests that she activated family capital in the development of her aspirations and there is evidence of working-class, gendered discourses of care (Skeggs, 1997) and a desire to give something back (Reay, 2003). There is evidence that what she could cope with emotionally and what she was looking for emotionally also influenced her aspirations,

“Yeah, I just want a place where I can be content and enjoy the job that I’m doing and the people around me. So like overall happiness is something you just can’t —

you can't fault, you have to have that I think, like for me I do. And ... I really need a routine, because I find I function better as a person when I've got routine."

Steph was reflexive about depression as part of her personal biography; she felt she needed to "*function*" and stressed the importance of happiness. In the following quote she shared what she feels she learned because of the painful emotions she experienced whilst on placement and at university, "*I've very much learnt that if I'm not happy, I can just move on. There's no point staking that. I don't get very many moments of happiness in this life, so I'm not gonna waste it.*" Her story suggests that her aspirations were modest, "*...as long as I'm financially stable and I'm quite happy and I've got enough to live off, I'd do with that little bit extra to like go for a drink every week or something like that, then I'd be happy.*" Steph's aspirations are influenced both by capital acquired in her social field of origin and by her new experiences at university and my analysis suggests that there are limits to the extent of change she is willing or able to accommodate.

Everyday reflexivity

Steph activated the informational capital she had gained on placement about family businesses and the nature of work in an office to be reflexive about what was best for her in terms of her own preferences. She explained how she enjoyed feedback and a sense of her own progression, "*I love having a goal, I love having a timeline. Anything with a task and improvement, moving forward's great.*" It was also important to Steph that she continue to meet her care obligations to her family, "*Like I need to know that I can be there within an hour, two, three at the most if anything were to go wrong.*"

Steph's placement provided her with information about what she did not want to do. However, there is little evidence of strategic planning in Steph's story as this necessitates a clear imagined future. Instead, Steph commented:

“I just want a job so I can work somewhere — so I think I need some more experience and some more insight before I say, ‘yeah that’s definitely me,’ or ‘that’s what I need to do, what I want to do.’ I think at 22 I’m still quite young to have a — I know a lot of people are going out there right now with like an ideal path in mind and things like that, but I’m really struggling with that and I think it’s because I don’t have that kind of influence at this level.”

Steph’s story suggests that she can weigh up alternatives and give reasons for her choices in a general sense but that she accumulated insufficient capital to enable her to undertake a detailed evaluation of alternative careers.

5.3.5 Similarities and differences in participant stories relating to the development of aspirations for graduate careers

In contrast to the development of aspirations for HE, participant provided little evidence to suggest that career aspirations were developed at the level of practical consciousness. Instead, they provided a wealth of evidence suggesting that participants are reflexive, that the focus of such reflexivity varies and that it has the potential both to limit and to enhance the capability to aspire. This was consistent with my expectations based on the literature, which suggests that rapid change in society which characterises late modernity extends the role of reflexivity (Giddens, 1991; Beck, 1992; Lash, 1999; Archer, 2012).

The analysis provides further evidence that capital is a conversion factor in the development of the capability to aspire. Thalia and Evie both had career-relevant family capital which was not available to Steph. Both Thalia and Evie were also able to accumulate and activate further social capital relating to the field of graduate career whilst at university and on placement. In Thalia’s case the activation of capital enabled her to position her career aspirations in the context of continuity of her personal biography and in Evie’s this enabled reflexive adjustment of personal biography. Steph’s

experience at university and on placement was very different; she did not develop close relationships and her capital accumulation was more limited. Her story suggests that this limited her ability to build cultural capital in the form of enhanced confidence and to adjust her personal biography to accommodate change.

Participant stories provide evidence that, as Burkitt (2012) suggests, emotions and relationships can both motivate reflexive thought and provide the basis for reflexive thought. My analysis indicates that reflexivity often relates to how participants felt about other people and the world. Whilst Thalia had a sense of expectation and confidence in relation to the development of aspirations for graduate career, Steph and Evie's stories suggested that they lacked confidence and that as a result some imagined futures engendered painful emotions. In Evie's case the accumulation and activation of emotional, esteem and companionship support enabled her to reflexively accommodate change to her personal biography, enhanced her capability to aspire and her individual agency. In contrast, Steph's story suggests that if this capital is not available change may be limited and individuals may activate family capital to support aspiration development. Painful emotions have the potential both to enhance the capability to aspire by providing a stimulus for change and to limit the capability to aspire; my analysis suggests that the combination of capital and emotion is important to the enhancement of agency.

Participant stories suggest that the accumulation and activation of informational support is particularly important to everyday reflexivity. Steph, Evie, and Thalia used the information they had about graduate careers to evaluate their options. Whilst Evie and Thalia were able to undertake detailed evaluations based on the rich sources of accumulated information, Steph's story suggests that her evaluation was more general and that she had not accumulated sufficient capital to clearly imagine and evaluate alternative futures.

The stories of these participants confirm my findings above that reflexivity can act as a positive conversion factor in the development of the capability to aspire but that this is not always the case. As discussed in Chapter 1, page 37 the process of choice making or by extension aspiration development is important in itself; the reasoned evaluation implied by reflexivity in the context of personal biography therefore suggests greater freedom in the development of the capability to aspire when compared to aspiration development without consciousness. However, reflexivity in the context of personal biography can be used to justify the rejection of possible imagined futures outside an individual's social field of origin and my findings suggest that this reflexivity often relates to important relationships and painful emotions or imagined painful emotions. This provides further evidence of the slowing of social mobility observed by Friedman (2016) and confirms the findings above that preference is always adaptive and formed from a position shared by structure.

5.4 Overall conclusions

The stories of participants whose parents had attended university suggest that potential aspirations from outside their field of origin are not visible to them as they accumulate and activate capital relevant to their existing social field. The accumulation of capital may therefore add aspirations to the aspiration set but within the confines of their social field of origin. Participant stories therefore suggested that, whilst preferences were adaptive and aspirations limited to social field of origin, the accumulation, conversion and activation of capital enhanced individual agency and the capability to aspire within that social field.

In terms of levels of consciousness, participants whose parents had attended university developed aspirations at the level of practical consciousness or reflexively positioned

their aspiration in the context of continuity of their personal biography. Their stories did not suggest the reflexive accommodation of change to personal biography and painful emotions were not prevalent as they moved through school and HE. To an extent, this was expected, as I selected participants from a Russell Group university, a social field which was a good fit with the personal biographies of my middle-class participants whose parents had attended university.

My analysis of participant stories suggested that social mobility can be a painful experience or an imagined painful experience, if participants lack capital relevant to the new social field. This emotion can stimulate reflexivity in the context of personal biography to justify the status quo. A lack of capital can limit the visibility of potential options but can also lead to the reflexive rejection of options and a slowing of social mobility in order to avoid painful emotion. Participants accumulated capital from those with whom they had a close relationship, accumulation was gradual and therefore there is evidence to suggest that participants attempted to match their social mobility with available capital. If sufficient informational capital is available to enable an option to be visible, and sufficient companionship, emotional and esteem support is available to build cultural capital and to mitigate the potential painful emotion, individuals may be able to reflexively accommodate change to their personal biography and move to a new social field. The ability to accumulate social capital of all types is therefore key to the development of the capability to aspire and the enhancement of individual agency. Participant stories suggest that without sufficient capital, reflexivity does not have the potential to enhance agency in the sense of broadening the aspiration set. However, the presence of reflexivity is an important indicator of agency in itself.

Chapter 6: Conclusions and implications

6.1 Introduction

This chapter presents my conclusions, outlines the implications of my work, and makes recommendations for the sector, the Russell Group and my own institution. It also sets out the scope for further research in aspiration development.

6.2 Conclusions

The preceding two chapters present a nuanced account of the differences in capital available to students from different class backgrounds and considers the ways in which participants developed their aspirations. This enabled me to consider both the extent of student agency and the factors affecting student agency in the development of the capability to aspire. My analysis suggests that there are class differences in the family capital available to participants relevant to the social fields of HE and graduate careers. First-generation participants had lower levels of family cultural and social capital relevant to the social field of HE and as a result were more reliant on social capital from outside the family than participants whose parents had attended university. Participants who had more family capital relevant to the development of an aspiration for HE had a richer range of visible options relating to HE than those who did not, but seemed unaware of options outside the social field of HE. Lower levels of economic and cultural capital available to working participants upon entry to university had a negative impact on the size and strength of social networks relevant to the development of aspirations for graduate career. Participant stories suggest that students from all backgrounds find their social networks at university and, where relevant on work placement, important to the development of the capability to aspire to graduate careers.

In considering the extent of participant agency in the development of the capability to aspire, my findings suggest that preferences are influenced by structure. As Bridges (2006) suggests, preferences are therefore adaptive and individual agency limited. The extent of this limitation differed across participants. In the development of aspirations for HE middle-class participants – whose parents had attended university – aspired within their social field of origin and did not include aspirations from beyond that field in their aspiration set; they expected to go to university and went to university largely without considering alternatives. In contrast, first-generation participants were aware of a broader range of options both within and outside their social field of origin: HE and alternatives to HE. However, they did not have the same range of potential HE options as participants whose parents had gone to university. There were therefore subtle class differences in agency in terms of the size of participant aspiration sets. In the context of a freedom to aspire, participant stories suggest that the agency of participants whose parents had attended university was limited by structure. The aspirations of first-generation participants were also subject to structural limitations but the extent of this varied, depending on their exact position in social space and the opportunities they had to accumulate capital relevant to the development of an aspiration for HE.

Capital, emotions and the presence of or absence of reflexivity influence the extent of participant agency in the development of the capability to aspire. My findings confirm those in the literature that capital is a positive conversion factor in the development of the capability to aspire. In contrast, reflexivity in the context of personal biography can be a positive or a negative conversion factor. It is positive when it is used to enable an individual to adjust their sense of self and expand the range of aspirations in their

aspiration set beyond their social field of origin. It is negative when it is used to justify the status-quo and reinforce structural limitations.

My analysis of participant stories suggested that social mobility can be a painful experience or an imagined painful experience if participants lack capital relevant to the new social field. This emotion can stimulate reflexivity in the context of personal biography to justify the status quo. A lack of capital can limit the visibility of potential options but can also lead to the reflexive rejection of options and a slowing of social mobility to avoid painful emotion. Participant stories suggest capital is accumulated in relationships and therefore the availability of social capital is particularly important to the development of aspirations beyond social field of origin. This accumulation is a slow process and therefore individuals attempt to match their social mobility with available capital. If sufficient informational capital is available to enable an option to be visible and sufficient companionship, emotional and esteem support is available to build cultural capital and to mitigate the potential painful emotion, individuals may be able to reflexively accommodate change to their personal biography and move to a new social field. The ability to accumulate social capital of all types is therefore key to the development of the capability to aspire and the enhancement of individual agency.

My conclusions suggest that the differences in social capital available to participants from different class backgrounds whilst at university are important to understanding differentials in career trajectories. For students from working-class backgrounds the broader university experience is therefore important to the development of the capability to aspire. Social capital accumulated as part of career-relevant work experience is important to the development of the capability to aspire for participants from all class backgrounds and opportunities for reflexivity enhance student agency. However, such

reflexivity may not always result in an enhancement of the capability to aspire by broadening the aspiration set.

6.3 Implications and recommendations

6.3.1 Introduction

The implications of my study focus on the ways in which the sector, the Russell Group and my own institution, can help students to develop their capability to aspire. I considered these implications in the context of the class differences I observed and summarised. However, I also considered ways in which my own institution might enrich opportunities for career-related work experience and facilitate reflexivity in the context of personal biography for students from all backgrounds.

6.3.2 Sector

(a) Introduction

In considering the implications of my study at a sectoral level, I am aware that this is a small-scale study drawing on the lives of a small number of working- and middle-class students studying in HE. However, participant stories mirror those found in much larger-scale studies, which are not focused on aspiration and career (Coulson et al., 2018; Reay, 2018b). In examining the sector, I included relevant legislation but also examined guidance and best practice reports produced by the following bodies: the Office for Students, the UK Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA), Universities UK and Advance HE. The Office for Students and the QAA are responsible for the regulation and monitoring of HE, whilst Universities UK represents the interests of the sector and Advance HE seeks to work with HE institutions to improve the sector.

(b) A deficit view and the failure to focus on class as a site of inequality

Class¹⁷ is not a protected characteristic covered by UK equality legislation (Equality Act, 2010); however, the literature (Coulson et al., 2018) and participant stories provide evidence of class-based inequality in HE. The growing economic inequality in UK society (Piketty, 2014) and broader evidence of class-based inequality (Pattison and Warren, 2018) suggests that the protected characteristics should incorporate class.

As a consequence, HE legislation, policy and guidance fail to refer to class as a site of potential discrimination or inequality. *The National Strategy for Student Access and Success in Higher Education* (Department for Business Innovation and Skills, 2014), associated Policy (Explanatory Memorandum to the Higher Education and Research Act, 2018), and guidance produced by a range of bodies, for example Universities UK (Gaskell and Lingwood, 2019) refer to disadvantaged backgrounds. Socio-economic background, as measured by free school meals, Participant of Local Areas (POLAR) quintile and the multiple deprivation index, is monitored as a site of inequality in HE (Explanatory Memorandum to the Higher Education and Research Act, 2018). HE institutions are therefore required to submit Access and Participation Plans to the Office for Students which cover attainment and progression inequalities based on socio-economic background. However, as highlighted by Coulson et al. (2018), the reference to background is problematic as it suggests that HE is a neutral experience in which students leave behind their backgrounds and have an equal chance of success. It fails to consider the socio-cultural differences between students from different classes and the continuing relevance of classed experiences of HE. This suggests that the problem lies with the

¹⁷ See page 25 for a definition of class and pages 112 to 113 for details of how I have operationalised the concept in my thesis.

students themselves rather than with the ways in which the social field of HE acts to disadvantage these students and foregrounds a deficit view (Smit, 2012) of under-represented groups in HE.

Furthermore, the focus on socio-economic background and the exclusion of class from the equalities legislation leads to a consistent failure to highlight class or socio-economic background as an important aspect of inclusion. Whilst the Access and Participation guidance and dashboard (Office for Students, n.d.a) highlight socio-economic background as an important inclusion consideration, neither the Office for Students nor the QAA have issued best practice guidance relating to this as an aspect of inclusion, retention or success. The QAAs guidance for teaching and learning (QAA, 2018a), enabling student achievement (QAA, 2018b), student engagement (QAA, 2018c) and work-based learning (2018d), refers to protected characteristics and does not recognise socio-economic background or class as an inclusion consideration worthy of attention except as it relates to access (QAA, 2018e). The Office for Students have produced topic briefings (Office for Students, n.d. b), which highlight effective practice in access and participation, none of which cover class or socio-economic background as an issue of inclusion.

As I was writing the implications of this study, the House of Commons Education Committee (2021) issued a report highlighting the problems faced by white working-class children and students across the education sector. I welcome the focus on class as a site of inequality, in this case as measured by access to free school meals. I think it is helpful to understand intersectionality based on ethnicity and class, but the positioning of the report as a counter to issues of white privilege is unhelpful and potentially divisive.

(c) Nature of the guidance

Many agencies have issued best practice guidance on retention and success, inclusive teaching and learning and the creation of a sense of community and belonging: the Office for Students, the QAA, Universities UK, the Russell Group, Advance HE. This guidance is contained in a variety of reports with different foci, which are difficult to locate and navigate. Some focus on inclusive approaches to teaching and learning (Thomas and May 2010; Hockings, 2010; Office for Students, n.d.a) or causes of difference in retention and outcomes (Myhill et al., 2020; Turhan and Stevens, 2020; Mountford-Zimdars et al., 2015) and others consider engagement, retention and success more broadly (Advance HE, 2019a; 2019b; 2019c; QAA, 2018b; QAA, 2018e; Thomas, 2012). This guidance acknowledges a link between HE experiences, retention and graduate outcomes but fails to identify broader university experiences as important to aspiration development and progression to graduate careers. Similarly, guidance on progression to graduate careers (Gaskell and Lingwood, 2019) or on employability more broadly (Advance HE, 2019c) does not refer to the importance of inclusive teaching and learning across the curriculum and the development of community. My analysis of participant stories suggests that universities need to consider all elements of the student experience when considering how to facilitate the development of career aspiration. Progression to graduate careers is to some extent dependent on the success of universities in fostering an inclusive and supportive environment for all students and creating a sense of belonging and community. This facilitates the accumulation of career-relevant social capital in the form of close relationships with peers. Guidance on career progression should not therefore be developed in isolation from the broader guidance on inclusive approaches to teaching and learning and the creation of a sense of belonging.

The Universities UK report which focuses on progression to graduate careers (Gaskell and Lingwood, 2019) suggests that a lack of ambition and career-relevant skills in students from disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds are partially responsible for differentials in career outcomes across students from different backgrounds. In terms of ambition, the report suggests that students from disadvantaged social backgrounds are less regionally mobile and that this negatively affects career outcomes. However, the report fails to consider the ways in which the limited availability of social, cultural or economic capital relevant to the social field of a graduate career in London may constrain such an ambition, nor do they consider the ways in which universities might support students to build such capital. The report recommends that students enhance their networking skills and build career-relevant social capital. It further suggests that HE institutions offer intra-curricular work-based learning, employer mentoring schemes and a personalised approach to support.

The focus on a skills shortfall in certain students suggests a deficit view of students from certain socio-economic backgrounds. Participant stories and the broader literature (Mountford-Zimdars et al., 2015) support the recommendation that intra-curricular career-relevant opportunities would benefit all students. However, they may be particularly helpful for students from the working classes, not because of a skills shortfall but because students undertaking paid part-time work may find it more difficult to engage in extracurricular opportunities. My study provides further insight as to the nature of personalisation: universities could offer more intra-curricular opportunities for reflection and facilitate the accumulation of social capital at a pace which enhances agency and change, rather than damaging confidence and stimulating painful emotion. Employer mentoring and work experience are likely to benefit all students but if they are

to enhance confidence, and not stimulate painful emotions, such opportunities need to be carefully matched to developmental needs and circumstances. For example, students may benefit from a mentor from a similar position in social space and from work experience with employers who are aware of and able to provide career-relevant emotional and esteem support. Some students may also benefit from the opportunity to build longer-term relationships with employers and mentors throughout their studies, although this needs to be carefully balanced against the informational benefits that working with a range of employers can bring.

6.3.3 Russell Group

The broader literature in the sector indicates that students from under-represented backgrounds may experience issues with a sense of belonging (Mountford-Zimdars et al., 2015) and this issue is specifically referred to in *The National Strategy for Student Access and Success in Higher Education* (Department for Business Innovation and Skills, 2014). This issue is likely to be amplified in the Russell Group. As these institutions are to a greater or lesser extent dominated by students from higher participation neighbourhoods who are more likely to be from the middle classes and to have been independently educated. Approximately 6% of the UK's school population attend private school but the proportion of state school educated students in nine of the Russell Group universities is less than 75% (The Independent, 2021). Studies by both Reay (2018b) and Coulson et al. (2018) focus on the experiences of working-class students studying at elite institutions and the difficulties they may face with social integration. Reay (2018b) refers to a sense of being out of place and the difficulties students have in approaching staff when they need help. Coulson et al. (2018) consider the attitudes of students from the middle classes, who prefer to socialise with other students from similar backgrounds.

These findings are consistent with studies which consider choice of institution; Bathmaker et al. (2016), and Reay et al. (2005) report that working-class students may avoid applying to elite institutions, as they do not like the atmosphere. My analysis of participant stories suggests that social exclusion influences the ability to build career-relevant social and cultural capital, which in turn limits students' capability to aspire. Inclusive approaches to teaching and learning and initiatives which facilitate the development of community are therefore particularly important in Russell Group institutions to foster a sense of belonging in all students. The evidence cited above suggests that this is important to the development of career aspirations and therefore progression to graduate careers, but it is also important to retention and success. However, the imbalance between students from high-participation neighbourhoods and those from low-participation neighbourhoods and the proportion of students from independent schools suggests that this will be challenging unless Russell Group universities address issues of access.

The Office for Students (2019) have set higher-tariff¹⁸ institutions challenging targets around access, which can only be achieved by taking a contextualised approach to admissions (Boliver et al., 2019). However, Boliver et al. (2019) argue that there is little evidence to suggest that higher-tariff institutions offer students from "*contextual backgrounds*" (p.3) significantly lower grades than those from non-contextual backgrounds. In fact, evidence suggests that those from non-contextual backgrounds are also often admitted with lower grades. In a recent report (Turhan and Stevens, 2020), the

¹⁸ The University & Colleges Admissions Service – UCAS (2021) distinguishes in its annual statistical reports between higher-tariff, medium-tariff and lower-tariff providers

Russell Group suggest that students with lower A level grades on entry have a significantly lower chance of achieving a 1st or 2:1 and therefore may have an intellectual or skills deficit and will require additional support. However, the data cited in the report is based on a study by Boliver et al. (2019) which does not control for contextual background and therefore may be distorted by the inclusion of students from “*non-contextual*” backgrounds who were admitted with lower grades. Furthermore, the report fails to recognise that differences in outcomes and progression between students from under-represented groups may not be attributable to differences in ability or skills but rather due to inequalities in HE experiences. In a later study, Boliver et al. (2021) suggest that there is likely to be a positive relationship between the proportions of contextually admitted students and their chance of success; students are more likely to experience a sense of belonging if universities enhance student diversity. Russell Group institutions therefore need a better understanding of the outcomes and experiences of students admitted with contextualised offers and need to do more in this area to widen access.

6.3.4 Implications for and reflections on my role and practice

(a) My role

I am Associate Dean for Teaching, Learning and Students for the Faculty of Social Sciences. Associate Deans work within the faculty and chair the Faculty Teaching and Learning Group but also work closely with the Pro-Vice Chancellor for Teaching and Learning across the institution. Each Associate Dean leads on, or is associated with, one or more institutional initiatives and my area is inclusivity. I was appointed Associate Dean in September 2019 and my interest in and involvement in inclusivity work across the institution is driven by my own experiences of HE and by my doctoral work in this area.

I was appointed Chair of the Inclusive Teaching and Learning Steering Group in 2021 and have become a member of both the Access and Participation Strategy Group and of the Access and Participation Operations Group. I work with the Academic Registrar, which links me into our college system, student support, the student unions, and our inclusive learning team. This section summarises some of the ways in which I have influenced institutional practice and outlines my plans. I want to find ways in which students from all backgrounds are supported: to recognise, value and activate the career-relevant capital they possess and to accumulate further career-relevant capital at a pace which facilitates the reflexive accommodation of change to personal biography. Raising students' awareness of their own potential in this way enhances process agency and has the potential to expand aspiration sets. Broader initiatives around inclusion, community and belonging are important to this because peers can be an important source of social support. However, I also recognise that work-based experiences are a particularly valuable source of career-relevant social capital for all students as strong relationships with employers and colleagues not only have the potential to provide informational support but also emotional, esteem and companionship support.

(b) Curriculum and pedagogic design

My study and broader reading highlighted a need to foreground both inclusive teaching and learning and initiatives that build community. The university is about to enter a phase of programme redesign. Working with student interns, the inclusive learning team co-created a set of resources and reflective questions around inclusive approaches to teaching, learning and community. I have highlighted the need to ensure that departments draw on these resources and reflect on their approach to teaching, learning and community as part of their design work. Faculty Teaching and Learning Groups are

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responsible for programme approval and programme reviewers will be trained to evaluate the ways in which these inclusive approaches to pedagogy and curriculum have been incorporated at the programme approval stage. This will raise departmental awareness of best practice as it relates to inclusive approaches to teaching, learning and community and ensure departments see how this is relevant to their work.

I have also been able to link the inclusivity team to the broader Access and Participation work. Access, student support and careers are well represented in this area, but I was able to identify inclusive teaching and learning as an area of under-investment. This has led to the growth of the team and the approval of inclusivity placement year students to support this work further.

(c) Building academic and departmental communities

My research and reading made it clear that we must consider the whole student experience and not just what goes on in the classroom when considering the development of a sense of belonging. Good relationships with peers are important to the development of career aspiration and have an impact on student engagement, retention and progression. During the pandemic, I co-designed and was responsible for leading on an initiative to embed student interns in departments to organise community-building activities for students and to better leverage and promote the central, departmental and student union community offer. Each department worked with a student Departmental Community Coordinator (DCC) and every student was offered the opportunity to be matched with a small group of students with similar interests from their cohort. The central inclusivity team coordinated the DCCs centrally working with three Faculty Community Coordinators (FCCs) to co-create resource and share good practice.

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This year we are working in partnership with the student unions to re-shape the project in the hope that will help students feel a greater sense of belonging in their department. Inclusive communities will be an important focus and in addition to FCCs and DCCs we are recruiting six Inclusive Community Coordinators (ICC) to represent under-represented groups at Mount. The ICCs will help train the DCCs and will work with the inclusivity team and our student union part-time representation officers to identify initiatives and ways of working that will facilitate building inclusive communities across the institution. They will work within departments and will co-create a communities and communication needs analysis, which considers each aspect of the community offer. DCCs will produce and implement an action plan which meets the specific departmental need in building inclusive community and leveraging engagement with the broader offer at departmental level.

I have also written and disseminated university guidance around the importance of pedagogic practice to building a sense of community. In 2020/21, this was in the form of “quick wins” for module leaders during the pandemic, for example running informal live question and answer sessions, creating module study groups, incorporating group work in seminars and encouraging students to get to know each other using ice-breaker activities. I was Director of Teaching and Learning in my department until January 2021 and I re-structured modules and programmes to ensure that all students have an early opportunity for assessed group work as part of their programme as recommended in the broader guidance around building inclusive community (Thomas, and May 2010; Hockings, 2010; Thomas, 2012).

(d) Personal supervision and careers coaching

I am a member of a small working group examining personal supervision at Mount with a view to making recommendations for improvement. Mount currently has a personal supervisor system whereby one to one academic, pastoral and to an extent, careers support are provided by a named personal supervisor who remains with the student throughout their programme of study. Almost all academics at Mount are involved in proactive personal supervision; the supervisor contacts their supervisees and requests that they attend termly or twice termly one to one meetings. The guidance around inclusive approaches and fostering a sense of belonging (Hockings, 2010) suggest that this is good practice in terms of the named contact, the longevity of the relationship and onus on the supervisor to arrange the meeting. Whilst both students and staff value the current system at Mount, we recognise that on some occasions students who would value a strong supervisory relationship are not matched with a suitable supervisor. To strengthen student-staff relationships and to foster a greater sense of belonging we will allow students to change supervisor if they feel that a relationship has not developed. Personal supervisors have some responsibility for encouraging students to reflect on their career-related experiences and employability development. They also encourage students to engage with the broader careers support at Mount.

Departments have a named careers advisor, but students need to be proactive in booking an appointment with an advisor. Departmental careers advisors run optional timetabled careers and placement sessions whilst the central careers team provide broader opportunities for careers development and career-relevant experiences. For example, the Mount Strengths Programme, which encourages students to reflect on and to leverage their own career-related experiences, supported by trained coaches. Employer and

alumni mentoring is available at Mount but via a website of mentor profiles; if a student wants a mentor they must send an email requesting mentorship directly to the mentor concerned. Conversations with careers advisors and students indicates that take-up of careers provision is skewed toward those students who understand the importance of building career-relevant experiences whilst at university and who are confident in proactively seeking support. Literature in this area, for example, Harvey et al. (2017), indicates that these students are more likely to be from the middle classes. Academics at Mount have a broad variety of responsibilities and for most, personal supervision is not central to their work. The extent to which they are aware of the careers support available at Mount and have relevant skills and experience qualifying them to facilitate employability development differs widely. They are therefore perhaps not best positioned to facilitate and encourage engagement with careers support.

To enhance the availability of career-relevant social capital, I proposed that employability is removed from the remit of the personal supervisor and that instead all students are allocated a named careers coach who will remain with them throughout their studies and with whom they will meet regularly. The frequency of meetings and nature of the support given will be agreed with reference to a reflective needs analysis, which the careers coach and student will produce together. This will enable the university to provide differential levels of support to students with different needs without stigma. It will also offer opportunities to monitor and support engagement with central initiatives and to connect students to appropriately matched employer- or alumni-mentors. It will provide regular opportunities for reflexivity in the context of personal biography around career-related experiences.

(e) Authentic work-related experiences built into the curriculum

The guidance around inclusive practice relating to career or employability suggests that universities should build work-based experiences and interaction with employers and other external organisations into the curriculum¹⁹ (Gaskell and Lingwood, 2019). My analysis of participant stories suggests that this can enable students to build career-relevant social capital and to facilitate the accommodation of change to personal biography. There is good practice in this area across the institution and external engagement with employers, voluntary organisations and the local community fits well with our mission to be a university for the public good. However, as an institution we do not monitor or promote this activity. I met with the Director of Employability and Careers to support him in identifying and highlighting good practice in this area. This is an emerging area of work for the central careers team, and I am working with them to help them build the strong relationships with departments that they will need to make progress in this area.

(f) External influence and dissemination

The Russell Group (Turhan and Stevens, 2020) recognises that there is a need for greater collaboration between institutions in the areas of access, participation and progression. The Russell Group has a community of practice, which focuses on access and another examining equality, diversity and inclusion but there is no group considering inclusive practice in teaching, learning and the broader student experience. In June 2021, I organised a community of practice for academics and educational developers with an institutional remit for inclusive teaching and learning. This covers the Russell Group but

¹⁹ In this context I use the term “the Curriculum” to refer to assessed units of work or modules which carry credit

is open to all higher-tariff, research-intensive institutions. This group will provide an informal space in which we can share approaches to inclusive practice around areas of common interest and will provide colleagues with a community within which they can build productive working relationships.

As a member of Teaching and Scholarship staff, my job description involves scholarship rather than research. I need to think carefully therefore about the ways in which I disseminate my work and ensure that my work has practical application. I plan to write a series of articles based on my thesis, some of which may have a theoretical emphasis – for example I have added to the theory around types of reflexivity and its potential to enhance agency. I set out the scope for further research more broadly in section 6.4 but my priority is to draw more extensively on the stories of all participants to examine the way in which capital, emotion and reflexivity work together in the development of the capability to aspire. I am planning other work which will draw together my findings around the importance of emotional, esteem and companionship support to the development of the capability to aspire and which will add to the literature around inclusive practice in career development.

6.4 Further research

There is a large body of research around the development of aspirations for HE but much less on the ways in which students develop aspirations for graduate career whilst they are in HE. In my small-scale study I have developed an approach which builds on the work of Reay and others, but there is scope for much larger-scale, cross-institutional work looking at the relationship between the broader experience of HE and aspirations for graduate career. I have focused on the experiences of young women, but the experiences of young men are also important and require consideration.

I have added to theory both by exploring the potential of reflexivity as a conversion factor in the development of the capability to aspire and by bringing together different theoretical accounts of reflexivity so as to consider the focus of reflexivity. I have analysed participant stories in order to consider the ways in which capital, emotion and reflexivity work together to limit or enhance aspiration. However, my thesis has not given me scope to write up all participant stories in detail (my rationale for selection is on page 139) and I plan further publications based on stories excluded from this work. Studies which empirically examine reflexivity are polarised around two areas; those which focus on Archer's classification and others which do not acknowledge reflexivity's potential, unless the focus of such reflexivity is the nature and structure of society itself. There is therefore much scope for work in this area across all areas of aspiration development – for example HE and careers – and with a much broader variety of participants.

6.5 Final thoughts

My thesis changed the way I think about students and the way I think about my experiences and career development. I will always examine my work with colleagues, with those outside the university and with students through the lens of relationship and community. I strive to empower all students at Mount irrespective of gender, ethnicity or social background, to be aware of and to honour their personal biography and to accommodate change in ways which do not engender pain and conflict.

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Appendix 1: HE participation rate for England and UK

Date	Participation rate (%) ²⁰
1950	3
1970	8
1990	19
1999/00	39
2000/01	40
2001/02	40
2002/03	41
2003/04	40
2004/05	40
2005/06	42
2006/07	42 (API 40%)
2007/08	43
2008/09	45
2009/10	46
2010/11	46
2011/12	49
2012/13	43
2013/14	47
2014/15	48
2015/16	49
2016/17	50
2017/18	50

²⁰ The methodology for calculating participation rates changed in 2007/08. Prior to 2007/08 participation was measured using the Age Participation Index (API) which calculated the percentage of under 21-year-olds entering HE and was based on UK data. From 2007/08 this was replaced by the HE Initial Participation Rate which calculates the percentage of 17-30 year olds participating in HE and is based on data for England.

Sources: Data up to and including 2006 refers to the UK and was extracted from Bolton (2012) and data from 2006 onwards is based on English data from Department of Education (2019).

Appendix 2: Trow's conception of elite to mass to universal²¹

	Elite (0-15%)	Mass (16-50%)	Universal (over 50%)
<i>i) Attitudes to access</i>	A privilege of birth or talent or both	A right for those with certain qualifications	An obligation for the middle and upper classes
<i>ii) Functions of higher education</i>	Shaping mind and character of ruling class; preparation for elite roles	Transmission of skills; preparation for broader range of technical and economic elite roles	Adaptation of 'whole population' to rapid social and technological change
<i>iii) Curriculum and forms of instruction</i>	Highly structured in terms of academic or professional conceptions of knowledge	Modular, flexible and semi-structured sequence of courses	Boundaries and sequences break down; distinctions between learning and life break down
<i>iv) The student 'career'</i>	"sponsored" after secondary school; works uninterruptedly until gains degree	Increasing numbers delay entry; more drop out	Much postponement of entry, softening of boundaries between formal education and other aspects of life; term-time working
<i>v) Institutional characteristics</i>	- Homogenous with high and common standards - Small residential communities - Clear and impermeable boundaries	- Comprehensive with more diverse standards; - "Cities of intellect" – mixed residential/commuting - Boundaries fuzzy and permeable	- Great diversity with no common standards - Aggregates of people enrolled some of whom are rarely or never on campus - Boundaries weak or non-existent
<i>vi) Locus of power and decision making</i>	'The Athenaeum' – small elite group, shared values and assumptions	Ordinary political processes of interest groups and party programs	'Mass publics' question special privileges and immunities of academe
<i>vii) Academic standards</i>	Broadly shared and relatively high (in meritocratic phase)	Variable; system/institution 'become holding companies for quite different kinds of academic enterprises'	Criterion shifts from 'standards' to 'value added'
<i>viii) Access and selection</i>	Meritocratic achievement based on school performance	Meritocratic plus 'compensatory programs' to achieve equality of opportunity	'open', emphasis on 'equality of group achievement' (class, ethnic)
<i>ix) Forms of academic administration</i>	Part-time academics who are 'amateurs at administration'; elected/appointed for limited periods	Former academics now full-time administrators plus large and growing bureaucracy	More specialist full-time professionals. Managerial techniques imported from outside academe
<i>x) Internal governance</i>	Senior professors	Professors and junior staff with increasing influence from students	Breakdown of consensus making institutional governance insoluble; decision-making flows into hands of political authority

Source: Extract from Brennan, J. (2010, p.558-559).

²¹ Participation rates relate to percentage of school leavers participating in HE, aged 18-19.

Appendix 3: Questionnaire

Introduction

I am currently undertaking a Doctorate in Education at the University of Sheffield. My thesis will examine how female undergraduates from England and Wales develop their aspirations.

Do I have to take part?

It is up to you to decide whether or not to take part. This means you don't have to complete this questionnaire and if you do decide to complete it and are selected for the study you can still say no at that stage or at any other point. You do not have to give a reason.

If you do decide to take part you will be more information about the study and will be asked to sign a consent form.

Please provide details of the best way or ways of contacting you to arrange an interview.

Email address:

Mobile number:

If you have any questions about the study you can contact me as follows:

Jill Webb

jill.webb@york.ac.uk

Jill Webb

1. Name
2. Age
3. Were you born in England or Wales? Please tick as applicable and answer the relevant supplementary question in the box below:

Yes

No

IF YOU ANSWERED 'Yes' to question 3:

Have you lived in England or Wales all your life? Please tick as applicable

Yes

No

If not please provide details of how many years you lived outside England and Wales, the age you left and the age you were when you returned below.

IF YOU ANSWERED 'No' to question 3:

How old were you when you started living in England and Wales?

Have you lived in England or Wales continuously since then? Please tick as applicable

Yes

No

4. Do you consider yourself the first in your family to go to university?

Yes

No

Please explain below

5. How would you define your Social Class: _____

What do you base your social class on? (tick as many as you feel apply)

Parental education

Parental occupation

Household income

Personal education/employment

Residence Background

Family history

Other (please state) _____

6. List the people who lived with you when you were growing-up (if you lived in more than one household list the people in each household)?

Household 1	Household 2

7. List the current occupation of each of these people (don't include them in this table if they are under 18)
- if they are retired then please state retired but give their last occupation before they retired.

Household 1 Person/occupation	Household 2 Person/occupation

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8. List the people you lived with when you were growing up who have a degree?

Household 1	Household 2

What will happen if I take part?

You will be interviewed twice; the first interview will take place before the end of the Spring term and the second in the Summer term. I will contact you by email to arrange interviews and offer a range of potential dates and times. You will be able to arrange a time and a place for the interview which is most convenient to you.

Thank you

Appendix 4: Participant Information Sheet

The development of aspirations in female undergraduates

You are being invited to take part in a research project. Before you decide it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. Ask me if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information. Take time to decide whether or not you wish to take part. Thank you for reading this.

Project purpose

The purpose of the project is to examine how female undergraduates develop aspirations. I will be asking you about your plans for the future and about how you make these plans, who you involve in those decisions and how you involve them and how decide what is right for you.

This work will form a pilot study which will be used for building an understanding of women's aspirations in this disciplinary field. The pilot study will form the data set for my thesis in which is part of the requirements for completion of a Doctorate in Education. Following successful completion of the pilot phase I hope to be able to extend the study to develop a longitudinal data set and I may ask if you are willing to be involved in the project throughout your time at York. However at this stage I am seeking consent for your involvement in the pilot phase only.

Why have I been chosen?

In total between 8 and 16 participants have been chosen for the study. I want to look at women who have different characteristics, for example those who have chosen to go on

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placement and those who have not and those who are the first in their family to go to university and those who are not. You have therefore been chosen because you have a particular profile of these characteristics, for example you may be a placement student who is the first in their family to go to university.

Do I have to take part?

It is up to you to decide whether or not to take part. If you do decide to take part you will be given this information sheet to keep (and be asked to sign a consent form) and you can still withdraw at any time without it affecting any benefits that you are entitled to in any way. You do not have to give a reason.

What will happen to me if I take part?

You will be interviewed twice; both interviews will take place before the end of the 2018/19 academic year; for some people this will be an interview in Spring term and a follow-up in Summer term and for others two interviews in the Summer term. The first interview will last approximately an hour and a half and the second approximately 2 hours.

Arranging interviews: I will contact you by email to arrange interviews and offer a range of potential dates and times. You will be able to arrange a time and a place for the interview which is most convenient to you.

The study is a narrative biographical study this means that it is looking at your aspirations in the context of your life as a whole and will look at the choices you have made in the context of major events in your life and the relationships you have with others. It will also consider the way in which you reflect on your choices internally or in conversation with others.

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What are the possible disadvantages and risks of taking part in the study?

There are no risks to you personally in taking part in the study but you may find it that some of the things I ask you to think about might stir up your emotions. If this happens, and you want to, you will be able to pause or withdraw from taking part and I will be able to help you find any support you might need to help you deal with any difficult feelings you might have.

What are the potential benefits to the study?

I am hope that reflecting deeply and talking about your aspirations will help you in making choices and raise your awareness of how you make choices.

What if something goes wrong?

If some unexpected adverse event occurs during the course of the study, for example illness or other change of circumstance then you may withdraw from the study or I can re-arrange your participation at a mutually convenient time.

The University of Sheffield is the data controller for this study. If you wish to raise a complaint in respect of my handling of your data in relation to this study then you can contact the Data Protection Officer for the University of Sheffield. You may also contact my Doctoral supervisor Caroline Hart (c.hart@york.ac.uk) at the Sheffield University or Tony Royle (tony.royle@york.ac.uk) the Chair of the York Economics, Law, Management, Politics and Sociology Ethics Committee if you have broader complaints. If you feel that your complaint has not been handled to your satisfaction that you can contact the Head of Department of Education at Sheffield University, who will then escalate the complaint through the appropriate channels.

Will my taking part in this project be kept confidential?

Your participation in the study will be confidential. All the information that I collect about you during the course of the research will also be kept strictly confidential. You will not be able to be identified in any reports or publications although there is a small chance that the nature of the information you give me might result in someone reading the results of my research and identifying you.

What type of information will be sought from me and why is the collection of this information relevant for achieving the research project's objectives?

The first interview will ask about the story of your life and what you want for yourself in the future. The second interview will consist of a series of open questions which will encourage you to reflect on your aspirations for the future and to consider how these aspirations have been formed. You may also be asked about how you have formed your aspirations more generally in the past and the changes in the way you form aspirations. These questions are likely to involve you revealing information about how or whether your friends and family influence your aspirations and how you feel about this. You will also be asked to consider whether you have changed the way in which you form your aspirations since the beginning of your first year and to outline how this has changed.

Will I be recorded, and how will the recorded media be used?

Ideally, with your permission, each interview will be audio recorded to assist with transcription and data analysis. If you consent to being recorded you will be able to listen to your recording should you wish and have the right to have any material you feel uncomfortable with to be omitted from the analysis. The audio recordings of our interviews will be used only for analysis and quotes may be drawn from them for

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illustration in my thesis. No other use will be made of them without your written permission, and no one outside the project will be allowed access to the original recordings. All recordings will be deleted upon completion of my Doctoral thesis.

What will happen to the results of the research project?

The results of the research project will form the basis for my Doctoral thesis, may also form the basis for a series of journal articles or a book and will be used to inform the development of initiatives to support students in the development of their aspirations whilst at university; it is therefore in the public interest. I hope to complete my Doctoral thesis by December 2019 and any other publications will take place after this date. You will be able to obtain a copy of the initial results of the research from me when the thesis completed. My thesis will also be available to view online via the White Rose repository or the British library. If you wish I will send you a copy of the results and of any publication which is the result of this research. You can inform me of your preferences on the consent form. You will not be identified in any report or publication.

Who has ethically reviewed the project?

This project has been ethically approved The Department of Education ethics review procedure. The University's Research Ethics Committee monitors the application and delivery of the University's Ethics Review Procedure across the University.

Contact for further information

If you want any further information about this study you can contact

Jill Webb	Caroline Hart
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jill.webb@york.ac.uk	c.hart@sheffield.ac.uk
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You will be given a copy of this information sheet to keep at our first meeting and a copy of the signed consent

Appendix 5: Prompt for production of life history schematic

This research is about your aspirations in the context of your life as a whole. These might include career aspirations but might encompass much broader aspirations for your life as a whole.

In the interview, I will ask you the following questions:

- Tell me the story of your life, as you remember it, to where you are now
- What do you want for yourself in the future?

To prepare I would like you to begin by thinking about your life as a story. All stories have characters, scenes, plots, and so forth. There are high points and low points in the story, good times and bad times, heroes and villains, and so on. A long story may even have chapters. Think about your life story as having at least a few different chapters. What might those chapters be? I would like you to describe for me each of the main chapters of your life story. You may have as many or as few chapters as you like, but I would suggest dividing your story into at least 2 or 3 chapters and at most about 7. If you can, give each chapter a name and describe briefly the overall contents in each chapter.

Before we meet please draw up a timeline, a mind map or other diagram, which shows the chapters of your life together with key words to describe them.

Appendix 6: Questions for semi-structured interview

Note questions in boxes are prompts to ensure that I cover all theoretical aspects if these have not naturally arisen in response to the main question

Notes

- Paper, pen and recorder
- Participant information sheet
- Consent form the participant signed last time
- List of questions with follow-ups and tick-list
- Offer a hot drink
- Water, glass and tissues available
- Sitting in an open way i.e. not across a table but both with table to side
- If participant opts for office then as neutral as possible and away from desk near table
- If participant opts for a meeting room then booked before so room I can arrange it appropriately
- If participant opts for café or other public space, only at a time when it is very quiet

Introduction to interview

Thank you for agreeing to be interviewed a second time. In the first interview I asked you to tell me your life story. I've now had a chance to look at that in detail and you'll find that some of the questions in this interview are drawing directly on some of the things you told me in the first interview and exploring them in a bit more depth. You may feel on occasion that I'm going over or repeating things that you've already told me. This is because I'm trying to ensure that I cover all the issues I'm interested in with all of the people in my study in a reasonably consistent way.

I asked you to populate your timeline, mind map or notes that you used for the first interview with the people who were important to you at different points in your life. We'll be drawing on that preparation later in the interview.

Tell them they can have a break whenever they want.

Your life story and influences

1. In looking back over your life would it be possible to identify certain key moments that stand out as turning points – episodes that marked an important change in you or your life story. Tell me the story of what happened

- a. Where did this happen?
- b. When did this happen?
- c. Who was involved?
- d. Can you describe any thoughts you had?
- e. Can you describe any feelings you had?

2. Did these key moments influence your aspirations in any way and if so can you describe how they influenced your aspirations?

3. Do you feel there were any major influences on you when you were growing up? You can refer back to your populated timeline at this point if it helps. Describe each of these influences?

- a. Outline how they have influenced you
- b. Are there ways in which these people have supported you and if so how?
- c. Are there ways in which these people have constrained or limited your aspirations in any way?

Aspirations and their development

4. Think about what your future will be like a year or two after leaving university:
 - a. If you could have your ideal future what would you imagine it to be?
 - b. What do you expect your future to be?

5. I'm interested in how women like you have developed their aspirations across the life course and whether these have evolved or changed as time has gone by. I would like to ask you to think a little bit about any early aspirations you may have had. I'm aware that not everyone has clearly defined aspirations at a young age so don't worry if nothing specific comes to mind.
 - a. Casting your mind back to when you were leaving primary school, aged around 11, can you recall/describe any aspirations you might have had at that time? These could be related to school but also to any other areas of life too'
 - b. What aspects of your aspirations have remained the same since then and in what ways have your aspirations changed?

6. Think about what led to the changes in your aspirations. Can you tell me something about led to these changes

- a. Are there any key points when your aspirations changed?
 - b. Describe any people who may have influenced your aspirations?
 - c. Outline how and why they influenced your aspirations?
 - d. Describe your thoughts and feelings as your aspirations changed

7. Can you think of a positive event or experience you have had that was significant to you in forming your aspirations or changing your aspirations? Tell me the story of that event

8. Can you think of a negative event or experience you have had that was significant to you in forming your aspirations or changing your aspirations? Tell me the story of that event?

Focusing on particular decisions

9. Have you had to make any key decisions in your life so far? Can you tell me about a couple of situations where you have had to make a big decision? For each of the examples tell me the story of what happened?

- a. Where did this happen?
- b. When did this happen?
- c. Who was involved?
- d. Can you describe any thoughts you had?
- e. Can you describe any feelings you had?

10. Can you describe a situation where you made a decision not to do something or when you ruled something out as an option. Tell me the story of what happened.

- a. Where did this happen?
- b. When did this happen?
- c. Who was involved?
- d. Can you describe any thoughts you had?
- e. Can you describe any feelings you had?

11. When it comes to these big decisions how would you say you make them?

- a. Do your feelings play a role?
- b. Do you decide quickly and jump in?
- c. Do you try to imagine the future?
- d. Do you weigh up your options?
- e. To what extent does this take place individually and to what extent do you involve others?
- f. If you do involve others what is their role?

Appendix 7: Opening up technique

Aspect to consider	Observations and inference
1. Situated context: At what time of the participant’s life is this life story constructed	
2. Temporality: How does the story begin and is it told entirely in chronological sequence? Where does the story end? Are particular events/sequences returned to? Does the story jump in places? Are there particular periods left out or glossed over?	<p>Mark shifts in space, time and context. Pull together coding for these sections and it will tell you something about the complexity of the story. Are the sequences linear and chronological or are they more complex?</p> <p>Think about Order, Duration, and Frequency.in respect of place, stories and episodes.</p>
3. Space: Are there movements in space as well as time. How does the participant express these? Are there affiliations to space; community, home? How does the respondent articulate these; are they just a setting or are they emotionally evaluated?	<p>Insight into participant’s configuration. This might tell us something about the significance of family and how that has changed over time or how the importance of different places and periods in the participant’s story. It might also draw attention to significant periods of time or episodes, which might be followed-up in the second interview.</p>
4. Participation in communities of practice.: family, colleagues, friends, fellow students, housemates	<p>Participants of the community, how they are characterised, how the inter-personal interactions develop:</p> <p>Adaptation</p>

	<p>Exclusion</p> <p>Inclusion/belonging</p> <p>Positive/negative</p>
5. Contexts	<p>How are they characterised?</p> <p>Adaptation</p> <p>Exclusion</p> <p>Inclusion/belonging</p> <p>Positive/negative</p>
6. Changes	<p>Are these structural, beyond the participant's control or within the participant's control?</p>
7. Use of key phrases	<p><i>Provides insight into how the participant views life; how do they interpret their existence? Purposeful journey, transformation, redemption? Fate, coincidence, compulsion, choice, control, make a difference.</i></p> <p>Some of these metaphors may be indicative of habitus and others may highlight important episodes or links between episodes and some may be indicative of self-reflection.</p>

Appendix 8: Background, turning points and aspirations

1. Summary of class and first-generation characteristics – family capital
2. Summary of turning points - timeline
3. Description of aspirations

Period of young person’s life	Description of aspiration (if any) NOTE account for periods where there is an absence of aspiration	Illustrative quote

4. Notes on consciousness

POINT FOR ANALYSIS FROM LITERATURE	MY COMMENTARY/ DISCUSSION Capital/Emotions	ILLUSTRATIVE QUOTES
Improbable practices rejected as impossible <i>“not for me” (Archer et al, 2007)</i> <i>“taken for granted”- Atkinson (2010, p.59)</i>		
Practical consciousness <i>“always known” (Reay, et al.,2005)</i>		
Reflexive confirmation of personal biography		

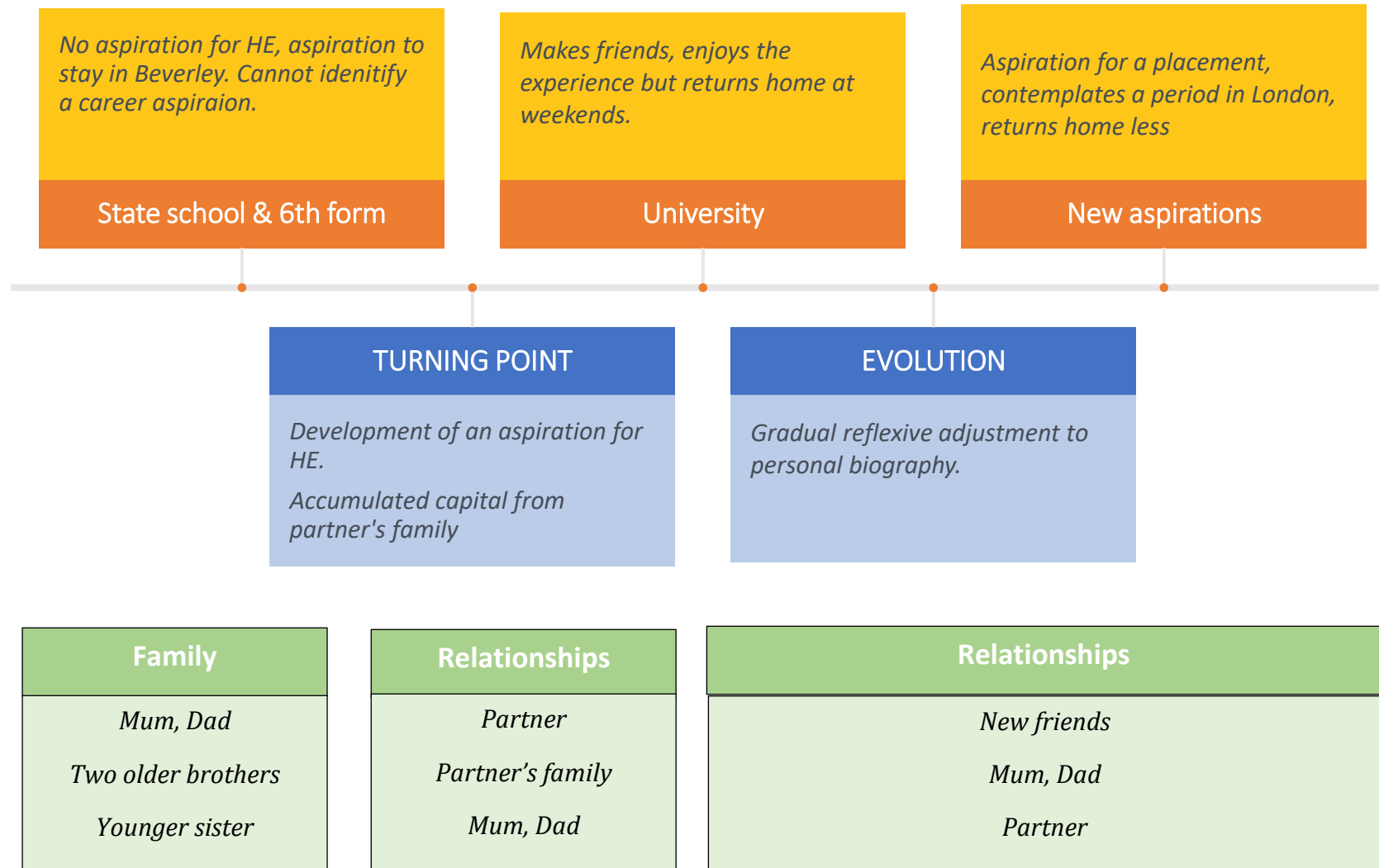
<p><i>“we’re workers in this family” (Snee and Devine, 2014)</i></p> <p><i>“people like us” (Reay, et al.,2005, Snee and Devine, 2014)</i></p> <p><i>“everyday person” (Stahl et al., 2018)</i></p>		
<p>Reflexive incorporation of change</p>		

Appendix 9: Background, turning points and aspirations

Alice (First year)

Overall classification Middle Class, First-Generation (MC-FG)	
Objective	Subjective
NS-SEC Classification: Middle class	Self-classification: Working class
Parents did not participate in HE	Self-classified as First-Generation University

Alice 's dad owns two successful bike shops and her mum does not work. She is from a small affluent town near Hull. Neither of Alice's parents went to university and both attended state schools although many of her father's wider family attended independent school. She has two older brothers neither of whom have participated in HE and one younger sister. She did not experience economic constraints in the development of an aspiration for university and her family provided esteem support in terms of Alice's intelligence. However, they did not provide cultural capital in the sense of an expectation that she would attend university and were unable to provide social capital in the form of informational support relevant to the social field of HE. Alice described how her mother has always lived in the town where she was born and how generations of her family have lived locally.



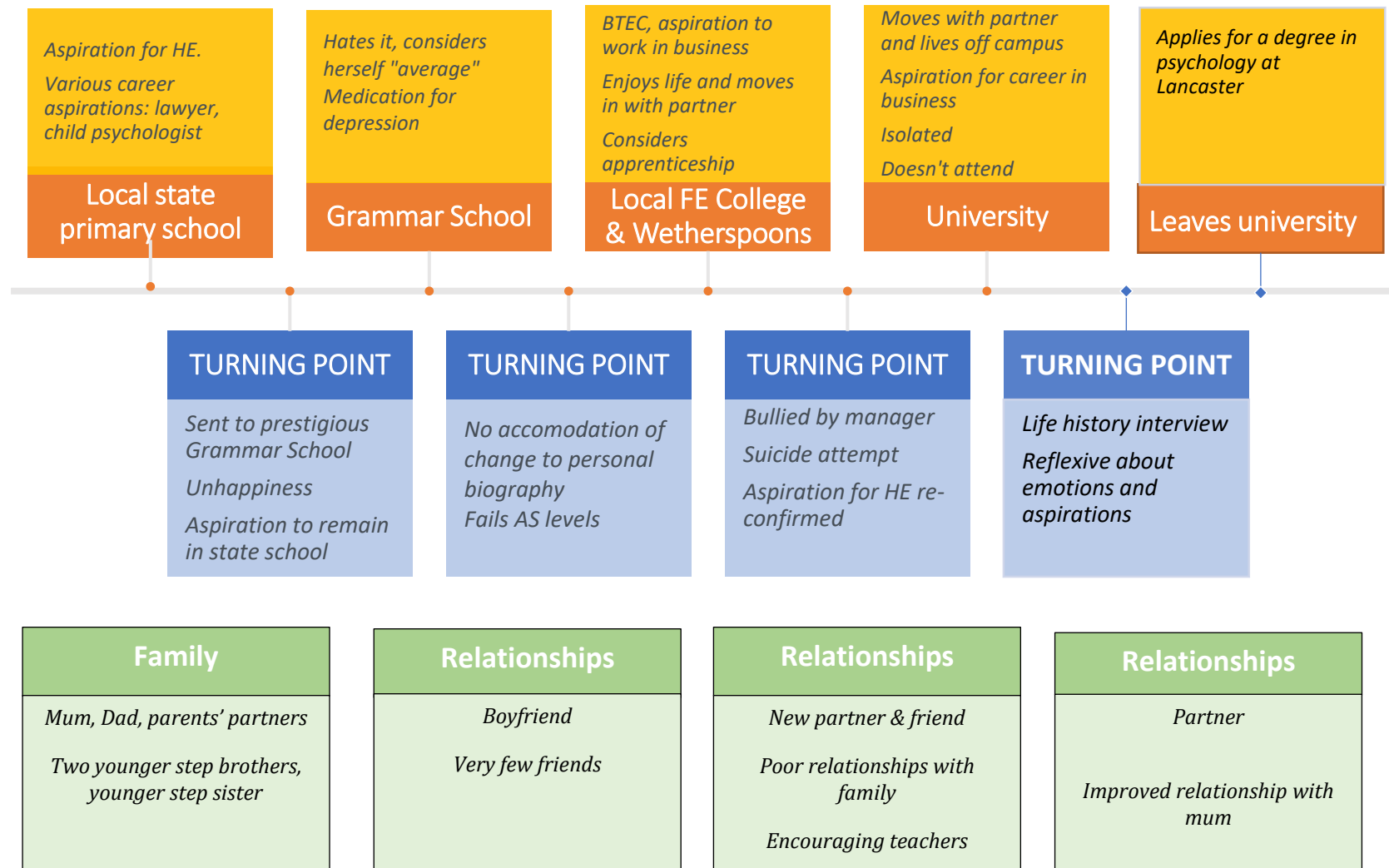
Lucy (First year)

Overall classification Middle Class, First-Generation (WC-FG)	
Objective	Subjective
NS-SEC Classification: Working class	Self-classification: Working class
Parents did not participate in HE	Self-classified as First-Generation University

Lucy’s dad is a sales person for a local lawnmower and her mum is a retail cashier. She is from a small town in the North West. Neither of Lucy’s parents went to university and both were educated at state schools. During Lucy’s childhood, she lived with her mum and dad until she was three years old. Following her parents split Lucy lived with her mum during the week and her dad at weekends. She spent a lot of time in both households. Her dad re-married when she was seven years old and divorced when Lucy was twelve; she has a half-sister from this relationship. Lucy’s mum has had two significant relationships since splitting with Lucy’s dad and a child from each relationship. She is now married to the father of her youngest son.

Lucy’s family sent her to a prestigious Grammar school at considerable financial cost; wider family contributing to uniform and travel costs made this possible. Her dad has pushed her academically and she expected to attend university. However, her family were unable to

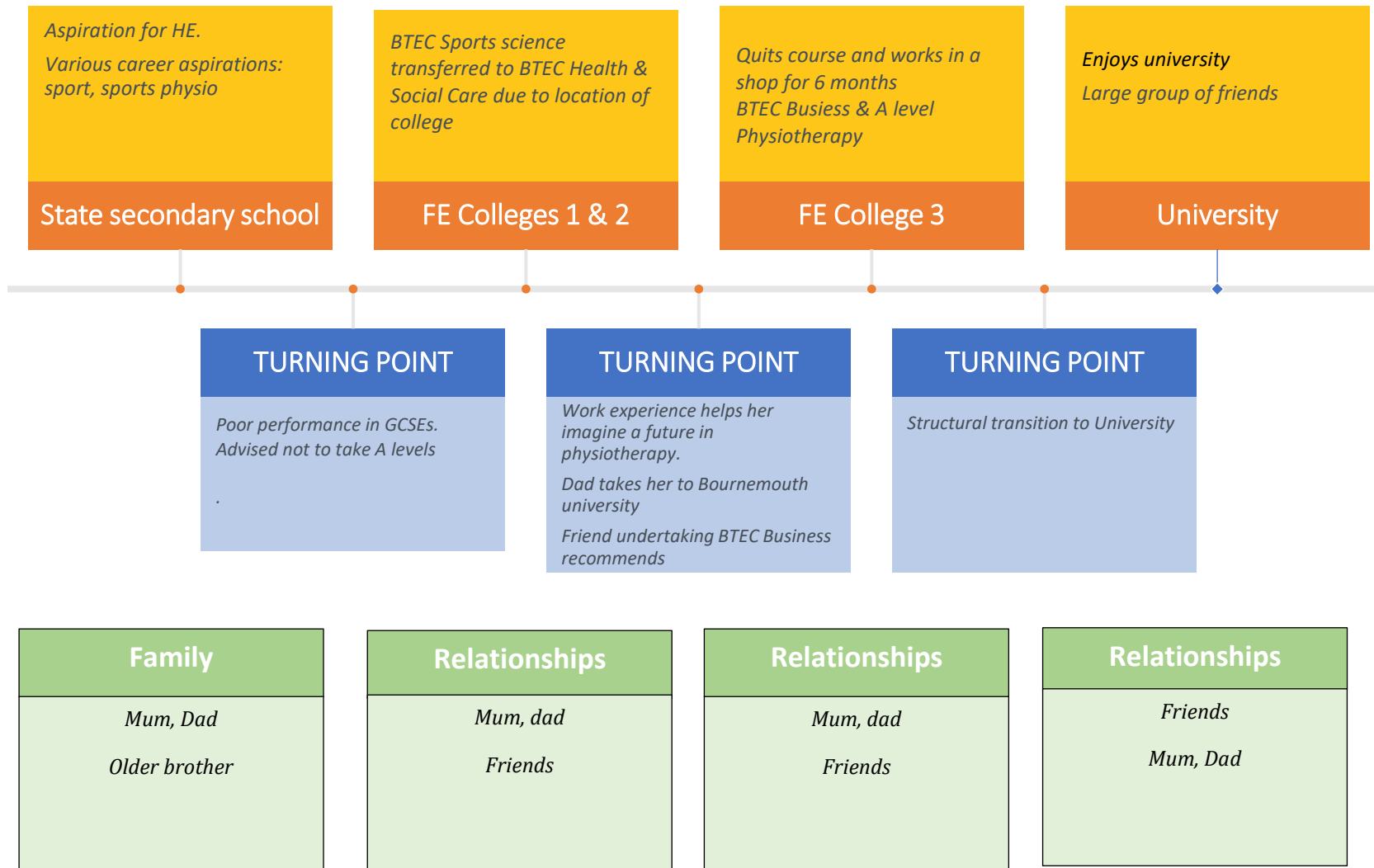
provide social capital in the form of informational support relevant to the social field of HE. Lucy struggled with her mental health since secondary school and has had little emotional support from her family.



Jade (First year)

Overall classification Middle Class, Not First-Generation (MC-NFG)	
Objective	Subjective
NS-SEC Classification: Middle class	Self-classification: Middle class
Parents participated in HE	Self-classified as Not First-Generation University

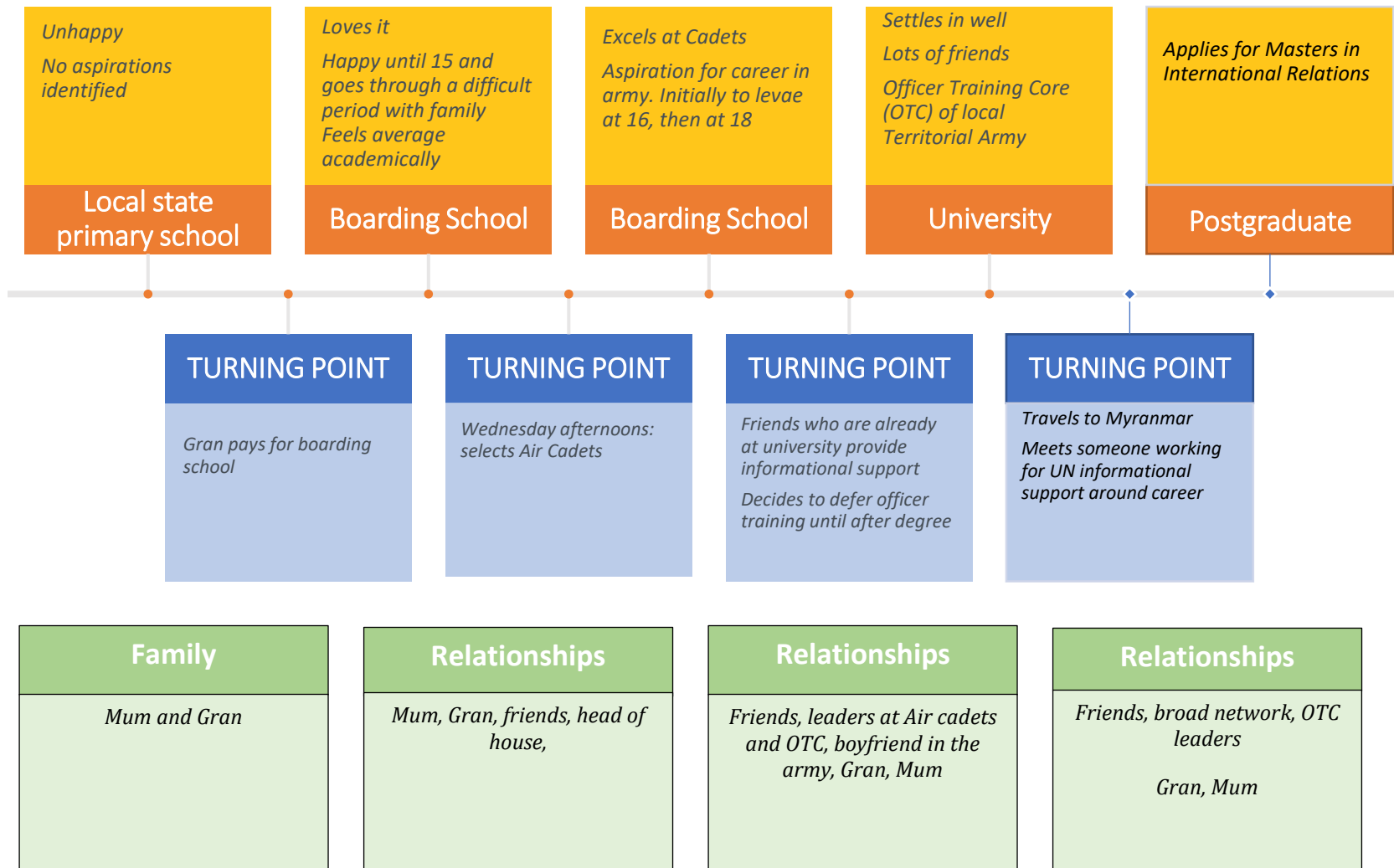
Jade’s parents work in IT, her father in the financial sector in London. Jade’s mum is Italian and studied with the Open University as a mature student. Jade attended state school and a variety of FE colleges. She comes from Surrey. During her childhood, she lived with her mum, her dad and her older brother until she was three when her parents divorced. She moved out of the family home with her mum and brother and her dad moved into London. Jade struggled at school but her dad encouraged and supported her in maintaining high aspirations. Jade’s dad provided informational support relevant to the social field of a HE and Jade had high levels of expectation and confidence. Jade’s older brother also provided informational support relevant to the development of an aspiration for HE.



Taylor (Final year – no placement)

Overall classification Middle Class, First-Generation (MC-FG)	
Objective	Subjective
NS-SEC Classification: Middle class	Self-classification: Working class
Parents did not participate in HE	Self-classified as First-Generation University

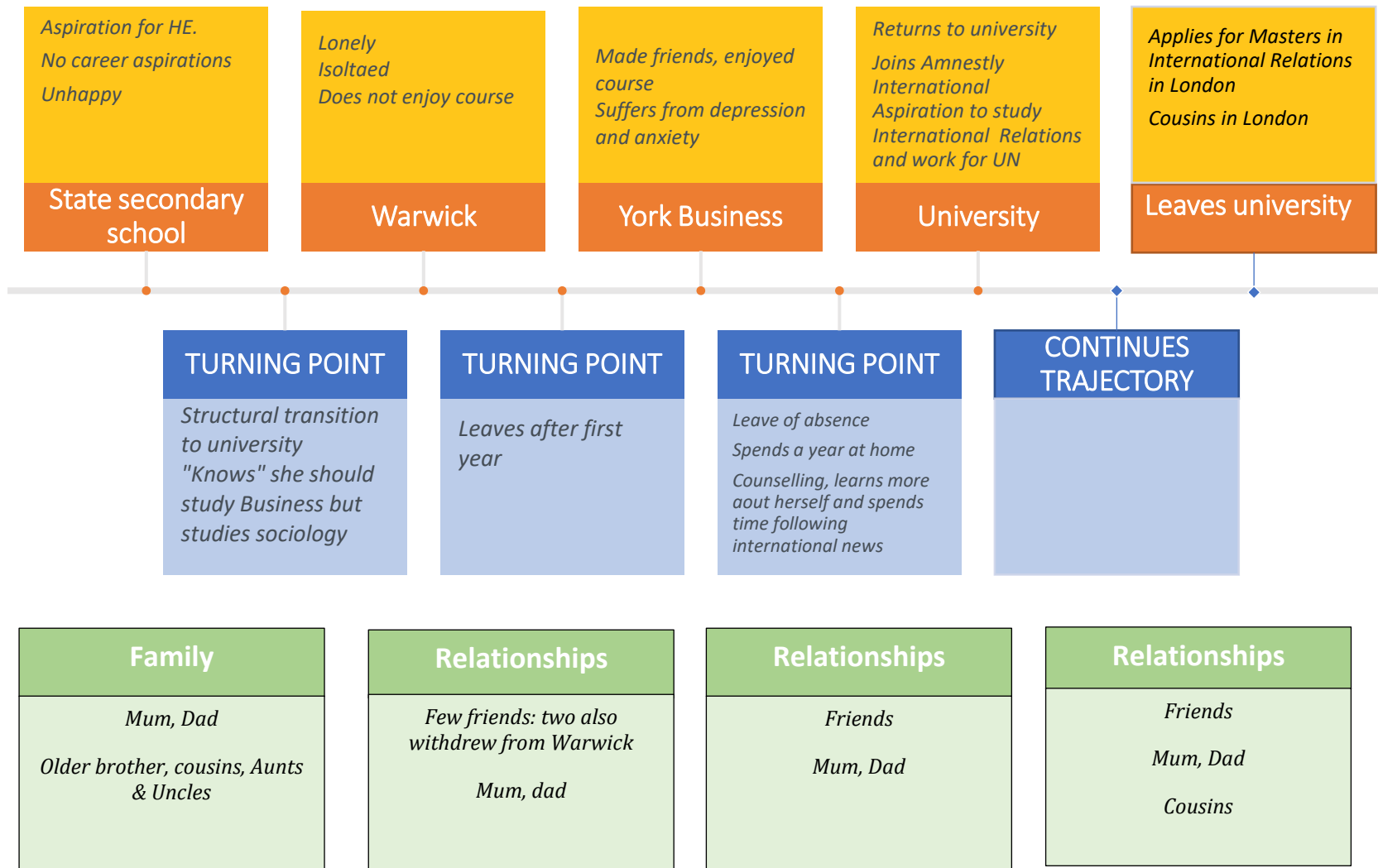
Taylor is an only child from a single parent family and has limited contact with her father who she says is not one of her parents. Her parents were not together when she was born and she initially lived with her Gran and her mum in a small town in Somerset. Taylor therefore feels that her mum and gran are her parents. Her mum was in a car accident when she was younger sustained injuries, which limited her emotional maturity. Taylor describes her as *“more of a sister than a mother”* and says, *“mum’s always been a little bit unstable.”* Taylor was unhappy in primary school and moved to Bristol with her gran when she was in year 4 when she started to attend independent day school. During the week, they lived in a one-bedroom flat in an area that Taylor describes as very different from where her school friends lived. At weekends, Taylor returned to Somerset to spend time with her mum. She subsequently moved to a private boarding school when she was 13. Her education was funded partly from her Gran’s savings and partly by bursaries and scholarships. Taylor’s parents did not provide cultural capital in the sense of an expectation that she would attend university and were unable to provide social capital in the form of informational support relevant to the social field of HE or graduate careers.



Jaanavi (Final year – no placement)

Overall classification Middle Class, First-Generation (MC-NFG)	
Objective	Subjective
NS-SEC Classification: Middle class	Self-classification: Middle class
Parents participated in HE	Self-classified as Not First-Generation University

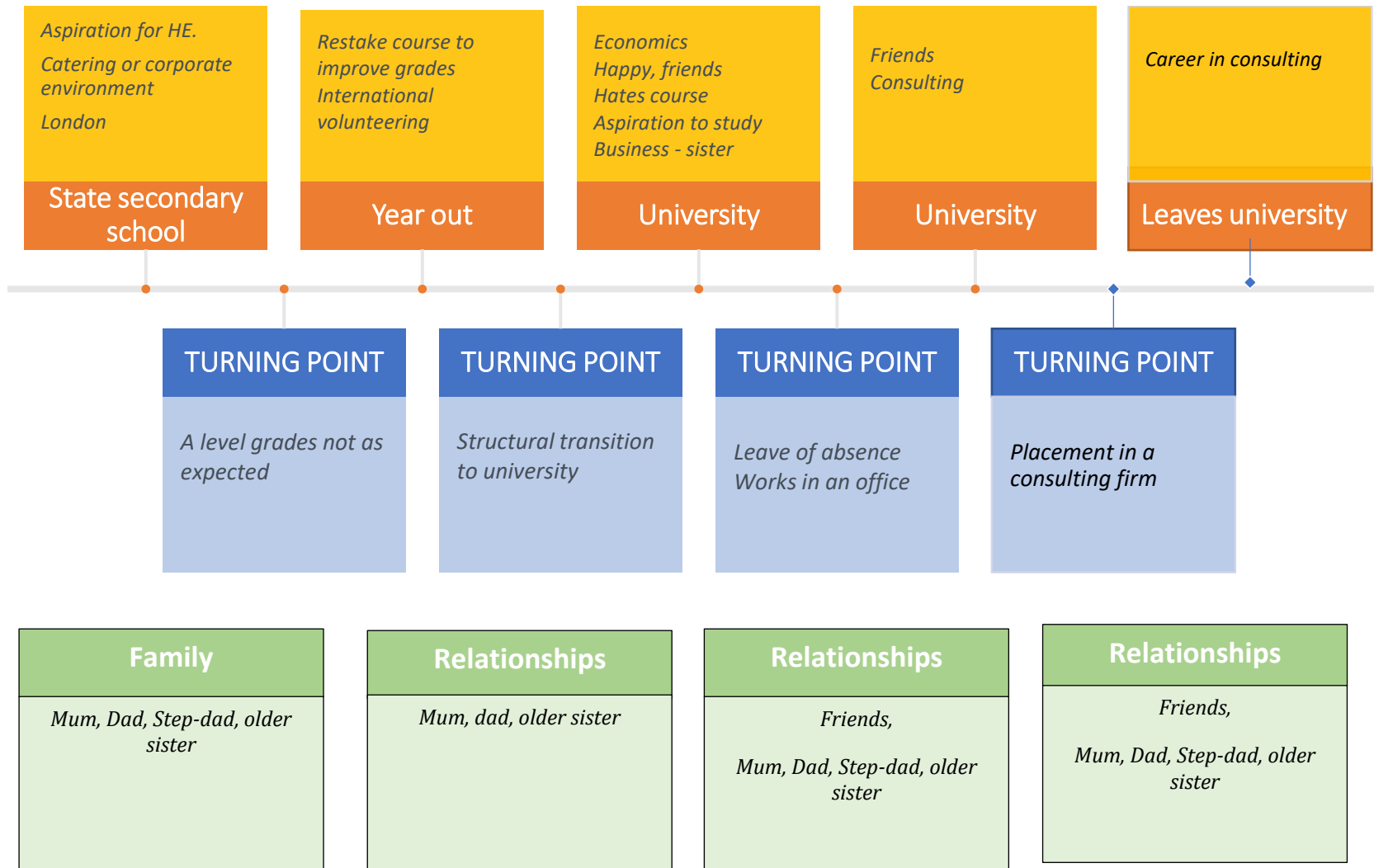
Jaanavi’s dad worked in IT for a construction company but is now retired. Jaanavi’s mum works in a call centre. Both are first-generation British Asians whose families are of Indian heritage. Jaanavi is from a large town near Birmingham. Jaanavi was educated at a state school where she was bullied and was very unhappy. She has an older brother and a close extended family. She is close to her older cousins all of whom went to university. Jaanavi was expected to go to university but her story does not refer to any specific informational support from her family.



Thalia (Final year – placement)

Overall classification Middle Class, Not First-Generation (MC-NFG)	
Objective	Subjective
NS-SEC Classification: Middle class	Self-classification: Middle class
Parents participated in HE	Self-classified as Not First-Generation University

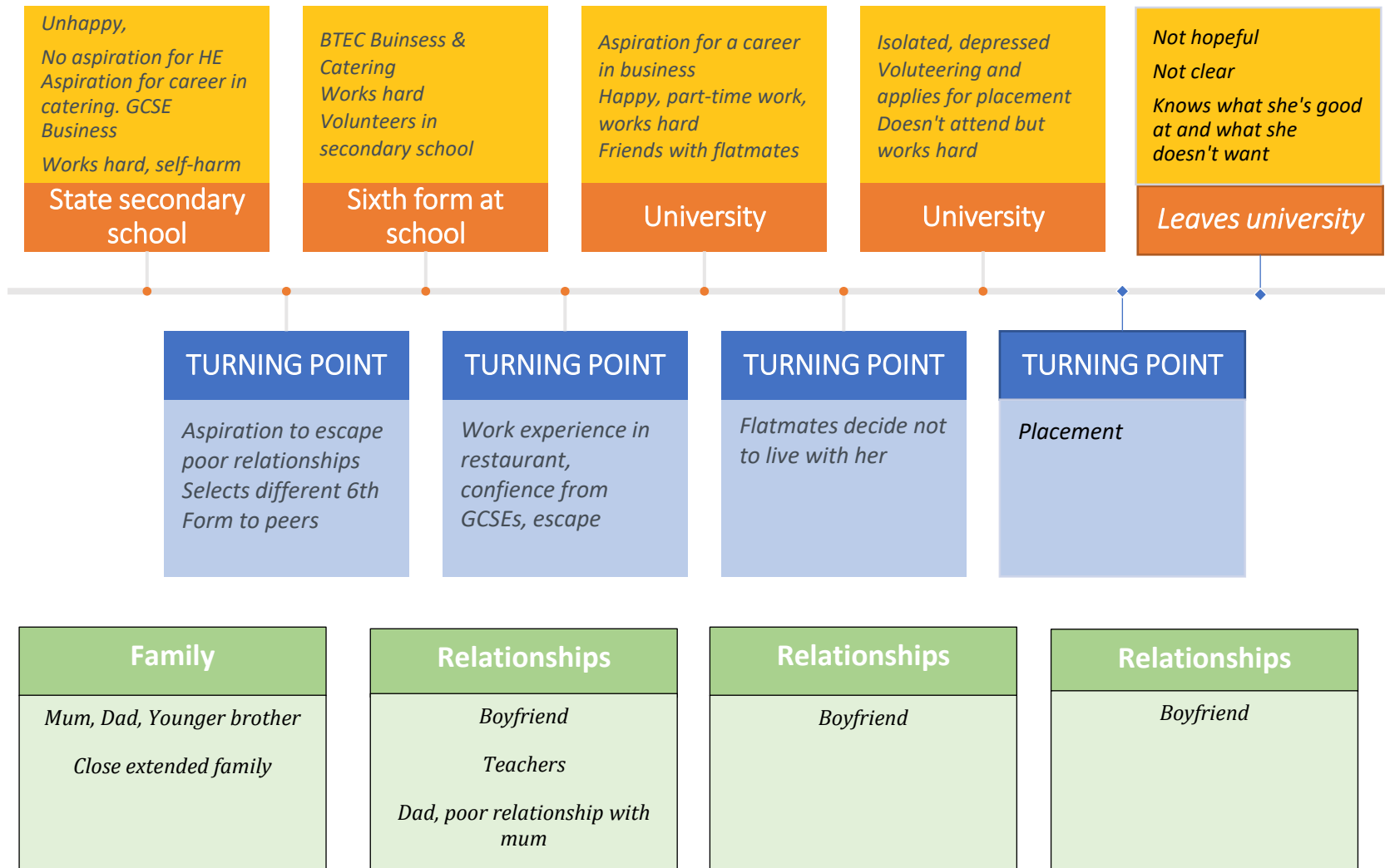
Thalia is from London and her parents both worked in senior positions in a corporate environment. Her mum and dad divorced when she was eight and she lived with her mum, stepdad and sister whilst maintaining a close relationship with her dad. Thalia attended a state school. Thalia did not get the grades she was expecting at A level and took a year out to retake. During this year, she also volunteered overseas. Thalia’s parents provided informational support relevant to the social field of a HE and graduate career and Thalia had high levels of expectation and confidence. Thalia’s sister also provided relevant social capital; she was undertaking a placement at Bath University and this was influential in Thalia’s decision to undertake a placement.



Steph (Final year – placement)

Overall classification Working Class, First-Generation (WC-FG)	
Objective	Subjective
NS-SEC Classification: Working class	Self-classification: Working class
Parents did not participate in HE	Self-classified as First-Generation University

Steph’s mum works in a care home and her dad is a metalworker. She is from a small town in the North East. Neither of Steph’s parents went to university and both were educated at state schools. She has a large and close extended family, who she describes as stupid but hardworking. Both Steph and her mum suffer from depression and she struggled with self-harm at school. In terms of cultural capital, her family considered high school education as important but there was no expectation for HE. Steph had low levels of confidence and expectation around HE and around graduate career. She was bullied at school, has always worked hard, and had close relationships with her teachers.

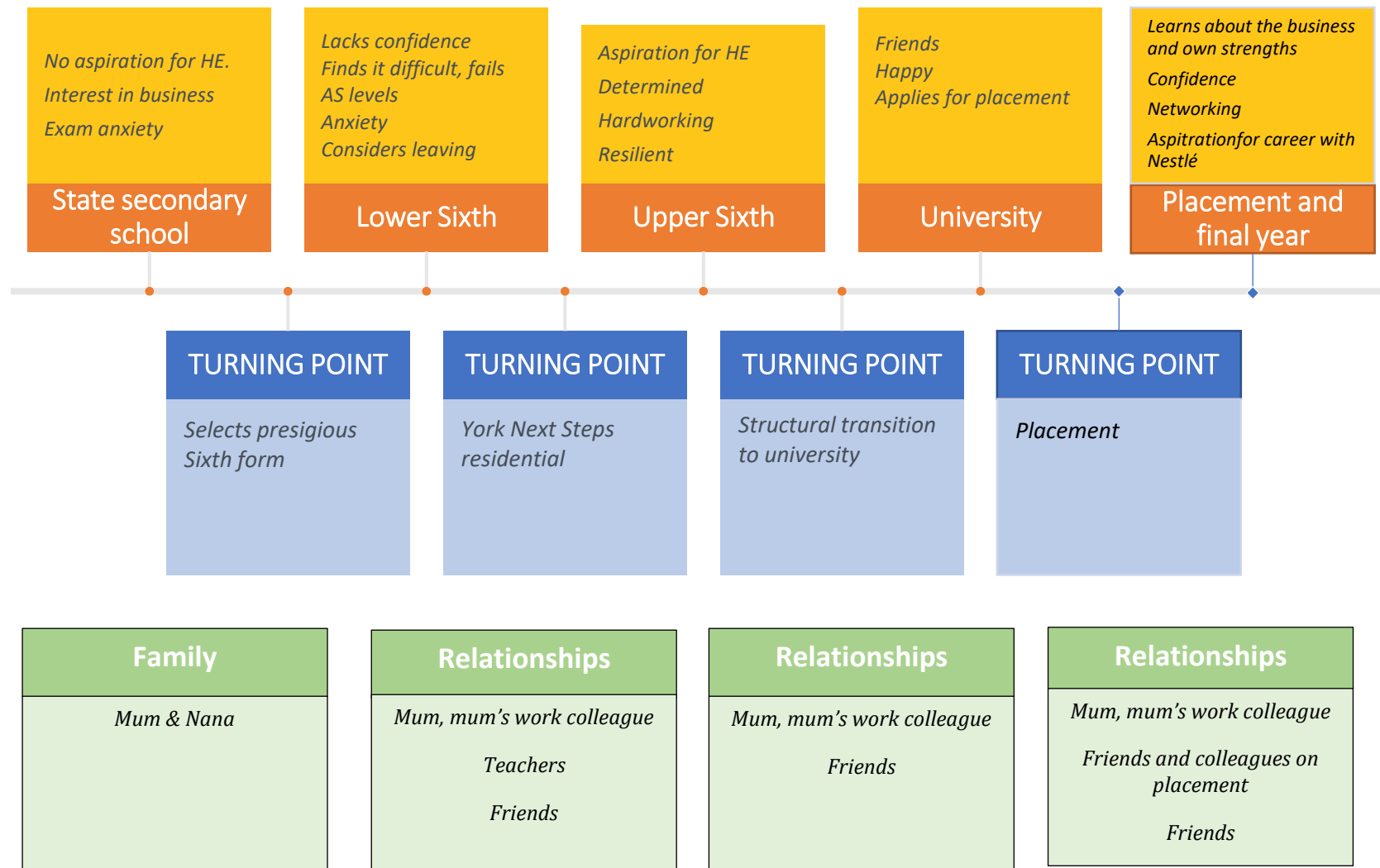


Evie (Final year – placement)

Overall classification Middle Class, First-Generation (WC-FG)	
Objective	Subjective
NS-SEC Classification: Working class	Self-classification: Working class
Parents did not participate in HE	Self-classified as First-Generation University

Evie’s mum is a single parent. As a child, Evie lived near her Nanna who helped her mum with childcare. Evie’s mum did not go to university but is upwardly mobile and worked full-time in Information Technology since Evie was born. She is now a manager and has graduates in her team but Evie’s story indicates that money was an issue for the family. Economic risk and a lack of availability of economic capital were part of the reason Evie considered apprenticeships both as she left school and throughout sixth form.

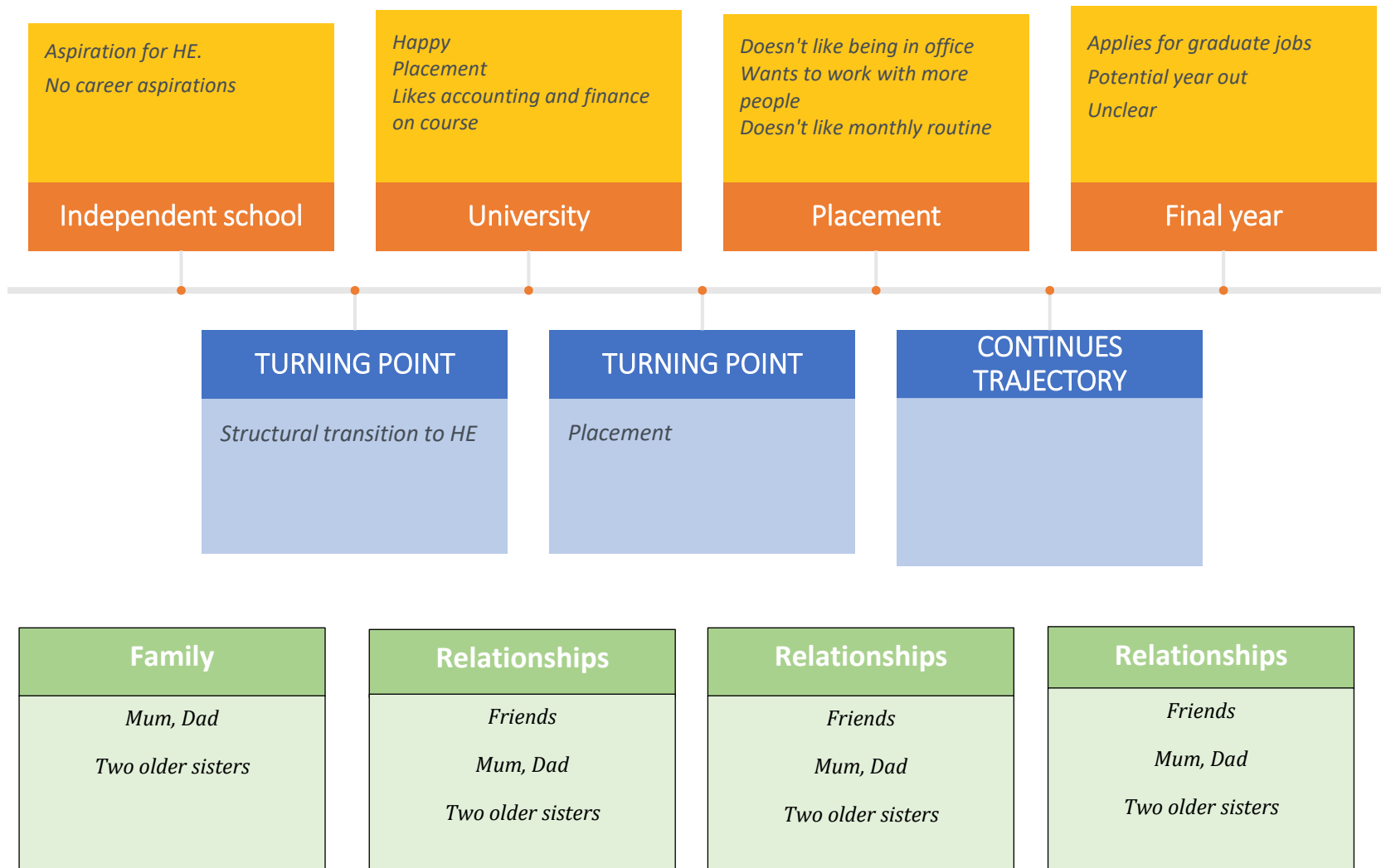
Evie’s mum was an important source of cultural and social capital for Evie. Both her mum and her Nanna considered education to be important, were a source of practical help and emotional and esteem support and instilled a work ethic in Evie. Whilst there was, no expectation for HE. Evie was encouraged to “*consider everything.*” However, despite the support and encouragement Evie considered herself average and had initially relatively low levels of confidence and expectation.



Pippa (final year – placement)

Overall classification Middle Class, First-Generation (MC-NFG)	
Objective	Subjective
NS-SEC Classification: Middle class	Self-classification: Middle class
Father participated in HE but mum did not	Self-classified as Not First-Generation University

Pippa’s mum is a radiographer and her dad is a radiologist. She comes from village on the outskirts of a large town in the North West near Manchester. Pippa’s mum is from the village where the family live; her parents have a farm in the village and her dad grew up in the local town. Pippa’s dad describes his own family as working class but he attended independent school on a scholarship. Both her father and Pippa’s two older sisters studied at University of Liverpool. Pippa attended an independent school between the ages of eight and eighteen. Her parents split when she was eleven, her mum moved out of the family home and Pippa and her sisters spent their time equally between the two households.



Appendix 10: Capital: Within and across participants

ECONOMIC CAPITAL

	Economic constraints	Economic support
Pippa (MC-NFG)		
Thalia (MC-NFG)		
Jade (MC-NFG)		
Jaanavi (MC-NFG)		
Taylor (MC-FG)		
Alice (MC-FG)		
Steph (WC-FG)		
Lucy (WC-FG)		
Evie (WC-FG)		

CULTURAL CAPITAL					
	PARENTS				SCHOOL/WORK EXPERIENCE
	<p>Expectation and confidence</p> <p><i>Levels of confidence, certainty and entitlement (Reay, et al.,2005)</i></p> <p><i>Working class: Lack of confidence: "Hoped for" (Irwin and Elley, 2013)</i></p> <p>desire to "get on" (Snee and Devine, 2014)</p> <p><i>"setting your sights too high" (Archer, 2010)</i></p> <p><i>Middle class: "giving up is not an option" (Walkerdine et al., 2001)</i></p>	<p>Work ethic</p> <p>Resilience</p> <p>We're workers in this family</p>	<p>Involvement in school work</p>	<p>Importance of education/Concerted cultivation of extracurricular</p>	
Pippa					
Thalia					
Jade					
Jaanavi					

Jill Webb

Taylor					
Alice					
Evie					
Lucy					
Steph					

EMOTIONAL, ESTEEM & COMPANIONSHIP SUPPORT

	PARENTS		PARTNERS	FRIENDS	TEACHERS	WORK
	Generalised emotional support "being there" (Kenny et al., 2007)	Field-relevant emotional or esteem support		Belonging		
Pippa						
Thalia						
Jade						
Jaanavi						
Taylor						
Alice						
Evie						
Lucy						
Steph						

Jill Webb

INFORMATIONAL SUPPORT

	PARENTS	SIBLINGS	PARTNERS	FRIENDS	TEACHERS	WORK
Pippa						
Thalia						
Jade						
Jaanavi						
Taylor						
Alice						
Evie						
Lucy						
Steph						

Appendix 11: Ethical Approval



Downloaded: 14/10/2021
Approved: 19/04/2018

Jill Webb
Registration number: 150234894
School of Education
Programme: EdD

Dear Jill

PROJECT TITLE: The development of aspirations in female undergraduates
APPLICATION: Reference Number 016680

On behalf of the University ethics reviewers who reviewed your project, I am pleased to inform you that on 19/04/2018 the above-named project was **approved** on ethics grounds, on the basis that you will adhere to the following documentation that you submitted for ethics review:

- University research ethics application form 016680 (form submission date: 31/01/2018); (expected project end date: 31/12/2019).
- Participant information sheet 1037878 version 2 (31/01/2018).
- Participant information sheet 1037876 version 2 (31/01/2018).
- Participant information sheet 1037875 version 2 (31/01/2018).
- Participant information sheet 1039335 version 1 (31/01/2018).
- Participant information sheet 1039334 version 1 (31/01/2018).
- Participant consent form 1037879 version 2 (31/01/2018).

If during the course of the project you need to [deviate significantly from the above-approved documentation](#) please inform me since written approval will be required.

Your responsibilities in delivering this research project are set out at the end of this letter.

Yours sincerely

David Hyatt
Ethics Administrator
School of Education

Please note the following responsibilities of the researcher in delivering the research project:

- The project must abide by the University's Research Ethics Policy:
<https://www.sheffield.ac.uk/rs/ethicsandintegrity/ethicspolicy/approval-procedure>
- The project must abide by the University's Good Research & Innovation Practices Policy:
https://www.sheffield.ac.uk/polopoly_fs/1.671066!/file/GRIPPpolicy.pdf
- The researcher must inform their supervisor (in the case of a student) or Ethics Administrator (in the case of a member of staff) of any significant changes to the project or the approved documentation.
- The researcher must comply with the requirements of the law and relevant guidelines relating to security and confidentiality of personal data.
- The researcher is responsible for effectively managing the data collected both during and after the end of the project in line with best practice, and any relevant legislative, regulatory or contractual requirements.