The 21st Century Ladz:

The School-to-Work Transition and Masculine Identity of Marginalised Working-Class Young Men from the South Wales Valleys

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Doctor of Philosophy

September 2022

Abstract

This thesis explores the school-to-work transition and formation of masculinity of a group of marginalised working-class young men in the South Wales Valleys, in the context of social and economic change after the end of heavy industry. The qualitative research was undertaken collaboratively with a youth centre organisation and consists of an ethnographic study of nine young men, plus interviews with youth workers and a school teacher. The research engages with the themes of masculinity and social class, whilst also considering predicted future employment changes and the possible implication of these changes for the participants' educational experiences and employment aspirations.

It considers this group of young men in relation to the 1977 research on the lads conducted by Paul Willis (1977). Although there are similarities to the lads, in the context of the loss of heavy industry, there are notable changes in the young men's views and behaviour, including a pragmatic approach to education, some deviation from a manual employment orientation, softer displays of masculinity and a rupturing of previous modes of being that derived from heavy industrial masculinity. The significance of this is that, while previous research has demonstrated the complex intergenerational effects of the loss of heavy industry, which has resulted in an opposition to neoliberal individualism, service sector employment and emotional labour among a previous generation of young men in the area (Gater 2022), the current research identifies significant generational changes.

In light of the coming changes in work related to increased automation and new technologies, it is vital to consider how young men such as these might have access to better paid and skilled employment. The results of this research allow us to consider employment futures other than low-skilled manual employment and thus to potentially increase the life chances of marginalised working-class young men.

Contents

Acknowledgements

In Loving Memory of

Loki Gater

April 19th 2015 – December 30th 2021

I guess, if I am writing this acknowledgements section, then I have somewhat completed the final stage of an eight-year-long journey and the only part that, at times, I thought I wouldn't finish, often longing to return to the world I had left behind and a simpler place and time. This stage has made me question my identity, ability, and whether this was a bridge too far, but I have dug deep and worked hard to get here. But those actions alone would not have got me to this point. As I know too well, people with a biography like mine rarely embark on this journey, let alone make it! And I have made it because of others, including people's willingness to engage in my research, supportive family, friends, and mentors who have looked beyond the tattoos, bald head and valleys accent, most importantly, Professor Valerie Walkerdine and Professor Phillip Brown. This success story (regardless of the viva outcome) is as much all of yours as mine, and I thank you all for everything you have done for me – Big ♥

#ChaseYourDreams

#FollowYourHeart

Chapter One:

Introduction

Context and Rationale

This study aims to explore the school-to-work transition and formation of masculinity of a group of marginalised working-class young men in the South Wales Valleys, in the context of social and economic change after the end of heavy industry. The foundations for this school-to-work transition study derived and evolved from a PhD studentship that I was awarded and was based in a coalfields community and an area that is my place of residency. In light of the area's industrial past and issues concerning the fact that young men from South Wales Valleys coalfield places have found themselves trapped in a cycle of low pay and precarious work yet do not want to leave their communities to find employment (Jimenez and Walkerdine 2011; Walkerdine and Jimenez 2012), the research was concerned with working with local young men to develop a training programme that would enable them to get into training and feel skilled and equipped to enter employment. The studentship was entitled: Engaging masculinities in a former Welsh Pit Village: supporting preparation for new industrial training/education. The overarching question was: Can locally-produced and targeted support assist in getting men in deindustrialised communities into training/education for new industrial work? The study was in collaboration with a local youth centre where the research was to be conducted using research methods, including ethnography and psychosocial interviewing to understand current issues relating to masculinity, work, and strength of feeling about the valley in the present work-age male population.

After initially getting to grips with some of the literature surrounding working-class young men, employment and masculinity, I began fieldwork and ethnography at the youth centre, observing and talking to the young men. It quickly became apparent that the original research aims and objectives of developing a training programme did not fit the cohort of young men because many of the young men at the youth centre were below employment age and openly confessed to a negative or complex relationship with education and manual employment aspirations. Thus, I realised that it would not be as simple as creating a programme and offering the young men training. The training programme would require some level of educational engagement. However,

my early assessment of the young men from the youth centre somewhat suggested that many of them resembled the lads from Willis's (1977) study and demonstrated associated elements of protest masculinity (Connell 1995; Kimmel 2005; Johansson and Haywood 2017), including macho behaviour, resistance to authority, and engaged in open discussions concerning their disengagement with education, truancy, classroom disruption, 'petty' crime and violence. However, as this thesis demonstrates, my early assessment of the young men was not entirely correct. The young men, or the Ladz as I came to refer to them, equally engaged in practices that somewhat contradicted my initial lads' (Willis 1977) categorisation and protest masculinity (Connell 1995) association through behaviour and views, including physical tactility, sensitivity, empathy and compassion, which align with inclusive masculinity (Anderson 2009), open masculinities (Elliott 2020) and 'new' masculinities (Spector-Mersel and Gilbar 2021).

The Ladz' contradictory views and behaviours were particularly puzzling to me, not merely based on my theoretical understanding of the fields of interest, but because I am a research insider (Merton 1972) both concerning the area where the research is situated, which is my place of residency, but more importantly because as later sections document, I myself would have been categorised as a lad (Willis 1977) during my youthful years, and as I explain, some of the views and behaviour that the Ladz practised transgressed the youthful laddish code that myself and my peers adhered to. However, although the Ladz' behaviours and views were unfamiliar to my youthful laddish understanding, they were somewhat an extension of the findings from the MSc research and PhD pilot study (Gater 2022) that I undertook in the same research locality.

My MSc was a qualitative study which explored the relationship between place identity and the educational experiences and ambitions of five young men aged 21-37 in the Aber Valley who had rejected school and education more broadly based on its perceived irrelevance. The main conclusion drawn from this research was that the young men had inherited a masculine identity from prominent male figures that was encouraged by friends. The findings also established that all participants were employed in manual work and favoured active, physical jobs. This information influenced the pilot study, which was a set of follow-up semi-structured interviews which explored the young men's employment experiences and relationships. The pilot

study findings indicated that participants' experiences and relationships with employment were influenced by community traditions and a working-class masculinity associated with attributes previously conducive to heavy industrial work, including stoicism, risk-taking, and toughness (Walkerdine and Jimenez 2012; Ward 2015). This led them to favour some but not all forms of manual employment, whilst dismissing sedentary service sector work and emotional labour. The appeal of manual employment was attributed to its physical nature, perceived health-related benefits, and participants' awareness of personal wellbeing. The participants' concern for personal health and wellbeing contradicted the health-averse practices often associated with traditional masculinity (Courtenay 2000; Garfield et al. 2008). Therefore, the finding from the pilot study, coupled with my early observations at the youth centre, led me to question the identity of contemporary marginalised young men in this coalfield community. For example, why were there similarities between the lads from Willis's (1977) study and my youthful laddish understanding, yet also significant disparities? Why were these consistencies occurring, and how could we understand and explain the changes? Therefore, influenced by these queries and issues, I decided that it was necessary to modify the research plan to focus on exploring the young men's education and employment aspirations from the youth centre aged 12-21 and changing the research into a school-to-work transition study. Furthermore, due to the young men's observed behaviours and views and my reading of the literature involving working-class young men, I believed that research would require me to engage with several different kinds of literature that I had previously only somewhat considered, including literature on school-to-work transition, masculinity and class. Furthermore, because of the young men's age and the increased likelihood that they would potentially be affected by predicted future employment changes (Frey and Osborne 2013; Frey and Osborne 2017; Mckinsey 2017; Hawksworth et al. 2018), I also needed to consider new technologies and the future of work debates.

The following section provides insight into my youthful laddish background, including a personal biographical account that contradicts Delamont's (2000, p. 99) notion that "most of the male sociologists who have . . . chronicled the rebellion and resistance of the hooligans to schooling . . . worked hard at school, did their homework, passed exams, took the advice of teachers". Additionally, unlike the criticisms aimed at Willis (Hammersley and Atkinson 2007) and akin to the

representation of the young men in this study, the subsequent section is not a celebration of my past nor an attempt to portray myself as a working-class anti-hero (Roberts 2012); instead, it is a 'warts and all' account that demonstrates a degree of integrity through forthright documentation of my connection to the research topic, whilst also explaining my motives for conducting this study.

The Valley Boy

Eight years ago, I decided to return to education. On reflection, it still seems like a crazy decision, and it was one that was greeted with mockery by people who knew me. However, this jesting was not unfounded because my re-engagement with education was on the basis of not a single GCSE. This lack of educational attainment was the consequence of my youthful disengagement from school. Akin to the lads (Willis 1977), I also placed minimal importance on academic qualifications. A sociological examination of oneself is often a complicated process (Bourdieu 2001). However, on reflection, I believe there are a few possible reasons why I had rejected education.

As a young boy, I had poor coordination skills that I now know stem from my recently diagnosed severe dyslexia and dyspraxia. Subsequently, my childhood ability to successfully engage in sport was hindered, and although my dyslexia and dyspraxia were undiagnosed during my school years, I now assume that they must have caused me difficulties. Therefore, I guess my resistance to the school was an attempt to carve out an identity for myself and demonstrate my teenage masculinity through an avenue other than sporting prowess (Frosh et al 2002) or academic achievement (Mac an Ghaill 1994).

My resistance to education and what quickly escalated into early teenage smoking, drinking alcohol, drug-taking and 'petty' crime, were intensified by my youthful admiration and what later became a friendship with a group of young men from my village termed the 'Square Boys'. This group of working-class young men shared an association with the coal mining forefathers of the area, demonstrating toughness and stoicism (Ward 2015) and akin to the lads (Haywood and Mac an Ghaill 2003), epitomised what has become known as protest masculinity (Connell 1995).

Using a play on the words of Richard Burton (Dick Cavett show 1980), for me, and young men from the area like myself, our ambition was to become a 'Square Boy' who stood on the street corner because, for us, they were the kings of the contemporary underworld. Neighbouring groups of young men revered them and knew that entry into the 'Square Boys'' territory would potentially be met with violence. The 'Square Boys'' rough and ready displays drew the attention of local girls that seemed attracted to the young men's strong, lively masculine characteristics (Frosh et al. 2002). This popularity intensified the 'Square Boys' attraction to myself and others like me.

The connection between myself and the lads goes beyond a rejection of academic qualifications. My father was a carpenter, and relatively early in my teenage years, I committed to manual employment and becoming a carpenter like my father, because it seemed like the obvious employment route (Veness 1962). This commitment led me to enrol on a local college carpentry course that, at the time, had a no qualification entry requirement. Although I completed this two-year course, other than a couple of brief spells on building sites as a carpenters' labourer, I could not get any substantial experience in building-site carpentry because apprenticeships were in minimal supply. Subsequently, I lacked the know-how and confidence to successfully transition from a college-qualified carpenter to one that was building-site proficient.

Without building-site experience and being unable to find a building firm or someone to support me further in my carpentry development, the two years I spent at college were worthless. Subsequently, with no GCSEs, my employment trajectory cascaded into a series of what are often referred to as 'dead-end jobs' (MacDonald and Marsh 2005). Although I do not entirely subscribe to the notion of dead-end jobs, because I am not convinced that everyone seeks career progression and social mobility (Walkerdine et al. 2001; Reay 2013), the jobs I have been employed in, fall into the strict definition of this term: low paid, with minimal room for progression (Lindsay and McQuaid 2004) with some being precarious.

You name it. I have done it! I have made washing lines in a factory. I have worked as a local park attendant. I have sold sports nutrition supplements in a health shop. I have worked in a factory making concrete products, including garden ornaments. I have laboured on building sites, and I have worked at a supermarket picking products for home delivery.

At age 32, I had what Thomson et al. (2002, p. 339) refer to as a 'critical moment': an event depicted in narrative "considered to be important or to have had important consequences". I have chosen to leave this event undocumented. However, this experience brought about an early midlife crisis and made me realise my life was going nowhere. My lack of educational attainment had significantly reduced my employment opportunities, and my life lacked meaning. Consequently, based on a 'nothing to lose' attitude and expected failure, I returned to education and enrolled on a youth, community and social work access to education course.

I chose youth, community and social work because I wanted to become a youth worker and help younger marginalised versions of myself and prevent a life trajectory similar to mine. Additionally, my park attendant job led me to believe that I could gain young people's trust. However, a spell of youth work employment experience dissuaded me from this career path, and I fell in love with sociological theory through the work of Ferdinand Tönnies, Karl Marx and Émile Durkheim. Thus, here I am today, having exceeded my expectation of failure.

What does this biographical documentation offer besides integrity, and what does it tell us about my motivation? This thesis draws on my past experiences and blends all of the life components that have led me to this point, including my original attraction to youth work and desire to help marginalised young men, together with my acquired love of sociological theory, all eventually coming together in an attempt to understand the school-to-work transition of working-class young men not entirely dissimilar to a younger version of myself. The following section provides a contextual overview of the literature concerning this study whilst also explaining the overall argument of this thesis.

Background

Post-World War II education and employment-related literature often identifies the significance of social relations and the inheritance of a masculine identity (Tolson 1977; Willis 1977) associated with stoicism, risk-taking, toughness and resistance to authority (Connell 1995; Kimmel et al. 2005). The inheritance of this identity led some working-class young men to reject education and a manual work orientation that supported the expression of this characteristic (Veness 1962; Carter 1966; Ashton and

Field 1976; Willis 1977) yet also led to monotonous, unrewarding jobs (Goldthorpe et al. 1969a; Beynon 1973).

However, the “Thatcherite Revolution” (Nayak 2003a, p. 149) and the UK’s subsequent rapid deindustrialisation from the 1970s onwards led to a decline in such work and an increase in service sector employment, although much of the latter consists of low-skilled, poorly-paid jobs, especially for those from working-class backgrounds (McDowell 2003; Lindsay and McQuaid 2004; Roberts 2020). Much service sector employment also requires historically associated ‘feminine’ attributes, such as customer service, interpersonal communication, and the presentation of self (McDowell 2003; Warhurst and Nickson 2020).

Despite all this, much post-industrial research continues to recognise the significance of masculinity in the UK, especially among sections of working-class youth in former industrial locales once reliant on coal, steel and manufacturing, often identifying issues around education and employment (see, for example, McDowell 2003; Nayak 2003a; Nayak 2003b; Nayak 2006; Jimenez and Walkerdine 2011; Walkerdine and Jimenez 2012; Nixon 2006; Nixon 2009; Ward 2015) that often derive from the intergenerational transmission of previously essential ways of being, including community-related attachment and working-class masculinity characteristics (Walkerdine and Jimenez 2012; Ivinson 2014a; Ward 2015) which oppose the neoliberalist ideal of individualism (Giddens 1991; Beck 1992) and service sector employment requirements of emotional labour (Hochschild 1983) and deference and docility, features claimed to be at odds with working-class masculinity (Connell 1995; McDowell 2003).

Adjacent to these studies, there has been research documenting the changing nature of masculinity, including the notion of hybrid masculinity (Bridges and Pascoe 2014) and inclusive masculinity (Anderson 2009). It is within the scope of inclusive masculinity that Roberts (2018) offers an additional perspective on working-class young men and employment and suggests that his ‘missing middle’ participants (working-class young men who have not disengaged from school/employment, yet neither achieved degree-level education or a professional occupation), no longer fully subscribe to traditional norms of masculinity and are instead demonstrating a more

inclusive form of masculinity that is more in tune with the emotional labour (Hochschild 1983) requirements of service sector work.

Roberts (2018) and, more recently, Brozsely and Nixon (2022) make important contributions to working-class studies through the focus on the missing middle or ordinary kids (Brown 1987). However, this study provides a contemporary accompaniment to place-based comparable studies of class and social change in post-industrial locales (McDowell 2003; Nayak 2003a; Nayak 2003b; Nayak 2006; Jimenez and Walkerdine 2011; Walkerdine and Jimenez 2012; Ward 2015) and returns the focus to more marginalised working-class young men because, firstly, masculine identity and the notion that "masculinities are configurations of practice that are constructed, unfold, and change through time" (Connell and Messerschmidt 2005, p. 852). Secondly, because of surrounding claims regarding changes in social class distinctions (Giddens 1991; Beck 1992; Savage et al. 2015) and working-class identity (Ainsley 2018), and thirdly because future employment changes research suggests that men with low educational attainment and manual forms of employment will be negatively affected (Frey and Osborne 2013; Mckinsey 2017; Hawksworth et al. 2018). Furthermore, the government policy response to future employment changes, increased automation and new technologies often includes upskilling and lifelong learning (Bell et al. 2017; Leopold et al. 2018; Brown et al. 2020; HM Government 2021; Schlogl 2021; Wheelahan 2022). Subsequently, based on the current understanding of marginalised working-class young men and the associated negative and complex relationship with education, the success of this policy response is questionable.

In this respect, this research offers a valuable contribution to working-class studies by reversing the recent school-to-work participant shift (Roberts 2018; Brozsely and Nixon 2022), refocusing on a group of marginalised working-class young men in the context of the 1977 research on the lads conducted by Paul Willis (1977), whilst also considering relevant contemporary studies. Furthermore, I argue that, although the young men from this study share some similarities with the lads from Willis' (1977) study, and various similarities with other research concerning working-class young men, education and employment, including the intergenerational transmission of previously essential ways of being and a subsequent complex relationship with education, manual employment orientation and attachment to place (Veness 1962;

Carter; 1966; Ashton and Field 1976; Willis 1977; Mac a Ghaill 1994; McDowell 2003; Nayak 2003a; Nayak 2003b; Nayak 2006; Nixon 2006; Nixon 2009; Jimenez and Walkerdine 2011; Walkerdine and Jimenez 2012; Ward 2015), there is also evidence of inconsistencies and a change and departure from traditionally associated values of working-class masculinity (Connell 1995). This includes learning disabilities and/or struggle with mental health, which contribute to a pragmatic approach to education as opposed to anti-learning (Willis 1977; Jackson 2006; Jackson 2010), softer displays of masculinity (Anderson 2009) and some deviation from manual employment orientation that was the consequence of specific social circumstances. Here, I refer to a rupturing process that destabilised modes of being, associated with heavy industry (Walkerdine and Jimenez 2012; Ivinson 2014b; Ward 2015). The differences in the young men's attitudes and behaviour are significant, especially in the context of future employment changes and the notion that manual employment, low-skilled and poorly educated young men will be negatively affected by increased automation and new technologies. They provide us with an opportunity to harness and develop the identified changes through targeted intervention and a locally-based initiative delivered by trusted community members and organisations aimed at increasing educational engagement and considering employment futures other than low-skilled manual employment and increase the life chances of marginalised working-class young men.

Overview of the Thesis

This study considers several aspects, including social class and gender, future employment changes and current knowledge concerning working-class young men, education and employment. This collection of components and their complexity requires a discussion of several works of literature. For this reason, the literature review consists of two chapters.

Chapter Two reviews significant literature and the trajectory of ideas concerning working-class young men, education and employment, identifying commonalities, disparities, and identifies a research knowledge gap while also discussing future of work changes, highlighting the possible negative effect on marginalised working-class

young men and government policy shortcomings, and exploring competing arguments concerning social class and defining the thesis' interpretation and use of this concept.

Chapter Three assesses the literature and different theories relating to masculinities, highlighting shortcomings in these ideas concerning related aspects of this study and identifying missing issues.

Chapter Four documents and explains the research method, design and sample incorporated in this study, introduces the participants and discusses positionality and ethical considerations.

Chapter Five is the first empirical chapter and provides contextual information while exploring the young men's educational experiences, demonstrating similarities and dissimilarities with the lads and contemporary studies.

Chapter Six explores the young men's employment orientation and reasoning, identifying commonalities with the lads through some attraction to manual work whilst also highlighting a deviation from this aspiration.

Chapter Seven presents and discusses empirical findings relating to the young men's social relations and masculinities, demonstrating views and behaviours that contradict working-class masculinity associated characteristics.

Chapter Eight discusses the main findings from this thesis, incorporating theoretical and empirical literature from previous research whilst also suggesting policy approaches and identifying follow-up research possibilities.

Chapter Two:

Working-Class Young Men, Education, and Employment

Introduction

This chapter has two subsections: firstly, it explores prominent literature concerning working-class young men, education and employment. The second part discusses future employment changes and social class, which are not directly addressed in the body of the thesis but which function as background with implications for the labour market prospects for young men like the participants in this thesis.

A chronological approach is used to identify key themes in the literature: working-class young men's views towards education and employment: how and why these aspects are constructed, and the effects on employability. The chapter identifies some consistencies concerning the Post-World War II Studies and post-industrial research, however, the chapter also demonstrates that these studies and their findings may be somewhat dated. It highlights, in contrast, a recent study by Roberts (2018) that presents a departure from the prior research findings. The chapter argues, however, that Roberts research findings need to be considered in the context of place-based specificity and working-class subgroup studies.

Post-World War II Studies

In the introduction to *Learning to Labour,* Willis (1977, p. 1) opens by offering a research statement that includes: "the difficult thing to explain about how working class kids get working class jobs is why they let themselves". This statement was partly the basis for Willis's qualitative ethnographic study, which documents the transition from school to work of a group of working-class young men. Although the study includes data from various participants, the research primarily focuses on two groups of young men, including the ear'oles and the lads, with the lads having a more central focus. The lads consisted of a group of twelve non-academic working-class young men attending a boys-only secondary modern school that was situated in a small industrial town in the West Midlands in the heart of a "working class inter-war council estate" (Willis 1977, p. 4), and the school intake consisted mainly of working-class pupils.

Willis's findings demonstrate the lads' immersion in a counter-school culture and rejection of school, which derived from a working-class, shop floor culture (Roberts 1995) and form of masculinity that has become known as protest masculinity (Connell 1995; Haywood and Mac an Ghaill 2003). This form of working-class masculinity was often inherited through social connections, including family and mainly male figures, including the father (Tolson 1977) and honed within the peer group (Willis 1977). These social connections and subsequent identity construction generated manual employment aspirations and a rejection of academic credentials based on the belief that these qualifications would not enhance future employment prospects, thus discarding the notion of meritocracy. Instead, the lads' school experience centred around "dossing, blagging, wagging" (Willis, 1977 p. 26) and resistance to authority, behaviour influenced by their inherited and honed masculine form of working-class identity, which generated a desire and commitment to manual work and a rejection of mental labour and "'pen-pushing'" (Willis 1977, p. 149) based on the belief that these were effeminate and "'cissy'". Conversely, the ear'oles conformed to school norms and had middle-class aspirations.

Essentially, Willis argues that the lads were not passively channelled into jobs; instead, "they were actively choosing their own future in unskilled work" (Roberts 1995, p. 88) and complicit in their own social reproduction (Skeggs 1992; Griffin 2005). The lads' cultural upbringing and masculine environment in which they were raised instilled qualities that facilitated a simple transition to manual work due to the masculine nature of the employment and the ability to express aspects of their previously honed cultural identity, such as resistance to authority, banter and distrust of theoretical work. However, the employment experiences in unskilled and semi-skilled manual work eventually became monotonous and unrewarding (Willis 1977).

Although *Learning to Labour* has been an influential study in school-to-work transition research and other research fields, this study is not without criticism. For example, Brown (1987, p. 24) argues that Willis creates a bi-polar depiction of working-class young men's educational experiences, including a pro and anti-school response that does not explain why "large numbers of working-class pupils do not reject school". Additional criticisms centre around Willis's focus on boys (McRobbie 1991; Griffin 1985), a lack of objectivity due to over-rapport with the lads and a "celebration of their lifestyle" (Hammersley and Atkinson 2007, p. 88) and a lack of focus and attention on

the ear'oles (Griffin 2005). Despite these critiques, Willis's bi-polar model offers "an explanation of why pupils develop the responses they do" (Brown 1990, p. 61) and shows how class is socially reproduced (France and Roberts 2017).

Learning to Labour and Willis's study offers a cultural (Brown 1987; France and Roberts 2017) explanation of working-class young men's educational experiences and employment aspirations. However, the additional school-to-work Post-World War II studies (Veness 1962; Carter; 1966; Ashton and Field 1976) offer a structural explanation (France and Roberts 2017). Despite the differing positions, there are recognisable commonalities between the studies. Akin to the identified significance and influence of family and peers in Willis's study, Veness (1962), (Carter (1966) and Ashton and Field (1976) also demonstrate the significance of social class and socialisation through family and community traditions which determined young people's ambitions, school experience and employment aspirations.

Carter (1966), for example, focused on differing working-class family types and distinguished three groups, including home-centred and aspiring, solid working-class and what he calls the rough. "These three types of background exert distinctive influences upon children[s] . . . job aspirations and general attitudes towards work [and] knowledge about work" (Carter 1966, p. 41). For example, home-centred families are categorised as having middle-class aspirations with husbands in skilled employment and position of responsibility. Therefore, children are encouraged to study and do well in school and careers, whilst factory work and shop work are rejected because of the associated low standing. Solid working-class family types are defined by male fathers in semi and unskilled manual employment and children that aspire to the same jobs as their fathers and neighbours and thus only partially engage in school work. The rough family type is defined by deprivation, and their children bear a significant resemblance to the lads from Willis's (1977) study with males in semi and unskilled work and children that do not care about school and have no appreciation for the joys of learning and are ready-made for 'dead-end' jobs.

Similar to Carter, Ashton and Field (1976) also define three family types with equally distinct influences and outcomes, including careerless, short-term, and extended careers. The careerless correspond with Willis's (1977) lads and Carter's (1966) roughs and are defined by large working-class families living in impoverished

conditions with parents in careerless low-income jobs with little formal education. Children often develop a negative attitude toward education, reject meritocracy, and enter jobs like their parents, with extrinsic reward and financial gain being the primary motivator. Conversely, extended careers include mainly middle-class families with few local ties and whereby children experience minimal school difficulties. Academic achievement is deemed necessary for career orientation, and manual occupations are seen as demeaning and beneath them. Veness (1962) also offers a three model typology regarding school leavers' employment aspirations and expectations, including tradition-direction, which "refers to the situation in which the choice [of] employment is predetermined by family or neighbourhood traditions because no other choice would be thinkable to the young person" (Veness 1962, p. 69). Inner-direction, whereby the choice of employment is made with reference mainly to a person's interests and talents, often overlapping with tradition-direction (Carter 1966). And other-directed, where a young person's career orientation is influenced by external sources of information and stimulated by "talks, conversations, pamphlets, broadcasts and so on" (Veness 1962, p. 73).

In summary of the Post-World War II Studies, although there are variations in the point of focus and differing terminology used, there are commonalities among these studies. These include varying forms of working-class responses to education and employment aspirations that derive from cultural and structural influences and socialisation or intergeneration transmission of ways of being that generate a range of outcomes, including young men that conform to school norms with middle-class aspirations together with those that reject education and manual work orientation. Despite these variations, during the Post-World War II period, the labour market was defined by a segmented structure with a clear division between unskilled, skilled and professional forms of work and relatively full employment rates (Tomlinson 2013). Therefore, various educational outcomes and employment aspirations were accommodated, thus generating a relatively smooth, fluid school-to-work transition (Tomlinson 2013) and enabling working-class young men who left school with no qualifications to find manual employment with satisfactory rates of pay and some prospect of security with reasonable ease (Willis 1977; McDowell 2003; Roberts 2020). However, as the following section shows, these labour market conditions have altered significantly.

The Shift from Manual to Service Sector Work

The late 1970s “Thatcherite Revolution” (Nayak 2003a, p. 149) and Conservative Government policy led to a move away from industrial work, a decline in manual jobs and a shift toward service-sector employment. This employment shift lessened the need for male manual workers who once dominated employment in the heavy industries, while the growth in the service sector employment stimulated demand for female workers. Service sector employment consists of a range of work, from well-paid, high-tech and professional occupations to low-status, insecure jobs (Ward 2015). Therefore, unlike in the Post-World War II era, working-class young men who leave education with no qualifications are now likely to find themselves in the precariat class and limited job opportunities in minimum wage employment such as “hospitality (hotels, bars, cafes, restaurants) and in retail shops” (Roberts 2020, p. 35) and job roles requiring traditionally associated ‘feminine’ attributes and skills including emotional labour interpersonal communication and presentation of self (Hochschild 1983; Leidner, 1993; McDowell 2003). However, the deference and docility features of emotional labour have historically been claimed to be at odds with certain forms of working-class masculinity (Connell 1995; Nixon 2018) and “the right to `stick up for yourself” (McDowell 2003, p. 176). Although this section demonstrates significant structural changes in the UK labour market and economy, the following post-industrial studies related section highlights some continuations and consistencies concerning Post-World War II school-to-work transition research while identifying a significant disparity.

Post-Industrial Studies

Some post-industrial studies demonstrate a degree of continuity with Post-World War II research. For example, Mac an Ghaill’s (1994) ethnographic study at a UK West Midlands secondary school explored how boys learn to become men. In doing so, akin Post-World War II research, Mac an Ghaill identified groups of working-class young men with differing approaches to school and employment aspirations determined by their “relations with their families, their experiences of school and the local labour market” (Hopkins 2013, p. 185). These groups of working-class young men included The Academic Achievers who came from a skilled employment working-class family

background, had “a positive orientation to the academic curriculum” (Mac an Ghaill 1994, p. 59) and saw academic credentials as a route to upward social mobility. The New Enterprisers gravitated toward vocational curriculum subjects and saw these as a means of social mobility. The last group of working-class young men includes The Macho Lads. Similarly, to the lads, roughs and careerless (Carter 1966; Ashton and Field 1976; Willis 1977), these young men rejected “formal school knowledge and the potential exchange value it has in the labour market” (Mac an Ghaill 1994, p. 65). Instead, The Macho Lads school experience centred around three Fs – fighting, fucking and football and a “valorisation of ‘masculine’ manual labour that informed the group’s social practices” (Mac an Ghaill 1994, p. 71).

Similarly, Nayak’s (2003a; 2003b; 2006) research in the North East of England identified a group of working-class young men with a “prominent masculine legacy of manual labour [which] ran through their familial biographies” (Nayak 2003b, p. 150) and a negative attitude towards education that derived from the belief that school was of little importance to their future. Instead, the young men expressed elements of an industrial heritage embodied in an appreciation of skilled physical labour and a commitment to the traditional working-class masculine ideal of ‘hard graft’. McDowell’s (2003) research on young men and their school-to-work transition yet again identifies a legacy of manual labour and attraction to typically masculine jobs, including semi- or unskilled manual work, and who generally expressed a “`don’t much care’ [attitude] to school and its regulatory environment” (McDowell 2003, p. 118). Furthermore, despite the identified significant labour market shift, although some of the young men did have some involvement in service sector work, McDowell (2003, p. 134) “found little evidence . . . that the young men [were] . . . looking for work in the retail sector, in leisure or tourism or the hospitality industry”. Correspondingly, Nixon (2006, 2009) demonstrates low-skilled, poorly-educated working-class men’s rejection of anything other than male-dominated manual occupations, with socialisation and educational background being influential factors (Andersson and Beckman 2018). Service sector work was generally only considered where customer interaction and emotional labour (Hochschild 1983) were minimal, including a narrow range of ‘masculine’ service sector jobs, including distribution, transportation and warehousing.

Similarly to the Post-World War II studies, although the post-industrial studies demonstrate some degree of plurality in working-class ways of being and educational

experiences and employment orientation, despite the shift from manual to service sector work, there is a continued identification of a macho laddish subgroup of working-class young men that adopt a negative attitude towards education and manual employment aspirations (O'Donnell and Sharpe 2000) that largely derives from socialisation or intergenerational transmission of working-class masculine ways of being and structural factors. However, these post-industrial studies are nearly two decades or more old, and the recent research of Roberts (2018) somewhat challenges these notions and offers an alternative understanding.

Roberts (2018, p. 2) research draws on findings from a "longitudinal qualitative study covering a seven-year period with young men of working-class origins from Kent, in the South-East of England" and a historically industrial area with an employment source that included shipbuilding, milling, and coal mining. However, despite deindustrialisation and the dearth of industrial jobs, the research area ranked among the least deprived third of the UK (Roberts 2011) and has witnessed significant regeneration and profound growth in retail, hotels, restaurants and wholesale.

Underpinned by masculinities theory from Connell (1987, 1995, 2000, 2005) and Eric Anderson (2005, 2009, 2011), the theoretical toolbox of Bourdieu and drawing on a study sample that included 24 white, heterosexual working-class young men aged 18-24, Roberts (2018, p. 4) explores the educational and employment experiences and formulation of masculinity of a group of working-class young men that "are not the most marginalised, most spectacular or most dispossessed members of the working class, as is the focus for many scholars", or what we might consider to be the lads explored by Willis (1977), instead, focusing on the 'missing middle' – "those working-class men who, by virtue of being neither disengaged from school/work nor on a route to a 'typically successful' adulthood characterised by a degree and a professional occupation".

Dissimilar to prior research on working-class young men and the identified centrality of socialisation or the intergenerational transmission of working-class ways of being and the subsequent masculine attraction to manual employment (Veness 1962; Carter; 1966; Ashton and Field 1976; Willis 1977; Mac a Ghaill 1994; McDowell 2003; Nayak 2003a; Nayak 2003b; Nayak 2006; Nixon 2006; Nixon 2009), Roberts (2018, p. 126) states that his missing middle study sample "had not merely inherited older

generations of men's dispositions towards and understanding of appropriately masculine work". Therefore, unlike Nixon's (2006; 2009) participants, Roberts argues that his working-class young men were not tied to traditional predispositions but have developed a form of inclusive masculinity more in tune with the emotional demands of retail work. Roberts claims that the differentiation in his findings can be explained through the contemporary nature of his research and participants' detachment from previous ways of being due to the decline in heavy industry and the coinciding rise in service sector work.

Although Roberts' findings demonstrate the discontinuity of intergenerational transmission of working-class masculine modes of being, Roberts seems to distinguish his research from previous studies based on geographic location. For example, Roberts (2018, p. 78) states that his study was based in Kent, in the South East of England, "a contrasting setting to much academic work on young men and changing economies conducted in industrial 'powerhouse' regions (e.g. Furlong & Cartmel, 2004; McDowell, 2003; Jimenez & Walkerdine, 2011)". Therefore, Roberts somewhat implicitly raises the signal of the importance of cultural and geographical specificity (Walkerdine and Jimenez 2012; Invinson 2014a) in understanding young men's responses to education and work and seems to acknowledge that "the industrial and social history of a place affects [the] identity of its inhabitants" (McDowell 2003, p. 96). Within the 'industrial 'powerhouse' regions' distinction, Roberts includes the work of Jimenez and Walkerdine (2011), which was conducted in the South Wales Valleys, the same research location as this study. Therefore, the following section explores the research in this locality regarding working-class young men and their experiences and relationships with education and employment.

South Wales Valleys

Jimenez and Walkerdine's (2011) research was based in South Wales Valleys, UK, and a community referred to as 'Steeltown' due to the area's strong association with steel production owing to a steelwork, which was a major employer in the area up until its closure in 2002. The study demonstrates the "intergenerational transmission of gendered codes of masculinity" (Jimenez and Walkerdine 2011, p. 194) and the subsequent reluctance of young men to engage in low-status forms of service sector

employment due to family and friends ridiculing, rejecting and shaming the young men about their engagement in jobs and wearing a work-related uniform that was communally viewed as 'feminine'. Furthermore, in the main publication resulting from the 'Steeltown' study, Walkerdine and Jimenez (2012, p. 119) discuss issues around education in the research locality, stating that young men in the area were "a bit like Paul Willis's (1977) lads several decades earlier, [and] were longing to be men and had followed the path of many generations of men before them who left school with no qualification".

As mentioned, a significant criticism of Willis's (1977) study concerns the bi-polar depiction of working-class young men's educational experiences (Brown 1990) and narrow focus on disaffected youths (Brown 1987). In response to this, Brown's (1987) South Wales based 'Middleport Study' of young men's school-to-work transition, which was based on data collected from three comprehensive schools and using both qualitative and quantitative data collection, largely focuses on what Brown (1987, p. 31) terms Ordinary kids, working-class young men that "neither simply accept nor reject school, but comply with it", which Brown argues is an attitude towards school adopted by the majority of working-class pupils. The 'ordinary' working-class young men's response to school was characterised by "'getting on within the working class" (Brown 1990, p. 68), which led them to make an effort in school based on the belief that a modest level of attainment and academic credentials would enhance their chances of employment. However, similarly to Post-World War II school-to-work transition studies (Carter 1966; Ashton and Field 1976; Willis 1977), Brown equally identifies two other subgroups of working-class young men, including the Swots who adopted a 'getting out' approach to school and "who were identified as spending all their time working and never having a laugh or getting into trouble with teachers" (Brown 1990, p. 67), and Rems who akin to Willis's (1977) lads, rejected school based on the belief that it was boring and irrelevant, and was mainly a venue for "hav[ing] a laugh" (Brown 1987, p. 72). Similar to the Post-World War II school-to-work transition studies, although Brown does not explicitly explore gender, his findings have been interpreted through the lens of masculinity and claimed to demonstrate that "working-class boys construct a variety of masculine identities of which being macho is only one" (O'Donnell and Sharpe 2000, p. 45).

Masculinity is a central aspect in the research of Ward (2015). Ward's research is a longitudinal study based in a former mining community in the South Wales Valleys. Using Goffman's notion of performance of self, Ward demonstrates how the young men perform masculinity in different settings and concerning education, leisure and employment and engage in "a degree of chameleonising . . . where individuals can adjust and alter performances with different audiences" (Ward 2015 p. 150). These subgroups of working-class young men include The Geeks, who were academic achievers and mainly demonstrated a form of masculinity based on educational success, which is often perceived to oppose laddish (Willis 1977) working-class masculinity. However, outside the confines of school, The Geeks visited strip clubs and engaged in sexist laddish associated behaviour.

The second subgroup of working-class young men included The Valley Boiz, whom Ward argues resembled Willis's (1977) lads and had a similar attitude towards education and employment and engaged in fighting and drinking large amounts of alcohol. However, these young men stayed on in education post-16, which was influenced by the limited employment options in the locale. Furthermore, some of The Valley Boiz undertook part-time service sector work in pubs and fast food outlets. However, although this involvement may be regarded as somewhat contradictory considering the young men's association with working-class/or protest masculinity, which is often deemed antithetical to the service sector requirements (Connell 1995; McDowell 2003), Ward surprisingly overlooks this disparity and does not explore the young men's experience of service sector work. Nevertheless, similarly to The Geeks, The Valley Boiz also engaged in dual displays of masculinity by "perform[ing] a 'softer' side through intimate stories with close friends" (Ward 2015, p.152).

The third and final subgroup in Ward's study is The Emos. These young men adopted a similar approach to education as Brown's (1987) 'ordinary kids' and "did enough to 'get on' in school" (Ward 2015, p. 98) whilst also displaying an alternative version of masculinity through a distinctive style including long hair and tight skinny jeans together with traditional displays of working-class masculinity. Essentially, Ward's (2015) study argues that despite social transformations, the influence of heavy industry continues to prevail and make working-class masculinity a "default reference point" for young men (Ward 2015, p. 96).

This South Wales Valleys portion of this review reveals findings somewhat dissimilar from those of Roberts (2018), contradicting the notion that working-class young men are not tied to traditional predispositions. The literature demonstrates the persistence of working-class masculinity (Willis 1977; Connell 1995), a negative or complex relationship with education and the "intergenerational transmission of gendered codes of masculinity" (Jimenez and Walkerdine 2011, p. 194). However, these studies predate Roberts and may be regarded as somewhat dated concerning social and economic change, especially considering that the findings from the most recent study are nearly a decade (Ward 2013) or more old. The review now considers the significance of future employment changes to the above debates.

Future Employment Changes

This section explores the literature concerning future work changes, new technologies, increased automation and the predicted impact on job types and individuals. The future of work debate is complex. However, this section confines itself to a broad outline that simply locates various positions to further situate the research in the future kind of work that awaits young men like the participants. There are consistencies between these positions principally centred around the notion that manual forms of employment and low-skilled, poorly educated young men will bear the hardest impact from future employment changes.

Therefore, rather than merely reconciling working-class young men's future to the hands of fate, this chapter errs on the side of caution and considers predicted future employment changes as a realistic outcome and thus identifies possible shortcomings concerning government policy response and current understanding on marginalised working-class young men, education and employment.

Future of Work Studies

Driven by capitalism, humanity is set to achieve even greater technological and scientific advances that may potentially deliver unprecedented social change, particularly concerning employment (Rifkin 1995; Autor 2015; Grace et al. 2017). The notion of a job apocalypse and a surplus population of human workers has stoked

public fears surrounding a future of inequality, whereby employment will be limited to an elite few (Beaudry et al. 2016; Aggarwal and Nash 2018). Contemporary media discourse has often been at the forefront of this portrayal, regularly emphasising the notion that automation is set to create thousands of job losses in forthcoming years. Examples of this media depiction include headlines such as: *'Robots are coming for your job: and faster than you think'* (Chan 2016). *'Robots 'could take 4m UK private sector jobs within 10 years'* (Booth 2017), and *'The Year the Robots Came for Our Jobs'* (Malesic 2017).

Despite media portrayal, there is little research-based consensus about the future scale of labour substitution resulting from automation. However, it is widely believed that new technologies will primarily impact 'routine' jobs that are easier to automate. For example, Frey and Osborne (2013; 2017) estimate that around 47 per cent of total US employment is at high risk from automation in the next two decades or by the year 2030. Overall, the findings indicate that the jobs most at risk of computerisation are those that are predictable or physical forms of employment, including transportation, construction and extraction, manufacturing, office administration, and sales and services. The jobs least at risk from computerisation require complex perception, manipulation skills, creativity and social intelligence, such as skilled management, engineering and science, computers, education, healthcare, legal services and the arts and media, subsequently leading to anticipated increased demand for competencies including soft skills and social skills (Brynjolfsson and Mcafee 2012; Davenport and Kirby 2016; Deloitte 2016; Goodhart 2020). Others who support this view include McKinsey (2017), Grace et al. (2018), as well as non-American studies: Pajarinen and Rouvinen (2014), Deloitte (2014) and Frey and Osborne (2014).

The findings of Frey and Osborne are cited in several articles that relate to the future of work and automation, yet despite this popularity, their research has obvious shortcomings. Firstly, they fail to account for the possibility that automation will create new jobs, a notion that is particularly evident in several pieces of research, including that of Hawksworth et al. (2018), IFR (2018) and Leopold et al. (2018). Further, much of this research contradicts the findings of Frey and Osborne by suggesting that rather than damaging human employment, automation is labour-augmenting and has the potential to increase employment levels due to the creation of new jobs (Arntz et al. 2016).

Secondly, whilst Frey and Osborne's findings and claims offer a very deterministic view of automation and employment, they fail to account for the economic aspects of automation (Brown et al. 2018), such as the cost of replacing humans with machines. Moreover, substituting workers with machines may not be economically viable or even worthwhile to all forms of business (Hawksworth et al. 2018). Arntz et al. (2016) also suggest that Frey and Osborne's research is methodologically flawed and thus overestimates the number of jobs that can be fully automated.

The basis of Arntz et al.'s (2016) critique is centred on the notion that jobs are often made up of multiple tasks (Autor and Handel 2013) and that not all tasks within an occupation are easily automatable, thus making the analysis of a job as a whole, and the occupational-based approach, flawed.

To substantiate their claims and critique of Frey and Osbourne and the occupational-based approach, Arntz et al. (2016) employ a task-based approach to the analysis of automation and its effects on employment. Rather than assuming jobs as a whole are displaced by automation, the task-based approach assesses employment tasks that machines can displace (Arntz et al. 2016). Employing this method, Arntz et al. (2016) analysed the percentage of jobs at risk from automation for 21 OECD countries, including America. This analysis involved using the "PIACC database (Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies) that surveys task structures across OECD countries" (Arntz et al. 2016, p. 8). Using this data, Arntz et al. were able to take into account the way tasks varied by roles within the same occupation.

The findings of Arntz et al. (2016) estimate that for the 21 OECD countries included in their research, on average, 9 per cent of jobs are automatable. American jobs at risk from automation fall into this average category of 9 per cent, with the UK being slightly higher at 10 per cent. In comparison, Frey and Osborne (2013; 2017) estimated that 47 per cent of American jobs are at risk from automation, a contrast that equates to a 38 per cent discrepancy. Furthermore, Arntz et al. (2016) also suggest that their own estimate of job risk and automation may be exaggerated due to social, legal and economic obstacles. Moreover, even if businesses were to employ new forms of technology, human workers may be able to adapt their skills and switch tasks and thus secure employment.

Leopold et al. (2018) offer a somewhat optimistic view of automation and employment. The estimates of these scholars suggest that by the year 2022, automation will actually increase jobs in emerging professions, which will subsequently offset any decline that may occur in other forms of employment. Leopold et al. (2018) predict that automation will lead to an 11 per cent increase in employment, an estimate slightly greater than their predicted job decline of 10 per cent, yet it still equates to a net gain of employment overall.

The notion that automation will increase employment levels overall is also predicted by the data-driven research of Hawksworth et al. (2018). In relation to education, males face the most significant risk from automation. Men with low educational attainment are often over-represented as craft and related trade workers and machine operators. In contrast, low-educated women often have a high representation in service and sales work and elementary occupations such as cleaners and helpers, all areas estimated to be less affected by automation than the jobs undertaken by men with similar educational attainment.

Despite differing views on the impact of technologies and automation on jobs, all of the estimates indicate that there is a clear distinction between the jobs most likely to be affected by automation and those least likely to be affected, with this difference being distinguished through the categorisation of routine jobs and non-routine jobs. Overall, the future of work research suggests that the forms of employment most likely to be affected by automation are routine jobs, occupations relating to using fingers and hands, or exchanging information and selling (Brown et al. 2018). Many of these forms of employment are often performed by individuals with minimal educational attainment (Frey and Osborne 2013). Routine forms of employment are identified as high risk because they are often repetitive and mainly consist of job tasks based on well-defined procedures that machines can easily replicate and perform (Reidy 2014). Furthermore, not only can machines replicate these jobs and their tasks, but in many cases: “if a machine can do job tasks currently done by humans, a machine will often do the task with greater precision, speed and at a lower cost’ (Muro et al. 2019, p. 14).

Policy Response

The UK and Welsh governments have recognised the potential threat of automation and job loss: UK Government National AI Strategy (HM Government 2021); the Welsh Government Employability Plan (Welsh Government 2018); The Welsh Government Wales 4.0 Delivering Economic Transformation for a Better Future of Work (Welsh Government 2019). Generally, the policy narrative echoes the literature and studies surrounding the future of work (Brynjolfsson and McAfee 2012; Arntz et al. 2016; Leopold et al. 2018) and has become entwined with education, reskilling, upskilling (Kapetaniou 2019; Allas 2020; WEF 2020; WEF 2021), and the notion that "If workers can up-skill through better education and training, they will be better placed to complement the intelligent machines of the future" (Spencer and Slater 2020, p. 121).

A Future for Working-Class Young Men

This future of work discussion reveals little consensus, but it is widely assumed that employment changes will negatively impact low-skilled, poorly educated young people. In response to this impact, government policy largely focuses on the notion of lifelong learning and upskilling individuals to counteract the impact of new technologies. However, concerning the current understanding of marginalised working-class young men and the identified negative association with education, the benefit and success of this educational focus are currently questionable. Therefore, without addressing this potential policy shortcoming and considering methods to engage marginalised working-class young men in education, future employment changes may increase inequality due to the negative impact on marginalised societal groups and increase youth unemployment. Furthermore, automation and new technologies are predicted to affect manual jobs severely. These forms of employment have been traditionally associated with a working-class status due to the relationship to the modes of production and subsequent level of income, economic security, chances of economic advancement and position of authority and control (Goldthorpe 1980; Goldthorpe 2016). However, the UK labour market structure has altered significantly since these employment-related social class definitions. Therefore, the following section explores social class and the discussions surrounding this topic, demonstrating the trajectory of ideas and the shift in understanding this concept whilst

also defining this study's use and interpretation of social class. Understanding social class is important to youth transition research, as it often shapes a person's understanding of the world and their decisions and choices (France and Roberts 2017).

Social Class

At this point, the thesis requires a brief survey of class in relation to identifying commonalities, disparities, and identities as a means of examining research knowledge gaps.

The term 'class' is commonly used in various forums ranging from academic journals to tabloid newspapers, yet, despite this, it is frequently argued that there is no universal measure of class and thus no single correct definition (Crompton 2008). The traditional definition of this term refers to groups of individuals that jointly share similar occupational statuses and incomes (Manstead 2018). This classical objective notion of class is attributed to the emergence of 18th Century technological/scientific innovation and the subsequent birth of industrial capitalism (Crompton 2010). These distinct social and economic changes created a social class distinction based on occupational relationships while also intensifying the importance of paid employment, thus making occupational status a key indicator of social advantage or disadvantage (Crompton 2008). Thus social divisions under this model are based on differences between those that control and own material means of production, often referred to as the bourgeoisie or middle-class, a new class, distinct from inherited aristocratic wealth, and those possessing only their labour-power which they were forced to sell to the bourgeoisie to survive, these being the proletariat or working-class (Marx and Engels 1987; Dorling 2014).

The correlation between occupation and class status is a relationship that has guided significant, influential Post-World War II (WWII) sociological studies, Lockwood's *The Blackcoated Worker* (1989) being the most notable, but others *The Affluent Worker Study* (Goldthorpe et al. 1968a, 1968b, 1969) also exerted a profound influence (Savage 2010).

Goldthorpe et al.'s case study of three major manufacturing companies (Vauxhall, Skefco and Laporte), all based in Luton, UK, aimed to explore workers' class identity.

One of the fundamental objectives of the research was to explore the theory of 'embourgeoisement', or in other words, whether certain more highly paid workers were incorporating middle-class norms and values (Goldthorpe et al. 1967). The findings derived from both of these studies inspired Goldthorpe to pursue further research, including *The Oxford Mobility Study* (Goldthorpe 1980). From this, he developed a model, often referred to as the Goldthorpe or Nuffield Class Schema (Goldthorpe and Hope 1974), which created a scheme of occupational grading used as a measure of class structure. This schema has had a lasting legacy, being central in the creation of the National Statistics Socio-economic Classification (NS-SEC) (Rose and Pevalin 2003) and contemporary class-based analysis in Britain (Scott 2010). To this end, the Goldthorpe schema was adopted as the foundation for the NS-SEC because the schema is seen as internationally accepted and believed to be theoretically balanced (ONS 2010). It is also generally considered a good measure and predictor of education and health outcomes. Despite these assertions, Goldthorpe's schema has received significant criticism. Crompton (2010, p. 51) argues that there is "a number of difficulties in using occupation (or job) as a measure of 'class'". Firstly, these complications include the difficulty of categorising individuals without a job. Secondly, Goldthorpe's schema was moulded to the contours of men's employment (Crompton 2008) and thus placed little emphasis on gender, and thirdly, occupational rank does not indicate a person's capital or wealth holdings (Crompton 2010). Devine (1998) also criticises Goldthorpe for being economically deterministic and failing to recognise the cultural aspects that also form class identity.

The Golden Age of Social Mobility

The critiques of Goldthorpe's work are particularly pertinent for this thesis, especially the gender-related issue, as this criticism emphasises the trajectory of socio-economic transformation that has occurred in Britain and the subsequent impact on particular societal groups, mainly the working-class.

Goldthorpe's schema was created during the early 1970s, a period that was yet to experience the full impact of the 'gender role revolution' (Esping-Andersen 2009) and was thus categorised by a sexual division of labour (Benería 1979) and a male breadwinning ideology (Williams 2008). These configurations were influenced by employment opportunities and the relatively high rates of male working-class dominated forms of manual employment, including manufacturing, shipbuilding, steel

production and coal mining (Qayyum et al. 2020). Many of these jobs provided secure forms of employment, comparatively high rates of pay and generous employee benefits (Beck et al. 2005). Furthermore, traditional forms of manual employment were often a significant source of working-class identity (Willis 1977). These jobs were often physical, dirty and dangerous, yet these employment characteristics and the ability to cope with them meant that working-class workers commanded social respect (Bottero 2004). Moreover, traditional forms of working-class employment were often also categorised by high levels of trade union representation, providing members with a sense of strength, solidarity and power (Jones 2012). These employment conditions, coupled with relatively balanced standards of living and elevated levels of social ascent, led this era to be associated with the 'Golden Age of social mobility' (Bukodi and Goldthorpe 2018).

The trend towards declining inequalities in income and wealth in the Post-WWII period was not long-lasting. As previously stated, the introduction of a Tory Government and the "Thatcherite Revolution" (Nayak 2003a, p 149) led to deindustrialisation and the closure and demise of heavy industry and manufacturing. Certain jobs once a source of employment for many working-class men were significantly offshored to other countries. The fracturing of these industries, coupled with a dramatic increase in service sector employment (Allen and Hollingworth 2013), has entirely altered the prospects of the UK's working-class, with many men and women now forced to undertake precarious, low-paid jobs that offer little prospect of career progression (Ainsley 2018). Furthermore, contemporary employment changes have also witnessed a significant increase in professional and managerial occupations (Goos and Manning 2007). This employment shift has contributed to a modern British society that now suffers from distinct levels of income and class inequality (Rowlingson 2011). Inequality has many detrimental implications on a person's life chances (Weber 1948), especially for those deemed to be working-class (Wilkinson and Pickett 2010).

Cultural Approaches to Class

Despite the identified significance of class, some scholars consider social class to be an obsolete notion (Tittenbrun 2014). This idea is a strong theme among theorists and neo-liberalist advocates (Giddens 1991; Beck 1992; Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 2002). Claims surrounding the 'death of social class' base themselves on contemporary transformations in employment, production and related institutions, including the

expansions of female employment, a decline in manufacturing and trade union associations, the rise in service-sector employment, precarious work and zero-hour contracts, rising unemployment and more extended periods in education (Crompton 1996). These changes are claimed to have detached individuals from older collective ways of life and shared identities; thus, people have become responsible for their own life biography. Subsequently, this individualised societal shift has led Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (2002) to refer to social class as a 'zombie category', meaning the idea of this category still lives on in society, yet the reality that it relates to is dead. It should be noted, however, that these notions are theoretically grounded assertions and lack empirical substantiation (Atkinson 2007).

The 'death of social class' assertion has coincided with what has been termed the 'cultural turn' (Bottero 2004). The cultural turn is a genre of social class analysis that has dominated contemporary discussions around class. Unlike the employment-related approach to social class, where class position is primarily derived from occupation (Goldthorpe and Mcknight 2004), the cultural turn addresses how social inequality can be produced and reproduced through cultural practices and "focuses on people's identities, emotions and their subjective experiences of living in a particular class position" (Watson 2012, p. 186).

Influential in this new approach has been Bourdieu's notion of class analysis which deviates from the idea of economic determinism and argues that social class arises from three kinds of capital; cultural capital, which refers to a person's interests, tastes and cultural knowledge (Bourdieu 1989): social capital, which includes social networks, friendship and association, and economic capital made up of income, property and material resources (Bourdieu 1986). The primary but contested critique of Bourdieu's work stems from a failure to recognise agency within the notion of habitus and thus reducing people to mindless individuals that are merely influenced by their socialisation process (Ingram 2018). Despite these critiques, Bourdieu enables us to think about class as a cultural phenomenon and "explore the implicit ways that class is lived and reproduced" (Hebson 2009, p. 28). As such, Bourdieu's work continues to influence contemporary class-based analysis, particularly the work of Savage et al. (2013) and the associated Great British Class Survey (GBCS).

The work of Savage et al. (2013) offers a fresh take on class analysis in the 21st century (Ainsley 2018). Inspired by the writing of Bourdieu, the theoretical position used by Savage et al. (2013) assumes that occupations are not the leading indicators

of social stratification. Instead, the adopted approach aimed to move beyond economic determinism and provide an analysis of class that represented its multi-faceted nature (Savage 2015).

Utilising a web-based Great British Class Survey, Savage et al. (2013) argued that the established model of class had altered and fragmented to such a degree that social stratification in contemporary Britain consists of seven categories ranging from the elite at the top, the precariat at the bottom and five categories in between (established middle class, technical middle class, new affluent workers, emergent service workers, traditional working-class) with the boundaries between these five categories being blurred.

Class and this Research

Despite Savage et al.'s. (2013) claims, as stated previously, the associated cultural turn has received criticism due to its decreased focus on the economic aspect of class (Atkinson 2015; Fraser 2000) coupled with the scant attention paid to questions around work and employment (Vogt 2018), criticisms that are particularly pertinent to this thesis.

As the previous section demonstrated, predicted future employment changes and the influence of automation and Artificial Intelligence are potentially set to significantly affect un-skilled and semi-skilled forms of employment (Frey and Osborne 2017) and jobs that have been traditionally associated with the working-class (Goldthorpe 2016). Subsequently, this possible occurrence and its discriminatory effect re-establishes the significance of occupation as a class indicator due to the possible detrimental effect of wholesale job loss and the prospect of reduced life chances (Weber 1948) for a large section of working-class individuals across Britain. Thus, concerning this thesis and in consideration of possible future employment changes, social class is considered through a dual-lens that assigns equal importance to both the economic and cultural dimensions.

Conclusion

This chapter has described the trajectory of studies and ideas around working-class young men, education and employment. Although the literature demonstrates the plurality of working-class identity, it also largely identifies a subgroup of working-class young men with a negative or complex relationship with education and attraction to

manual employment that derives from socialisation or intergenerational transmission and structural factors. However, Roberts' recent finding shows some deviation from these associations and demonstrates working-class young men's engagement with education and attraction to employment other than manual labour. However, the context of Roberts' study is significant because Roberts' study was conducted in an area that has seen significant societal development, a changing labour market structure, was not an industrial heartland and included a missing-middle or ordinary kids study sample, as opposed to the lads, careerless, roughs, macho lads, rems, valley boiz and young men that have been continually associated with a negative or complex relationship with education and attraction to manual employment. Therefore, although Roberts' work offers a valuable contribution to working-class studies, this study returns the focus towards more marginalised working-class young men because existing knowledge may be considered somewhat dated, especially considering prior related study findings are almost a decade or more old, which generates queries around the contemporary identity construction of this subgroup of working-class young men in deindustrialised locations. Furthermore, this chapter has also discussed future employment changes and highlighted the potential negative impact on low-skilled, poorly educated young men and forms of manual employment often associated with a working-class status while also discussing social class, the competing perspectives and arguing for the importance of assessing social class through a dual-lens that assigns equal importance to both the economic and cultural dimensions.

Chapter Three:

Masculinities

Introduction

This literature review section includes an assessment of masculinities theory and analyses how and why differing masculinity explanations exist and the criticisms in order to establish the current understanding of masculinity. The chapter concludes by arguing that masculinities theories need to consider the significance of place-based specificity together with the effect of broader contemporary societal change and the dual impact of these aspects on shaping current working-class young men's masculine identities for the purpose of understanding continuity and changes in masculinity related views and behaviours.

Contextual Information

Masculinity as a core concept has been subject to continuous debates and evaluation regarding its nature, origins and existence (Carrigan et al.1985). This conceptualising of masculinity and gender has included the notion that men behave differently from women because they are biologically programmed to do so (McCormack 2012). This notion of sexual variation is based on the idea that hormonal, psychological and genital differences determine disparities in behaviour, temperament and emotions (de Boise 2015). A prominent contemporary proponent of the biological notion of masculinity is the Canadian psychologist and YouTube personality Jordan Peterson. Peterson has attracted an extensive following of young men due to his critique of feminism and his 'traditionalist' ideas of masculinity grounded in the notion of gender identity based on biological sex (Stern 2019). However, as the following sections demonstrate, this biological notion of masculinity has been challenged by opposing ideas, often presenting a social constructionist perspective of masculinity and gender.

Sex-role Theory

Despite enduring biological notions of masculinity, many sociologists have tended to focus on the structural and social formulation of gender identity and masculinity. One

of the first sociologists to engage in the structural and social approach to gender identity was Talcott Parsons (1954), who argued that biological differences were incapable of explaining social patterns of sex roles – a notion that is centrally based on the idea that "men learn to be men" (Roberts 2018, p. 44), and thus gender identity and masculinity are socially constructed through families, schools, peer groups and societal institutions (Parsons 1964). Parsons argued that sex roles – which included men as breadwinners and women as primary caregivers – were crucial features of a well-ordered society. Furthermore, any deviation from these roles would generate 'role strain' and ultimately undermine society's stable fabric.

Robert Brannon (1976) further developed the sex-role theory and identified four specific components males needed to uphold to achieve their sex role status. The first of these was 'No Sissy Stuff', the idea that masculinity and a male identity require a dissociation from femininity. The second aspect was 'Be a Big Wheel', masculinity was measured by success, power, wealth and status. Thirdly, 'Be a Sturdy Oak' denotes stoicism, emotionlessness and strength over weakness, and finally, 'Give 'em Hell', the notion that masculine men engage in risk-taking, aggressive and courageous behaviour. The sex-role theory maintained a respected position in theoretical thinking and still holds some utility today (McCormack 2012). However, the growth of the 1970s women's movement and the increased emergence of feminist theorists began to challenge sex role theory (Ward 2015).

Hegemonic Masculinity

One of the most prominent and influential challenges to the sex role theory came from Carrigan et al. (1985), who critiqued the sex role theory based on its failure to recognise power relations and men's dominance over women. Influenced by this critique, Carrigan et al. (1985) presented a new model of gender identity and masculinity that aimed to understand how some groups of men asserted social power over women and some men. This theoretical model moved beyond a singular notion of masculinity and instead proposed the idea of multiple masculinities. This idea of multiple masculinities includes a hierarchal structure with hegemonic masculinity holding the highest-ranking position and considered the form of masculinity culturally esteemed at any one time (Connell 1995). As the name suggests, hegemonic

masculinity is rooted in the ideas of Gramsci (1971) and is based on the notion that certain groups of people claim and sustain power and positions of dominance in social life through coercion and consent rather than force (Connell 1987). The incorporation of this Gramscian concept together with masculinity generated Connell's (2005, p.77) following definition of hegemonic masculinity "the configuration of gender practise which embodies the currently accepted answer to the problem of legitimacy of patriarchy, which guarantees (or is taken to guarantee) the dominant position of men and the subordination of women". This dominant male status, coupled with women's subordination, provides men with an institutional and economic advantage (Ralph and Roberts 2020). However, access to these societal advantages is not inclusive of all men and depends on a person's ability to wield power and thus successfully engage with hegemonic masculinity (Waling 2019). Although there is an associated link between hegemonic masculinity and power, "visible bearers of hegemonic masculinity are not always the most powerful" (Ward 2015, p. 9). Subsequently, hegemonic masculinity is not associated with a fixed character type, yet it is often "characterised by numerous attributes such as domination, aggressiveness, competitiveness, athletic prowess, stoicism and control" (Cheng 1999, p. 298). Conversely, Messner (1992) argues that men avoid the appearance of vulnerability, weakness, fear and compassion because these characteristics are often associated with women and femininity.

Along with women's oppression, discrimination against gay men is also built into hegemonic masculinities (Gough 2018). Subsequently, homophobia is an additional central tenet in the production and reproduction of hegemonic masculinity (Anderson 2009). Hegemonic masculinity is categorically heterosexual, whilst homosexual masculinities are subordinated (see below) (Connell 2000). This subordination often involves the oppression of gay men and the policing of non-hegemonic behaviour often regulated through homophobic taunts, which are used as a gender policing tactic and means of ensuring that boys and men avoid actions and practices deemed to be effeminate and homosexual (Connell 2000; Martino 2000; Pascoe 2007). Subsequently, some men avoid engaging in physical or emotional support acts out of fear of being deemed emasculated and homosexual (Mac an Ghaill 1994; Hayward and Mac an Ghaill 2003). Collectively, hegemonic masculinity's associated features have led to its affiliation with the endorsement of sexism, homophobia, misogyny, a

breadwinner ideology, and suspicion of anything implying femininity (Ralph and Roberts 2020).

As previously stated, hegemonic masculinity and its dominant, powerful position rely on consent and persuasion (Connell 1987). Carrigan et al. (1985) argue that one of the main promoters of this coercion is the mass media and the circulation of idealised images of men and a masculine stereotype often found in sports imagery, films and advertisements (Connell 2000; Connell and Messerschmitt 2005; Messner; 2007; Messner 2013). This visual representation subsequently generates an idealised form of masculinity that filters throughout society, thus becoming the internalised accepted norm within societal institutions such as family, employment and schools (Mac an Ghaill 1994). Despite this societal pressure, Carrigan et al. (1985, p. 592) argue that only a small percentage of the total population of men actually embody hegemonic masculinity. However, many men are complicit in maintaining this model of masculinity because "most men benefit from the subordination of women, and hegemonic masculinity is centrally connected with the institutionalisation of men's dominance over women". Through this idea of complicity, Carrigan et al. (1985) and Connell and Messerschmitt's (2005) notion of multiple masculinities begins to reveal itself fully. Within Carrigan et al. (1985) and Connell and Messerschmitt's (2005) hierarchal notion of multiple masculinities, sitting directly below hegemonic masculinity is complicit masculinity. This form of masculinity is the category where most males find themselves (Roberts 2018) and refers to men that do not enact hegemonic masculinity, are not militant in defence of patriarchy, but do benefit from a “patriarchal dividend” (Connell 2009, p. 142) – the advantage men gain from maintaining an unequal gender order. Often positioned below complicit masculinity is subordinated masculinity, a category primarily used to refer to gay men (Pascoe 2007).

The final form of masculinity is marginalised masculinity which refers to men that are powerful in terms of their gender position yet weakened concerning race, class and ethnicity (Connell 2005). These features – race, class and ethnicity – lead to decreased access to economic resources and institutional authority (Connell and Messerschmitt 2005). Subsequently, due to the reductive nature of these features and the weakened position of power, Connell (2005) presents the notion of protest masculinity. Connell (2005, p. 114) defines protest masculinity as a "marginalised masculinity, which picks up themes of hegemonic masculinity in the society at large

but reworks them in a context of poverty". This reworking includes trying to obtain power with limited means. Connell (2005, p. 110) argues that this power retrieve is often exercised through various gender practices, including "school resistance . . . heavy drug/alcohol use, occasional manual labor, motorbikes or cars, short heterosexual liaisons", whilst also being associated with “hypermasculine, aggressive displays of violence and criminal behaviour” (Maguire 2020, p. 20).

Furthermore, protest masculinity is "a pattern of masculinity constructed in local working-class settings" (Connell and Messerschmitt 2005, p. 847) and has thus become commonly associated with working-class men (Elliott 2020) and synonymous with laddish behaviour, which is often linked to macho values including courage, toughness and physical strength (McDowell 2003). However, as Haywood and Mac an Ghaill (2003) indicate, some of the values and behaviours often attributed to protest masculinity are similar to those associated with hegemonic masculinity (Cheng 1999). These similarities potentially blur the distinction between protest masculinity and hegemonic masculinity and may complicate identification and classification. Moreover, additional analysis of protest masculinity reveals further ambiguity. For example, Connell (2005) initially associates protest masculinity with violence, crime and drug/alcohol use, all acts that have become commonly associated with the phrase 'toxic masculinity', "the mainstream term for hegemonic masculinity” (Whitehead 2019 p. 47). Conversely, in the latter parts of the discussion relating to protest masculinity, Connell (2005, p. 112) argues that protest masculinity "is not simply observance of a stereotyped male role. It is compatible with respect and attention to women . . . egalitarian views about the sexes, affection for children, and a sense of display which in conventional role terms is decidedly feminine". These aspects of protest masculinity – particularly affection for children – contradict the former characteristics of protest masculinity and align themselves with caring masculinities, defined as types of masculinities "that reject domination and its associated traits and embraces values of care such as positive emotion, interdependence, and relationality" (Elliott 2016, p. 240). Subsequently, these conflicting characteristics of protest masculinity potentially create confusion (Walker 2006) and make this form of masculinity challenging to define and identify conclusively, especially considering the contextual societal epoch of Connell's (2005) original definitions, coupled with recent changes that have challenged original notions of class identity (Savage et al. 2013) and working-class

status (Ainsley 2018). Therefore, although this study incorporates the notion of protest masculinity, its adoption is mainly a means of comparative analysis and working within the established and recognised understanding of working-class masculinity.

Connell's (1995) protest masculinity offers an economically associated interpretation of working-class masculinity. However, Jimenez and Walkerdine (2011), Walkerdine and Jimenez (2012) and Walkerdine (2015; 2016) offer a somewhat alternative understanding of working-class masculinity in the form of heavy industrial masculinity. As opposed to the economic determinism of protest masculinity, industrial masculinity is a form of working-class masculinity that is place-based, historically produced, born out of necessity, associated with heavy industry and "served to keep the community safe through hard-won practices . . . [and] assuming the bodily strength and fortitude to withstand heavy, dangerous work" (Walkerdine 2016, p.701). Due to the centrality of industrial masculinity and its necessity for survival, this masculine mode of being is claimed to be intergenerationally transmitted and "passed down through generations" (Walkerdine and Jimenez 2012, p. 94) and potentially causes issues around education and employment (Jimenez and Walkerdine 2011; Walkerdine and Jimenez 2012) due to characteristics that oppose individualism. Although industrial masculinity offers a cultural place-based understanding of working-class masculinity, similarly to Connell and Messerschmitt's (2005) locally constructed notion of working-class masculinity, it somewhat overlooks the possibility of external cultural influences beyond the immediate proximity.

Connell's (2005) models of masculinities and the possible static nature have become a notifiable critique, with critics arguing that this masculinities framework has been used to create stationary typologies (Demetriou, 2001; Anderson, 2009) with male research participants merely placed into the masculinity categories of hegemonic, complicit and marginalised (Pascoe 2007). However, in response to this critique and a reworking of the original concept, Connell and Messerschmidt (2005, p. 852) state that "masculinities are configurations of practice are constructed, unfold, and change through time". This response suggests that hegemonic masculinity is malleable and susceptible to change, potentially due to alterations in accepted societal and cultural norms and beliefs. Additionally, Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) also argue that the construction of masculinity is often place and space specific. Thus there is the possibility for localised variations of hegemonic masculinity constructed through

face-to-face interaction within societal institutions, including families, schools and peer groups.

The potential multifaceted application of hegemonic and multiple masculinities has meant that it has been significantly influential and used as a theoretical template for numerous studies across several academic disciplines ranging from sport (Messner 1992) to crime (Tomsen and Gadd 2019) through to domestic violence (Lisco et al. 2015). However, this extensive use highlights an additional critique of hegemonic and multiple masculinities. McCormack (2012, p. 40) argues that the definitions of hegemonic and complicit masculinity are vague and thus "appear to work as catch-all statements that encompass a large and diffuse range of gendered behaviours". Furthermore, I would argue, as I did above, that this criticism is particularly applicable to protest masculinity due to the associated extensive range of contradictory characteristics that capture almost all aspects of masculinity, both those considered to be negative or 'toxic' (Whitehead 2019) along with attributes considered to be progressive and positive (Elliott 2016). Additionally, some academics have suggested that an overdependence on hegemonic masculinity may equate to restrictive accounts of masculinity and decreased lines of enquiry (Sparkes 1992; Pringle 2005). Moller (2007) substantiates this claim by arguing that some academics identify patterns of hegemonic masculinity even when the social dynamics are often much more complicated. Anderson (2009) also adds further critique by stating that Gramsci's hegemony theory potentially overemphasises a top-down approach to power, thus implying that the hegemonic masculinity theory may exclude human agency and its potential ability to influence gender practices.

Hybrid Masculinity

The notion of agency features in the concerns of Demetriou (2001), who argues for a greater acknowledgement of agency and the way that hegemony is achieved by incorporating non-hegemonic masculinities instead of merely oppression through force or shame. These concerns subsequently led Demetriou (2001, p. 337) to argue that "hegemonic masculinity is not a purely white or heterosexual configuration of practice, but it is a hybrid bloc that unites practices from diverse masculinities in order to ensure the reproduction of patriarchy". Essentially, the masculine bloc refers to a

hybridised form of hegemonic masculinity that involves incorporating and appropriating selective elements of other masculinities – particularly subordinated masculinity – to adapt to societal changes and maintain systems of power, control and inequality. The idea of masculinity hybridity has become a common feature of contemporary masculinities research and used to explore the flexibility, plurality, and fluidity of contemporary masculinities (Gough 2018). Pivotal to the hybrid masculinity debate and often heavily cited is Bridges and Pascoe's conceptualisation (2014). Drawing on Demetriou's (2001) original notion of the hybrid bloc, Bridges and Pascoe (2014, p. 246) refer to hybrid masculinity as the "selective incorporation of elements of identity typically associated with various marginalised and subordinated masculinities and – at times – femininities into privileged men's gender performances and identities". Essentially, hybrid masculinities suggest that some men (particularly those that occupy privileged social categories) display softer masculine characteristics in an attempt to distance themselves from a hegemonic masculine position whilst simultaneously reinforcing dominance and obscuring inequality and gender differences (Eisen and Yamashita 2017). Subsequently, Christofidou (2021) argues that softer masculine expressions do not challenge systems of gender or sexual inequality.

Despite the notion of hybrid masculinities and the growing popularity in contemporary masculinities research, Connell and Messerschmitt (2005) remain unconvinced that hybrid masculinities represent anything other than a transformation of hegemonic masculinity at a regional level. However, the notion of refashioned masculinity is also evident in additional contemporary masculinities literature. Gough (2018) argues that some men engage in traditionally associated feminine behaviour. However, rather than demonstrating a decline in conventional masculinity, these behaviours are merely a reworking and repackaged form of traditional masculinity that corresponds with a more image-conscious, consumer-orientated society. Fundamentally, these ideas propose that recent changes in male behaviour and masculinity are merely stylistic, and rather than being an indication of progressive change, they are actually "mechanisms of how hegemonic forms of masculinity perpetuate themselves in the face of challenges" (Elliott 2020, p. 34) and thus reassert power and dominance. Despite these assertions, Roberts (2018) argues that research on contemporary masculinities needs to consider the possibility of change and

resistance beyond the reproduction of dominance – an alternative that hybrid masculinity and hegemonic masculinity fail to permit. It is within this statement that the concerns of myself and this research reside. The discussed masculinities theoretical frameworks demonstrate a commitment to the ideas of power and dominance, even those that engage with the identification of 'progressive' forms of male behaviour. There is minimal consideration regarding the possibility that resistance and change may coexist and that change may be an indication or the possibility of progress rather than a 'covert' tactic. Thus, similar to the argument made by Pringle (2005) and Sparkes (1992), by continually observing male behaviour through a fixed analytical lens, lines of enquiry are diminished, and we negate the possibility of identifying and considering behavioural changes that may be indicative of genuine progressive changes in masculinity and thus denying any hope of fostering positive forms of male behaviour that are beneficial to all. This shortcoming almost has an element of 'complicity' and is particularly damaging for working-class young men on the margins of society whose life chances, education and employment opportunities may be further diminished due to 'regressive' forms of masculine behaviour.

Inclusive Masculinity

Hegemonic masculinity and the associated notions of power, dominance and inequality are central features that guided much of the previously discussed research. However, some recent masculinities studies have diverged from these ideas and presented a contrasting understanding of contemporary masculinities – primarily through the inclusive masculinity theory (IMT). Unlike hegemonic masculinity, IMT argues that masculinities are no longer stratified and hegemonic. Instead, Anderson (2009) argues that there are two different types of masculinity in contemporary society, sharing equal societal power and neither holding a hegemonic position. These two forms of masculinity include orthodox masculinity, which is comparable to hegemonic masculinity (Anderson 2005), and inclusive masculinity – a more expressive and tactile version of masculinity. Furthermore, dissimilar to hegemonic masculinity and its associated notions of emotional detachment and the avoidance of actions and practices deemed to be effeminate and homosexual (Connell 2000), the body of research related to IMT suggests that:

> many young straight men: reject homophobia; include gay peers in friendship networks; are more emotionally intimate with friends; are physically tactile with other men; recognise bisexuality as a legitimate sexual orientation; embrace activities and artefacts once coded feminine; and eschew violence and bullying (Anderson and McCormack 2018, p. 548)

The basis for these claims and divergence from previous notions of men and masculinity is essentially underpinned by Anderson's (2009) contested assertion (see, for example, de Boise 2015) that contemporary Western cultures have experienced a decrease in overt homophobia and what he refers to as 'homohysteria' – "defined as the cultural fear of being homosexualised" (McCormack 2011, p. 338), or in other words, viewed as being gay. Subsequently, due to these decreases, the controlling power of homophobic discourse – which has often been used as a central tool for policing male behaviour and maintaining hegemonic masculinity (Pascoe 2007; Anderson 2009) – weakens. Thus, heterosexual men can engage in emotional and physical intimacy without fear of being stigmatised.

Despite the significance of homohysteria, Anderson and McCormack (2018, p. 549) argue that additional aspects have also been instrumental in the transformation of contemporary masculinities, including societal and structural changes such as changes in law, greater access and an increased percentage of sexual minorities in a diverse range of social institutions, along with labour market changes and the shift away from an industrial economy, growth of the internet and "processes of individualisation where social institutions have less influence on moral values". However, interestingly, despite the inclusion of individualisation and its common association with the diminished relevance of social class in contemporary society (Giddens 1991; Beck 1992; Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 2002), the findings of McCormack (2014) somewhat present a slightly contradictory argument.

McCormack's ethnographic study incorporated Bourdieusian theory to explore working-class young men's behaviour in a school in the south-east of England. The study's findings revealed inclusive (Anderson 2009) forms of behaviour among the participants, including pro-gay attitudes, emotional closeness, and homosocial tactility. However, when comparing these findings to a similar study on middle-class six form young men in the same region of England (McCormack and Anderson 2010), the analysis revealed less pronounced inclusive forms of behaviour in the working-class

participants, with the middle-class young men engaging in more intimate forms of male behaviour such as kissing, hugging and cuddling. McCormack (2014, p. 132) explains this differentiation by arguing that class acts as "a dampening but not prohibitive factor on the development of more inclusive attitudes and behaviours". Subsequently, these findings and comparative analysis reveal that although individualisation (Beck 2002; Giddens 1992; Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 2002) is associated with the development of inclusive masculinity (Anderson and McCormack 2018), paradoxically, social class can also have a buffering effect (Roberts 2018).

Inclusive masculinity has become increasingly recognised and applied in several UK-based studies related to working-class men in the form of education (McCormack 2014; Blanchard et al. 2017), sport (Magrath 2021) and employment (Roberts 2013). These studies essentially focus on young working-class men. Therefore, Christofidou (2021, p. 7) argues that "the intersections of class and age may be particularly revealing as age, in this case, maybe the main factor encouraging change". Despite Christofidou's (2021) claim, scholars such as Roberts (2018) have already recognised and acknowledged the importance of age and its potential influence in determining inclusive masculine practices. However, an aspect that Christofidou (2021) overlooks is the regional specificity of the research. Although the studies identify an inclusive masculine perspective among working-class participants, the results refer to specific areas of the UK – predominantly the South of England. Thus, these studies' regional specificity raises questions about the nature of place, space and their potential influential role in gender construction (Connell and Messerschmidt 2005), along with the generalisability of the findings (de Boise 2015).

Despite the current association between working-class studies and inclusive masculinity, initial research relating to the IMT predominantly centred on university attending men in a soccer team (Anderson 2005), a rugby team (Anderson and McGuire 2010) and a fraternity (Anderson 2008). Due to these studies' university-based nature, IMT is often critiqued based on study samples that predominantly included white middle-class participants (de Boise 2015; O'Neil 2015). Subsequently, scholars such as Gough (2018, p. 10) suggest that "men who enjoy privileged status and embody traditional markers of masculine success . . . can more easily engage in traditionally feminised practices without having their masculinity diminished". A further critique of the study sample is offered by de Boise (2015), who suggests that Anderson

is selective in his use of examples when demonstrating inclusive masculinities. Additional general criticism of IMT includes O'Neill (2015), who likens IMT to post-feminism and an association with personal choice, which negates gendered power relations. Similarly, Ingram and Waller (2014, p. 39) argue that IMT "fails to account for or challenge gender inequalities". The criticism relating to gender power relations/inequalities reveals an important consideration, including the realisation that many of the IMT related studies focus on homophobia and male-on-male interaction and thus ignore male and female relations and any possible evidence of a power imbalance and gender inequality. Finally, de Boise (2015, p. 334) offers an additional noteworthy critique of inclusive masculinity, stating that IMT is:

> actively dangerous in that it conflates the hard-fought legal rights won by gay rights activists with a mistaken belief that because homophobic speech and violence are less apparent in public contexts, that we are nearing some historical end-point for gender and sexuality discrimination. This has the potential to close down discussions around how we should be continuing to change attitudes toward gender and sexuality.

Although de Boise offers an important consideration here, there is a potential contrasting perspective that he negates. If one was to even slightly contemplate the findings or changes linked to IMT related studies, paradoxically, rather than closing down discussion, they potentially create a debate around how these changes can be fostered and thus decrease levels of gender and sexual discrimination, be that possibly only at a micro level, yet still providing wider benefit.

Conclusion

The masculinities literature offers a diverse range of competing arguments spanning relatively static notions of masculinity to ideas of fluid changing forms of masculinity. However, these explanations potentially offer a limited understanding of the masculine identity construction of contemporary marginalised working-class young men in industrial heartland communities. For example, protest masculinity and its association with poverty suggest an economically deterministic masculinity formation that negates external societal and cultural influences. Similarly, by suggesting that protest masculinity is "a pattern of masculinity constructed in local working-class settings", Connell and Messerschmitt (2005, p. 847) somewhat suggest that influences outside

of immediate residency have limited influence. Equally, Walkerdine and Jimenez's (2012) emphasis on locality and the notion of industrial masculinity may be considered somewhat place-based deterministic due to the focus on locally and historically produced ways of being and intergenerational transmission that somewhat dismisses the impact of cultural forces beyond the immediate vicinity. Moreover, inclusive masculinity, similarly to the notions of the death of social class and individualisation, is largely premised on broad societal changes and ignores the impact of place-based specificities and their ability to shape masculine identity. Therefore, these explanations of masculinity overlook the possibility of a middle-ground position that considers the significance of place-based specificity and communities with stagnant social and economic development, yet a broader society that has seen significant societal development. Essentially, what happens when old and new ways of being collide, and how does it impact identity construction? When these issues also take into account the previous discussion of working-class, education and employment-related studies, together with future of work debates and social class, overall, the literature review identifies the need to refocus on the school-to-work transition and masculine identity of contemporary marginalised working-class young men. The following chapter illustrates the research questions and methods that guided the study.

Chapter Four:

Research Methodology

Introduction

This chapter discusses the methodological approach and methods used in this study and justifies their appropriateness to the research aim of exploring the school-to-work transition and formation of masculinity of a group of marginalised working-class young men in the South Wales Valleys, whilst also providing a detailed reflexive account of data collection and analysis. It begins by discussing the design for the original study, why I felt it needed to be modified, the alterations I made and the subsequent new design and research questions. A discussion of the use of ethnography and the research participants are followed by ethical considerations, a section on COVID-19 and its impact on the study and several sections also include a discussion concerning researcher positionality.

Original Study Design

As briefly explained in Chapter One, although this research is a school-to-work study, this was not the initial focus and aim of the PhD. Originally, this ESRC-funded PhD studentship was concerned with creating a training programme that would provide South Wales Valleys coalfield area young men with the necessary training and skills to help increase their chances of skilled employment. The foundations for the PhD studentship derived from the area's industrial past and in light of the fact that prior research in the South Wales Valleys had identified young men that had found themselves trapped in a cycle of low pay and precarious work yet did not want to leave their communities to find employment (Jimenez and Walkerdine 2011; Walkerdine and Jimenez 2012). The studentship was entitled: Engaging masculinities in a former Welsh Pit Village: supporting preparation for new industrial training/education. The overarching question was: Can locally-produced and targeted support assist in getting men in deindustrialized communities into training/education for new industrial work? The research methods included undertaking ethnographic fieldwork and psychosocial interviewing to understand current issues relating to masculinity, work, and strength of

feeling about the valley in the present work-age male population and involved working collaboratively with a local youth centre organisation and young men who attended the centre to create a locally-based training programme.

The research partner youth centre was situated in the Aber Valley, a community which is my place of residence, which in some ways creates insider positionality (Merton 1972), an aspect I discuss more thoroughly throughout this chapter. The Aber Valley is a community in the borough of Caerphilly in South East Wales and comprises of two villages, Abertridwr and Senghenydd. This community previously had two coal mines, the Universal Colliery and Windsor Collieries. The sinking and construction of these two coal mines in the 1890s helped transform the Aber Valley from a rural farming area with a population of 86 to a thriving industrial community of 11,000 inhabitants. At their peak, the two coal mines collectively employed almost 5,000 people (Phillips 1991; Llywelyn 2013). The Universal Colliery excavated coal until its closure in 1923, and the Windsor Colliery closed in 1986. Due to the Aber Valley's geographic location and the relatively isolated nature of the area, it has failed to effectively replace the employment lost with the demise of the two coal mines. Subsequently, the Aber Valley is now classified as a deindustrialised area and suffers from high levels of deprivation across several social and economic indices (Welsh Government 2019). Unemployment rates, especially for men, are, for example, significantly above the national average: male unemployment in Aber Valley is currently 9.4 per cent compared with the UK average of 5 per cent, although female unemployment, which stands at 4.8 per cent is only slightly above the UK average of 4.5 per cent (ONS 2021a; ONS 2021b). Nearly 35 per cent of Aber Valley residents have no academic qualifications (ONS 2021a).

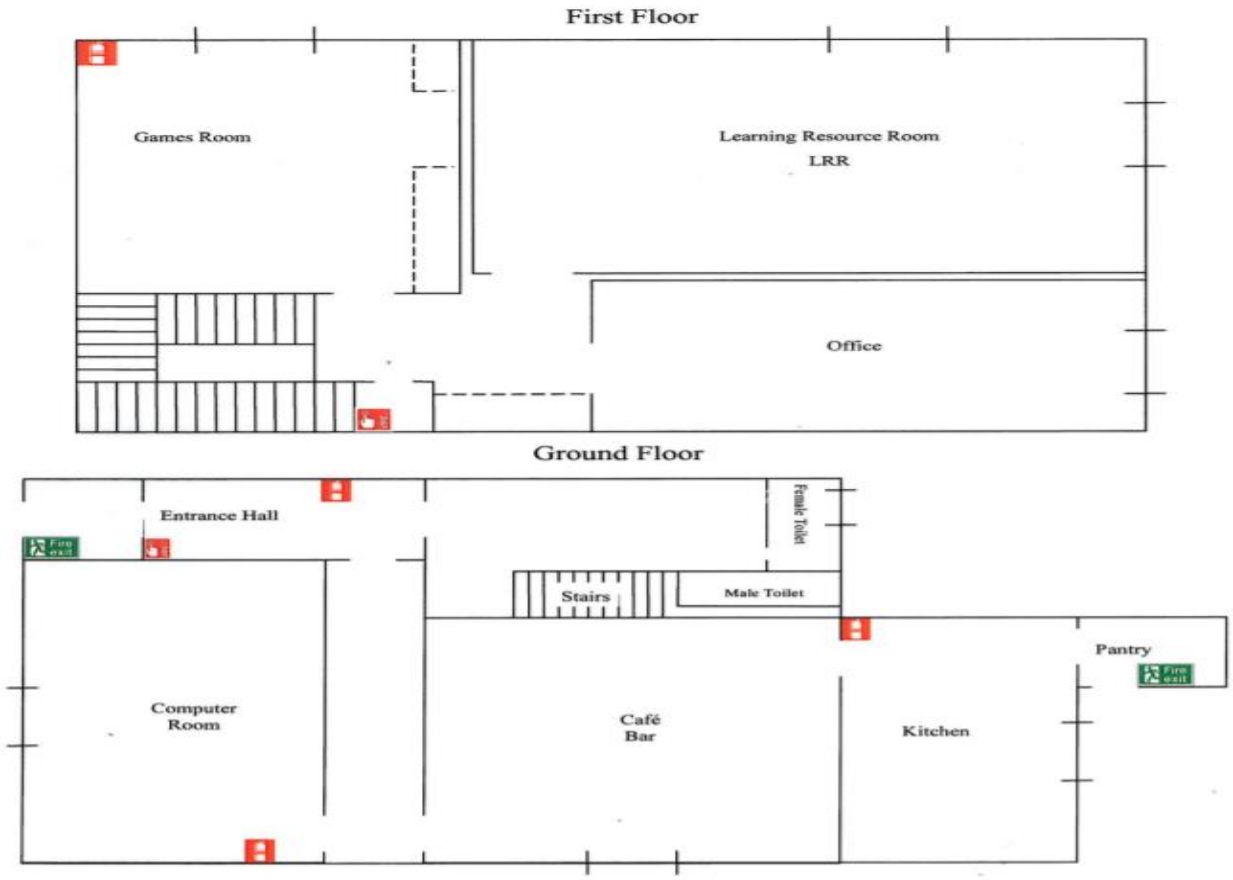
The youth centre is a charitable status company. It relies on contributions and support that originally and up until recently largely came from the Welsh Government's flagship programme for tackling poverty, 'Communities First'. However, in 2017 the Welsh Government decided to end the Communities First programme, which had run for sixteen years, which left the youth centre in a precarious position. It is now forced to source funding from the National Lottery and various other providers, often through complicated and extensive application processes, with funding becoming increasingly difficult to access. Furthermore, the youth centre is based in a building originally built as a hotel during the early 1900s and the peak of local coal excavation. Essentially,

the building is what one youth worker referred to as a *"big house"* and provided provisions including performance and visual arts and crafts, drugs and alcohol guidance, and holiday activities and projects.

I describe here my initial ethnographic fieldwork within the youth centre in order to set out how I came to understand the necessity to shift the focus of the original research project. I realise that I have not yet set out the ethnographic method or parameters, which I do later in the chapter, but I can only explain the shift in focus by explaining to the reader what transpired at the beginning of the ethnography.

My initial experience of the youth centre was one of surprise. The interior of the building, in some ways, echoed its dated exterior and the depressed socioeconomic conditions of the community. The building had a compact feel, and a musty, damp smell hung in the air; and although the staff had done their best to brighten up the surroundings through murals and pictures, the building's dilapidated state was clear to see, with cracks in the walls and damage to the ceilings. As Figure One shows, the ground floor was a series of narrow corridors that gave a claustrophobic feel that led into two function rooms: a computer room and the café bar. The computer room included nine tightly packed, relatively old desktop computers sitting side by side, which the young people often used to play music through YouTube. The café bar had a relatively light and airy feel with bright yellow painted walls and a large window letting in daylight.

The first floor consisted of three rooms: the games room, learning resource room and office. The games room's central feature was a pool table that almost echoed the dilapidated state of the building. The table cloth was worn, and pieces of cardboard were placed under the table's legs to help level the playing surface. Despite the tables' deterioration, the games room was a well-used, lively, popular space. Adjacent to the games room was the learning resource room, which again consisted of several dated desktop computers and piles of paperwork and boxes crammed into a relatively unaccommodating area. The neighbouring room was the office that the centre manager mainly used.



(Figure One)

Starting the Fieldwork

After initially getting to grips with some of the literature surrounding working-class young men, employment and masculinity, I began my fieldwork at the youth centre and the ethnography. I started observing the young men's behaviour at the youth centre, and after building a rapport with them, I started talking to the young men about general topics and more research-focused discussions, including employment and education. What quickly became apparent from my discussions with the young men, was that the research aims and objectives of developing a work-related training programme did not fit this cohort of young men because many of the young men at the youth centre were below employment age and openly confessed to a negative or complex relationship with education and manual employment aspirations. Thus, I realised that it would not be as simple as creating a programme and offering the young men training. The training programme would require some level of educational

engagement. However, my early assessment of the young men from the youth centre somewhat suggested that many of them resembled the lads from Willis' (1977) study and demonstrated associated elements of protest masculinity (Connell 1995; Kimmel 2005; Haywood and Mac an Ghaill 2003), including macho behaviour, resistance to authority, and engaged in open discussions concerning their disengagement with education, truancy, classroom disruption, 'petty' crime and violence. However, as this thesis will demonstrate, my early assessment of the young men was not entirely correct. The young men engaged in practices that somewhat contradicted my initial lads' (Willis 1977) categorisation and protest masculinity (Connell 1995) association through behaviour and views, including physical tactility, sensitivity, empathy and compassion, which align with inclusive masculinity (Anderson 2009; McCormack 2018).

Their contradictory views and behaviours were particularly puzzling to me, not merely based on my theoretical understanding of the fields of interest but because, as I have documented, I myself would have been categorised as a lad (Willis 1977) during my youthful years, and as I explain in the findings chapters, some of the views and behaviour that they practised transgressed the youthful laddish code that myself and my peers adhered to. At this point in the research process, I was confused and started questioning my understanding and memories of my youthful years. For example, were my memories distorted by time? Did I engage in physical tactility and emotional openness, and I had merely forgotten? Therefore, I started to ask my youthful laddish friends about their memories of our childhood and whether these were behaviours that they remembered engaging in, and every reply came back with a unanimous no. Furthermore, much of the literature also suggested that some of their behaviours may be considered uncommon practices for laddish-style young men (Mac an Ghaill 1994; Frosh et al. 2002; Hayward and Mac an Ghaill 2003; Blanchard et al. 2017). I cannot understate how confused I was at this point in the research project. Therefore, I started to reflect on my prior MSc research and a PhD pilot study I had conducted, which was situated in the exact location of the PhD studentship, to see if these studies clarified my confusion.

MSc Research

My MSc was a qualitative study which explored the relationship between place identity and the educational experiences and ambitions of five young men aged 21-37 in the Aber Valley who had rejected school and education more broadly based on its perceived irrelevance. This point of focus derived from my lived understanding of the area and the idea that negative attitudes towards education were particularly prevalent in young men who identified with the area and its history. The research findings identified a relationship between place identity and the young men's educational experiences and ambitions, with family and friends significantly affecting the young men's academic experiences and ambitions. The main conclusion drawn from this research was that the young men had inherited a masculine identity from prominent male figures that was encouraged by friends. The findings also established that all participants were employed in manual work and favoured active, physical jobs. This information fed into and influenced the PhD pilot study (Gater 2022), which explored the young men's employment experiences and relationships and was based on the following research questions:

(1) How did the men initially become involved in manual labour?

(2) Why do the men favour active, physical manual jobs?

(3) What influences the men's preference for active, physical manual work?

Through a series of follow-up semi-structured interviews and based on thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke 2006), the findings from the PhD pilot study revealed that participants' experiences and relationships with employment were influenced by community traditions and a working-class masculinity associated with attributes previously conducive to heavy industrial work, including stoicism, risk-taking, and toughness (Walkerdine and Jimenez 2012; Ward 2015). This led them to favour some but not all forms of manual employment, whilst dismissing sedentary service sector work and emotional labour. The appeal of manual employment was attributed to its physical nature, perceived health-related benefits, and participants' awareness of personal wellbeing. The participants' concern for personal health and wellbeing contradicted the health-averse practices often associated with traditional masculinity (Courtenay 2000; Garfield et al. 2008).

At this point in the research, I reflected on all of the information I had on young men in this coalfield community, including my youthful laddish understanding, the findings from my MSc research, the pilot study and the early findings I had gathered from the youth centre. I then deduced that not only would the original PhD studentship design not work because of the reasons stated above, but, despite significant social and economic change, there were intergenerational groups of young men in this community that had a complex relationship with education and were drawn towards manual employment. However, the reflective comparative analysis seemed to suggest a generational change in the young men's masculine behaviour, views and ways of being. This reflective process sparked my sociological imagination (Wright Mills 1959) and generated questions, including why did the young men at the youth centre bear many of the hallmarks of the lads from Willis's (1977) study yet also engage in behaviour that might historically be considered contradictory? Why were consecutive generations of young men in this community developing a complex relationship with education and drawn towards manual employment despite social and economic change? It was at this point that I decided to modify the study design. The following section discusses this process.

New Study Design

Essentially, the reflexive process and the queries that had arisen led me to believe that the research needed to take a step back and understand how the young men's perceptions of education and employment were constructed and the motivation for these views before we could consider providing employment-related training. I also wanted to increase the emphasis on masculinities to understand what appeared to be behavioural changes in the young men from previous generations. Furthermore, due to the relatively young age of the youth centre attendees and the increased likelihood that they would potentially be affected by predicted future employment changes related to the proposed automation of much unskilled manual work (Frey and Osborne 2013; Mckinsey 2017; Hawksworth et al. 2018), I also believed that the research needed to account for this. Therefore, I started to widen my literature consideration and reading and created the following four questions:

RQ1: How do these young men understand employment in the context of their biography and changing social and economic circumstances?

RQ2: How do these young men make sense of education, and how is this understanding constructed and influenced?

RQ3: To what extent is the young men's masculine identity representative of common laddish understanding, and how is this identity formulated?

RQ4: What do these young men's employment and education findings tell us concerning discussions about the future of work?

After developing these questions, I decided to use case study research because this method allows for the "extended examination of the culture, or way of life, of a particular group of people" (Hijmans and Wester 2010, p. 176) whilst also enabling me to investigate and understand complex and subjective issues (Flyvbjerg 2006). Furthermore, case studies enable researchers to analyse complex contemporary phenomena in their natural context, especially when the distinction between the phenomenon and context may not be easily separated (Yin 2012). Therefore, case study research seemed a fitting method that would help me explore and understand how and why (Yin 2012) consecutive generations of groups of young men in this particular coalfield community were developing complex views towards education and manual employment aspirations, how this culture was created, and how and why it persisted despite significant societal change.

The form of case study chosen for this study was exploratory. This type of case study is often used to gain insight, refine ideas and problems and create a hypothesis (Mills et al. 2010). These features of an exploratory case study correspond with the study's emphasis on understanding and gaining insight into the participants' 'common-sense thinking' (Bell et al. 2019). In contrast**,** although a **"**survey is the most widely used standardized form of sociological research" (Hijmans and Wester 2010, p. 176), this method provides only a snapshot of information at a certain point in time and offers minimal information on underlying meanings and provides weak evidence of cause and effect (Guy 1994). Therefore, although surveys would have enabled me to gather information on attitudes and opinions (Hijmans and Wester 2010), this method would be limited in explaining how these attitudes and opinions were constructed and the causes (Guy 1994).

Exploratory case studies are often justified by the absence of preliminary research or when the topic of interest has not been the subject of extensive research (Rodney and Malen 1991). Subsequently, because the school-to-work transition of working-class young men has been the object of considerable prior research, with social class and masculinity also being considered, my selection of an exploratory case study may seem questionable. However, Connell and Messerschmidt (2005, p.852) argue that "masculinities are configurations of practice that are constructed, unfold, and change through time", with working-class masculinity considered to be locally constructed (Connell and Messerschmidt 2005), and social class claimed to be subject to change (Giddens 1991; Beck 1992; Bauman 1999; Ainsley 2018; Savage et al. 2015). Therefore, this notion of time and space specificity means that studies regarding masculinities and social class that have any regional or time difference from previous research are arguably experimental and require exploratory methods.

Although a comparison between the original research design and the new research design demonstrates that I made significant changes to the overall research design and questions, I decided to keep ethnography in the new study design because my early use of this method and observations were pivotal in helping identify generational changes in the young men's behaviour, including the physical tactility discussed above. Therefore, I kept ethnography in and did 120 hours' worth of ethnographic observations and interviews on the basis that I felt that this method might reveal additional patterns of behaviour that would offer insight into the meaning and purpose (Mannay and Morgan 2014) of young men's masculine practices (Ward 2015) and help understand the historical and cultural influences (Jones and Smith 2017).

Ethnography

As I stated in Chapter One and I make clear throughout this thesis, I did not arrive at my research site devoid of prior understanding. My past lived experiences and insider status meant that I arrived at the youth centre with knowledge, values, beliefs and interests shaped by location and personal biography (Hammersley and Atkinson 2007). Accordingly, my ethnographic observations were not conducted in a vacuum, yet, a neutral position is neither necessary nor always beneficial (Jones 2001). Despite these underlying personal perspectives, ethnography and fieldwork require theorised

modes of action involving specific procedures and actions that must be followed and performed to establish academic credibility and rigour (Blommaert and Jie 2010). The specifics of these standards have become blurred in recent times, with the term 'ethnography' being associated with a diverse range of qualitative research. Some scholars have claimed the descriptor of 'ethnography' for interview-based research, while others have used it in studies where the author themselves is the focus of investigation (Walford 2009). These approaches and the associated use of the term ethnography have created a contested discussion surrounding the exact definition of this word. At one end of the spectrum, some scholars associate ethnography with qualitative research, while others suggest it is 'simply what anthropologists do' (Walford 2009). However, neither of these extremes offers a truly plausible explanation, as ethnography sometimes includes quantitative data and analysis (Hammersley 2010), and anthropologists sometimes use only interviews as a data method tool. However, despite the ambiguity surrounding ethnography, some commonalities are consistently highlighted within ethnographic discourse. Hammersley and Atkinson (2007, p. 3) suggest that:

> Ethnography usually involves researcher participating, overtly or covertly, in people's daily lives for an extended period of time, watching what happens, listening to what is said, and/or asking questions through informal and formal interviews, collecting documents and artefacts - in fact, gathering whatever data are available to throw light on the issues that are the emerging focus of inquiry.

Additionally, Bryman (2001, p. x) suggests that ethnography has five central features, with the last aspect moving beyond purely the data collection process:

1. Ethnographers immerse themselves in a society;

2. to collect descriptive data via fieldwork;

3. concerning the culture of its members;

4. from the perspective of the meanings members of that society attach to their social world;

5. and render the collected data intelligible and significant to fellow academics and other readers.

Despite slight variation between the two definitions, some commonalities unify them both. These include the notion that ethnographic research is generally considered a relatively small-scale in-depth study, and the data analysis involves trying to understand the meaning and purpose of human actions (Mannay and Morgan 2014). These characteristics typify the traditional notion of ethnography rooted in anthropology and sociology and concerned with learning about people within their native surroundings (Malinowski 1922). This classical notion of ethnography is associated with in-depth observations of groups of people, considering the historical and cultural influence of social interaction (Jones and Smith 2017). These methods allow the researcher to assess and describe the complexities and shared cultural characteristics of the phenomenon under investigation within a real-world context (O'Reilly 2009). This immersive approach, coupled with in-depth fieldwork, is central to traditional ethnography and facilitates participant observation, enabling the study of participants' behaviour, language, and values (Blommaert and Jie 2010).

Traditional ethnographic methods have been a central feature among several significant studies relating to working-class young men, education and employment (Willis 1977; Brown 1987; Mac an Ghaill 1994; Ward 2015). These ethnographic studies have enabled us to consider working-class young men's educational experiences and employment choices and the historical, cultural and structural factors that influence this decision process. Subsequently, following in the tradition of these comparable studies and inspired by a desire to understand the lived experiences of my participants, this study also employed the use of traditional ethnographic methods. The essential qualities of this form of ethnography and the subsequent ability to understand complex social phenomena (O'Reilly 2012) allowed me to assess participants' patterns of behaviour, actions, and the culture within which these are created and exist (Hammersley and Atkinson 2007; Walford 2008).

As the previous section demonstrated, there are crucial elements associated with traditional ethnography (Walford 2009), including participant observation – the act of being in situ and observing events and processes as they occur (Delamont 2004; Hammersley and Atkinson 2007). This method is influenced by the researcher who "interpret(s) what they see and hear . . . and that they do all this in the context of their own personal biographies" (O'Reilly 2009, p. 189). Consequently, esoteric knowledge and personal experiences can influence researcher participant observation, a

statement that is particularly true for me. Akin to the suggestion of Emerson et al. (2007), I drew on reflections of my youthful laddish actions and that of my extensive friendship group to help situate and focus my ethnographic lens. This technique helped highlight the similarities and disparities between the young people in the two respective studies (Willis 1977) conduct and that of the study participants, and I believe that "my personal experience sensitize[d] me to things that others [potentially] wouldn't notice" (Bourdieu 2001, 0: 44: 10). Furthermore, this approach created distance between myself and the participants and sometimes helped make a familiar research topic strange (Hammersley 2010).

My ethnographic observations were also influenced by the roles I adopted at the youth centre. For example, my initial fieldwork began with me having a relatively free role, and I was allowed to move around the youth centre with considerable ease, choosing which rooms to situate myself in and whom to observe. However, as the weeks progressed, this free role became restricted. Due to underfunding and staff illness, I was required to undertake an integrated position within the organisation and become a 'makeshift youth worker'. Subsequently, akin to the staff themselves, I was compelled to adopt the room rotation system, meaning each team member spends an hour in a specific room supervising youth activity and then swaps places at hourly intervals. This transition changed the dynamics of my researcher role. I was no longer a participating observer (Gold 1958). I became an overt full member (Bryman 2016) of the organisation with newly acquired roles and responsibilities that presented me with challenges while also enhancing the quality of my data collection. For example, upon reflecting on my data, I recognised that the role transformation had been advantageous. As a 'makeshift youth worker', the data I collected was more comprehensive than the initial 'freelance' role. Being fixed in a specific room for a set period heightened my focus and led to increased detailed documentation.

Observations are crucial for ethnographic studies and provide data for future analysis (DeWalt and DeWalt 2010). Traditionally, the method used to log observations has included fieldnotes – a "written record of the observations, jottings, full notes, intellectual ideas, and emotional reflections that are created during the fieldwork process" (O'Reilly 2009, p. 70). General consensus suggests that fieldnotes should be written in or as close to the field as possible (Emerson et al. 2007). Lareau (1996, p. 217) suggests that "writing up fieldnotes immediately is one of the sacred

obligations of fieldwork". The notion of writing early and in situ is a method that is closely associated with classic ethnographic studies, which often detail the use of paper, pens and small note pads as a means of documenting fieldnotes (Emerson et al. 2007). However, contemporary technological advances and the development of mobile phones with notetaking capabilities have facilitated new ways of documenting fieldnotes (Emerson et al. 2007).

The opportunity to use a mobile phone for notetaking was an approach that was particularly suited to my surroundings. The young people's use of mobile phones at the youth centre was extensive, to the degree that many forms of social interaction revolved around this apparatus. Subsequently, I capitalised on the visual familiarity of mobile phones and used my mobile phone for notetaking. This method had multidimensional advantages. Firstly, it allowed me to record notes in situ candidly and while relevant documentation occurred. Secondly, this approach also allowed me to continue to engage with the participants while simultaneously taking notes. Thirdly, my use of a mobile phone occasionally stimulated conversation, with the young men asking about the make and model of my phone and then proceeding to display and discuss their phone.

Despite the beneficial capabilities of mobile phone notetaking, this method also had disadvantages. On occasions, after concentrating on my phone and recording relevant occurrences, I would return my gaze back to the surroundings and realise that I had missed an incident that might have been relevant to my research. However, as Emerson et al. (2007) argue, irrespective of the notetaking approach, this problem is one faced by all ethnographic researchers that choose to write in situ and highlights the difficulties of "deciding when to write and when not to write" (Ward 2015, p. 166).

Robust ethnographic studies often include foreshadowed problems (Malinowski, 1922; O'Reilly 2012). Foreshadowed problems are the ethnographic equivalent of hypotheses (Hammersley and Atkinson 2007) and include a set of issues and ideas that guide the fieldwork and observation process (Delamont 2004). My foreshadowed problems derived from my engagement with relevant literature, related theoretical concepts (Delamont 2001), and my MSc and PhD pilot study (Gater 2022), as discussed above.

Although my MSc and PhD pilot study sample sizes were relatively small, and the respondents were older than those in this research, the findings offered foreshadowed problems (Malinowski, 1922). These foreshadowed problems included some of the queries that led to the change of research design and ideas I discussed at the beginning of this chapter, including the idea that subsections of young men within the study setting demonstrated a complex relationship with education and were drawn towards manual work due to the influence of family, friends and community traditions. Furthermore, as stated, there also seemed to be something of a shift in the young men's masculinity, based on their concern for personal health and well-being, which contradicted the health-averse practices often associated with traditional masculinity (Courtenay 2000; Garfield et al., 2008). These ideas offered guiding principles, yet as Malinowski argues (1922, p. 8-9), these ideas must be flexible, or one risks producing unsound findings:

> If a man sets out on an expedition, determined to prove certain hypotheses, if he is incapable of changing his views constantly and casting them off ungrudgingly under the pressure of evidence, needless to say his work will be worthless.

This notion of credibility is essential to me, both personally as a man of integrity and equally regarding my research and its credibility. Therefore, the foreshadowed problems were merely some hypotheses (Hammersley and Atkinson 2007) to help initiate my research and activate my ethnographic lens; they were by no means a definitive guide.

Although ethnography offered a seemingly appropriate methodological approach for this study, it is equally important to recognise and distinguish the potential challenges of this method. Criticisms of ethnography often stem from natural science and are based on the belief that ethnography fails to meet positivist standards and lacks scientific rigour (Hammersley and Atkinson 2007). This criticism derives from the researcher's direct involvement in the study and the subsequent ability to influence data. However, no data collection technique is conducted in a vacuum and is truly value-free (Brewer 1994). Furthermore, rather than being adverse, the subjective quality of ethnography is its strength in helping to assess complex cultural phenomena within a material-world culture (O'Reilly 2009). Researcher influence can also be managed through reflexivity (Attia and Edge 2017), continuous evaluation, and honest appraisal of researcher positionality.

Further criticisms of ethnography revolve around the researcher and the act of 'going native' (Kanuha 2000), ethical concerns, and generalisability – how applicable the study findings are at predicting and interpreting human behaviour in a place different to the research setting (Brewer 2004). However, the ability to generalise findings can often be determined by considering whether or not the participants and site of the study represent the phenomena or culture you are studying as a whole (Kirner and Mills 2020).

Although there are criticisms of ethnography based on the notion of subjectivity and the researcher, this perspective fails to consider the possible beneficial qualities of a researcher and their viewpoint. I would argue that my esoteric knowledge and lived experience of the lads' (Willis 1977) culture, coupled with a relatively recently acquired objective academic awareness, offered a unique position and a potentially enhanced understanding of the phenomena of interest.

Although I ethnographically observed the young men and often engaged in lengthy discussions, including the relevant research themes, I also conducted interviews with them. The following section discusses my selection and use of interviews.

The original research design included psychosocial interviewing. However, I did not include these in the new research design for several reasons. Firstly, I had never used psychosocial interviewing before. Therefore, if I am honest, I was apprehensive about my ability to use this interviewing technique successfully, and although the original design included support and training in psychosocial interviewing techniques, I wanted to use an interview method that I was confident in delivering and used successfully in previous research projects. Secondly, although I had engaged in conversations with the young men regarding relevant research-related topics, these discussions often omitted information that allowed for a complete in-depth understanding of their school-to-work transition. Therefore, in consideration of these aspects, semi-structured interviews were selected to complement the ethnographic data because they allowed me to use an interview guide and develop a list of questions (DiCicco-Bloom and Crabtree 2006; Brinkmann 2013) to help fill in the missing gaps and explore some of the topics I had partially ethnographically discussed with the young men. The semi-structured interviews generally lasted around an hour in length, with some being slightly shorter or longer, and one interview was conducted with each participant. The

interviews were mainly conducted with each participant individually. However, on request from the participants, a couple of interviews involved two of the young men being interviewed together,

Moreover, although I was open to “hanging loose” (Rubin and Rubin 1995, p. 42) and allowing the young men to discuss topics that were important to them or I had not anticipated, the new study design had a specific focus and a desire to understand the young men’s educational experiences and career aspirations. Therefore, semi-structured interviews and a research guide enabled me to gain the necessary knowledge and avoid the possible pitfalls of unstructured interviews and attention spent on potentially unrelated aspects (Klenke 2008). However, I did not rigidly adhere to this. I allowed the young men to discuss topics relevant to them openly whilst also following up on these “unanticipated issues and ask[ing] spontaneous and unplanned questions” (Braun and Clarke 2013, p. 79).

My semi-structured interviews incorporated the funnel approach, which involves the researcher beginning the interview with broad, open-ended questions, followed by more specific and/or focused questions (Wengraf 2009). Allen (2017) argues that the funnel approach works best to get the interviewee comfortable sharing information. I adopted this interview approach as, generally, young men in their early teenage years have a reputation for not being good compliant talkers (Frosh et al. 2002). Furthermore, based on this premise, I also incorporated visual methods and pictures of various forms of employment as a possible means of stimulating conversation. However, contrary to the notion that teenage young men are challenging to talk to (Frosh et al. 2002), I found conversation with the participants relatively easy and fluid. In fact, as I document in Chapter Seven, opposed to “the popular view . . . that boys . . . are ‘emotionally inarticulate’, lacking the capacity to ‘name’ and therefore even to experience feelings and emotions” (Frosh et al. 2002, p. 21), some of the young men spoke candidly to me about mental health issues, depression and suicidal thoughts.

When deciding how and where to conduct the semi-structured interviews, I drew on my experience as a ‘makeshift youth worker’ and the time I had spent in the various youth centre rooms observing how the young people engaged and conversed in different settings. My observations led me to believe that the pool room was a particularly good space for conversation and a place where the young people seemed

relaxed and open. This recognition was further established in the interview I did with Dafyd – the centre manager – after I had conducted my interview with the young men:

> The pool room is a good place where you can do a little bit of chat and test the water with the youngsters because when they're playing a game of pool, they will actually chat to you fairly openly, so you can test the waters with them and see if things are okay with them and their family and things like that.

Based on my ethnographic observations, I decided to conduct my interviews with the young men whilst playing pool. I thought this would create a relaxed environment and possibly encourage the young men to speak openly and freely, which I believe the conditions did or certainly contributed to. Whilst playing pool with the young men, influenced by my interview guide, I adopted a conversational interview approach and asked the participants questions, including: tell me a bit about school? What do you want to do for work? Why do you want to do that job? The young men's responses were probed and followed up with further questions where necessary. I also explored any unanticipated topics that emerged (Braun and Clarke 2013).

To record the young men's interviews, I once again made use of my smartphone, which was always placed on the side of the pool table, to make it visible to the young people and provide honesty and integrity while helping with clarity of sound. A mobile phone was chosen because, as Bosley et al. (1998) and Gravlee (2002) state, research participants often feel more at ease with mobile phone recording devices. This notion stems from the idea that mobile phones are compact, discrete and familiar in contemporary society (O'Reilly and Dogra, 2017). Furthermore, this recording equipment allowed me to be more attentive to the interviewee, whereas notetaking would have hampered my ability to respond to the participants' needs and cues (Patton 2002).

Although I feel that the smartphone recording device was a relatively successful choice, I realised post-interview that there were also problems with using this piece of equipment. Patton (2002, p. 691) states that "as a good hammer is essential to fine carpentry, a good recorder is indispensable to fine fieldwork". My smartphone was a relatively decent standard that had adequate recording capabilities. However, because I placed the phone directly on the pool table, the contact of the pool balls was recorded and created substantial background noise (Given 2008; Bell 2019 et al.),

making listening back over the interviews difficult in parts. Nevertheless, I decided to persist with the smartphone recording device and the positioning on the pool table because I felt it was essential for researcher honesty and integrity. Furthermore, an advanced recording device with its more formal design would have potentially negated the relaxed interview environment that the pool room created and contradicted my purposeful selection of this setting.

Participants

As previously stated, the new study design aimed to understand marginalised working-class young men's school experiences, employment orientations, and masculine identity. Subsequently, to achieve this aim, I had to find participants willing to participate in the study whilst also being able to express their thoughts and opinions openly. These abilities are often determined by the strength of the researcher's relationship with potential participants and the level of trust and rapport between both parties (Mannay 2010). Therefore, guided by the principles of trust and rapport and the research aims, I adopted a purposeful sampling technique. Patton (2002, p. 230), who is frequently cited as a leading authority on this method, suggests that:

> The logic and power of purposeful sampling lies in selecting information-rich cases for in-depth study. Information-rich cases are those from which one can learn a great deal about issues of central importance to the purpose of the inquiry, thus the term purposeful sampling. Studying information-rich cases yields insights and in-depth understanding rather than empirical generalizations.

Purposeful sampling is an approach that is widely adopted in qualitative research, and as Yin (2015, p. 93) states, it is often used as a means of deliberately choosing specific participants that “will yield the most relevant and plentiful data, given your topic of study”. Therefore, with this study focusing on working-class young men on the margins and based on the notion of rapport, I selected and asked young men to participate in the research with whom I had built a good relationship. These participants somewhat represented young men that are “relatively detached from the education system and the labour market, whose dress, behaviour and attitudes are apparently anti-social, ungovernable” (Delamont 2000, p. 106) and at the time of the research were relatively representative of young men at the youth centre and potentially somewhat illustrative

of the nearly 35 per cent of Aber Valley residents with no academic qualifications (ONS 2021a). However, some young men at the youth centre did not fall neatly into the lads (Willis 1977) category, with one of the young men painting his fingernails. Nevertheless, at the time of conducting my research, although I wanted to include this young person in the study and I had gathered ethnographic information on him and spoken to him about education and employment, he explicitly said he did not want to be included in the research. Therefore, in line with ethical requirements, this young man's data is not included in the study. My relationship with this young person did strengthen as it did with all of the young men at the centre, and I believe I may have eventually been able to include him in the research along with several other young men. However, as discussed in a later section in this chapter, the consequences of COVID-19 meant that this opportunity was terminated.

Although purposeful sampling was the chosen method and considered the most appropriate and beneficial sampling technique, this approach is not devoid of critique. Sharma (2017, p. 751) states that purposive sampling – also known as purposeful sampling (Patton 2002) – is "highly prone to researcher bias due to the use of judgement and the significant role the researcher plays in selecting participants". However, this judgment is only a disadvantage when decisions are misguided and poorly considered or no rational judgment based on clear criteria (Sharma 2017). The rationale for selecting the young men has been outlined above. However, the criticism of researcher bias is particularly significant to this study and my position as a researcher based on my insider status (DeLyser 2001; Breen 2007; Saidin 2017). However, the documentation and acknowledgement of my connection to the study group demonstrate a sense of objectivity that adds validity and integrity to the research (Malterud 2001; Unluer 2012). Furthermore, self-recognition of my rapport with the participants heightened my sense of researcher reflexivity (Attia and Edge 2017) and led me to challenge my taken-for-granted assumptions (Sikes 2003).

The following sections introduce and provide some personal insight into the young men who participated in this study. In the subsequent sections, I collectively refer to these young men as the Ladz. However, this was not a term the young men used, nor were they an entirely unified homogenous group. However, as the following sections and later chapters demonstrate, all of the young men share various levels of similarity with the lads from Willis's (1977) study. Therefore, the Ladz seems a fitting

contemporary play on words and point of reference, creating a terminological distinction from Willis's lads and avoiding confusion.

Stan

Stan typified the lads' culture (Willis 1977), displaying hostility towards authority, volatility, and often engaged in racist, misogynistic and homophobic discourse (Walker 1985; McRobbie 1991; Skeggs 1992). At age 13, Stan was already primed to work in male-dominated industries. His ability to have a 'laff' and engage in masculine forms of piss-taking (Willis 1977; Collinson 1988; Nixon 2009) – often at others' expense – was of a standard that exceeded his youthful years.

Despite his young age, Stan had already gained notoriety in the community and was banned from two local organisations for vandalism and destruction. Furthermore, community shop owners often had to call the police on him due to his intimidating, anti-social behaviour. Stan's run-ins with the law meant that almost all local police officers could personally identify him. Stan seemed to take great delight in this police notoriety. For example, on one of the many occasions that the police visited the centre – often merely on liaison visits – Stan confronted a police officer and said: *"Do you know me?".* The police officer replied: *"No, should I?"*. Stan responded: "*I'm Stan Jones. You're obviously new"*. Stan clearly thrived on the infamous status and seemed disappointed that the police officer failed to recognise him and acknowledge his reputation.

Stan's incident with the police officer was an example that typified his thirst for attention. This need was overwhelmingly demonstrated in our interview. As noted above, I used my phone as a recording device, and it was always placed on the pool table in front of the young men both for clarity of noise and integrity. Early in his interview, Stan detected my phone, hovered close to it, and the following discussion proceeded:

> **Stan**: Is it recording?
>
> **RG**: Yes, Stan.
>
> **Stan**: Hey, guys! (humorous tone). Can it see me? (excited tone)

RG: No, Stan. It is only recording your voice.

Stan: Awww. Why aren't you filming me? (disappointed tone)

At a later point in the interview, Stan and I engaged in an almost identical discussion, with Stan again disappointed that he was not being filmed. Stan's conduct appeared to be propelled by a desperate need for attention that seemed to generate a masculine display (Ward 2015) of machismo, bravado and aggression. My assessment of Stan is consistent with Amy, the Youth Worker's view: *"He [Stan] does seem to be very much like craving attention. He'll do any sort of outrageous thing in order to get attention, even if it's not the good kind".*

Stan's behaviour was occasionally demonstrated to me directly due to my role as a 'makeshift youth worker' and the requirements of supervising the young people and ensuring they adhered to the organisation's rules and regulations, including appropriate behaviour and language. For example, one evening, when I was assigned to the pool room, two of the younger members were happily playing pool. During their game, Stan entered the room and asked one of the young men if he could take a shot for them. At Stan's request, the young man despondently gave Stan the pool cue. Despite being relatively small, Stan was a formidable figure and leader among some of his peers. After taking the requested shot, Stan continued to hit several other balls in a sporadic frenzied manner. The young man initially playing pool appeared dismayed by Stan's behaviour but seemed unwilling and afraid to challenge him. Stan was reluctant to stop, and his actions recklessly intensified, with him hitting balls forcibly off the pool table and around the room. Subsequently, I said to Stan: *"That's enough, Stan. You have taken the shot you wanted. Now give the pool cue back, please. You can play next".* Stan replied: *"Fuck you, Rich".* To which I replied: *"Don't speak to me like that, please, Stan. I asked you nicely and showed you respect. Now give the cue back, or I will be forced to give you a warning. I don't want to do that, so just give the cue back, please".* Again, Stan replied: *"Fuck you, Rich, I am playing".* At this point, I was getting agitated.

I had worked hard to build up a good relationship with Stan. He was recognised as a 'difficult' character by all the staff, but I had invested much time into him, as I thought he would be particularly relevant to my research due to his lads' (Willis 1977) characteristics. However, Stan's behaviour had become dangerous. He had the

potential to hurt others and damage equipment. My role as a 'makeshift youth worker' had put me in an awkward position. I could not let Stan's behaviour continue, but by intervening further, I was potentially going to jeopardise the relationship I had worked hard to build. I was angered that I had been put in this position, but I had no choice but to halt Stan's actions. Therefore, I said: *"Stan, I have given you fair warning. You have given me no choice now. This is your first warning. Please don't make me give you another. It is cold outside, and I don't want to give you another warning and kick you out. Just give the cue back, please".* The centre operates on a 'two-strike rule'. You give an initial warning for wrongful behaviour, and upon receiving a second warning, the person is asked to leave. At this point, I was dejected. Stan was crucial to my research, and I had purposely emphasised the use of the word 'please' because I knew that he disliked authority, and I wanted to demonstrate respect.

However, in response to the warning, Stan once again said: *"Fuck you, Rich, you can't kick me out. That would be tight [bad], and you are sound [good]"*. Stan continued his reckless behaviour and forcibly hit what little balls were left on the pool table. I sat for what felt like an eternity, despondently knowing that as a 'makeshift youth worker', I had a duty of care to the other members, and I now had to eject Stan from the centre and potentially alienate him from my research. Downheartedly and full of internal anger towards the position I had been put in, I said to Stan: *"Stan, You've given me no choice. This is your second warning. You've got to leave, butt, sorry"*. Stan looked at me angrily, slammed the cue on the table and left the room.

Stan did not directly leave the building and lingered until the senior youth worker asked him to go and threatened a lengthy ban if he did not respond. I left the centre that night despondent, dejected and full of emotional turmoil, which led me to reflect on my researcher positionality (Attia and Edge 2017). I was a 'Valley boy'; I was an insider; I was one of them! Why didn't Stan listen to me? Had I code shifted (Ward 2015), lost my working-class 'Valleys' identity, and gained the middle-class academic status that I had desperately tried to avoid on my academic journey?

Furthermore, I felt aggrieved that I had been put in a position where I had to penalise Stan's behaviour and jeopardise a relationship I had worked hard to build. However, I equally recognised that the youth centre was underfunded, understaffed and desperately required my help. I was conscious that as researchers, we continually

‘take’ in the pursuit of our research goal, yet sometimes fail to give our hosts anything directly in return, a thoughtless process that did not and does not sit comfortably with me. Thankfully, on his return to the centre, Stan bore no grudge against me and even apologised for his behaviour.

Tommy

Tommy was the first participant with whom I established a rapport. Tommy and Stan were relatively close friends, and both displayed similar protest and/or hegemonic masculine values, including courage, toughness, stoicism and risk-taking (Cheng 1999; McDowell 2003). However, Tommy was less confrontational in his mannerisms and demonstrated milder hyper-masculine behaviour (Mac an Ghaill 1994). He presented a ‘cheeky chappie’ persona with a confident, masculine swagger and bounce in his step.

Akin to Stan, Tommy had a negative reputation in the community and had been involved in criminal activity. However, unlike Stan, when questioned and speaking about his misdemeanours, Tommy often presented the idea of victimhood as opposed to Stan’s boastfulness. For example, on one occasion, I had heard that Tommy had been involved in the vandalism of a car, and I asked him about it:

> **RG**: Tommy, I heard about the car incident. What happened, butt?
>
> **Tommy**: We leaned against it, and the handbrake wasn’t on, and it rolled down the hill.
>
> **RG**: Is that really what happened?
>
> **Tommy**: Yeah, honestly, boy! We didn’t mean to damage it!
>
> **RG**: Did the police come?
>
> **Tommy**: Yeah, I told them to fuck off!
>
> **RG**: What did they say?
>
> **Tommy**: They just said you can't talk to us like that, and I might get fined. I just laughed in their face.

In this ethnographic excerpt, Tommy suggests that the car's damage was accidental and denies criminal intent. It is particularly noticeable that no masculine bravado is attached to the incident itself, and Tommy dissociates himself from criminal activity. However, concerning the police, Tommy displays aggressive disdain and typical laddish anti-authority qualities (Willis 1977). Of course, Tommy might have been cautious about me and purposefully dishonest out of fear of incriminating himself. Although, I always felt that the young men were honest and comfortable around me. Nevertheless, this analysis somewhat reveals the complexity of Tommy's personality, which often included both outright displays of protest masculine values (Connell 1995) and, as Chapter Seven will demonstrate, elements of sensitivity and caring.

Dan

Dan was not a regular user of the youth centre and only appeared on sporadic occasions. However, my relationship with Dan extended beyond the centre; I knew him through our involvement in the local rugby club as I had trained the youth team. Therefore, there was already an established relationship between myself and Dan, and I decided to capitalise on this connection as I felt it would be helpful during an interview process, a decision that would later be justified through the richness of Dan's data.

At 16 years of age, Dan was an exceptionally large young man. Standing at roughly six feet and five inches tall, with broad shoulders and weighing around 18 stone, Dan was a formidable figure who towered over me and all the youths at the centre. Despite Dan's powerful presence, he had a relatively laid-back character. However, this persona was occasionally offset with hyper-masculine, aggressive displays of violence (Maguire 2020). On one of the occasions that Dan attended the centre, he got into a violent altercation with another young man. I did not witness this fight myself, but I was told Dan had inflicted considerable damage on the other young man because he had apparently bad-mouthed one of Dan's family members

Dan's masculine association extended beyond his physical displays. Together with rugby, and akin to Stan and Tommy, Dan's hobbies included off-road motorbike riding. This recreation strongly connects to protest masculinity (Connell 2005) due to the associated link between risk-taking (Cheng 1999) and danger.

Craig

At 12 years old, Craig was the youngest of the nine participants. Due to Craig's age, I deliberated about including him in the research. However, despite Craig's age, he was a relatively confident young man, and my ethnographic observations and interviews revealed that he had clear ideas about his future employment trajectory.

Unlike the previous three participants, Craig's outward bodily display of laddish qualities were less forceful and assertive. He was a relatively small young man with a happy-go-lucky demeanour. Craig's disposition appeared to help generate a confident, conversational ability, leading him to express his thoughts and views freely. Subsequently, Craig was an easy young man to engage with verbally, further supporting his inclusion in the study.

Despite Craig's less distinct physical displays of masculinity, his discourse had significant masculine and laddish qualities. He frequently used misogynistic and homophobic discourse (Willis 1977) and talked with boastful enthusiasm about his violent physical encounters outside the centre. For example, during Craig's interview, he proceeded to tell me about rugby:

> **Craig**: I like rugby. It gets my anger off everything. If I'm like angry and playing rugby like, I always full force hit them. Cos I remember, I don't know where it was, but all the team fighted. I went mental, I did – mental! I run up to this kid, gripped him by the throat and punched him sixteen times in the face!
>
> **RG**: Did you get hurt in the fighting?
>
> **Craig**: Yeah, I did have a nose bleed and a black eye, but it's alright cos the kid I punched in the head sixteen times, I think I fractured his nose!

Here we see Craig talking about his passion for rugby, which is overwhelmingly linked to anger and aggression. Furthermore, there is a distinct – potentially excessive – emphasis on the violence Craig inflicted. Craig also deflects from his injuries by suggesting that he imposed more significant trauma on his opponent. This excerpt almost typifies the masculine discourse that Craig engaged in. There was always an exaggerated – almost unnecessary – emphasis placed on masculine-related acts and "a lot of work put into keeping up a front" (Connell 1995, p. 111).

Lewis

Lewis was one of the oldest participants at 18 years old and was a suave stylish young man, often dressed in designer clothes. Lewis also seemed to have a penchant for women and dedicated significant parts of his interview to discussing his various relationships with girls.

Despite his confident, macho masculine front (Ward 2015), Lewis was a very complex young man who suffered from various mental health issues and had previously had a marijuana addiction. During his interview, Lewis spoke candidly about his mental health and behavioural problems (explored more thoroughly in Chapter Seven), including issues with anger management. The following excerpt is taken from Lewis's interview: *"I got anger issues. That's why I smoke so much. I smoke a fag, and it calms me down. Then an hour later, I'm angry again".* Lewis's problems with anger had led to his involvement in more than twenty brawls, one of which he excitedly and descriptively discussed in his interview:

> Before right, I got into this fight with this ex-marine. He was like 36, and I was 16 like. I got into a fight with him. I pushed him like tha, hit him off his feet, and I was all like yesssss.

Lewis' interview was an assortment of topics ranging from laddish-associated behaviour to discussion about vulnerability, heartbrokenness and attempts to take his own life. The interview was a rollercoaster of emotion that deeply saddened and disturbed me.

Billy

Akin to Dan, Billy was another relatively large young man, yet less muscular in his appearance. In some ways, Billy's persona was similar to Craig's. Billy displayed a cheerful and laid-back demeanour and was articulately spoken.

Billy's laid-back demeanour was often intensified due to his use of marijuana. Like several youths at the centre, Billy engaged in cannabis use, often leaving the centre, using the nearby lane to partake in drug use, and then returning to the centre.

Like the subsequent three participants, Billy's outward displays of laddish behaviour at the centre were limited, and peripherally he may seem like an outlier. However, his laddish (Francis 1999) qualities and those of the following three participants become more pronounced and distinguishable in their interview data.

Ian

Ian was an energetic, inquisitive young man. Unlike some of the other Ladz, Ian did not demonstrate any outright physical laddish qualities, and as the following interview excerpt shows, he was entirely against some historically associated laddish activities like smoking (Willis 1977). *"I tried smoking once. I hated it! Never again! Why waste my money on that? I wouldn't do it again. I don't understand why people waste their money on that".* Contrastingly, Stan offered the following view of smoking: *"If you live in this community an ya don smoke by the time you're 14, you've got fucking problems"*. Comparative analysis of these two excerpts reveals distinct dissimilarity between Stan and Ian. Stan seems to suggest that smoking is part of the inherent culture of the area, and if you abstain from this activity, you are abnormal. In comparison, Ian views smoking as a meaningless waste of money. Therefore, based on Stan's perspective, Ian would arguably be unaffiliated with the area's culture and lads' category. However, verbally, Ian did demonstrate his commitment to this classification. For example, the following ethnographic excerpt demonstrates Ian's masculine competitive nature and macho laddish qualities (McDowell 2003): *"I'm fast as fuck, faster than Kyle. I'm not scared to tackle anyone, don't give a fuck how big they are. I will tackle them!"* Furthermore, on a different occasion, Ian arrived at the centre directly from work and still in his work clothes. On his arrival, Ian came up to me, placed out his hand, and the following discussion proceeded:

> **Ian**: Look at my hand, Rich?
>
> **RG**: What is it, butt?
>
> **Ian**: Cut my hand, haven't I. I've been grafting! I love getting my hands dirty.

As this ethnographic excerpt shows, although Ian seemed to lack laddish qualities peripherally, he does demonstrate a commitment to this category through an associated masculine devotion to dirt and hard labour, often called grafting, a term

favoured by manual workers to imply that they have been doing physical work as opposed to mental labour (McElhinny 1994; Walkerdine and Jimenez 2012).

Cole

Cole was another young man who only sporadically attended the youth centre – he was 20 years of age and had possibly started to outgrow the place. Cole was not initially a person I considered for the research because of his irregular attendance at the centre and the subsequent lack of ethnographic data. However, Cole was almost the 'poster boy' of the youth centre and had spent time there on work placement. Therefore, the centre staff encouraged me to include Cole in my research.

Cole's interview was the most emotionally disturbing interview I have ever conducted. Even myself, a self-proclaimed masculine – sometimes cold – 'tough man' could not help but be emotionally affected by Cole's story. I cannot fully document this story out of fear of breaching anonymity. However, I can honestly say that Cole's childhood experiences are the most harrowing that I have ever heard. Therefore, although Cole referred to himself as a *"nightmare"* teenager and he does display laddish qualities, including a desire for manual work (Willis 1977; Connell 2005), it would be disingenuous to slot Cole into the lads' category neatly because, as some of the later sections will show, the lads' culture and some of its adverse outcomes are almost imposed on Cole due to his childhood experiences.

Wesley

Wesley was another centre 'poster boy' and was heavily involved in many of the centres' activities, including the youth committee. Therefore, akin to Cole, I was encouraged to incorporate Wesley into the research. However, I would have included Wesley myself in reflection because he offers contrasting characteristics and an element of comparative analysis.

In some ways, but not all, Wesley is the outlier of the Ladz group. He was a shy, timid young man. This temperament was coupled with a tall, slender frame and a muffled form of speech that sometimes made him difficult to understand.

Wesley was a frequent user of the centre, and although he was friendly with many of the other youths, he often spent his time sitting in the corner of rooms or with his headphones on, listening to music.

Physically and verbally, Wesley's data reveals a limited direct association with the lads' category. However, as later chapters demonstrate, Wesley's educational and potential employment outcomes resemble laddish consequences.

Four adults were also involved in the research and interviewed. These included Dafyd, the youth centre manager and Martin, the lead youth worker. Both of these men were university-educated and included because of their senior roles in the youth centre, their twenty years or more longstanding service to the organisation, and considerable youth work experience and knowledge of young people in the community associated with the study. The third youth centre staff member involved in the research and interviewed was Amy, a relatively young female youth worker in her mid-twenties. I included Amy for several reasons. Firstly, she had attended the youth centre herself in her youthful years and later progressed to a youth worker. Therefore, she had been involved and seen successive generations of young men using the youth centre and gained considerable knowledge of young people in the area. Secondly, Amy was the youth centre staff member that was particularly prominent and comfortable discussing issues around sexuality and gender with the young people and often confronted the young men on their use of homophobic slurs. Subsequently, I felt that Amy might contribute valuably to discussions around masculinity. Thirdly, Amy offered a female perspective that was lacking in the research. The fourth and final adult included in the research was Tony. Tony was the manager of the local pupil referral unit that some of the young men attended. Although my involvement with Tony was limited and only included a single interview, he was included in the study to offer his perspective on the young men and his pupil referral unit, which is significant in some of the young men's educational experiences.

Apart from the three youth centre staff and Tony, all the young people I observed and interviewed were between 12 and 21. This age range places their birth dates from 2002 through to 2009. Subsequently, the case study sample situates itself within the demographic cohort of Generation Z (Gen Z) (Grow and Yang 2018; Seemiller and Grace 2018). Though it may be counterintuitive to generalize based on epoch

(Mannheim 1970), Lub et al. (2015, p. 655) argue that “people born in different generational cohorts have experienced different events and circumstances in a formative phase of their lives, and have developed different mental schemas about the world they live and work in”. Subsequently, generational consideration can help make sense of differences between age grouping and locate individuals within a specific period (Pilcher 1994). Within the context of this study and my status as a researcher, the notion of generational disparity is significant.

Being twenty-one years or more my junior, the participants of this study are significantly younger than me, to the extent that I am a similar age to many of their parents. Thus, although there were many shared similarities between myself and the case study participants, my generational position arguably also makes me an outsider.

Unlike myself and my generation, Gen Z has generally grown up with mobile phones and has never known a world without the internet (Twenge 2017). The participants’ use of phones initially alerted me to the extent of my outsider status. I was aware of young people’s extensive phone use, but my early observations revealed an intensity that I was neither accustomed to nor conscious of. Furthermore, although the participants used many colloquial terms that I was familiar with, they also adopted unfamiliar terminology. For example, the phrase: *“Alright fam”* was communally used by young men as a friendly way of greeting each other. ‘Fam’ is a slang word short for family but does not mean biological relations; instead, it relates to people they feel close to. The term ‘fam’ is closely associated with American hip-hop and features in grime lyrics by Lethal Bizzle and Stormzy. Stormzy’s music was favoured by many of the participants of this study and was often accessed using the internet and YouTube.

In contrast to the term ‘fam’, my favoured choice of greeting is the Welsh colloquial term ‘butt’ (“Alright butt”). This word is commonly used across the South Wales Valleys by many men of my generation and links back to an era of industrial work, “where the term ‘butty’ was synonymous with coal miners working together underground” (Ward 2015, p. 49). The comparison between these two greetings arguably demonstrates a generational difference, my outsider status and the possible influential strength of the technology and contemporary popular culture. The significance of music was further cemented when one of the participants (Dan) was sat in the computer room listening to the Eminem song entitled Stan. Stan was released in the year 2000, and the lyrics

from this song evoked happy, youthful memories for me. Subsequently, I said to Dan: *"Like this song do you, butt?"* Dan replied: *"Yeah, it's a good song, but it is a bit old"*. At this point, I recognised that Dan also potentially viewed me as old, a reality that highlighted my outsider status due to the age difference between myself and the participants. The following section discusses ethical related issues.

Ethics Part One

For research projects to be valid, credible and ethical, it is crucial that the researcher clearly states and defines their role, especially for those employing qualitative data collection methods (Unluer 2012), because a researcher has a pivotal intimate role in collecting, selecting, and interpreting data (Finlay 2002). These methods are often affected by the relationship between the researcher and participant (Ingram 2018). Researchers who undertake qualitative exploration can adopt various roles within the research setting. These roles include an outsider (etic) – a researcher that has no association with the subject of study (Bridges 2001), an insider (emic) – a researcher that has a strong relationship with the study group (Kanuha 2000), and various categories in-between (Dwyer and Buckle 2009).

Personally, I find discussing researcher positionality an uncomfortable process. It often feels narcissistic while also having an element of intimacy due to its revealing nature. However, as the following discussion demonstrates, my researcher role is pivotal to this study. Thus, my researcher positionality demands detailed reflexive exploration to avert criticisms of credibility and validity (Unluer 2012).

My researcher role is complex. I may be regarded as an insider due to my association with the community where my research is based (Brannick and Coghlan 2007). The youth centre linked to this study is situated in a community I have inhabited for almost the entirety of my life. It is a place that I am deeply fond of and have close ties to through family, friends and community institutions. My connections to the area have led me to adopt a strong sense of place identity (Proshansky et al. 1983), which influenced my ideas, feelings, beliefs, and attitude (Massey and Jess 1995).

My emotional investment and physical attachment to the place of study potentially raises questions regarding my ability to be objective and thus possibly challenges the

validity of my data (Breen 2007). The query of objectivity stems from the notion of familiarity and the idea that prior knowledge of an area may lead to unconscious assumptions and thus decrease the rigorousness of exploration (DeLyser 2001).

Additional issues around prior understanding include the notion that an insider researcher may seek out participants similar to themselves and thus fail to explore a full range of participants that may otherwise offer varied sources of information (Stephenson and Greer 1981). Concerns centred around bias transcend merely data collection. Some critics suggest that insider researchers may have an affinity with the research participants and thus only partially report empirical findings to portray the study group more favourably (Saidin 2017). In contrast to these critiques, it is suggested that an outsider researcher may have increased value due to their objectivity and the ability to emotionally distance themselves from the study group (Kerstetter 2012). Despite concerns about objectivity, it is equally necessary to consider insider status's benefits.

Bonner and Tolhurst (2002) distinguished three key advantages of being an insider researcher. Firstly, insider researchers have an increased understanding of the study topic. Secondly, their awareness of social codes and colloquialism means they do not unnaturally alter the flow of social interaction. Thirdly, they have a shared understanding with the participant, which encourages an open and honest discussion. Smyth and Holian (2008) also suggest that an insider researcher has pre-existing knowledge that may take an outsider longer to obtain. Furthermore, Bourdieu (2001) argues that an insider status and personal experience potentially sensitise a researcher to things an outsider researcher would not notice.

As is clear from the above review, insider and outsider status have various advantages and disadvantages. However, despite the dualistic discourse that often attaches itself to researcher positionality and the insider and outsider status, several scholars (Merton 1972; Breen 2007; Mercer 2007) have argued that there are very few cases where someone can be categorised as a real outsider or insider. Furthermore, a researcher's identity is often relative and altered due to time, space, and research participant. Dwyer and Buckle (2009, p. 60) refer to this relational research position as “the space between”, a notion that challenges the simplistic dichotomy of insider

versus outsider status and suggests that researchers are likely to fill different spaces at various times.

'The space between' offers an additional researcher role perspective. However, as the previous sections and following discussion demonstrate, my researcher positionality included multiple roles incorporating insider (Kanuha 2000), outsider (Bridges 2001), participant-observer (Gold 1958) and overt full member (Bryman 2016), all of which have arguably both enhanced my research, while also posing difficulties.

As stated, the setting of this research study is my place of residency. It is a community that contains my family, friends and everything dear to me. To not have an emotional attachment to this place would be almost unthinkable to a working-class man like myself who cherishes the ideal notion of community and togetherness. Subsequently, the strength of my insider status is inescapable and extensive (Merton 1972). In some ways, I may be described as what Adler and Adler (1987) refer to as a complete member, a researcher who possesses a lived understanding and shared experiences similar to the research subject.

The similarities between myself and the participants of this study extend beyond living in the same community. As I have discussed and later sections will support, akin to the lads from Willis's (1977) research, many of the young men from this study partially display a form of working-class masculine resistance to education (Connell 1995). As stated in Chapter One, it was within the lad's category that many of my youthful school years were spent, often 'dossing, blagging, wagging' and 'having a laff' rather than academically engaging. Subsequently, the association between the participants of this study and me is significant. These correlations were favourable in creating a shared understanding and subsequent awareness of social codes and colloquialisms that have collectively enhanced my interaction with some of the participants (Bonner and Tolhurst 2002) while also allowing me access to individuals that might have been closed to outsiders (Dwyer and Buckle 2009)

Despite the benefits of shared experience, similarities have also presented me with difficulties. The young men's behaviour and mannerisms often generated a dual psychological and emotional response within me, including fond youthful recollections, contrasted with a sense of sadness for opportunities lost and consideration for what

might have been had I averted the lads' culture (Willis 1977) and engaged academically. These affective responses produced an undeniable affinity between me and some of the participants, but this link was also beneficial. Unlike Hammersley and Atkinson's (2007) criticism that Willis (1977) celebrated the lads' culture and lacked objectivity, I understand and have experienced the negative implications of the lads' culture and its ability to reduce life chances (Weber 1948). This knowledge increased my commitment to the study. In times of weariness, I drew strength from the belief that my research could potentially enhance the life chances (Weber 1948) of youths not so dissimilar to a younger version of myself.

An additional aspect worthy of documentation includes my demeanour. I do not feel that I fit into the stereotypical academic image. My sense of place identity (Proshansky et al. 1983) has generated a strong South Wales Valleys working-class associated accent. My right arm exhibits a virtually full-sleeve Japanese tattoo. I have a bald head littered with scars collected through my participation in rugby, with my deformed ear being particularly noticeable. The reality of my non-traditional academic image was once made clear to me by an established senior Russell Group University lecturer, who, upon initially meeting me, presented me with the following response: *"What is someone like 'you' doing at university*? *We don't normally see people like you here"*. My demeanour and commitment to a traditional working-class identity often make me feel like a "fish out of water" (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992, p. 127) in academia. However, as the following example demonstrates, this personal attribute is often advantageous within specific fieldwork settings.

My initial experience at the youth centre began with an early encounter with Tommy. As stated above, Tommy was thirteen years old and of a slight build, yet his confidence and swagger gave him an undeniable noticeable presence that offset his slender frame. On my very first day at the centre, I was standing at the entrance, and Tommy approached me with an air of self-assurance that belied his young age; he looked me up and down and said: *"You are new here. Are you a rugby player? I can tell because of your ear. I like you. I think you're going to be OK".* Tommy's early positive assessment of me seemed intuitive based on my image. Furthermore, the response illustrates favourable recognition of my demeanour instead of the adverse reaction received from the senior Russell Group University lecturer, thus possibly highlighting the benefits of an 'unconventional' academic image in specific fieldwork settings.

The previous positionality-related sections collectively demonstrate the multidimensional nature of my researcher positionality, which included an insider status (Kanuha 2000) that enhanced my interaction with some of the participants (Bonner and Tolhurst 2002) while also possibly allowing me access to individuals that might otherwise be closed to outsiders (Dwyer and Buckle 2009). However, this position was also offset by an outsider status (Bridges 2001) due to age disparity and subsequent cultural differences. Furthermore, the acquired 'makeshift youth worker' role and subsequent overt full membership (Bryman 2016) altered my relationship with the participants, forcing me to engage with them authoritatively, yet, equally enhanced my data collection due to the restrictive characteristics of the role, which increased my focus. This multitude of researcher roles was advantageous and disadvantageous while also evoking a personal emotional response. However, collectively, these forms of researcher positionality have arguably helped contribute to a rich "thick description" (Geertz 1973, p. 7) while also influencing my ethnographic lens. The following section focuses on ethical issues related to gaining Cardiff University ethical approval and my ethical considerations for the research project.

Ethics Part Two

Before conducting my fieldwork, I had to gain ethical approval from the Cardiff university ethics committee. This process involved completing an ethical approval application and submitting it to the ethics committee for consent to conduct my research. The ethical approval application included several categories, including a summary of the research, research questions, who are the participants, what sort of data will be collected and what methods will you use to do this, does your project involve children or young people under the age of 18, will you obtain written consent for participation, are you collecting identifiable data, and If yes, how you will anonymise these data. My ethical approval application went through two rounds of reviews, mainly because of clarity and a need to expand my replies.

In response to the ethical approval application questions asked, I recognised that my chosen research methods involved using participants and that my research was also being conducted within a relatively small community setting, thus generating ethical issues that required consideration (BSA 2017). Therefore in accordance with

British Sociological Association ethical guidelines (BSA 2017) and the Social Research Association ethical guidelines (SRA 2021), I recognised that I was responsible for safeguarding the research participants' physical, social and psychological well-being whilst also protecting their rights, interests and their privacy.

Concerning privacy, the consent form stated that participants would be anonymised, and any personal information and identity would be kept confidential (Brewer 2000). However, the form did not state that the area would be anonymised. The decision not to anonymise the area was not taken lightly. As stated above, I understood that the research was being conducted in a "relatively small community [and] issues of ethics and anonymity require extra thought" (Braun and Clarke 2013, p. 64). Openly naming the area means that the place of research is identifiable to all potential readers of this work. However, the participants' identities and the names of anyone they mentioned are hidden and anonymised.

My justification for not anonymising the area was determined by what I believe is the detrimental homogenising effect of the anonymising process. Although the Aber Valley shares many similarities with other deindustrialized areas, including high rates of long-term sickness and low-level educational attainment (ONS 2021a; Beatty et al. 2019; Welsh Government 2019b), the Aber Valley also has distinct and important historical, geographical and structural specificities that anonymisation would negate (Nespor 2000). The Aber Valley has suffered from collective generational trauma (Walkerdine 2010; Walkerdine and Jimenez 2012) stemming from the significant loss of life due to the catastrophic consequences of coalmining disasters, through to the disproportionately high rates of male unemployment (ONS 2021a) arguably linked to failure to replace the jobs lost due to the demise of the coal industry. Subsequently, anonymisation would result in decontextualisation, neglecting aspects that I believe are important specificities and potentially "leave underlying power structures unchallenged, preventing the pursuit of transformative research goals" (Saunders et al. 2015, p. 618).

An additional ethical consideration worthy of documentation involves the incentive used to help engage the young men in the research, which included a £5 gift voucher to spend at the youth centre cafeteria. This form of motivation was chosen for three reasons. Firstly, it was a token of thanks to the young men (SRA 2021). Secondly,

using a voucher rather than a cash payment meant there was no risk that the research would 'potentially' fund harmful or illegal activities (SRA 2021). And thirdly, a centre voucher meant that the money would benefit the host organisation and provide a much-needed cash injection.

Obtaining written consent for participation is a further ethical aspect that caused me difficulties. Due to several of the young men's age and being under sixteen, some of the participants required a parental signature on a consent form that documented the aims of the research, how the information provided would be used, my contact details and the parent's right to withdraw the young person from the study at any time (SRA 2021).

Having not conducted research with young people before this project, on reflection, I was very naïve regarding the consent forms and their return to me. The young men were generally very positive about my research and taking part in it. Subsequently, after providing the young men with consent forms, I foolishly thought they would take them home to be signed and return them promptly. However, the reality was not remotely similar to this idealised process. Most young men failed to return their forms after the first request. However, this 'noncompliance' was not reflective of a reluctance to engage in the research, far from it. Many of the young men asked me to conduct their interviews without their consent forms or on a promise that they would return them later. Understanding and adhering to ethical guidelines, I reluctantly rejected this request. My reluctance stemmed from realising that the young men might not return the forms, and I would fail to complete my research. Thankfully, after several repeated requests and much anxiety on my part, the young men started to return the forms, with the young man I felt would be the least likely to return his form being the first.

Within two months, all forms had been returned bar one, Tommy's, the young man discussed above. I desperately wanted to interview Tommy as my ethnographic observations revealed he would be a valuable asset to the study. Subsequently and desperately, one evening, I approached Tommy and asked him about his form, and he replied: *"It's up my house, signed and everything. Do the interview, and I'll bring it in tomorrow, promise"*. I rejected this request, but as a last roll of the dice and thinking on my feet, I offered to drive Tommy to his house to collect the form. To my surprise, Tommy accepted this offer. Understanding the youth work ethical guideline of not

working with young people alone – especially on a car journey – I asked one of the youth workers to come with me. They agreed, and we collected Tommy's signed parental consent form.

COVID-19

The impact of the Coronavirus lockdowns significantly affected my research and somewhat determined participation in my research and the number of case studies included. For example, due to COVID-19, the youth centre was required to close, and I could no longer conduct my fieldwork at the organisation. At this point in the research, I had collected around 120 hours of ethnographic fieldwork notes and conducted nine semi-structured interviews. Without sounding selfish, this point of the research was a distressing time for me. I was into the second year of a three-year PhD studentship, and I realised time was running out, and I favoured including more young men in the research and possibly conducting follow-up interviews. As we know, the impact of COVID-19 was significant and lasted for an extensive period of time. Due to this impact and the curtailing effect on empirical research, the Cardiff University ethical committee offered researchers the possibility of conducting remote interviewing through telephone calls and Zoom video communications based on submitting an additional ethical approval form or a modified and updated version of the original version.

Based on the possibility of conducting remote interviews and increasing my data collection, which I desired, I pondered the possibility of doing additional remote interviews with young men from the youth centre. After long deliberation, I rejected the possibility of doing these interviews mainly because my fieldwork revealed that several of the young men from the youth centre suffered from emotional difficulties and had experienced difficult upbringings. Therefore, based on the fact that COVID-19, the restrictions and lack of human interaction had negatively impacted people's mental health and living conditions, including my own, I put the welfare and well-being of the young people before the interests of my research and considered the fact that the remote interview process might cause unnecessary distress. Subsequently, based on this decision and the long-lasting impact of COVID-19, my research became a case study of nine young men.

Although I decided not to pursue remote interviews with the young people, I did conduct my four interviews with the adults remotely through Zoom video communication. I made this decision on the basis that I felt that adults would be emotionally stable enough to cope with the interview process despite the difficulties of COVID-19, and if the adults were experiencing difficulties, they would be able to reject the interview process, whereas young people might have been less able or willing to say no. My Zoom interviews with the adults were a positive experience and followed a semi-structured interview process based on an interview guide and a list of questions (DiCicco-Bloom and Crabtree 2006; Brinkmann 2013) that I had developed from my early analysis of the young men's data and my ethnographic observation. For example, concerning the physical tactility I had observed the young men engaging in, I asked the youth workers about their thoughts on this behaviour and probed their responses. Similarly, I used the young men's responses concerning the pupil referral unit to create an interview guide and a list of questions for Tony. The following final section of this methods chapter discusses the data analysis process.

Data Analysis

The thirteen interviews were transcribed verbatim. I chose this method because I wanted to include everything said by the participants and reduce claims of researcher bias, as opposed to selecting relevant sections that seemed important and transcribing them, a technique used by some qualitative researchers (Peräkylä 2003) because it is labour-saving, yet can impose the researcher's frame of reference on the data one stage too early in the analysis (Seidman 2006).

After completing the transcription of the thirteen interviews, together with my ethnographic data, I had almost 150,000 words worth of findings that required analysis. Although this may be a relatively small figure to some, considering that my previous research projects consisted of a third of this amount or less, this was a seemingly excessive amount of data to me that felt overwhelming. Paradoxically, due to the curtailing effect of COVID-19, I was equally anxious about whether I had enough data to understand and discuss the phenomenon of interest. As a means of dealing with these issues and in an attempt to ease my anxiety, I began by reading the transcripts and listening to the audio recordings, immersing myself in the findings and

familiarising myself with the dataset. The interview transcripts and data were then split into smaller, more manageable targeted sections, including education, employment and aspects unrelated to these topics, such as social relations and community. I then began a process Braun and Clarke (2013) refer to as 'noticing'. Braun and Clarke (2013, p 205) state that noticing's are a "stream of consciousness, a messy 'rush of ideas', rather than polished prose . . . [and] often reflect what we bring to the data". Essentially, I read the transcripts, listened to the audio recording and noted aspects of interest or things that seemed peculiar based on my lived youthful experience as a lad (Willis 1977), my understanding of the literature on the school-to-work transition and masculinity, any aspects that generally seemed relevant to the research question and those that were not initially related.

Upon completing my noticing for all the interviews, I assessed the dataset, identified noticings that shared commonality, and grouped them in a separate document. These documents were then sent to my supervisor, and we discussed the noticings together, whereby sometimes we agreed, and other times my supervisor identified aspects that I had overlooked. This process was undertaken numerous times and helped me become comfortable and confident enough to consider data analysis.

As stated, my initial overview of the dataset involved familiarising myself with the findings, a process that is the first stage of thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke 2006). I then continued with thematic analysis, which is a qualitative analytical strategy that involves reading through transcripts and identifying patterns and meaning across the dataset, often used with a minimum sample size of six or more (Braun et al. 2016) because:

> It can provide analyses of people's experiences in relation to an issue, or the factors and processes that underlie and influence particular phenomena. It can identify patterns in people's (reported) practices or behaviors related to, or their views and perspectives on, a certain issue (Braun et al. 2016, p. 193).

Simply put, the strengths and benefits of thematic analysis corresponded with the qualities of case study research (Yin 2012) and my overall research aim, which was to understand how the perceptions of education and employment of a particular subgroup of working-class young men in this in a specific South Wales Valleys coalfield community were constructed and the motivation and influence for these

viewpoints. Therefore, discourse analysis and merely analysing the use of language (Hodges et al. 2008) would have been insufficient for my research aims, and although interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) provides "detailed examinations of personal lived experience" (Smith and Osborn 2015, p. 41), IPA is theoretically bounded (Braun and Clarke 2006) and generally considered a methodology (Smith and Osborn 2015) rather than a standalone research method.

Having selected thematic analysis as my choice of data analysis tool, I moved on to the second stage of thematic analysis, which includes a coding process (Braun and Clarke 2006; Braun and Clarke 2013), and I chose complete coding, which involves "identify[ing] anything and everything of interest or relevance to answering your research question, within your entire dataset" (Braun and Clarke 2013, p. 206) and providing a label for a feature of the data. Basically, I went through the data set, highlighted sections of interest, and wrote a comment next to the section on why it was relevant to the study and research questions (Braun and Clarke 2013). However, I also adhered to the motto of inclusivity (Braun and Clarke 2013), and if I was unsure "whether something in the data may [have been] relevant to addressing [my] research question, I code[ded] it" (Braun and Clarke 2013, p. 2013).

Once all the data had been coded, all the codes were collated, and themes were created that captured something important about the data concerning the research question while demonstrating patterned response or meaning in the data set (Braun and Clarke 2006). The theme names are often derived from "compelling data quotations" (Braun et al. 2016, p. 14) and are purposely arranged to present a coherent and rational narrative addressing study topics and research questions (Braun and Clarke 2013).

One of the clear omittances from my data analysis includes qualitative computer software. In honesty, I did not use computer software because I only really started using computers when I returned to education eight years ago, which has led me to become a bit of a technophobe. Therefore, I stuck to the tried and trusted manual method that I was comfortable with and had previously used successfully in my research, and which I believe has been successful again in this study.

Conclusion

This chapter has discussed the original research proposal and justified my alterations to the original research design and the new study design I created, introduced the participants, discussed the chosen qualitative methods and ethical considerations, and included necessary information on researcher positionality. All of this was discussed using a forthright and honest approach in an attempt to strengthen the validity of the research. The following sections of the thesis present the outcome of the data analysis in relation to the research questions, which are organised into three chapters, beginning with the Ladz and education, followed by the Ladz and employment, and finishing with the Ladz' social relations and masculinities.

Chapter Five:

The Ladz and Education

This section of the thesis presents the results of my ethnography and interviews. It is divided into three chapters, the first of which explores the Ladz and education and addresses **RQ2:** How do these young men make sense of education, and how is this understanding constructed and influenced? The second explores the Ladz and employment and corresponds with **RQ1:** How do these young men understand employment in the context of their biography and changing social and economic circumstances? And the final chapter explores the Ladz' social relations and masculinities and addresses **RQ3:** To what extent is the young men's masculine identity representative of common laddish understanding, and how is this identity formulated? And all three chapters collectively address **RQ4:** What do the young men's employment and education findings tell us concerning future work discussions? Overall, the three findings chapters develop the argument that although the participants of this study share some similarities with prior research concerning marginalised working-class young men, education, employment and masculinity, there are also notable changes in the young men's views and behaviour which allow us to consider employment futures other than low-skilled manual employment and thus potentially increase the life chances of marginalised working-class young men.

Introduction

This first findings chapter explores the Ladz' education and in the light of Willis's lads (1977) while also considering findings from more contemporary post-industrial studies of the school-to-work transition. It discusses the Ladz' school behaviour, demonstrating their association with Willis's (1977) lads through nonconformist conduct linked to protest masculinity (Connell 1995), which is amplified by issues including learning difficulties, mental health problems and disaffection with teachers. However, the association between the two groups of young men becomes somewhat fragmented through a discussion of the Ladz' attitudes towards school and academic credentials. Unlike the lads (Willis 1977), the Ladz believe that some academic

credentials are important to their employment aspirations. Therefore, this chapter's central argument is that despite the historical association between laddish culture and anti-learning (Willis 1977; Jackson 2006; Jackson 2010), the Ladz no longer entirely reject education, and there is no indication that undertaking academic work is feminine or cissy (Willis 1977; Jackson 2002). Although these marginalised working-class young men are still "dossing, blagging [and] wagging" (Willis 1977, p. 26) and experiencing schooling difficulties; they do not disregard the significance of academic credentials.

"You Don't Understand"

It was 2020, on a mild December night in the South Wales Valleys, and I had spent almost three months at the youth centre. I had established a good rapport with the staff and many of the youths. On this particular night, the centre was well-staffed. I was allowed to adopt a relatively free researcher role instead of the 'makeshift youth worker' position that confined me to certain areas of the centre.

The centre was a hive of activity, and many of the young people were in a boisterous mood. I had positioned myself at the main entrance to the centre, a place where many of the young people often gathered as it offered them quick and easy access to the outside and the ability to smoke, an activity that many of the young people engaged in. Whilst standing at the entrance, I heard an outpouring of laughter and noise coming from outside. I decided to investigate and find the source of what sounded like enjoyment. However, I was about to witness one of the most bewildering scenes of my time at the youth centre.

As I made my way through the entrance door and approached the main road outside, I was greeted by a group of young men chasing each other around a car. The sound of retching filled the air as the young men drew phlegm from the back of their throats and nasal passage and then proceeded to spit it in each other's faces, all the while laughing as they did it. Observing the young men engage in this act and watching nasal mucus drip from their faces as they laughed dumfounded me. Within the masculine working-class lads (Willis 1977) culture I grew up in, spitting in another man's face was considered a cowardly and dishonourable deed. It was an act that transgressed the 'man code' (King et al. 2021) and ideas of masculine toughness

(McDowell 2003), courage and respectability. My youthful laddish ideas of spitting are potentially reflected in sporting law. For example, the English Football Association Disciplinary Regulation 2018/2019 – pre-covid-19 – imposed a three-match suspension for violent conduct. However, spitting at an opponent or another person was penalised more severely and warranted a six-match suspension (FA 2018).

In line with the centre's operational rules, we had a staff meeting later that night to discuss and debrief the night's events. I was still stunned and puzzled by the spitting episode and decided to discuss it with the staff, together with my thought process and a brief explanation of my research and the lads' category. After explaining the lads (Willis 1977) category, Dafyd – the centre manager – offered the following response: *"That category of men doesn't exist anymore. These young men have been changing for the last ten years".* Dafyd followed this statement by saying that girls have become less feminine, more masculine and essentially presented the idea of 'ladettes[1]' (Jackson and Tinkler 2007). This statement puzzled me because, as the following findings chapters will demonstrate, the participants of this research do demonstrate laddish (Jackson 2006) qualities. However, Dafyd would later sum up my research experience through the following statement:

> You're from the area. You know the area really well, you know the people we're dealing with, you know the families we're dealing with, and yet you don't understand in some ways why people are acting the way they are.

Dafyd was right. I did not quite understand these young men. At times they displayed laddish behaviour that I was familiar with. However, they equally engaged in conduct and expressed views that might be considered contradictory. Furthermore, although there are some similarities between Willis' lads and the young men from this study, it is important to state, and as I discuss in this section and subsequent chapters, many of the Ladz suffer from learning disabilities and/or struggle with mental health. Therefore, whereas Willis' lads were simply categorised as 'non-conformist' or 'anti-school', the Ladz' learning disabilities and/or struggles with mental health often inform their perceptions and actions, which in turn influence the young men's schooling experience and contribute to what I refer to in this chapter as a pragmatic approach to education, whilst also influencing employment orientations. The combined effect of

[1] 'ladettes' are [women or girls] presented as crude, loud, bold, (hetero)sexually assertive, hedonistic and into alcohol and smoking (Jackson 2006, p.11).

these ways of being creates a complexity that this first findings chapter begins to explore and unravel by discussing the participants' education, demonstrating the young men's laddish behaviour (Francis 1999; Jackson 2006; Willis 1977) and attitude while identifying cultural and institutional change.

"I fucking threw a chair at one of them!"

Akin to their lads' predecessors, 'dossing, blagging [and] wagging' (Willis 1977, p. 26) and demonstrations of resistance to authority were generally central features of the Ladz' school conduct. The following section presents this behaviour and confirms the participants' laddish association. However, the reasoning and meaning are explored in later sections due to the complex nature that extends beyond a macho rejection of educational values (Mac an Ghaill 1994; McDowell 2003).

The Ladz were forthright about their laddish school behaviour – they did not try to disguise it, and there even seemed to be an element of bravado and pride attached to some of their descriptions. For example, when I initially asked Ian about his school experience, he responded: "*I was a troublemaker in school. I was always the black sheep in school".* Similarly, Lewis offered the following response: *"I was a naughty boy in school. I wasn't concentrating; I was always distracting others. I was always messing about".* In both excerpts, the two young men display a sense of macho agency and personally distinguish themselves as disruptive instigators.

Truancy was an additional feature of the young men's nonconformist school behaviour. Billy's discussion on truancy further demonstrates an element of agency through his selective approach to class attendance and his refusal to engage: *"Like school, like I mitch [play truant from school] sometimes, like I only go to certain lessons, and I play up an tha, like I refuse to do work in school".* However, this individualist rhetoric did not entirely encapsulate all the truancy-related data.

As previously stated, many aspects of Cole's laddish association were imposed on him due to his adverse childhood experiences and negative ramifications. Due to the involuntary negative features of Cole's childhood, he became a victim of extensive acts of violent school bullying. Cole stated that the school failed to intervene and offer him support against this behaviour, and he was subsequently forced to remove himself

from school. Correspondingly, some of the Ladz themselves also committed acts of violence, aggression and bullying towards teachers and fellow students.

Stan, Tommy, Lewis and Dan's school behaviour extended beyond verbal disruptive and self-detrimental conduct and expanded towards intensified acts of aggression and physical confrontation. Tommy and Stan both openly confessed to their displays of rage-related behaviour, with Stan's extending to acts of violence towards teachers: *"I fucking threw a chair at one of them!".* Stan then went on to explain how he had to be continually restrained by teachers:

> **Stan**: Restrain me and that. I bet you didn't know you are allowed to restrain kids, did you?
>
> **RG**: They restrain you in school, do they?
>
> **Stan**: Fucking right they do, boy! There was four of them on me!

As was previously evident with Craig, here again, we see a verbally constructed display of machismo. Stan recognises that restraint and the need for four teachers are excessive forms of prevention and seems to use this awareness to portray his threat level and physical strength.

Dan also engaged in physically aggressive acts of violence, yet these were targeted at fellow pupils rather than teachers:

> It was just all building up to be honest – mainly just mitching and fighting, really. Obviously, there are loads of people there [school]. You're not going to get along with everyone. It wasn't that bad.

This excerpt demonstrates a sense of masculine meaning-making. Dan seems to suggest that violence is a natural consequence when individuals are incompatible and dismisses the significance of his behaviour.

Some of the young men's laddish nonconformist school behaviour was also motivated and determined by peer group pressure and friendship association. Lewis identified his friendship group and the influential role it played in determining his school behaviour, drug use and attitude towards school:

> I would wake up, go school, mess around and go home go to bed. I didn't really think of anything cos the boys I used to hang out with, just used to go down the shop like and smoke weed and chill out like.

In a later discussion, Lewis reconfirmed peer influence and its effect on his performative laddish behaviour (Ward 2015).

> That's the thing I dun wanna do in class. I'd rather working, work by myself. Cos, do you get me? I work off other people's energy. So then they're full of energy, and tha boosts me up like. So I'm always bouncing around, distracting everyone like.

Craig's data also identified the strength of friendship and the collective importance of group formation. The following excerpt demonstrates that: "the essence of being one of [the Ladz] lies within the group" (Willis 1977, p. 23).

> **Craig**: I can be naughty sometimes for a bit of a laugh
>
> **RG**: What do you mean?
>
> **Craig**: Like I mess around, and all the boys, they tell me to do stuff and see if I will do it. If they tell me to run up to the front of the class, I'll just do it.
>
> **RG**: Why don't you just not listen to them then?
>
> **Craig**: It's just sometimes they call me a pussy or anything, so then I'd just do it. I just like wanna prove that I'm not scared to do it. And because sometimes I think hanging around with mates is better than school. Even though school is more learning and everything, I know it's a bit boring, but it's actually more educational to take in. Cos I prefer like hanging around with my mates than going to school

This discussion demonstrates the importance of having a laugh and/or 'laff (Willis 1977). This behaviour is influenced by collective identity and a necessity to conform, enforced through gender policing (Butler 1990) and a sexualised slur – pussy – which encourages normative gender expressions (Pascoe 2007; Pascoe and Stewart 2016). Additionally, Craig's loyalty to the group seems to be reinforced by educational difficulties and subsequent alienation: *"more educational to take in".* Essentially, the group seems to offer Craig a sense of male solidarity (Sennett and Cobb 1972) and ontological security (Giddens 1991). Furthermore, Craig's responses resonate with O'Donnell and Sharpe's (2003, p. 14) notion of macho masculinity, which is

“characterised by reciprocal loyalty and support among the in-group of ‘mates’ or lads, and frequently by suspicion and mockery of the ‘bosses’ and outsiders”.

This section somewhat confirms the participants’ association with laddish conduct and identifies a continuation of the behaviour previously expressed by the lads from Willis’s (1977) study. However, the following section demonstrates a noticeable significant contrast that distinguishes the Ladz from their predecessors and exposes a view of school that somewhat contradicts their behaviour.

“It’s alright, but it’s not the best”

The previous section revealed a correlation between the school behaviour of the lads from Willis’s (1977) study and the young men in this research. Despite a forty-three-year disparity between both pieces of research, ‘dossing, blagging [and] wagging’ (Willis 1977, p. 26) and acts of nonconformist behaviour are features that connect the two study samples. However, this section begins to reveal a contrast and a departure from previously associated laddish qualities.

Although *Learning to Labour* (Willis 1977) offers a detailed account of the lads' school-to-work transition and their active rejection of school based on its perceived irrelevance, there is relatively limited data on the lads’ ‘specific’ view of school. However, the subsequent two quotations do reveal Spanksy’s and Joey’s (the lads) relatively negative attitude towards school:

> **Spanksy**: I mean, what will they [ear’oles] remember of their school life? What will they have to look back on? Sitting in a classroom, sweating their bollocks off (Willis 1977, p. 14).
>
> **Joey**: I don't think school does fucking anything to you (...) It never has had much effect on anybody I don't think [after) you've learnt the basics (Willis 1977, p. 26).

Furthermore, Jackson (2006, p. 10) argues that “‘laddish’ masculinity is the positioning of schoolwork as uncool”. Although it may be slightly disingenuous to suggest that these quotations demonstrate complete disregard for school, they do present a negative perspective which is further evidenced by the following quotation: “The total experience of school is something 'the lads' most definitely want to escape from” (Willis 1977, p. 77). Similarly, in Mac an Ghaill’s (1994, p. 56) post-industrial study, the Macho

Lads viewed school as “a system . . . of meaningless demands”. Therefore, based on these perceptions, the following excerpts include the Ladz’ responses when asked about their view of school:

> **Billy**: I gotta be honest I’m not really a fan of school like. But I don't, I don't completely hate it.
>
> **Craig**: I don’t mind it; it’s just sometimes it is really hard.
>
> **Cole**: School was a nightmare for me. The pressure – I couldn’t cope with it anymore. I had people in school on my case.
>
> **Ian**: It was good.
>
> **Dan**: Quite disliked it. It wasn’t my thing.
>
> **Tommy**: Ummm, yeah. It’s not the best. It’s alright, but it’s not the best. It’s good but boring at the same time like.
>
> **Wesley**: It was alright. It wasn’t bad, as people might say, but it’s still quite bad.
>
> **Stan**: Shit! Fucking hell, school is fucking smelly as fuck.

Despite the Ladz nonconformist school behaviour documented in the previous section, generally, the young men did not demonstrate a total disregard for school as one might expect. There are obvious deviations in the data, including Stan and Cole’s potentially predictable responses. However, most of the views represent a middle-ground perspective epitomised by Tommy: *“It’s alright, but it’s not the best”.* This centre position is often affiliated with ordinary Kids – working-class young men who “neither simply accept nor reject school” (Brown 1987, p. 31) or the ‘missing middle’ (Roberts 2018) as they have become more commonly known. However, the Ladz rebellious, aggressive and violent hyper-masculine (Mac an Ghaill 1994) school conduct disaffiliates them from the missing middle category (Roberts 2018). Therefore, this section, coupled with the previous behavioural discussion, reveals irregularity in the Ladz’ school experience, behaviour and attitude.

This section has established that most of the Ladz neither like nor entirely dislike school. The following sections explore this ambivalence and assess the motives for these differing views, initially by providing important contextual, theoretical information.

Teaching Paradigm

One of the core theoretical concepts that underpins *'Learning to Labour'* (Willis 1977) and the assessment and explanation of the lads' school experience is the teaching paradigm. Essentially, the teaching paradigm – or education paradigm as it is sometimes referred to – distinguishes "schooling as a series of transactions or exchanges" (Walker 1985, p. 75). This exchange is based on the idea that teachers can provide important, meaningful knowledge that will lead to qualifications that can potentially facilitate social mobility and rewarding jobs. In return for these credentials and knowledge, students are expected to provide teachers with respect and conform to the rules and social relations of the schooling system (Feinberg and Soltis 2009). This process and the teaching paradigm can be summarised through the words of Willis (1977, p. 64) "The teacher's authority must be won and maintained on moral, not on coercive grounds".

Although most pupils invest in the school paradigm and bargaining exchange, the lads did not, which Willis refers to as differentiation. Influenced by their working-class cultural experience and their subsequent preference for masculine associated manual work, the lads did not see the worth in theoretical knowledge, which was viewed as 'cissy' (Willis 1977), feminine and irrelevant to their future career orientation (Mac an Ghaill 1996). Therefore, the lads reject the school paradigm and the expectation of respect and consequently engage in unruly count-school culture behaviour.

Essentially, this discussion suggests that the lads' rebellious school behaviour derives from their rejection of the school paradigm and the devaluation of the knowledge exchanged in this relationship. Subsequently, based on this perspective and the previous discussion that detailed the Ladz' display of laddish nonconformist school behaviour, one may reasonably assume that the Ladz also reject the school paradigm and the information and qualifications provided in this transaction. However, as the following sections demonstrate, this assumption would be untrue. The Ladz do place value on some, but not all, knowledge.

"You need them, you mad head"

Tommy and Stan's interviews were conducted together at their request. I was initially apprehensive about undertaking a joint interview with these two young men due to their friendship, behaviour and potentially volatile dynamic. This fear was realised by Stan jostling for attention, attempting to smoke out of the window, and breaking a pool cue. Despite this complication, the dynamic between the two young men was equally advantageous and led to revealing conversation and rich data. For example, Stan referred to school as shit, and the following three-way discussion occurred:

> **RG**: Tell me why school is shit [Stan]?
>
> **Stan**: Everything about school is fucking shit!
>
> **Tommy**: I don't think that. I think school is alright.
>
> **Stan**: Shut up!
>
> **Tommy**: Only, only to get like, like tidy GS, GCSEs.
>
> **Stan**: Fuck GCSEs.
>
> **Tommy**: You need them, you mad head.

As this interview excerpt demonstrates, despite Tommy's disruptive, aggressive school behaviour that has led to him being excluded from school (forthcoming section), Tommy recognises the relevance of GCSEs and does not discard the importance of these credentials. The relationship between Tommy and Stan and their responses to each other are equally important in demonstrating Tommy's commitment to qualifications.

During their interview, Stan offered the following comment: *"I'm the fucking leader of the pack".* This comment reflects Stan's social standing among the other young men in the youth centre. Stan presented himself as the group alpha male and asserted this status through excessive displays of hyper-masculinity (Mac an Ghaill 1994), aggression and physicality. Subsequently, Tommy's unwillingness to be submissive and align himself with Stan's negative views of GCSEs potentially reflects the strength of Tommy's views and the importance he places on these credentials. Additionally, through this response: *"Only, only to get like, like tidy GS, GCSEs",* Tommy seems to

try and divide school between a societal institution and a credential provider (Walker 1985).

Apart from Stan, this commitment to qualifications and some theoretical or practical knowledge is a feature that connected all of the young men, evidenced by the fact that they had either gained some level of formal qualifications or had aspirations to obtain these through school and further education.

This section and the Ladz recognition of qualifications demonstrates a partial commitment and understanding of the teacher paradigm. However, conversely, the young men's challenging and unruly school behaviour reveals contradictory conduct through the omission of respect and submissiveness. The following sections explore the factors that generate this contradiction and influence the young men's attitudes and school behaviour. This exploration includes a dissection of the teaching paradigm and an individual assessment of its two essential components, including an analysis of the Ladz' attitude towards school subjects – knowledge, followed by an analysis of the young men's view of teacher – respect.

"Just good knowledge, isn't it"

Like many aspects of the Ladz' data, their attitudes towards school subjects are complex, with some irregularities. Although some aspects connect most of the young men, some features only relate to one or two members. However, this information helps provide a broader understanding of the young men's working-class status and their educational meaning-making, thus warranting its inclusion.

The previous discussion demonstrated Stan's working-class masculine laddish qualities through his outright rejection of educational credentials and knowledge (Willis 1977). The influential nature of masculinity was also distinguishable in Craig's and potentially even Wesley's responses to school subjects. For example, when asked which lessons he favoured and enjoyed, Craig offered the following answer:

> **Craig**: Like in school, the ones I find the easiest lessons are digital technology, home economics and ummm, science. And PE!

In response to this reply, I then asked Craig why he thought these lessons were the easiest:

> **Craig**: Well, because PE – it gets more brain cells working and gets me more energy. Science is kind of alright because we always do practical. And digital, I don't mind doing work for stuff for a practical because I'm making something. I don't know what it's called, but I'm making like a car kit thing.

In his initial reply, Craig predominately identifies associated masculine subjects – physical education (Kehler 2010) and science (Archer et al. 2012) – and suggests that these are the most manageable and straightforward. When making sense of this easiness, Craig suggests that these subjects trigger biological responses, including increased cognitive ability and vitality. Additionally, there is an apparent masculine sway towards practical subjects with a material outcome (Nixon 2018).

As mentioned in the opening section, Wesley was the group's outlier in some ways. Nevertheless, there is also a possible suggestion of masculine meaning-making in Wesley's preference for school subjects. For example, when discussing his educational experience, Wesley provided the following responses:

> I picked media for GCSE. I knew I wanted to do it since year nine. I just liked it because it's really different from GCSE. I'm in college doing media – in the course we do like loads of different stuff, like we're doing photography when we go back after break, and we do like filming and stuff like that.

Although a direct association with masculinity may initially be conceived as a manufactured link, there are elements of this response that are suggestive and warrant consideration. Firstly, Wesley distinguishes media studies from GCSEs, or potentially interpreted as formal traditional theoretical learning. Secondly, photography and filming may be understood as practical processes, not in a complete traditional masculine sense (Willis 1977). However, they are hands-on (Nixon 2009) activities that predominantly exclude writing and 'pen-pushing' (Willis 1977; Mac an Ghaill 1994).

Despite the slightly individualistic aspects of the young men's data, Maths, English, and the mentioning of these subjects was a feature that connected the majority of the Ladz, yet for varying reasons. Craig and Billy both experienced difficulties with these subjects. Craig offered a response that potentially reflects the hidden injuries of class (Sennett and Cobb 1972) and a damaged working-class learner identity (Reay 2017):

> English and Maths, they're hard cos all my life, I've never been good at maths. And English – I'm not the best reader and everything. Like I can read, but it's just, I know I can't read proper.

This excerpt reveals that Craig has struggled with maths and English for the entirety of his life and places specific emphasis on reading. Similarly, Billy struggles with writing together with maths. However, as the following quotation demonstrates, Billy makes sense of these difficulties by suggesting that they are inherent deficiencies and neglects structural failing: *"With maths, it's like I don't enjoy it. I like, struggle ini, that why I don't listen like, do you know what I mean. It's like you got weak points and strong points haven't you".* In contrast to these responses, Dan and Tommy place significant emphasis on maths and English. The following section includes a lengthy discussion between Dan and me. However, the data distinguishes a critical theme that is essential to almost all of the young men's views of school subjects and their school experience:

> **RG**: Are there any subjects you enjoyed?
>
> **Dan**: Maths, I didn't mind it, but I didn't like it, but I done it cos it was relevant. You got to know things for exams.
>
> **RG**: So why did you think Maths was relevant? What was it relevant to?
>
> **Dan**: Cos I want to be a plumber, and you need a D in Maths GCSE, so I tried to get a D in Maths. Not only that, but it just helps in life, doesn't it. I don't know – simple things. If I never done Maths all my life, I probably wouldn't even go to the shop with a tenner because I wouldn't know how much change I would have. Some people moan about Maths and say we don't need it, but you are going to need it sooner or later in your life in you. So I just get my head down and do it. Sometimes I don't like it, and sometimes I just moan and get sent out, but most of the time, I'm alright like.

This discussion reveals a central theme of the Ladz' school experience and what I refer to as a 'pragmatic approach to education'. These young men are somewhat dissimilar from their laddish (Willis 1977) counterparts and are no longer completely anti-learning (Jackson 2006; Jackson 2010) and do not entirely reject education and its significance, and there is mainly no association between academic work and femininity (Jackson 2002) or the notion of it being "cissy" (Willis 1977, p. 149). Furthermore, the Ladz also differ from some of their post-industrial study counterparts,

who demonstrated a "`don't much care' [attitude] to school" (McDowell 2003, p. 118), a rejection of "formal school knowledge and the potential exchange value it has in the labour market" (Mac an Ghaill 1994, p. 65) and whereby school was perceived to have little importance to the future (Nayak 2003; Nayak 2006). Instead, the Ladz selectively engage in topics that they feel are particularly relevant to their chosen career path – *"Maths and English. Just good knowledge, isn't it. I need them to be a mechanic in it."* (Tommy), *"Biology's interesting, so I wen tha one. About the body and tha and part of paramedics I wanna do"* (Lewis) – or have real-world value as further demonstrated by Ian:

> ASDAN [Award Scheme Development and Accreditation Network] is something I liked. They actually taught us instead of getting put in front of a book and learning from that. They taught us basic skills. Like, one lesson they taught us how to learn to do tax and stuff like that. That's what people need more because, yeah, they just need it more.

Here again, we see that linkage between education and practicality and skills and knowledge that have value beyond merely a theoretical use (Willis 1977). Additionally, Ian seems to suggest that this knowledge is transmitted through a 'traditional' teaching style as opposed to the contemporary neoliberalist approach that is target driven and where "students are required to memorise and repeat received facts and concepts in exchange for certified skills" (Brown et al. 2020, p. 154).

This notion of practicality transcends the young men's school experience and also seems to continue into further education, as evidenced by the following quotation from Lewis:

> That's the whole point of being in college. You gotta learn stuff like. You just don't. Fuckin' math, we're doing stuff you learnt in year 6. Or in English, you just do the same mock tests you done in year seven like, so it's not like I'm learning anything.

This excerpt suggests that Lewis believes that the standard of education he receives in college is below his cognitive ability level and offers limited practical benefit. However, Lewis' successful completion of his college course is potentially determined by productive engagement with these topics and a positive outcome.

Superficially, the Ladz pragmatic approach to education seems to reveal a method that does deliver some benefit and engagement with education. However, as the

following discussion demonstrates, further analysis of this approach reveals equally detrimental implications.

> **Dan**: It was mainly science we mitched all the time.
>
> **RG**: Why Science? Why don't you like science?
>
> **Dan**: I don't care about science. I just wasn't interested at all. I don't feel like I need it in my life, so I just didn't do it.

As this excerpt demonstrates, the young men's pragmatic approach to education also has negative consequences. Here we see Dan rejecting science based on its perceived irrelevance and its everyday life benefit. Subsequently, the pragmatic approach to education and the hierarchical selective process reduces the Ladz' engagement with education to perceived essential subjects, with supposed unnecessary topics being rejected. This process reduces the young men's ability to achieve the considered positive educational benchmark of five GCSEs at A-C (MacDonald and Marsh 2005). This eventuality may negatively affect the young men's future life chances (Weber 1948).

Seemingly, this section shows a departure from the anti-learning laddish culture (Willis 1977; Jackson 2006; Jackson 2010) through the Ladz' pragmatic approach to education that is driven by an awareness of the significance of educational credentials: *"You need them [GCSEs], you mad head"* (Tommy). Although contemporary marginalised working-class young men's engagement with education is not unique (Ward 2015), the Ladz selective involvement resonates with the 'ordinary kids' and what Brown (1987, p. 100) refers to as alienated instrumentalism, which may be understood as viewing school "as a 'means' of obtaining credentials to compete for certain types of employment". However, as previously stated, the Ladz' hostility towards teachers and their aggressive macho laddish displays demonstrate contradictory behaviour that disassociates them from the ordinary kids. Brown (1987, p. 93-94) states that the ordinary kids "attempt[ed] to avoid conflict and hostility with authority". Subsequently, the Ladz' attitude towards school and challenging, unruly school behaviour generates a contradiction that complicates the Ladz' true identity and subsequent categorisation. However, additional consideration potentially reveals a reconfigured association with the lads.

The lads from Willis's (1977) study rejected education based on its perceived irrelevance to their future career orientation. The Ladz' pragmatic approach to education is almost identical yet reconfigured in line with contemporary social and economic changes and manifestations of neoliberal culture, including credentialism, which has increased the significance of qualifications (Patrick 2013). Essentially, the Ladz seemingly recognise the significance of credentials concerning training and job opportunities and, therefore, selectively choose to engage in subjects believed to facilitate their progression into working-class jobs – skilled but still predominantly working-class – whilst actively rejecting school subjects and knowledge perceived as irrelevant to their future career orientation.

"It all depends on the teacher"

The previous section demonstrated the Ladz' partial commitment to the teaching paradigm (Willis 1977) through their pragmatic approach to education and selective school engagement. This commitment generates questions about the Ladz' unruly laddish behaviour and why they do not fulfil the teaching paradigm requirements by providing teachers with respect and conforming to the rules and social relations of the schooling system (Feinberg and Soltis 2009). These questions and the fragmentation of the teaching paradigm are explored in the subsequent sections, initially by assessing the young men's view toward teachers and the notion of respect.

When exploring the young men's view towards school, teachers were one of the overriding influential factors. In all nine interviews conducted, some negativity was aimed at teachers, be that partially or outright disdain. Several factors determined this opposition, yet the notion of respect – in some form or another – is a feature that connects most of the participants' data.

As one might expect, outright disdain for teachers was associated with Stan. When I initially asked Stan why he did not like school, he responded: *"I despise school. They're cunts".* Although Stan demonstrates an intensified dislike of school, his use of 'they're' at the end of this statement is particularly revealing. By utilising this word, Stan seems to suggest that it is not the school itself but those within it. I responded to this answer by asking Stan if there were any aspects of school he liked, and the following discussion proceeded:

Stan: Depends on the teachers and tha, whether they hit me or restrain me and tha.

RG: Why did they restrain you?

Stan: Cause I fucking threw a chair at one of them!

RG: Why did you throw the chair?

Stan: Cause he fucking laughed in my face!

Stan's association with teachers evidently influences his relationship with the school. Although it is important to recognise Stan's hyper-masculine (Mac an Ghaill 1994) violent laddish behaviour, equal significance is the triggering of this conduct because it resonates with many of the Ladz and inversely connects with the teaching paradigm.

The triggering point for Stan's behaviour is the teacher laughing in his face. Subsequently, one may arguably assume that Stan feels belittled and disrespected. This notion of being undermined by teachers and a violent reaction is also evident in a response offered by Lewis:

> One teacher, I threw a chair at him. Cos, he told me to fuck off under his breath. So I said go on, say it again. And he smiled, so I lobbed a chair at him. Don't piss me off [laughs].

In these two excerpts, we begin to see the motives behind the Ladz' unruly, challenging school behaviour. Whenever these young men feel undermined, disrespected, or have a sense of powerlessness, they seem to draw upon their hyper-masculine (Mac an Ghaill 1994) identity and violent behaviour to reclaim self-worth (Jackson 2002). This response resonates with Dan's earlier rationale for violence, suggesting an instinctive, natural reaction to *"[Not getting] along with everyone"*.

Billy also identified teachers as crucial in determining his negative school experience and behaviour: *"I don't mind the education bit, but I can't stand the teachers. They think they can belittle us. They think they're all better".* This response corresponds with the above excerpts and the notions of disrespect and powerlessness.

The responses of these three participants reveal a contradictory fragmentation in the teaching paradigm. As previously mentioned, the success of teaching paradigms entails pupils providing respect based on the knowledge teachers provide. However,

conversely, the Ladz' replies suggest that they unconditionally desire respect from teachers or at least want to be respected. Furthermore, although the teaching paradigm proposes a mutual exchange – knowledge for respect – arguably, it also has undertones of the traditionalist ideas of respect where "children are taught to respect their parents, elders, people in positions of authority and law" (Elliot et al. 2013). Based on these ideas and perspectives, I decided to further explore the notion of respect in Billy's interview:

> **RG**: Billy, do you think teachers should get respect or do you think they should earn respect? What's your thoughts on that?
>
> **Billy**: It's 50/50 like ini? Some teachers like, if they did treat me with respect, I'll be the same with them. But like most teachers like, just won't settle down with me like. In my report, they always say I'm lovely kid ana, they say I need, I need to focus on my attention but like it's hard, and them um like, yeah if they treat me with respect I'll treat it with them back, but if I treat them with respect, I can't always expect it back.

In this excerpt, Billy suggests that respect is a reciprocal process and neglects the traditionalist ideas that elders and those in authority should freely be awarded dignity based on social status (Elliot et al. 2013). Billy's perspective challenges the very foundations of the teaching paradigm due to his noncompliant offering of unconditional respect based on the knowledge exchange value.

Teachers were also a defining feature of Tommy's school experience, and he also felt that the teachers picked on him and stated: *"They're [teachers] irritating! They pick on me. They piss me off! I hate them".* Furthermore, based on Tommy's previously mentioned middle-ground school perspective (It's alright, but it's not the best), I asked him what was good about school. He replied: *"Some lessons and sometimes the teachers have a laugh, but sometimes they can be dickheads".* Tommy's response additionally reconfirms his pragmatic approach to school (some lessons). It also reveals an additional disparity between himself and the lads (Willis 1977). Tommy's response suggests that if teachers have a laugh or establish a positive relationship, then school is potentially good. Conversely, Willis' (1977, p. 83) observations revealed the following:

> Techniques which attempt to get too close to 'the lads' are simply rejected because they come from 'teachers' and are embued with what 'teaching' already stands for in the institution.

Despite Tommy's laddish behaviour, unlike the lads, Tommy seems willing to accept a teacher-pupil relationship based on humour. Tommy's response correlates with Simpson and Simmons's (2021) study of a state primary school in a former mining community in the north of England. This research revealed that humour helped create and maintain positive relationships between pupils and staff.

Even Wesley, with his seemingly conformist demeanour, identified the significance of teachers. When I asked whether he engaged in school, he responded: *"It depends - sometimes. It all depends on the teacher".* And Ian talked about how he took advantage of the precarious nature of supply teachers: *"Supply teachers you can just muck around".*

This section shows that the Ladz' engagement with education – whether negative or positive – is significantly determined by the pupil and teacher relationship. The young men's nonconformist behaviour and lack of unconditional teacher respect may reflect their working-class protest masculinity (Connell 2005) and the idea of sticking up for oneself, speaking one's mind, and challenging authority (Willis 1977; Mac an Ghaill 1994; McDowell 2003). However, Billy's notion of reciprocal respect and Tommy's compliance based on a sense of humour potentially compromise the idea of outright ingrained anti-authority qualities. Furthermore, although the data does not evidence it, it is worth considering whether humour has the ability to lessen the hierarchal relationship between pupil and teacher and creates a foundation whereby the young men perceive themselves as equal or respected by the teacher.

"I'm fucking autistic"

The previous sections have collectively identified a disparity between the Ladz' alienated instrumentalism (Brown 1987) or pragmatic approach to education and their laddish, nonconformist, unruly challenging behaviour. This section contributes to this discussion and highlights an additional catalyst for the young men's 'seemingly' laddish classroom conduct.

Seven of the nine young men openly admitted to some form of learning disability and/or mental health condition. Out of the two remaining participants – Dan and Stan – Dan made no mention of these issues. Conversely, although Stan never outright confessed to learning disabilities, he did refer to issues with dyslexia when he was asked to do certain things at the youth centre. For example, on one occasion, Martin, the senior youth worker, asked Stan to engage in a survey, and Stan responded by saying: *"I can't. I'm fucking dyslexic".* Additionally, in his interview, Stan talked about his junior educational years and said: *"I was good at Maths and English. I am good at everything. It's just. I'm fucking autistic – joking!"* Stan's use of the word 'joking' may potentially mean one of two things. Firstly, this may be a display of his masculine piss-taking behaviour (Collinson 1988; Nixon 2009). Alternatively, this term may be a defence mechanism that allows him to evade or conceal difficulties that he may feel demonstrate weakness, especially considering his hyper-masculine (Mac an Ghaill 1994) qualities and laddish behaviour (Francis 1999).

Besides Stan and Dan, the other seven members of the Ladz were forthright about their learning difficulties and talked freely about their impact on their educational engagement. A previous section revealed that Billy disliked writing. When I questioned him about this displeasure, Billy offered the following response:

> I dunno. It's just I have, um, ADHD, so I can't concentrate, and then I'm writing, and I'll be in a mood, then someone catches my attention, then it takes a good 5 minutes to settle then.

In this excerpt, Billy suggests that his ADHD hampers his concentration and writing, affecting his mood and classroom behaviour. Lewis ' data also shows this notion of affective negative classroom behaviour due to a learning disability.

As the previous section showed, Lewis confessed to being a *"naughty boy in school".* When making sense of this status, Lewis provided the following rationale:

> I was always messing about. I could never concentrate because, in school, I could never understand the work. And like when people try to give me help, they would give me the wrong help. I didn't get diagnosed with it, dyslexia until the end of school. So, I was a bit distracted in school, so then I would mess around. And I was always getting in trouble. And then, when I was getting stressed, I was always working out for a fag. I'd get caught by the principal.

Akin to Billy, Lewis's learning disability also impedes his concentration, leading to disruptive classroom behaviour. However, in an additional response, Lewis contradicts this notion of affective disability behaviour and suggests that some of his adverse school conduct – that verges on sexual harassment – was determined by sexual attraction:

> One teacher was my favourite; I was only nice to her because I found her fit. I remember her like. I messed around too much with her, see. I was like, you could say I was very flirtatious with her. In the class, I would slap her arse and walk out. Bearing in mind, I was like 14-15 at the time. I just didn't care. I still don't now.

This excerpt undermines Lewis' initial 'victimhood' response and reveals negative classroom behaviour motivated by sexual desire, and reinforces his hyper-masculine (Mac an Ghaill 1994) status and laddish qualities. Additionally, through *"I just don't care. I still don't now"* Lewis seems to attempt to normalise his behaviour through a sense of macho (McDowell 2003) meaning-making. Furthermore, Lewis's sexual objectification of the female teacher may be understood as an attempt to seize "power through constituting her as the powerless object of sexist discourse" (Walkerdine 1993, p. 209) and, in doing so, taking the position of a sexualised man and changing the power dynamic.

Within the scope of learning disabilities and mental illnesses, Cole's story and his disaffected school experience become illuminated. As previously stated, the lads' culture and its adverse outcomes are almost imposed on Cole due to his disturbing childhood experiences. The following excerpt demonstrates Cole's disengagement from education due to mental health issues:

> Depression come around, and that hit me off. I didn't really know what I wanted from the start of year ten till the end of year eleven. I just give up sort of thing. I didn't have any plans, no dreams, no roles. I just shut down and locked myself away most of the time. Give up with everything like – just wanted to be there and not bothered.

This quotation demonstrates the adverse impact of depression and its negative effect on Cole's learning experience. The magnitude of this depression also threatened Cole's well-being due to self-harm and extensive periods in the hospital.

Tommy also had ADHD and frequently and openly talked about his problems with anger. On one occasion, Tommy arrived at the centre with a black eye. When I asked

him about it, he said he had got very angry and punched himself in the face. Tommy's issues with anger were a significant contributor to his school exclusion (discussed in the subsequent section).

Conversely to the negative learning disability and/or mental health affective behaviour, Ian and Wesley demonstrated a functionalist learning disabilities perspective that determined their educational engagement. For example, during their interview together, I asked Ian why he liked certain subjects, and the following conversation proceeded:

> **Ian**: I think that's why I like creating stuff.
>
> **RG**: Why's that Ia?
>
> **Ian**: I've got dyslexia. That's why my imagination is running wild.
>
> **Wesley**: Yeah, my sister is really creative – she has dyslexia and she like the art type, but me I'm just like – I've got dyspraxia and my art skills are not really good.

This excerpt demonstrates a sense of learning disability meaning-making. These two young men seem to determine their academic strength, weaknesses and subsequent engagement according to their learning disabilities. The Ladz' learning disability and/or mental health issues are features that continue into the employment-related data. Therefore, although these issues are only briefly touched on in this chapter, they are more extensively explored through the notions of medicalisation and individualisation (Ashurst and Venn 2014) in the following chapter.

"It's like behaviour school"

The previous sections have demonstrated the complexity of the Ladz' schooling experience, including a pragmatic approach to education and negative laddish school behaviour ranging from truanting to violent conduct. This final educational section deals with the ramifications of this negative school behaviour and explores one of the sanctions used on the young men while tying in a few final bits of important education related data.

As stated in previous sections, I share a connection to the Ladz due to my laddish history and lack of youthful educational engagement. Although I never physically

assaulted teachers, and I am not proud of my school behaviour, I was commonly truant, extremely disruptive in class and spent a large portion of my youthful school years engaged in drug-taking and smoking. As one might expect, this behaviour was deemed unacceptable, and I was penalised for it. The sanctions imposed included being repeatedly made to stand outside the class, having my classroom behaviour monitored and reported on by teachers, and eventually demoted to the lowest ability group in all lessons. Despite the negative school behavioural similarities between myself and the Ladz, the sanctions imposed on them differ significantly from mine.

Due to their negative school behaviour, Tommy, Stan, Dan, and Lewis had all been excluded from school and had spent extended periods in pupil referral units (PRU). Cole had also been referred to a PRU due to his enforced educational difficulties. PRU's are a:

> particular type of educational setting for young people of compulsory school age who, for different reasons (i.e. challenging behaviour and/or temporary and permanent school exclusion), have been removed from mainstream and special schools (Meo and Parker, 2004, p. 103).

The Ladz are almost an exact fit with the type of child excluded from school. Their characteristics and vulnerabilities place them at significant risk of being excluded and sent to PRU's. Overwhelmingly, children excluded from school include males, young people associated with poverty and those with special educational needs and/or poor mental health problems (Ashurst and Venn 2014; Gill et al. 2017). Additionally, the permanent and fixed-term exclusions from schools in Wales records, 2017/18, indicate that persistent disruptive behaviour and verbal abuse/threatening behaviour against an adult were the most common reasons for school exclusion (Hughes 2019).

Due to the high proportion of the study sample associated with PRU's, I decided to interview the manager of the PRU that the Ladz attended. Therefore, this section includes data from the young men together with Tony, the PRU manager.

The findings relating to the Ladz' experience at a PRU vary and potentially reflect the difficulties of dealing with these young men and catering for their education needs while accounting for their challenging behaviour. For example, Tommy was excluded from school because of his anger issues which sometimes led to violent outbursts: *"It's just my behaviour when I like get pissed off. I just get angry and frustrated when the*

teachers wind me up" (Tommy). However, the PRU seemed to be an equal source of frustration for Tommy:

> If I sit there and do fuck all because I've done all the work, they're like, "Do your work", but I've already done it, and then they're just moody at me then. I always do my work. I'm the first one to do it. When I've done my work [laughs], they go in a mood with me then and blame loads of things on me. I just piss them [teachers] off then.

In this excerpt, Tommy suggests that the academic work he is given at the PRU is not challenging enough. Subsequently, we potentially see a clash of frustration between Tommy, who finds the work too easy, and a teacher who cannot complete the teaching paradigm and maintain Tommy's attention and compliance academically.

An additional aspect of noteworthiness is Tommy's physical reaction and laughter after saying: *"When I've done my work"*. This seems a peculiar laughter point? Is Tommy lying about doing his work and being purely disruptive? His previous responses and the importance he places on qualifications suggest otherwise. Additionally, is Tommy's laughter a divergence technique that reflects his complex character of being torn between a laddish masculine avoidance of school work (Connell 1995; Francis and Archer 2005) and a pragmatic approach that recognises the importance of qualifications?

Tommy was desperate to return to mainstream education. At the point of his interview, his parents were in talks with his previous school, discussing the possibility of him going back.

As the following excerpt demonstrates, the notion of returning to mainstream education was also a feature of Tony's interview data:

> Ultimately I think it should be our goal to get everyone back into that kind of environment. I understand that we're needed, but the ones that are capable of going back to mainstream, we should push to go back to mainstream. All those social exposures that are part of growing up and maturing, are taken away from them just because they come to us. I will try very, very hard to get them back in mainstream school, but it is down to the school's appetite to have them back because more often than not, once they're done, they're done, and that's it. There's no way back.

Tony's response and the keenness he demonstrates around returning children to mainstream education reflect the passion for students he demonstrated in his

interview. However, this excerpt also highlights his acknowledgement and recognition of the hindering effects of PRU's. Additionally, his notion of 'no way back' correlates with Gill et al.'s (2017) findings. They suggest that schools have operated on a system that rewards students' academic outcomes since the onset of new public management. Under this system, schools are pressured to improve and sometimes use exclusion to enhance their critical criteria.

My previously documented reflection on my school experience, sanctions and comparison between the Ladz inspired me to ask Tony about this disparity – Tony provided the following response:

> I don't think for a lot of my kids, I could not put them outside of a classroom for ten minutes to reflect on their behaviour without them wanting to smash and break something, which is unfortunate - but it is concerning.

In this response, Tony arguably suggests a behavioural shift, with contemporary young men being more aggressive and having complex needs. Correspondingly, Gill et al (2017, p. 19) suggest that the increase in school exclusions can be explained by the rising number of "children experiencing the intersecting vulnerabilities" – including poverty, learning needs and mental illness – and schools' financial difficulties dealing with these problems.

Contrary to Tommy's negative perspective on PRU's, Dan offered a favourable view of this educational setting:

> It's like behaviour school. Just for people who have been in the same situation as me and kicked out of school, but they **help**[2] you a lot more – they've got more **time** for you as well. It's much better, I think. They've just got more **time** for you, and they **help** you a lot more if you're stuck or something. They just **help** you a lot more. Smaller classes plus two teachers in one class.

In this short response, the crucial words that are repeatedly used include help and time. Therefore, PRUs, with their smaller classes and more teachers, are beneficial in providing Dan with the support he seems to require. Additionally, despite Dan's laddish school behaviour that led to exclusion, this excerpt arguably further evidences his commitment to 'some' educational engagement.

[2] Phrases in excerpts are bolded to highlight their significance and demonstrate wording patterns.

Despite Dan's recognition of support, this particular PRU boasts that 2020 was its most successful year, with 85% of its pupils achieving five GCSEs of D-G. This attainment level is well below the recognised standard of 'good' educational achievement of five GCSEs at A-C (Roberts 2018) and places these pupils in danger of becoming NEET (Not in Education, Employment, or Training) (Simmons et al. 2014). Correspondingly, Ian and even Wesley – the apparent school conformist – also left school with qualifications well below the recognised 'good' educational benchmark.

The notion of support was also evident in Dan's discussion about his career advisor: *"I talk to him, and if I need anything, I've got his number. He's sound like".* The career advice offered to Dan corresponded with his chosen career path, plumbing. Tony referred to this process as a *"career match"*, which in Tony's words was: *"you tell us what you want to do, and she [career advisor] will get an employer in to talk about how you can get with him"*. Essentially, the Ladz' expectations were married to an equivalent employer. This 'career match' process corresponds with the method used in the Ladz' mainstream school. For example, when Lewis attended a college open day organised by the school, he was shown construction courses. Therefore, he did not realise that the college offered an access to nursing course, which he is interested in pursuing. Furthermore, when I asked Billy about careers advice, he provided evidence of a similar experience:

> People come in for careers and talk about construction an tha, but it doesn't interest me. And oh, was it called? It's in college, and they go to different countries and that, I think its army an tha, the forces and all tha.

Stan's data on his experience at the PRU is limited and potentially reflects his negativity toward school, which often led to sharp responses like: *"school is shit"*. However, his PRU school experience was once mentioned during an ethnographic observation of him talking to a group of girls:

> I'm allowed to do **anything**. I threw a chair at a teacher and still didn't get thrown out. I can literally get away with **anything,** and the teachers won't do **anything**. The best thing is I get to do dull work, colouring and stuff [laughter].

Akin to his previous excerpts, we see Stan's hyper-masculine (Mac an Ghaill 1994) posturing and desire for attention. Notably, he is talking to a group of girls and claiming he is untouchable – *"anything"* – yet this claim is untrue, as evidenced by the fact that

Stan has previously said that teachers restrain him. Therefore, arguably, Stan seemingly tries to impress these girls through a masculine verbal display of strength and superiority. Additionally, he seems to recognise the stigmatisation around PRU's and deflects this by stating that the *"dull work"* is the *"best thing"*.

Unlike Dan's positive experience of PRU's, Cole's encounters with these types of institutions echoed his adverse childhood and consisted of a collection of unfavourable experiences. Due to his forced self-removal from school, Cole was assigned to a PRU where he was provided with two hours of education five days a week and led to, in Cole's words: *"nothing except for a C in Maths, E in English and RE – that's all I had".* As stated previously, this attainment level places Cole in significant danger of becoming NEET (Simmons et al. 2014).

After his GCSEs, Cole could not go to local mainstream colleges out of fear of bullying and reoccurring episodes. Subsequently, Cole was provided with further education through alternative provision (AP), defined as an educational institution "for children of compulsory school age who do not attend mainstream or special schools and who would not otherwise receive suitable education, for any reason" (DfE 2018, p. 5). However, this institution could not cater to Cole's career aspiration – funeral directing, explored in Chapter Six – and provide him with the necessary education and training requirements. Therefore, Cole stated that:

> All I was doing was going there to sit there, to fall asleep in the corner and get paid £50 a week for it. I didn't really have much learning there at all. But they wouldn't say no because obviously, we got £50 a week, but they are also earning money because we're there. I weren't stupid – I know why they didn't say no and just left me there.

Essentially, Cole was used as a 'cash cow'. The AP could not meet Cole's education or career training needs yet registered him due to financial rewards. Cole's experience with AP's reveals many failings that compound the severity of his adverse childhood and existing decreased life chances (Weber, 1948).

Cole's experience at PRU's and the lack of opportunity echo Tony's honest account of his centre and the educational institution that the Ladz attended:

> I think firstly, if you come out of a really good mainstream school and you come to us, and there's a huge raft of support that's taken away. So the school's pastoral support,

> education welfare, school-based counsellors, the school nurses, education psychology - all of that is taken away. Then they come to us.

As this excerpt shows, although Tony was passionate about providing pupils with the best possible educational outcome, this objective was constrained due to a lack of provisions and financial support. Therefore, and as I critically explore and argue in the final discussion and conclusion chapter, although the Ladz make life difficult for their teachers in mainstream school (Delamont 2000), whose benefit do PRU's serve? Because although the smaller classes provide some advantages, the reduced level of provisions often equates to an inadequate educational experience (Ashurst and Venn 2014) that arguably reinforces a disaffected relationship with education and leads to decreased academic outcomes.

Conclusion

This chapter has demonstrated that although the Ladz share some education related consistencies with Willis's lads (Willis 1977), including nonconformist protest masculinity (Connell 1995) associated behaviour, which is intensified by mental health problems, learning difficulties and disaffected relationships with teachers, the chapter equally shows that the Ladz do not entirely reject education. In contrast to the lads, the Ladz believe that some academic credentials are important to their employment aspirations and adopt what I refer to as a pragmatic approach, meaning they selectively identify and partake in educational topics considered necessary to their employment aspiration whilst rejecting those deemed irrelevant. Therefore, despite the Ladz' nonconformist protest masculinity (Connell 1995) associated behaviour and connection to the lads (1977), these young men demonstrate relative change and are no longer entirely anti-learning (Jackson 2006; Jackson 2010) and do not seem to perceive academic work as feminine or cissy (Willis 1977; Jackson 2002). Instead, the Ladz partially recognise the necessity of academic credentials, which derives from employment aspirations. The following empirical chapter explores the Ladz' employment orientations and how these are constructed and influenced.

Chapter Six:

The Ladz and Employment

Introduction

This chapter presents the Ladz' employment-related data and explores aspects including what jobs the Ladz want to do and why, the jobs they disfavour, and their view towards service sector employment. The main arguments of this chapter are that almost all of the Ladz reject service sector employment based on the perceived inability to engage in emotional labour (Hochschild 1983), and several of the Ladz demonstrate a continued laddish (McDowell 2002) attraction to manual and physical hands-on forms of employment (Willis 1977; Nixon 2006), that largely derives from socialisation or the intergenerational transmission of masculine modes of being (Walkerdine and Jimenez 2012), often through prominent family and male figures (Veness 1962; Tolson 1977; Willis 1977). However, among some of the Ladz, the intergenerational transmission process has become destabilised through specific social circumstances, leading to an employment orientation other than manual employment. Therefore, this chapter demonstrates both continuity and change among this group of contemporary marginalised working-class young men.

"Anything to do with building"

The lads (Willis 1977) view towards employment was guided by their masculine working-class cultural and social background, which led them to believe that social mobility and the possibility of 'good' jobs were unattainable (Roberts 1995). Subsequently, unlike the Ladz from this study, academic qualifications were deemed irrelevant and thought to offer an illusory promise (Willis 1977). Furthermore, the lads placed minimal emphasis on 'specific' career choices and instead committed themselves to a "future of generalised labour" (Willis 1977, p. 100). This commitment was driven by the belief that work offers minimal intrinsic reward, and what mattered was the "potential particular work situation holds for self and particularly masculine expression, diversion and 'laffs' as learnt creatively in the counter-school culture" (Willis 1977, p. 100). Essentially, the lads demonstrated a commitment to unskilled

and semi-skilled masculine forms of employment and recognised that they did not need qualifications for these jobs (Roberts 1995).

Despite the initial behavioural similarities between the two study samples, contrary to the lads (Willis 1977), most of the Ladz' data does demonstrate a preference toward specific forms of employment other than unskilled and semi-skilled work. For example, when asked what form of employment they would like to do, the Ladz offered the following replies. Craig responded with: *"The most job I would like in the world is a roofer or like a plumber. That is all I would like to do".* Additionally, Craig also mentioned the possibility of joining the army, doing carpentry and being a chef or a scrap metal collector.

At the time of the study, Ian was employed as a plumber's mate. In response to the following question: *"Did you ever think about what kind of jobs you wanted to do when you were in school?"* Ian replied: *"Anything to do with building or something. Carpentry, bricklaying or plumbing".* Correspondingly, Dan also had a strong preference for plumbing. In response to Dan's attraction to plumbing, I asked him the following question: *"So plumbing is the job you favour. Do you think you would like to do any other jobs, Dan?* Dan offered the following response:

> I put a secondary choice of plastering, and if plumbing doesn't go well, sport. Like going into the local schools and coaching rugby or football, things like that. Mainly rugby – I wouldn't really want to do tennis or anything like that.

In this excerpt, we possibly see the strength of Dan's masculine working-class identity. Notably, Dan rejects involvement in tennis, a sport associated with a middle-class status (Bourdieu 1984), includes individualistic participation, and involves distance between opponents (Falcous and McLeod 2012) and thus omits masculine, physical, and bodily contact. Conversely, Dan favours rugby – a game that Bourdieu (1984) links to a working-class identity and is traditionally associated with masculinity (Anderson and McGuire 2010; Ward 2015) and involves collective involvement. Evidence of an employment-related masculine working-class identity was also potentially evident in Tommy's job preference data.

Similar to Craig and Dan, Tommy's preferred choice of work included mechanics, plumbing and scrap collecting. My ethnographic discussions with Tommy revealed that he had very fixed and rigid ideas about his employment ambition. As the choices

demonstrate, Tommy's work preferences exclusively include traditionally associated working-class manual forms of employment (Shildrick and MacDonald 2007) and exclude any mentioning of middle-class professions. This exclusion and the rigidity of Tommy's employment aspiration led me to ask him: *"Tommy, ever thought about being a lawyer, or something like that, butt?"* Tommy replied: *"Fuck that, too much paperwork. They gave me a huge paper test in school, and I said, fuck that. I chucked it in the shredder and walked out".* Notably, akin to the lads (Willis 1977) before him, Tommy strongly rejects the possibility of employment-related upward mobility and the middle-class profession of a lawyer (Ingram 2009) and demonstrates resistance to paperwork and an inclination to manual work.

Craig, Ian, Dan and Tommy's employment preference data reveal a strong connection with traditionally associated working-class forms of skilled manual employment, particularly construction work (Shildrick and MacDonald 2007). However, this connection was less distinct and rigid among the other five participants.

Being 20 years old, Cole had already reached employment age and worked for the local council as a memorial mason. Being slightly unsure of the job specification for a memorial mason, I asked Cole what the job entails. Cole provided the following response:

> A Memorial Mason is where you check the safety of grave headstones. I look after ten cemeteries and the headstone all over the borough – that's 55000 headstones. I've got to hand test every single one of them in a year to meet the safety specifications.

Although Cole seemed relatively happy in his current form of employment (explored in later sections), this was not his preferred job choice. From the age of eight, Cole had been drawn to funeral directing, whilst also favouring mechanical engineering in the army, yet was dissuaded from this career choice due to family concern and disproval.

Lewis' job preferences included a contrasting mismatch between masculine associated skilled working-class manual employment, including bricklaying and plumbing (Thiel 2007; Ness; 2012), together with frontline healthcare work in the form of a paramedic, which requires emotional labour (Hochschild 1983; Hayes et al. 2020) and associated feminine qualities (Leidner 1993; McDowell 2003). Lewis' career orientation data reveals a partial deviation from the traditional working-class masculine

form of manual employment; this departure is more pronounced in Billy's job preference data.

As was revealed in Chapter Five, unlike the previous six participants, Billy stated that he had no attraction to skilled working-class employment: *"Construction an tha . . . doesn't interest me".* Contrary to the other Ladz and the two that follow, Billy's job preference was cooking. In making sense of this preference, Billy offered the following response:

> Cooking is something I enjoy, like with math; it's like I don't enjoy it. I like, struggle ini, that why I don't listen like, do you know what I mean. But with cooking ana, it's something I enjoy. It's like you got weak points and strong points, haven't you.

As this excerpt demonstrates, cooking seems to provide Billy with a sense of intrinsic reward facilitated by his ability to engage in this activity successfully. The last two participants – Stan and Wesley – reveal further dissimilarities compared to Craig, Ian, Dan and Tommy whilst also demonstrating comparative contrast in job preference. However, they equally share a connection that links them together.

Chapter Five revealed Stan's strong association with the lads' category (Willis 1977) through his rejection of education and volatile displays of hyper-masculine (Mac an Ghaill 1994) behaviour. Stan's link to the lads' category was additionally evident in his employment preference data. When asked what job he would like to do, Stan offered the following response:

> I don't know! I want to dig graves up, and tha or maybe play rugby. Or do you know wha, I might actually work in a motorbike shop! What would you get more money off – motorbike shop or fucking. I'd probably do grave digging cos it's probably the easiest job. You don't need GCSEs or anything – it's literally easy as fuck!

There are several parts of this excerpt that require an explanation and analysis. Firstly, *"I don't know"* – a response Stan used frequently – was always delivered in an angry and aggressive tone. However, I never once felt threatened by this verbal display of aggression. Instead, I always felt that Stan was angry and frustrated at himself because he could not offer a definitive answer, epitomised by the multiple choices in his response. Furthermore, unlike the previous Ladz and akin to the lads – whose choice of a specific job could be "quite random" (Willis, 1977, p. 101) – Stan's job

preference response is relatively indecisive and ultimately based on the non-requirement of GCSEs.

Although Stan and Wesley had dissimilar personalities – Stan, hyper-masculine (Mac an Ghaill 1994) and volatile. Wesley, shy and timid – their employment preference data reveals similarities:

> I like television stuff. TV – stuff like that, but I don't know. I might change my mind and find something else that I am good at. I haven't thought like what type of job that much. I'll just give things a try, and then if I think that's not for me or that's not really my kind of thing. I like trying stuff like experimenting with like different jobs. (Wesley)

As the above expert shows, akin to Stan and unlike the other seven Ladz, Wesley also had a somewhat ambiguous sense of employment preference. There is no fixed career ambition. We also see the use of *"I don't know",* which is omitted from most of the Ladz employment preference data and only identifiable in Stan's data.

A 'Lagging' Labour Market

Collective analysis of the Ladz' employment preference data reveals a relatively strong connection to masculine working-class associated skilled manual employment (Shildrick and MacDonald 2007), yet with some deviations, including funeral directing, healthcare work, cooking and media. Notably, unlike their laddish predecessors (Willis 1977), unskilled and semi-skilled manual work and manufacturing are omitted from the Ladz' preferred choice of employment. However, this exclusion potentially reflects the historical changes in the UK labour market.

The 1970s and the period in which Willis conducted his research was a time of relatively high rates of manual work, with many working-class young men choosing to leave school at the earliest opportunity (McDowell 2003) and often finding employment in manufacturing, heavy industry and jobs constructed as masculine because of their hard, physical and dangerous nature (Nixon 2018). However, as stated in Chapter Two, the "Thatcherite Revolution" (Nayak 2003a, p 149), Conservative Government policy, and the onset of modern neoliberalism led to a move away from industrial work, a decline in manual jobs and a shift toward service-sector employment (Simmons et al. 2014). Subsequently, "the types of work that most of Willis's lads had walked into

in 1977 – unskilled manufacturing work with relatively good rates of pay and some prospect of security – [have] virtually disappeared" (McDowell 2003, p. 2). As a result, service sector work currently accounts for 82% of all UK employment (Brien 2022), with manufacturing and construction making up around 7.3% and 6.3% of jobs (ONS 2022), respectively.

The historical changes in the UK labour market and demise of heavy industry and manufacturing potentially reflect the Ladz' partial commitment to the teaching paradigm and the recognised significance of 'specific' qualifications that were identified in Chapter Five, especially considering that the mentioning of qualifications and their preferred choice of subject was always attached to their employment preference, for example: *"Maths and English . . . just good knowledge, isn't it. I need them to be a mechanic in it."* (Tommy), *"Biology's interesting so I wen tha one. About the body and tha and part of paramedics, I wanna do"* (Lewis). Furthermore, when considering the current UK labour market structure, the exclusion of service sector work in the Ladz' job preferences data is noteworthy. However, as Brown (1987, p. 140) states, "to understand the transition from school, we need to be aware of the range of occupational opportunities which are available in the local labour market".

Startlingly dissimilar to the current UK labour market structure, yet relatively comparable to the UK labour market conditions of 1977 – manufacturing 24.3%, construction 6.4% (Syed 2019) – within the borough in which the Ladz are situated, as of 2020, manufacturing accounted for 20.4% of employment and construction accounted for 5.6% of jobs (ONS 2021c). The labour market conditions of the Ladz surrounding employment area reveal a disparity compared to the UK figures, with nearly three times more manufacturing than the overall UK statistics. Furthermore, the Ladz' local employment opportunities are also dissimilar to Wales's employment conditions, consisting of 11.2% manufacturing and 5.5% construction, thus bearing some resemblance to the overall UK figures. Subsequently, although some contemporary UK working-class young men are employed in service sector work (Roberts 2018) and 'learning to serve' (McDowell 2000; McDowell 2003), considering the relatively high percentage of manufacturing work in the Ladz surrounding employment area, it may be plausible to suggest that many low-skilled working-class young men in this locality are still 'learning to labour' (Willis 1977). However, the labour market conditions reflect the Ladz surrounding employment area and not the

employment structure of their immediate place of residency. Therefore, the actual visibility of manufacturing jobs or the young people's exposure to opportunities for such employment and the subsequent impact may be somewhat questionable.

"It all goes back to family"

The previous two sections explored the Ladz' job preferences and then discussed these concerning the national, regional and local labour market. The Ladz' job choices mostly revealed – with some deviation – a relatively rigid attraction to traditionally masculine associated working-class forms of skilled manual employment, particularly construction work (Shildrick and MacDonald 2007; Thiel 2007; Ness 2012). The following two sections explore the social, cultural and individual factors that influence the young men's choice of employment.

When discussing their employment orientation, the influence of family and kin was overwhelmingly apparent in most of the Ladz' replies. These social connections played a crucial role in the young men's understanding of employment and their work choices. For example, when I asked Craig why he favoured specific jobs, he gave the following reply:

> My brother was a plumber, and he went to the army, and he said it's hard, but you have loads of fun there. He says [brother] like "try and do everything I've done". So I'm going to try and go to the army.

At further points in the interview, Craig also talked excitedly about how his father took him scrap collecting with him while also mentioning that his grandfather had been employed as a coalminer. Notably, all of the jobs that Craig favours are those associated with his immediate male family members and there is a legacy of manual labour in his family (Nayak 2003a; Nayak 2003b; Ward 2015). In the classical studies on working-class young men and employment, this legacy of manual labour is often attributed to a father's influence (Veness 1962; Tolson 1977; Willis 1977). However, as the excerpt and data show, although Craig demonstrates an attachment to his father, this influence is less prominent and replaced by a strong attraction to his brother's employment trajectory. An explanation for this deviation is potentially found in the structure of Craig's immediate family. Although I never wholly explored the Ladz'

family structure – because I felt it was inappropriate – Craig and several of the other young men occasionally talked about living in single-parent households headed by their mothers. The influential effect of a brother was also evident in Dan's data:

> **RG**: Why plumbing, Dan? What is it about plumbing?
>
> **Dan**: It's along the lines of fixing a bike with my brother when I was younger. Ever since he was ten [brother], he's been fixing motorbikes, so I've been brought with it. I've always thought proper work was building walls, bricklaying, plastering, carpentry and plumbing.
>
> **RG**: Why do you think they are proper jobs, Dan?
>
> **Dan**: Cos I've always seen people working outside and looking like they're working, all dirty instead of sitting in an office all clean and smartly dressed.

In this discussion – without explicitly using the term – Dan almost effectively explains socialisation: "the acquisition of values, attitudes and behaviours through exposure to cultural beliefs and values during childhood" (Chester 2021, p. 4). Essentially, Dan seems to have been raised in an environment where traditional working-class masculine forms of manual employment are the norm, and other types of employment are less visible. This process seemed to have determined his employment understanding and what he considers "appropriately masculine work" (Roberts 2018, p. 126) or what Dan terms *"proper work"*.

Ian's job motivation related data also reveals a deviation from the 'traditional' father social reproduction idea (Veness 1962; Tolson 1977; Willis 1977), yet reconfirmed the influence of male relatives: *"My uncle is a carpenter and I just like what he does and what he works as. He said he likes his job so I gave it a try and I love it"*. The uncle's employment-related persuasion is potentially explained by Ian's father's prolonged sickness-related unemployment and his mother's ill health and incapacity to work due to an eating disorder.

Craig, Dan and Ian's employment influence data demonstrate the significance of male family members or Veness's (1962, p. 69) notion of tradition-direction, which "refers to the situation in which the choice [of employment] is predetermined by family or neighbourhood traditions because no other choice would be thinkable to the young person", or what we might consider as intergenerational transmission (Jimenez and Walkerdine 2011; Invinson 2014a)

Although Billy and Cole's corresponding findings reveal some connection to male relatives, other influences, including female kin and pivotal life moments, are equally instrumental.

Billy's employment aspiration findings revealed an attraction to cooking. When asked to explain why he favoured this type of work, the following discussion occurred:

> **Billy**: Cos, my nan and family members helped me cook over the years. It just makes them proud to see me do something with what they have taught me.
>
> **RG**: So it's the influence from your nan?
>
> **Billy**: It's like my uncle, he loves Liverpool, and when I was younger, he used to buy me all the Liverpool kits. Then, I supported Liverpool. It all goes back to family, like where you start, they teach you things. It's like school, really.

Akin to Dan, in this excerpt, Billy also demonstrates an interpretive understanding of socialisation (Chester 2021) and highlights the career determined nature of family members. However, unlike the previous Ladz, rather than male kin, this impact predominantly relates to a female member, who influences a career direction other than traditional masculine associated working-class forms of employment. Billy's mother was a single parent, potentially explaining the significant female influence.

As stated in Chapter Five, Cole experienced a traumatic childhood that dramatically negatively affected his educational experiences. However, it equally had a significant effect on his career aspiration.

Cole grew up in an abusive household and was a victim of physical and verbal abuse at the hands of his father:

> I couldn't look at him [father] the wrong way. I was made a slave, coffee, food - I was cooking from the age of ten onwards. If I done it wrong, I would have it thrown at me. I had a cup of black coffee thrown at the back of my head once. I had a knife thrown at me in the kitchen, an axe in the garden.

This abuse led social service to award custody of Cole to his grandparents. Cole's brother also died at a young age. These two traumatic childhood experiences caused Cole to suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD): *"I sufferer from PTSD. That's through obviously my father and all the abuse and my brother in my arms at the*

age of six dead". Despite the magnitude of these two life events, an additional pivotal moment in Cole's life essentially determined and solidified his career aspiration.

At age eight, Cole's aunty passed away in front of him. Being close to his aunty, Cole was allowed to visit her in the funeral parlour. The following words are Cole's depiction of this event:

> I went to see her in the chapel of rest and to see her in a completely different place, looking healthier than she did in life, with brand new clothes on lying in a wooden box, as an eight-year-old that triggers a lot of questions. A lot of curiosity struck me, and I had access to the internet. I wanted to know what it was. I was just google searching, found out about these people, found out about who does this sort of job. The people that sort it and put it into the box, and then I realised what I wanted to do [for employment].

In this excerpt, we see what Thomson et al. (2002, p. 339) refer to as 'critical moments': events depicted in narrative "considered to be important or to have had important consequences". However, there are also some indicators of Giddens' (1991, p. 113) notion of 'fateful moments' described as: "times when events come together in such a way that an individual stands, as it were, at a crossroads in his existence". Although 'fateful moments' are considered to be potentially 'empowering experiences', and I would not in any way want to describe Cole's childhood experiences as 'empowering', far from it, they rigidly determine his career preference, as Cole later explained in his interview: *"I had a hard upbringing, and I knew after that, I couldn't go into like an ordinary type of job"*. However, objective analysis reveals aspects of Giddens' notion of 'fateful moments' (1991), including reflexivity, identity work, and undertaking research. Essentially, the passing of Cole's aunty and the experience of seeing her in the chapel of rest triggers Cole's curiosity and causes him to research funeral directing, which influences his career aspiration. Furthermore, this event, coupled with his childhood experiences, generates reflexivity – *"I knew after that, I couldn't go into like an ordinary type of job"* – strengthening his commitment to this profession.

The previous Ladz employment preference findings revealed a departure from the 'traditional' father intergenerational transmission concept (Tolson 1977; Willis 1977; Veness 1962; Jimenez and Walkerdine 2011; Invinson 2014a). However, Tommy and Lewis's corresponding data re-establish the significance of this notion.

Similar to Stan, at times, Tommy's responses were sharp and short. However, concerning this discussion, this method of response by Tommy potentially reveals the influential strength of his father:

RG: Tommy, why do you want to do mechanics, butt?

Tommy: Cos, my dad done it!

RG: So you want to do it because your dad did it. Is that the only reason?

Tommy: Obviously! And I've always liked cars.

Tommy's responses were delivered with a 'matter of fact' attitude that almost questioned my intelligence. The sharpness and manner in which these responses are delivered demonstrate the influential role of Tommy's father and reconfirms Veness's (1962, p. 69) idea of traditional-direction and notion that "no other choice would be thinkable to the young person". However, interestingly, when I questioned how he might achieve employment, Tommy suggested that he would draw on family networks and social capital (Bourdieu 1986) and ask his father's friend.

The influence of a father figure was also evident in Lewis's responses. When I asked him why he wanted to do construction, he responded: *"Because I go with my dad because he's always building shit. I dunno, he's always buying shit to build. So we are always doing tha".* However, there is equal job preference influence by his stepfather. When asked why he wanted to be a paramedic, Lewis answered: *"I like helping people and keeping people safe from the world. I've always wanted to be a paramedic since I was six"*. I responded with: *"Why do you think that is?"* Lewis replied: *"My stepfather. He's a paramedic."* As stated previously, there is a difference in job skill requirements or associations between these two jobs. Construction – masculinity (Thiel 2007; Ness 2012) and paramedic – emotional labour (Hochschild 1983; Hayes 2020) associated with feminine qualities (Leidner 1993; McDowell 2003). Lewis seems to have inherited both of these job associated skills from influential male figures.

Stan was also asked about his job preference and why he wanted to work in a motorbike shop, and he provided the following response: *"It's cos we've grown up around bikes and tha!".* Akin to Tommy's previous response, this reply was delivered in a matter-of-fact manner. Although this response potentially demonstrates the influence of cultural reproduction and link to protest masculinity (Connell 1995),

sometimes, it is important to consider aspects that do not come “up in the discussions in order to make sense of those that did” (Sennett and Cobb, 1972, p. 45). Notably, unlike the previous Ladz, there is no mention of family members and employment, and there is no mention of these aspects in Stan’s ethnographic data.

As stated previously, I did not interrogate these young men about their families. I did not feel comfortable or think it was ethical to dig into the family lives of marginalised young men with somewhat difficult upbringings. If they chose to speak about their families, then I explored those topics. However, because there is a strong association between kin and employment among the other Ladz, we have to consider whether Stan’s family, particularly his father, are not prominent in his life and therefore have a less influential effect on employment orientation.

Chapter Five established Wesley’s job preferences for media and television. This career choice seemed external from social or cultural influence. Wesley stated that he was drawn to these professions because of the enjoyment he got from his media studies course or interpreted as what Veness (1962) refers to as Inner-direction, whereby the choice of employment is made with reference mainly to a person’s interests and talents. Furthermore, when asked how he might gain employment in these professions, unlike Tommy, who mentioned family friends or what we might consider social capital (Bourdieu 1986), Wesley talked about looking on websites. Therefore, although many of the Ladz demonstrate a masculine working-class orientation to work and mainly reject social mobility, considering the strength of their social capital (Bourdieu 1986) coupled with the local labour market structure (ONS 2021c), their chances of employment are arguably more significant than Wesley’s, especially considering his low level of academic school achievement.

Unlike the other Ladz, the source of Wesley’s media and television career orientation was never wholly revealed beyond intrinsic reward and a liking for these activities. However, Wesley was heavily involved in many media projects at the youth centre. Therefore, we could speculate whether this involvement coupled with Inner-direction (Veness’s 1962) may also have contributed to Veness’s (1962) notion of ‘other-directed’, whereby external sources influence a young person’s career orientation or at least helped foster Wesley’s internal attraction to media and television.

"Older generation type of boy"

The previous section demonstrated how many of the Ladz' preference for certain jobs was developed from a young age and connected to their relationship with significant family members. This section builds on that contribution and explores the Ladz' occupational self (Nixon 2006) and the individual employment aspects that appeal to the Ladz and thus contribute to their orientation to certain forms of work.

When identifying the Ladz' preferred aspects of work, there were some individualistic elements, yet various factors connected several group members. Craig, Ian, Dan and Cole all highlighted the importance of working outside, coupled with the masculine-associated notion of dirty work (Walkerdine and Jimenez 2012; Invinson 2014b; Slutskaya et al. 2016) and the idea that "practice is more important than theory" (Willis 1977, p. 56).

> **Ian**: I wanted to be something like productive, like doing something outside or anything to do with building or something. Because I'm not very bright in maths or anything like that, so it makes more sense for me to do like anything else. I like to do stuff with my hands. That's why I like the work because I wouldn't want to be stuck in an office typing away, just stuck doing the same stuff over and over.
>
> **Cole**: I love being outside. I would rather be outside than stuck in an office. It would drive me insane looking at the same four walls every day. I can't sit down. I'm out in all weathers – I don't mind getting dirty. I don't mind getting wet.

These excerpts epitomise Craig, Ian, Dan and Cole's job environment and role preferences. We see a traditional working-class commitment to manual hands-on (Nixon 2006) 'practical' forms of employment. Ian's adherence to this type of employment is initially based on a lack of mathematical ability. Additionally, the Ladz make a natural distinction between this form of work and office work, and their replies and inability to be stationary bear a resemblance to a response given by Joey, one of the lads from *Learning to Labour*: "I got to be moving all the time, too energetic to have a fucking desk job" (Willis 1977, p. 104). Furthermore, although some working-class jobs have traditionally been associated with a monotonous, unrewarding experience (Goldthorpe et al. 1969a; Beynon, 1973; Willis 1977), conversely, the Ladz have an unfavourable view of middle-class professions based on their perceived repetitive and stationary nature.

When making sense of his preference for traditional working-class manual, physical employment, Cole offered the following response: *"Obviously, I grew up with my grandparents more than my parents, so I'm more older generation type of boy who would rather be out and about".* In this reply, Cole suggests that his employment orientation would reveal generational disparity due to being raised by his grandparents. However, the data indicates otherwise, with several of the young men having a similar work preference for outdoor physical employment.

The notion of practical contrasted with theory is also evident in Billy's data, yet not in the conventional understanding of manual labour versus mental labour (Willis 1977). As previously documented, Billy's preferred choice of employment is cooking. When making sense of this orientation, Billy stated that:

> It'll [cooking] be more practical than theory, won't it. I couldn't sit in an office all day. I wouldn't have the patience for it, but with cooking these so many things on your mind, oh I done the dough, have I taken it out of the fridge, all that stuff, is more practical needs than theory, well writing down, in cooking I reckon.

In this excerpt, we yet again see the traditional working-class distinction between 'practical' work, office work/mental labour and an associated masculine necessity for active forms of employment (Willis 1977; Roberts 2018). However, more interesting is Billy's ability to retraditionalize (Adkins 1999) or redefine cooking – work that has traditionally been defined as feminine (Kenway and Kraack 2004) – within the historical working-class masculine employment meaning-making of practical versus theory (Willis 1977). Billy's ability to redefine this form of employment is potentially supported by television programmes "that are hosted by male chefs (e.g. Gordon Ramsey, Heston Blumenthal, Jamie Oliver) [which] may have defeminised the kitchen and allowed men to participate in cooking without compromising their masculinity" (Roberts 2018, p. 155).

Lewis's data also shows the notion of retraditionalization (Adkins 1999) and a redefined understanding of hands-on work. The following discussion between myself and Lewis is lengthy. However, the findings potentially highlight the blurred nature of Lewis's masculine meaning-making.

> **RG**: Why plumbing Lew?
>
> **Lewis**: I dunno, it's just all in the category of getting your hands dirty ini.

RG: What is it about getting your hands dirty?

Lewis: I dunno its hand on shit like ini.

RG: What does that mean? Explain that one to me?

Lewis: Like fucking, how can I explain it? Um, I like to use my hand a lot like. My hands gotta be doing something. Cos that like the way I been brought up like to show respect, work and yeah be caring an tha. Because my mother and father broke up at a young age, well, when I was young, so I've just been brought up by my mum cos my father is a bit of a prick. When I was growing up like he left. So I've been brought up by my mother, but she's brought me up the right way.

Traditionally, a working-class inclination to practical manual and 'hands-on' (Nixon 2006; 2017) work has been theorised and understood through protest masculinity (Connell 1995). Although protest masculinity "is compatible with . . . a sense of display which in conventional role terms is decidedly feminine" (Connell 2005, p. 11), generally, this form of laddish associated masculinity (Haywood and Mac an Ghaill 2003) is often linked to values and characteristics including courage, toughness, stoicism, risk-taking and violence (Connell 1995; McDowell 2003; Kimmel et al. 2005; Johansson and Haywood 2017). However, conversely, in this excerpt, Lewis associates his preference for hands-on work with respect and caring for others, a feature that Elliott (2016) affiliates with caring masculinities, which are defined as alternatives to hegemonic dominant forms of masculinity and include values that have traditionally been associated women (Elliott 2020).

Correspondingly, when I asked Lewis why he wanted to do construction, hands-on and dirt were also mentioned: *"I just like getting my hands dirty ini. It helps my concentration because I got ADHD"*. Although this is a relatively short response, considering some of the educational data in Chapter Five, it is a reply with important significance, especially considering Tommy also offered a relatively similar response: *"I like taking things apart. It helps with my ADHD".* (Tommy).

As stated above, whereas an attraction to 'hands-on' work and manual labour has previously been associated with a working-class identity (Nixon 2006; Willis 1977) and protest masculinity (Connell 1995), Lewis and Tommy now associate their attraction to this employment with their learning disability. Therefore, akin to aspects of the Ladz' educational data, there is an indication of learning disability meaning-making. In other

words, the young men make sense of their decisions and behaviour in accordance with their learning disabilities. Furthermore, the Ladz' learning disabilities and their subsequent explanation for their behaviour result from a medical diagnosis. Consequently, although I do not want to disregard this diagnosis and the difficulties that these young men face, collectively and arguably, there is a possible case for understanding the Ladz' behaviour and disability meaning-making within the context of medicalization (Rose 2007), defined as: "interpreting newer and newer aspects of reality, including human behaviour, in medical terms, and treating them as medical problems rather than e.g. social, political or existential ones" (Kaczmarek 2019, p. 119). For example, protest masculinity and the behaviour commonly associated with it, including disruptive classroom behaviour and a preference for manual hands-on work (Connell 1995), is/was considered to arise from a position of powerlessness and condition of poverty (Connell 1995). Essentially, protest masculinity and the associated behaviour are deemed to be cultural and structural consequences. Conversely, the Ladz' disability meaning-making attached to a medical diagnosis negates the previously associated social, political and cultural issues and treats their behaviour as an individualistic medical problem, thus corresponding with the definition of medicalization (Kaczmarek 2019).

Dan's work orientation findings additionally indicate socialisation (Chester 2021) and how his "preferences for particular types of work develop[ed] from classed and gendered experiences from a young age" (Nixon 2006, p. 210): *"I like fixing things. I don't know – it's weird. It's like Lego – connecting Lego but with pipes and that. I just find it fun".* Conversely, as the following discussion shows, Tommy and Stan prefer to be destructive.

> **Tommy**: I've always liked breaking stuff and taking things apart.
>
> **Stan**: Yeah, boy! I love taking things apart.
>
> **Tommy**: Exactly!
>
> **Stan**: But it's fucking weird putting things back together.

Tommy and Stan's destructive preference is potentially explained by their hyper-masculine (Mac an Ghaill 1994) identity and physical actions that facilitate a masculine bodily display of strength, toughness and aggression. In distinct contrast to Tommy,

Stan and the rest of the Ladz, Wesley demonstrated an additional intrinsic association with work and favoured an employment experience that made him proud of himself.

"Everyone knows each other"

The previous sections have explored the Ladz' career orientation and the factors that influence this. Generally, the young men demonstrate a preference for employment that will require academic achievement and training. However, considering the Ladz' challenging school behaviour, there is a likelihood that some of the young men with fail to achieve this career aspiration, especially considering their pragmatic approach to education. Take Tommy, for example; the Level 1 motor vehicle maintenance course he favours requires 3 GCSEs at grades A*-E, including Maths/Numeracy and English/Welsh. However, his selective, limited school engagement reduces his likelihood of achieving these necessary grades.

Furthermore, although the Borough has disproportionately high manufacturing rates, this form of employment may be negatively affected by projected future employment changes towards automation due to its predictable physical nature, making it easier to replicate by machines and thus more susceptible to automation (Frey and Osborne 2017). In collective consideration of these factors, the following section explores the Ladz willingness to commute and consider relocating for employment.

For most of the Ladz, when questioned and discussing the possibility of moving out of the community to find employment, a sense of commitment to their family and the notion of ontological security was evident. Giddens (1991, p. 38-39) defines ontological security as a:

> person's fundamental sense of safety in the world and includes a basic trust of other people. Obtaining such trust becomes necessary in order for a person to maintain a sense of psychological well-being and avoid existential anxiety.

Simply put, ontological security refers to continuity in a person's life and environment. These notions of continuity, trust and security were particularly noticeable in most of the Ladz' data. However, there was equal recognition of the limited opportunities in the area and the necessity to find employment outside of the immediate locality. For

example, when asked if he would leave the community, myself and Billy engaged in the following discussion:

> Say towards Cardiff or something. But like, I wouldn't wanna move out of the valley, but if I got the opportunity to take my career path further, if they asked me to move out, I'd probably say yeah. It's just, cos in the valleys, it's not boring. It's just. It's just limited amount of things you can do really ini.

In response to this reply, I offered the following question: *"Ok, why would you think about staying in the valley? What would keep you in the valley, butt?"*. Billy gave the following answer:

> The amount of **family** I've got in the valleys so. I got loads of **family** members in the valleys, and it's like **everyone knows each other** here. You see someone on the street, and it's like, "alright butt". **Everyone knows each other**. It's like a little **community** like ini. **Everyone's got each other back** ini.

This excerpt is riddled with the fundamental features of ontological security. There is trust and continuity: *"Family", "everyone knows each other",* and security: "*Everyone's got each other back".* Essentially, Billy still identifies with the norms and values – solidarity, community – commonly associated with working-class communities, particularly those related to heavy industry (Walkerdine and Jimenez 2012; Ivinson 2014a; Ward 2015).

A reluctance to relocate, the importance of family, and a commitment to remaining spatially close to these social connections echoed in Tommy, Stan, Craig, Cole and Dan's findings: *"I wouldn't move away for fucking anything!"* (Tommy). *"I'd go to England for two hundred grand a year"* (Stan). *"I wouldn't move too far away because I love my family to bits"* (Craig). *In a reasonable distance like – I wouldn't go miles. family are everything"* (Cole). *"Cardiff is probably the furthest. Just because I've got loads of family here, I wouldn't want to start in a new place"* (Dan). Family was also evident in Lewis's data:

> I don't think I would actually work away from family. I'd rather be where my family cos if I'm not with my family, I feel like I'm **letting them down,** so I'd rather be around my family to **stick up for them** just in case anything happens. I've always been family is everything in life, thas what I know, respect your family like. **I've always stuck up for my family**. I've been in trouble so many times for people having a go at my family.

Notably, although there is a continuation of family importance in this excerpt, there are additional interesting aspects. The traditional notions of the breadwinner ideology (Williams 2008) refer to a sole male economic provider. However, this idea also assumes a male head of the household that takes care of and protects his family. Even though the excerpt excludes any mention of financial support, Lewis does demonstrate features associated with a breadwinner ideology, including a masculine emphasis on protecting and supporting his family.

In contrast to the other seven Ladz, Ian and Wesley did demonstrate a favourable view of moving away from the community. However, Ian's view is also inversely related to the community:

> I'd move away in a heartbeat! This place is dragging a lot of people down and stopping people from getting opportunities. Like if you wanted to get a job in London and you say you live in this area, they put a bad mark on you because you live here.

Ian's reply echoes Tyler's (2020, p. 8) definition of stigma: "degrading marks that are affixed to particular bodies, people, conditions and places within humiliating social interactions". Ian suggests that belonging and being affiliated to his community leads to decreased life chances (Weber 1948) due to the area's stigmatising ability.

Akin to Ian, Wesley also favoured moving out of the community, yet for a different reason. Throughout his interview, Wesley continuously emphasised the overwhelming need to be independent. This necessity is displayed in Wesley's reply regarding employment and his community:

> I want to get out. I don't want to be nasty, but I want to get out and move somewhere else. I don't mind where. I just need to get out of this place and survive on my own.

The source of Wesley's desire for independence was never revealed, and due to his timid nature, he was a relatively tricky young man to communicate with. However, I have considered two possible explanations. Firstly, this objective may be linked to a hegemonic masculine identity associated with success, self-reliance and independence (Courtenay 2000; Rogers et al. 2021). However, I also speculated that this desire might also arguably be linked to Wesley's timid character and a possible need to escape and portray himself differently, thus paradoxically also exposing a commitment to hegemonic masculine values and traits of self-reliance and independence (Courtenay 2000; Rogers et al. 2021).

"Buy a new car, get a house"

The Ladz' commitment to their family, kinship and associated working-class values of community and solidarity challenge neoliberalist discourse that assumes that these beliefs have broken down, and in the absence of long-term work and due to structural changes in the economy and new labour market conditions, people need to make themselves more competitive (Walkerdine and Jimenez, 2012). The structural changes and accompanying ideas have been supported by a political and cultural shift towards responsibilisation and risk management, where individuals are encouraged to invest in a 'neoliberal project of the self' (Walkerdine 2003). Furthermore, by investing in this project and "being adaptable to change, undergoing constant reinvention of the self and risk-taking, individuals are believed to be able to respond to the demands of neoliberal capitalism and become socially mobile" (Folkes 2021, p. 5). A summary of these ideas can be found in the words of Bauman (1988, p. 62): "Everyone has to ask himself the question "who am I", "how should I live", "who do I want to become" – and at the end of the day, be prepared to accept responsibility for the answer … Self-construction of the self is, so to speak, a necessity". Those who reject this individualist rhetoric, fail to conform to these beliefs, and prefer to be in their home community are thought to lack bravery and aspiration to compete in the neoliberal labour market (Mannay 2013). Therefore, within the context of these ideas and the reflexive identity project (Giddens 1991), the Ladz' commitment to their area and traditional working-class beliefs signify them as having an aspiration deficit. However, all of the Ladz do have clear life goals and ambitions.

Cole, Craig, Wesley and Dan demonstrated a clear commitment to 'conventional' long-term ambitions (Simmons et al. 2014) of a house, car, wife and family:

> **Craig**: in twenty years, I'm not gonna be as dead rich as I wanna be, but I know I'll at least have like a couple of thousand. So I'll buy a new car, buy a new flat for a bit and then get a house.
>
> **Wesley**: I'd like a job where I want to go and get loads of money and travel and help stuff like feeding the family and all that. That would be good.
>
> **Dan**: Hopefully, I earn £1200 or something like that. That's enough to pay your bills, buy food and clothes. I'll maybe have a girlfriend too, and if she had a job as well, it would be sound. We can rent a house and save a bit for a mortgage.

These three excerpts offer an interesting comparative analysis, especially considering the young men's personality traits. Firstly, Craig's emphasis on money seems to originate from an understanding "that one must earn to make one's way, to live, survive or thrive in the capitalist world" (Roberts 2018, p. 112). Comparatively and interestingly, despite Wesley's timid and mild demeanour, his ideas around wealth and his notion of *"feeding the family"* possibly align with the hegemonic masculine ideas of a wage-earner and breadwinner ideology (Connell 1995; Archer et al. 2001). Conversely, Dan, whose hyper-masculine (Mac an Ghaill 1994) and protest masculine (Connell 1995; Connell and Messerschmitt 2005; Walker 2006) attitude and behaviour have been demonstrated in previous sections, discusses the possibility of sharing bills with his girlfriend, an idea that corresponds with the "egalitarian family and dual-earner breadwinner model" (Hobson 2002, p.16).

None of these excerpts focuses on excessive wealth and the neoliberalist ideals of social mobility (Folkes 2021). However, Reay (2013) suggests that a desire for affluence and power only exists among a few. Conversely, these ladz' responses echo working-class ideas of being ontologically secure and having enough to emotionally and physically survive (Walkerdine et al. 2001).

Despite this notion of being comfortable and secure, some of the Ladz did demonstrate a commitment to becoming socially mobile. For example, Tommy and Stan discussed the possibility of collectively owning their own motorbike shop, but this goal seemed motivated by a protest masculine attraction to motorbikes (Connell 1995). Billy equally discussed the possibility of having a business, and when questioned about this, Billy offered the following response: *"My ultimate goal is to open my own restaurant"*. I questioned this answer by saying: *"Is this career goal about money or something else"*. Billy gave the following reply:

> No **being known** in it. It's a bit about the money, obviously. But it's mainly like **being known**. Like, if a family with like young children an tha or my children my age now and they think, oh there a new restaurant open or he's supposed to be good, like It tha urge of **being known** in it, the satisfaction of **being known**, people think positive about my work, praise me.

This response by Billy is interesting and potentially has a couple of explanations. Considering Billy's previous educational data and his notion of reciprocal respect and

self-worth (Jackson 2002), Billy's notion of *"being known"* is possibly an attempt to gain dignity from his employment (Sennett and Cobb 1972). However, Billy's idea of *"being known"* equally needs to be considered within the context of contemporary society. Youth culture is currently dominated by social media (Lee et al. 2020), including Facebook, Instagram, Twitter and Snapchat. These forms of social media – particularly Facebook – work on a system where users can 'like' other users' posts. This interaction can and sometimes does deliver social validation and gratification (Sherman et al. 2016). Arguably, Billy's response echoes this process. Billy is driven by external validations, including *"being known"* and people thinking positive about his work and praising him.

Whereas some of the Ladz discussed their future goals, Lewis also spoke about his current employment ambitions. Lewis was in college and received a £30 a week education maintenance allowance and saved this money to pay for motorbike insurance. However, Lewis's mother wanted him to start helping contribute to the family income and pay rent. Therefore, Lewis had attempted to gain employment in a local pub. In the following excerpts, Lewis discusses this experience:

> **Lewis**: I have been trying to get a job. I went for this interview down the pub, and they turned around and said, "Well, we can't take you on". I asked why and they said because of who you are. And I was like, wha do you mean? They asked wha my background was and tha, and they said we can't take you on just in case you snap.
>
> **RG**: What did they ask about your background?
>
> **Lewis**: How I was growing up like. And I told them about my anger problems. I said I snap really easily when I'm under pressure. They said, look, we can't take you on cos your problems, just in case you snap, which is understandable in a way, but it does have an effect on my self-confidence. That's the biggest issue I got. I haven't got any confidence anyway.

There are a few aspects of this section that are worthy of consideration. Firstly, we see the difficulties of a working-class status whereby Lewis is asked/expected to contribute to the family income whilst still in education. This predicament is possibly less likely in a middle-class home with a higher income (Reay 2017). Secondly and more interestingly is the interview experience, the discussion and an outcome that

arguably reflects contemporary society and issues that some working-class young men may face.

Historically, the traditional markers of hegemonic and/or protest masculinity, including courage, toughness, stoicism and risk-taking (Cheng, 1999; McDowell, 2003), have prevented many men from discussing their "psychological health since displaying a concern for one's well-being may be deemed feminine or weak" (Sloan et al. 2015, p. 206). However, conformity to these masculine ideals has been argued to have a harmful effect on the mental health of males (Courtenay 2000) and is associated with suicidal ideation and suicide in young adults and adolescents (Coleman 2015). In response to these issues, together with a push for equality and an egalitarian society, contemporary young men have been encouraged to share and express their feelings and emotions (McQueen 2017). This emphasis has helped generate catchphrases such as *"It's okay not to be okay"*.

When considering the previous section within the context of Lewis's data, there are corresponding similarities. For example, although Lewis associates his anger and aggression with his ADHD, these traits are also associated with protest masculinity and/or hegemonic masculinity (Connell 1995; Kimmel et al. 2005). Therefore, traditionally, Lewis would have possibly been Inclined to suppress emotions (Sloan et al. 2015), especially during an interview process and an employment opportunity. However, Lewis chooses to confess to his issues and adheres to the notion that: *"It's okay not to be okay"*. However, in response to this openness, instead of support and help, Lewis is rejected. This act of rejection intensifies Lewis's emotional distress and further weakens his existing fragile sense of self-confidence. Thus, we arguably see the emergence of a new identity issue where some working-class young men are still inheriting traditional masculine values while also trying to adhere to 'new' contemporary ideas of masculinity (McQueen 2017) in a society unprepared to deal with this complexity.

As the following excerpt shows, similarly to Lewis, Ian also slightly deviated from a specific focus on career ambition and focused on personal goals.

> **RG**: Have you got any career ambitions, Ian?
>
> **Ian**: It's just success – that's one thing I want to see because all my family just, most of them have succeeded. I wanna prove everybody wrong that I can succeed.

RG: What does success look like to you?

Ian: Success is a wealthy job – not a wealthy job, a happy job and all that.

Ian seems driven by an internal need to emulate the success of his family members and prove others wrong. Additionally, Ian's data reveals a commonality among the majority of the Ladz. Although Ian seems to recognise the necessity of money, intrinsic reward is also important to him. Conversely, as the following excerpt demonstrates, Willis' (1977) lads were purely driven by extrinsic reward and financial gain. The idea that a job itself could deliver intrinsic happiness and satisfaction was dismissed:

> **Joey**: It's just a ... fucking way of earning money. There's that many ways to do it (. . .) jobs all achieve the same, they make you money, nobody does a job for the love or a Job (. . .) you wouldn't do it for nothing. I don't think anyone would, you need the bread to live (. . .) there's a difference in the actual ways you do 'em, but it's there like, they all achieve the same end, they all achieve money (Willis 1977, p. 100).

The notion of extrinsic reward and dead-end jobs (Ashton and Field 1976) are themes that populate much of the early school-to-work and employment studies based on working-class males. For example, Goldthorpe (et al. 1968a) study of male workers from three Luton (UK) based factories found that many workers experienced no reward from work itself and were primarily motivated by extrinsic reward. This notion of financial incentive is equally found in Beynon's (1973, p. 122) classic employment study: "You work for money. That's what it's all about", and Carter's (1969, p. 166) school-to-work transition study: "Can't expect much from work – you just have to do it". In contrast to these studies and despite similarities with Willis's (1977) lads, the Ladz value and desire intrinsic reward.

> **Craig**: It's not all about the money. It's just like getting a job. I just wanna get a job when I'm older and have a happy life and everything.
>
> **Dan**: Imagine having a really good paid job, but you don't like it – I would hate that. I would just go for something with a lot less pay, but I do like it.
>
> **Wesley**: I'm not going to a job just for the money. As long as I enjoy it, then I don't care.
>
> **Ian**: Do a job you enjoy instead of hate. I would rather get £4 a week doing something I enjoy than get a million pounds a day [emphasis] just for doing a job I hate. Money doesn't make the world go round.

Conversely to the above quotation from Joey – one of the lads (Willis 1977) – and his emphasis on pure extrinsic reward, although Craig recognises the importance of money, these four excerpts demonstrate an almost opposite perspective of employment, where work is first and foremost about intrinsic reward instead of financial gain.

Cole also sought intrinsic reward from his work. However, as the following quotation shows, this intrinsic reward is deeply associated with his life experiences and 'critical moments' (Thomson et al. 2002).

> **Cole**: Work is about enjoyment! The money is just a big bonus. It's a sense of…the responsibilities I just had with burying of a family to dispose of the deceased in a safe and professional manner, I've done it – I've obviously back-filled. I've obviously done my job – they now have got their closure, and they can grieve. So that's like big. Losing my brother, that had a big impact on me growing up, and I didn't get a chance to have [closure], what I give to other people. Do you know what I mean? It makes me feel good about myself. It makes me feel better.

As this excerpt demonstrates, Craig's critical moments (Thomson et al. 2002) have not only shaped his career orientation, they have also influenced his desire to help others achieve closure which subsequently provides him with intrinsic reward.

Despite the emphasis on intrinsic reward, Stan offered a response that was almost a duplication of Joey's (lads) previous citation:

> **Stan**: There's no enjoyment in any work really is there. Like waking up in the morning and tha. It's like school but a bit better, probably. You only do it to get money. It depends what job you do, really. If you're a fucking scientist or something, then it's fucking shit!

Not only is this response similar to Joey's above quotation, but Stan mentioning of waking up in the morning also echoes an additional response by Joey: "No job's enjoyable 'cos of the fact that you've got to get up of a morning and go out when you could stop in bed" (Willis 1977, p. 102). Furthermore, although middle–class professions – scientist – are perceived to be superior forms of employment due to autonomy, Stan explicitly dismisses this type of work.

"The same stuff over and over"

The previous sections have explored the ladz career orientation and the social, cultural and individual determining factors. These two final sections assess the kinds of work and employment aspects that the Ladz disfavoured and why.

As the data hinted earlier, in contrast to the masculine physical forms of employment that the Ladz favoured, sedentary work was regarded unfavourably, particularly office work:

> **Ian**: My worst job would be working in an office. I hate office working. The same stuff over and over! In the job where I am now, we do the same stuff, but we do it at different times and places. It's like we do tiling one day, but the next time we do tiling, it could be a taller room and a different place.
>
> **Cole**: I couldn't be stuck in an office. It would drive me insane looking at the same four walls every day. I couldn't sit there all day with that sense of feeling enclosed.

As these two excerpts show, in contrast to the notion that some forms of working-class jobs are dead-end (Ashton and Field 1976; Willis 1977; Nayak 2003a; Nayak 2003b), monotonous (Beynon 1973), unrewarding, and lack autonomy, Ian and Cole associate these features with office work and employment that has middle-class ties. An aversion to confinement and being seated was also evident in Dan's findings:

> **Dan**: Bus driving is one of the worst jobs I wouldn't want to do. It's just boring sitting down, driving stuck in a little place on your own. Bus driving ain't the worse – I would rather that over the office cos you interact with more people and have a laugh and tha.

This quotation demonstrates Dan's opposition to bus driving due to perceived sedentary, confined working conditions. Although this response correlates with Ian and Cole's office related responses, Dan's preference for bus driving – as opposed to office work – and the reasoning are particularly significant.

Although Dan dislikes both bus driving and office work, he expresses an inclination towards the former based on greater interaction and the ability to have a laugh. The importance of having a laugh – referred to as 'laff' in *Learning to Labour* – was integral to the lads' school experience and primarily used to "defeat boredom and fear, and to overcome hardships and problems" (Willis 1977, p.29). The use of laughter to overcome certain work conditions – particularly mundane – is a common feature of

working-class employment-related studies (Roy 1958; Collinson 1988; Nixon 2009). Subsequently, Dan's mentioning of laughter within the context of his discussion demonstrates a correlation between these studies and their findings. Furthermore, the significance of laughter correlates with Chapter Five's findings, whereby teacher and pupil relationships were strengthened through humour.

The two jobs that Craig disfavoured were a writer and a police officer. The following excerpt shows Craig's rationale:

> **Craig**: Being a writer or a Police Officer – I would hate to be one because you have to fill out ten pages every minute. You have to do it really quick – your hands will be aching at the end of the day. And a Police Officer, I wouldn't be like that because when you catch a guy, you have to get up, write all the things down. And I wouldn't be happy just to sit down – it'd be boring!

In this excerpt, Craig's response reinforces the Ladz' dislike of sedentary work and reconfirms the association with boredom. Craig also mentions his aversion to writing and bases this on repetitive strain. However, coincidentally, the education findings revealed that Craig experienced difficulties in English.

Police officers were also mentioned in Tommy and Stan's responses to disliked jobs:

> **RG**: What job wouldn't you like to do, boys?
>
> **Tommy**: Probably a Police Officer.
>
> **RG**: Why wouldn't you want to be a Police Officer?
>
> **Stan**: Or yeah, a Police Officer. Because they are fucking pigs! (aggressive tone)
>
> **Tommy**: I hate them. I hate their guts! (laughter)
>
> **RG**: Why?
>
> **Stan**: Do you know if I got forced to be a Police Officer, Richard! I would fucking (raised voice) commit suicide!
>
> **RG**: Why don't you like Police Officers Tommy?
>
> **Stan**: Who the fuck does?
>
> **Tommy**: Cause they're smelly ugly cunts!

As was evident in their educational data – particularly Stan's – this excerpt is overwhelmingly riddled with a vocal display of antiauthority (Willis 1977), protest (Connell 1995) and/or hyper-masculinity (Mac an Ghaill 1994) that is manifested through an aggressive disdain for police officers. Furthermore, there is terminological use that is additionally noteworthy, particularly by Stan. Firstly, Stan explicitly uses my name. This use reveals a relatively 'clever' feature of Stan's linguistic ability. Whenever Stan wanted to emphasise a point or control the interview, 'Richard' was used loudly and deliberately. Moreover, there is a meaning-making assumption that all individuals dislike the police, thus arguably emphasising his hostility towards this form of authority while also potentially demonstrating a feature of coalfield communities and a historical distrust of the police that often originates from the 1980s mining strikes and police brutality (Bright 2012; Simpson 2021).

"I don't take shit off nobody"

In an earlier section of this chapter, the national, regional and local labour market was discussed. Compared to the UK levels, this review revealed a disproportionately high percentage of manufacturing in the Ladz local area and labour market conditions similar to the 1970s. In contrast to these labour market conditions, due to deindustrialisation and the "Thatcherite Revolution" (Nayak 2003a, p. 149), generally, since the 1970s, the UK economy has evolved from being reliant on manufacturing and heavy industry to becoming dominated by service sector work (Ward 2015).

Service sector employment often requires emotional labour (Hochschild 1983). That is, the ability to manage feelings and suppress emotions. Due to the qualities needed to undertake these types of public-facing service sector work, Nixon (2018, p. 64) argues that this form of employment "may be particularly challenging for [working-class] men, whose embodied masculinity seems particularly at odds with the kinds of skills, attributes and dispositions required". Nixon's claim has been supported by various studies that demonstrate working-class men's reluctance to engage in service sector work or opting for more masculine roles in distribution and warehousing (Leidner 1993; McDowell 2003; Nixon 2006; Nixon 2009; Jimenez and Walkerdine 2011; Walkerdine and Jimenez 2012).

Despite this suggestion, as stated in Chapter Two, Roberts (2018) offers an additional perspective on working-class men and service sector work and suggests that his 'missing middle' participants no longer fully subscribe to traditional norms of masculinity and are instead modelling a more inclusive form of masculinity (Anderson 2009) that is more in tune with the emotional labour (Hochschild, 1983) requirements of service sector work.

In keeping with these working-class studies, this final findings section explores the Ladz' view towards service sector work and their ability to engage in emotional labour (Hochschild, 1983). Although the Ladz' local employment conditions include a relatively high percentage of manufacturing work, similarly to many coalfield areas, the South Wales Valleys also have a significant amount of call centre employment (Beatty et al. 2019). This type of service sector work often requires historically "prize 'feminized' attributes such as keyboard skills and communication proficiency" (Nayak 2003c, p. 56). Therefore, based on the Ladz' pragmatic approach to education that makes their preferred employment choice speculative and additional employment possibilities realistic, the young men's attitude towards call centre work was assessed through visual methods.

All of the Ladz were shown a picture of a call centre. They were then asked to identify the work presented in the image and express their thoughts and feelings about the job and the work environment. The following experts are some of the Ladz' responses:

> **Craig**: Nah! [laughs]. Sometimes people rage on the phone, and you have to keep calm and try and hold your anger back, and then you can't, and you just say okay, bye! I'd go round their house and bang them out!
>
> **Stan**: Fuck that! That's the fucking worst job ever! That's another version of school boy.
>
> **Billy**: Office work. That's boring! It doesn't interest me. I'm not good with stuff like phones and tha. I can't talk to people like tha. And like, people when they got problems they get angry, and I'd end up getting angry at them, and then I'll lose my job. People need to be calm, don't they? When managing people over the phone, It's just if they were lipping me, I would go nuts.

Tommy: I would never do that because it would be too many people talking at once, and I'd get frustrated and fucking slap them.

Ian: Call centre. Depressing! I would hate to do that. You get spoken to like garbage. Horrible! A lot of people must have a lot of abuse doing that. I would say something back, and I know you're not allowed.

Wesley: If I had to do it and I needed the money, I would. My aunty used to be one, and she said it's all right, but if you're in a bad mood that day, you could get angry, and someone might report you, and you'd be out. People think I'm a really lovely boy, but my anger can go like that sometimes. I could lose my job because of it sometimes.

Lewis: It's a boring man's job. You gotta sit there fucking hours, just speaking shit to people. I don't like talking to people I don't know, and that's what that is ini. I wouldn't do tha job, I know for a fact. I'd fuck up in two minutes. I'd probably tell them to fuck off and end the phone call [laughs]. I don't take shit off nobody!

Although previous studies (Leidner 1993; McDowell 2003; Nixon 2006; Nixon 2009; Jimenez and Walkerdine 2011; Walkerdine and Jimenez 2012) have documented working-class men's reluctance to engage in certain forms of service sector work, Roberts (2018) argues that these studies are dated and focus on older or unemployed men. Therefore, the differentiation in his finding may be explained by the recentness of his study and "young working-class men [that] are not hostage to the traditional predispositions held by their counterparts from previous generations" (Roberts 2018, p. 121). Whereas this claim may be valid for Roberts' 'missing middle' study sample, the previous findings of this study do indicate 'traditional predispositions', with many of the Ladz demonstrating an inclination towards traditionally associated working-class forms of employment and displaying protest and/or hegemonic masculine (Connell 1995) values and behaviour. This masculine identity is also noticeable in the young men's view of service sector work.

The above five excerpts demonstrate the young men's reluctance to engage in service sector work. One of the crucial factors that makes service sector work unappealing is the possibility of being talked down to or *"spoken to like garbage"* and the Ladz inability to engage in emotional labour (Hochschild 1983) and manage their feelings and suppress emotions. Instead, the Ladz favour speaking their mind, sticking up for themselves (McDowell 2003) and 'fronting up' – physically in some instances – when challenged. This notion of defending one's honour and dignity is crucial to

expressing hegemonic (Kimmel 2008) and working-class masculinity (Nixon 2006; Nixon 2009).

In summary, the findings indicate that the Ladz are reluctant to engage in service sector work because of their working-class masculine identity (Connell 1995), an argument proposed by previous studies (Leidner 1993; McDowell 2003; Nixon 2006; Nixon 2009). Although Roberts (2018, p. 145) suggests that this notion is "damaging and offers a simplistic, almost victim-blaming, rendering of young working-class men's labour market difficulties in contemporary times", it is equally important to identify and highlight the constraining and adverse nature of structural and social inequality and their ability to determine and limit employment outcomes.

An additional aspect and a reoccurring theme that also makes the call centre work unfavourable is the sedentary nature of the work. This theme is also distinguishable in Dan's response to service sector work imagery:

> **Dan**: It's not my thing like. I would find it boring. You are just sitting on a computer. It's just boring like. I like doing more things practical. An office is like smart suits, writing and computers. Offices you have to be smart and all that don't you to get a tidy office job, smart, **clever** like. With a trade, they **give you a chance**. Like my brother, at the age of ten, he just always had it — he learnt himself. But some people try that, and they just can't do it. So you've either got it, or you haven't – that's what I mean by getting your hands dirty. You **either sort of got it, or you haven't**.

Although this excerpt reconfirms Dan's masculine working-class identity and preference for practical, physical forms of employment (Willis 1977), there are additional noteworthy aspects. Dan's notion of *"clever"* and *"give you a chance"* potentially reveals the hidden injuries of class (Sennett and Cobb 1972), whereby Dan does not think he is clever enough or incapable of doing office work. Conversely, Dan seems to suggest that trades and manual work require and draw on inherent or socialised (Chester 2021) values or abilities – *"either sort of got it, or you haven't".*

Unlike the previous ladz, Cole did not comprehensively discuss the call centre imagery, and although he also offered an adverse response to the call centre picture, his ability or inability to engage in emotional labour (Hochschild 1983) is relatively unclear in this reply:

> **Cole**: No, thank you. Call office – it would drive me insane. Sat in a rammed room with all them voices and trying to speak to someone on the phone. I don't mind a bit of retail, but it would have to be warehouse work, that sort of thing. I couldn't do shops – the frustration of so many people around me constantly, the fuss – you know what women are like shopping, they are always fussing about.

Although Cole mentions his frustration with noise, it would be disingenuous to claim that this is evidence of emotional labour (Hochschild 1983) inabilities. However, this excerpt does confirm his protest and/or hegemonic masculinity. Akin to the low-skilled, poorly educated men from Nixon's (2006; 2009) employment study, Cole opts for masculine roles in warehousing where customer interaction and the need for emotional labour (Hochschild, 1983) is minimal. Additionally, there is also a potential element of sexism in Cole's response – *"you know what women are like shopping, they are always fussing about".* Furthermore, Cole disfavours the predicament of having many people around him, whereas social interaction was identified as an enjoyable aspect of Roberts' (2018) respondents' retail employment experience.

Due to Cole's reply and the limited evidence of his ability or inability to engage in emotional labour (Hochschild, 1983), I asked him the following question: *"What are you like dealing with people in your work? Have you ever dealt with angry people?"* Cole gave the following response:

> Yeah, I had some guy back a few weeks back threaten to knock my head off my shoulders because he thought our machine had run over his mother's grave. But I promised him it didn't, and I de-fuelled the fire straight away.

Cole's response indicates an ability to engage in emotional labour and begins to reveal a disparity that I found in some of the Ladz' findings and replies.

Together with the call centre imagery, in an attempt to explore the young men's ability to engage in emotional labour and their masculine identity, I also asked them how they would fair taking orders from management or a boss. The following excerpts are some of the Ladz' replies:

> **Billy**: Yeah, not if they were trying to be a twat, but if they were doing it for my benefit, then I'd be comfortable with it. Like you should know, when people are bossing you around, they wanna get the best out of you.

Dan: Yeah, I'll do it. I'll do it easy. Because if they didn't tell me to do this or do that, then I wouldn't know what to do or where to go. There's always someone higher than you to tell you what to do unless you own your company like, which I want to hopefully soon.

Cole: The person I work beside, he's fully qualified. I've got no qualifications really, except for the work experience at the minute. So at the minute, I don't mind taking orders. I would rather someone instruct me and tell me how to do something or show me how to do something, so I can learn and adapt.

Wesley: It depends what it is. It depends what you want me to do. If I'm bad at it, and I know I'm bad, I wouldn't mind because I need how to learn how to do it.

Tommy: You'll have to listen, won't you!

Stan: I'd bang him out! No one is ordering me about!

Apart from Stan, which I have included to demonstrate the difference, these excerpts indicate that some of the Ladz are able and willing to be submissive to authority and accept orders. This notion contrasts with their school data and the Ladz' antiauthority displays of protest masculinity (Connell 1995) towards teachers. However, additional analysis and consideration reveal a crucial theme identified in the young men's educational data.

Excluding Stan, the responses show that the Ladz are prepared to accept orders and commands on the basis that these will enhance their employment capabilities and make them more proficient. This notion reveals a continuation of the pragmatic approach that the Ladz adopted to school. Essentially, certain school subjects and orders are tolerated because of the perceived ability to enhance the Ladz' life chances (Weber 1948) and employment prospects.

Conclusion

This chapter mainly demonstrates that although some contemporary working-class young men embrace service sector work (Roberts 2018), the Ladz mainly reject this form of employment due to the perceived inability to engage in emotional labour (Hochschild 1983). Correspondingly, despite evidence that some contemporary working-class young men are not "not merely inherit[ing] older generations of men's

dispositions towards and understanding of appropriately masculine work (Robert 2018, p. 126), similarly to the lads (Willis 1977), some of the Ladz are attracted to masculine manual forms of employment due to socialisation or intergenerational transmission (Walkerdine and Jimenez 2012; Invinson 2014a) that derives from family, friends and prominent male figures (Veness 1962; Tolson 1977; Willis 1977). However, this chapter equally demonstrates that specific social influences have destabilised traditional predispositions towards manual employment among some of the Ladz. In summary, this chapter argues that the Ladz demonstrate both continuity and change and inconsistencies with Roberts' (2018) recent findings, thus raising questions about why these contradictions exist and how we might explain them. The following final empirical chapter explores the Ladz' social relations and masculinities.

Chapter Seven:

The Ladz' Social Relations and Masculinities

Introduction

This final findings chapter is primarily based on my ethnographic observations and discussions with the Ladz at the youth centre. The chapter explores the Ladz' masculine identity within the context of social relations and their relationships with each other, women and their views towards homosexuality while also documenting their open expressions of emotion and compassion. The chapter tries to capture the complexity of the Ladz' masculine identity and show that although these young men do demonstrate behaviour and views that are commonly associated with protest masculinity and display continuities with the lads (Willis 1977), they equally engage in practices and discourse that may historically be considered as contradictory including same-sex touch, emotional openness, compassion and egalitarian views. Therefore, this chapter raises questions about the construction of contemporary laddish identity and the current understanding of this subgroup of working-class young men and their masculinity.

A Valley Boy Perspective

As stated in Chapters One and Four, unlike previous male sociologists "who worked hard at school, did their homework, passed exams [and] have lovingly chronicled the rebellion and resistance of the hooligans to schooling" (Delamont 2000, p. 99), my youthful educational years were primarily dedicated to "dossing, blagging, wagging" (Willis 1977, p. 26) and tied to a counter-school culture. Subsequently, I arrived at my research site with a lived understanding of the lads category. Although I do not assume that my previous laddish (Francis 1999; McDowell 2002; Jackson 2006; Jackson and Sundaram 2020) experiences and perceptions are wholly representational of laddish culture, my ethnographic observations were influenced and interpreted through the context of my biography (O'Reilly 2009). Due to my lived understanding of the lads category, behaviour and discourse that were familiar (Mannay 2010) and unfamiliar to me often drew my attention and subsequent observation, and I believe that "my

personal experience sensitise [d] me to things that others [potentially] wouldn't notice" (Bourdieu 2001, 0: 44: 10). Consequently, this chapter and its findings and themes are the results of this process and therefore deviates from the trend of the previous findings chapters and the significant focus on interview data and alternatively incorporates a greater proportion of ethnographic findings and my observations of the Ladz' behaviour at the youth centre. This data is discussed and explored through both the context of my laddish biography and relevant literature.

"We don't do it the old-fashioned way"

One of the most strikingly unusual patterns of the Ladz' social behaviour for me was their method of greeting each other. As a lad (Willis 1977) of the 1990s era and a period when laddish behaviour "gained renewed prominence in popular and media culture" (Jackson 2006, p.4), among my peers and the lads group that I associated with, the method of greeting each other was often verbal in the form of *"Alright, butt*", and if one wanted to express a more dominant masculine presence, this gesture was sometimes coupled with a nod of the head. My youthful recollection of male greeting practices shares similarities with a response offered by Martin, the lead youth worker at the youth centre who was a similar age to me:

> **Martin:** It was always…I don't know if boys ever really kind of even shook hands or anything like that back then. I've always been old Valleys, like a nod, you know or whatever.
>
> **RG:** Old valleys as in…? Elaborate on that for me, please.
>
> **Martin:** Just the old greeting – you know, like; a nod of the head and an "alright butt".

Despite the Ladz' amply evidenced protest (Connell 1995) and/or hyper-masculine (Mac an Ghaill 1994) behaviour and discourse, contrary to Martin's recollection and my youthful method of greeting that adhered to the traditional masculine 'man code' (King et al. 2021) of emotional inexpressiveness (Courtenay 2011), the Ladz engaged in a startlingly dissimilar greeting practice and hugged each other. For example, one evening, while I was sitting in the youth centre's cafe area and surrounded by a relatively large mixed group of teenage boys and girls, Wesley was leaning against a wall adjacent to me, engaged with his phone. However, this relatively withdrawn

practice significantly altered when Ian appeared at the youth centre. Ian had been doing overtime at work and arrived at the centre late on this particular night. Upon arrival at the youth centre and his entrance into the cafe area, Ian spotted Wesley and said: *"Hey, bro"* the two young men smiled at each other, clasped hands in a tight embrace, and then placed their arms around each other and hugged. This act of tactility between Ian and Wesley was not an isolated incident. It was a form of behaviour that was relatively universal among all of the Ladz and young men at the centre. Even Stan and Tommy engaged in this behaviour, with their embraces and hugs often being the most expressive and sometimes including expressions like: *"I love you, bro"*.

The Ladz' method of greeting each other and hugging practices dumbfounded me. This behaviour contradicted the gender practices (West and Zimmerman 1987) that were customary to the lads' (Willis 1977) culture I was once familiar with. This form of behaviour and physical tactility would have been heresy in my laddish (Francis 1999; McDowell 2002; Jackson and Sundaram 2020) epoch and would have made my heterosexuality questionable (Pascoe 2007) and thus potentially led to ridicule, social ostracization and even possible acts of gender policing (Martino 2000; Pascoe 2007) in the form of physical punishment. Physical tactility and hugging practices were associated with femininity and affection (Frosh et al. 2002) and thus perceived as evidence of homosexuality. Subsequently, we avoided this behaviour and any social activities coded as feminine and subsequently gay (Mac an Ghaill 1994) out of fear of undermining our masculine identity (Connell 1995) and retribution.

Due to the disparity between the Ladz' social greeting methods and the traditional laddish code that I once adhered to, including a "rejection of all aspects that are deemed feminine" (Hayward and Mac an Ghaill 2003, p. 97), I questioned some of the young men about their conduct. Tommy and Stan were the first two I asked, and the following excerpt is our collective discussion regarding their behaviour:

RG: I've noticed that everyone hugs each other – what's that about then?

Tommy: Best friends.

RG: So you hug each other because you are best friends?

Tommy: Yeah, besties for life! Nah, cos we're all gay together!

RG: You're all gay?

Stan: I'm a homosexual, you dull cunt!

Tommy: Na, joking. To say hello, init. We don't do it the old-fashioned way, do we, Stan.

RG: What's the old-fashioned way?

At this point, Tommy and Stan engaged in a theatrical display. Almost simultaneously, they both raised their hands to form a handshaking gesture, whilst jointly leaning backwards and then meekly shaking each other's hands, whilst Tommy said: *"Good day, good day, boy"*. In response to this demonstration, I asked the following question: *"So what's the new way?"* Subsequently, Stan and Tommy 'fist pumped' and embraced each other with a hug, with Tommy saying: *"Broskies"*. Stan replied with: *"Long-time no see"*.

This excerpt and dramatisation have several aspects that offer interesting evidence. Firstly, there is no attempt to defend or excuse their hugging practice; there is an outright acknowledgement of this behaviour, suggesting it is a normalised practice. Secondly, this behaviour is associated with friendship, or more importantly, *"best friends"* or *"Besties"*, possibly suggesting that this hugging behaviour is not widespread practice and is determined by the strength of the relationship. Thirdly, both young men recognise that male hugging and same-sex touch may be perceived as homosexual behaviour (Blanchard et al. 2017; Ralph and Roberts 2020), but this does not seem to matter to them. And lastly, we have the theatrical display where the young men identify generational change, suggesting that *"old-fashioned"* greeting methods include shaking hands, distance – the attempt to lean back – and terminology that almost has a middle-class Victorian feel: "Good day [sir]". Whereas contemporary greeting methods include a fist pump, tactility and words such as *"Broskies"*. This terminology potentially offers valuable evidential information.

Gough (2018, p. 54) suggests that "men are hugging each other more so than previous generations, at least in some Western nations like the UK". This behavioural shift includes the 'man hug' or 'bro hug'. The 'man hug' or 'bro hug' combines both a handshake and a hug and expresses masculinity and affection (Giese 2018). Although I feel that the young men's hugging practises were slightly more intimate than a 'bro hug', objective reflection of the Ladz' behaviour coupled with consideration of the

accompanying terminology – “Bro”, “Broskie” – does seem to suggest that ‘bro hug’ is a reasonable explanation. Furthermore, Keith (2021, p. 2) suggests that:

> The term “ bro” is a neologism and abbreviation of the word “ brother” and is thought to have been appropriated by white boys and young men who wanted to emulate what they believed to be cool about black boys and men.

Therefore, similar to Frosh et al.’s (2002, p. 153) study, which examined ‘young masculinities’ and aspirations and anxieties of 11–14-year-old boys in London schools, and whereby some of the young men “adopt[ed] the cultural practices they considered central to ‘black masculinity’”, the Ladz are also assuming aspects of ‘black masculinity’ and associated cultural practices including the terminological use of ‘Bro’ (Keith 2021), rather than the historical regional working-class associated term of ‘Butt’ (Ward 2015). Furthermore, as later sections show, this external cultural influence partially derives from contemporary popular music and seemingly affects the young men’s views.

The other member of the Ladz that I questioned about hugging was Billy. The following excerpt is our discussion regarding this behaviour:

> **RG**: Billy, I’ve noticed that you and the boys in here hug each other. What’s that about? What does that mean to you?
>
> **Billy**: Everyone here is like coming here every day. It's been open for years now, hasn’t it. It is a mess about at the end of the day init. It’s like when you score a try in rugby, you go over to your teammate and hug them. It’s all well done an tha. You see footballers kiss each other on the head an tha. It's just a thing of trust you have ini. It's like they’re my best mukkas [friends] an tha ini. And like, it's just weird, it's just. It’s not like, like anything weird, it's just, oh, you're one of my best mukkas like. I dunno just close friends.

In this except, Billy suggests that the young men have built up a close, trusting relationship and friendship that enables or facilitates their tactility. Furthermore, mentioning sports and footballers kissing indicates that the media and sports influence behavioural practices. However, conversely to the Ladz’ displays of male tactility, media and sport are often perceived to circulate stereotyped gendered images and promote hegemonic masculine ideals (Connell 2000; Messner et al 2000; Messner; 2007; Messner 2013), which include a rejection of behaviour coded as feminine and

gay (Epstein 1997; Hayward and Mac an Ghaill 2003) and the subsequent avoidance of homosocial tactility (Floyd 2000). Although these notions of sport and media hold some relevance, movements like the "#MeToo . . . [have] ushered in a broad cultural examination of masculinity" (Brown 2021, p. 13) which in turn has led to brands like Gillette releasing the: "We Believe: The Best Men Can Be" advert which challenges toxic (Whitehead 2019) and/or hegemonic masculine (Connell 1995) associated behaviour. Although the Gillette advert received a mixed response – including backlash – the toiletries brand 'Dove' also released the Dove Men+Care adverts series, which features iconic rugby players – including Wales and British Lions captain Alun Wyn Jones – promoting a more expansive representation of masculinity (Levant and Pryor 2020), showing men as both rugby players and fathers, subsequently demonstrating the notion of caring masculinities (Elliott 2016; Hunter et al. 2017). The contemporary cultural examination of masculinity has also emphasised the emotional suppressive nature (Courtenay 2011) of toxic masculinity (Whitehead 2021) and the detrimental effect on men's mental health. Subsequently, men have been encouraged to become more emotionally expressive (McQueen 2017). In keeping with this rhetoric and aligned with the theme of emotional expressiveness, the following sections explore some of the Ladz' expressions of feelings and emotions while incorporating reflexive discussion.

"I tried to commit suicide"

Several episodes during the data collection brought about deep reflexive moments that caused me to assess my identity, values and beliefs. One of these was the pool incident with Stan that I documented in Chapter Four, and Lewis and Cole's interviews caused additional reflexive moments.

Akin to the rest of the Ladz, Lewis and Cole's interviews concentrated on the school-to-work transition and the associated aspects. As stated previously, I never attempted to purposely probe into the young men's personal or family life because I rightly or wrongly felt it was relatively unnecessary and somewhat unethical. However, although I tried to avoid these topics, Lewis and Cole spoke freely and openly about their personal circumstances.

As stated in the earlier description of the Ladz, Lewis independently dedicated significant portions of the interview to discussions about females. However, rather than boasting about sexual conquest – as one might assume based on his hyper-masculine identity (Mac an Ghaill 1994) – he talked about depression and suicidal thoughts.

Lewis would often weave his depression into the discussion at relatively random points in the interview. Due to this randomness, although I did not entirely want to engage in this discussion (explained below), it seemed clear that Lewis did. Therefore, I reluctantly offered the following question:

> **RG**: Where do you think your depression comes from then? Is there a cause or anything?
>
> **Lewis**: Yeah. I know wha the cause was, tha relationship with her [girlfriend]. The relationship was way too toxic. She gave me really bad depression. At one point, it was getting too much for me. So I tried to commit suicide. Fuck me, people say things gotta get worse to get better, but I don't want to live because of the depression. It just makes me think like no one wants me, no one cares for me, I'm not worth nothing! This past year it's just been shit cos I been getting into relationships, and they've just been the same. I don't have any luck with girls. I am going to turn into a slag.

Cole also offered a relatively similar response:

> **Cole**: I had mental health. I suffered a lot with mental health because of a bad past. Depression come around and hit me off. I just give up sort of thing. I didn't have any plans, no dreams, no roles. I just shut down and locked myself away most of the time. Give up on everything like. With depression, a lot of it comes at you like, "you're worthless, you haven't got a meaning, what's the point in you being here?". I self-harmed – cut my arm up a lot. I ended up in hospital a few times – not eating. I wouldn't want to eat and wouldn't feel hungry. It did have a bad impact on me, like – my health. It did knock me back quite a lot. But I picked myself back up and got myself on the right roads, got myself a job and sorted my own life out.

As stated above, I tried to avoid engaging in these discussions on mental health and self-harm. However, this behaviour reflects my upbringing and socialisation process rather than being unconcerned, and I did report these issues to the staff at the youth centre, who were aware of the problems.

I am the child of an ex-pit miner's son, and I was raised in a family environment with a breadwinner (Williams 2008) structure whereby traditional (Courtenay 2011) masculine values were the norms, and I was expected to be tough and courageous (Cheng 1999). Subsequently, vulnerability disclosures were considered transgression and evidence of weakness and femininity (Connell 1995). One of my father's 'favoured' methods for regulating traditional masculine behaviour and eliminating potential emotional displays was through the gender policing phrase: *"Stop being a big girl's blouse!"* (Cornwall and Lindisfarne 2003). Furthermore, in my youthful social surroundings, mental health and depression discussions were relatively unheard of or considered a 'dirty secret'. Therefore, although men's mental health, depression and emotional openness have gained popularity (McQueen 2017), unfortunately, due to my socialisation process and the durable nature of my habitus (Bourdieu 1990a), discussions around emotion, especially male emotion, make me uncomfortable, and I am unsure how to respond or react. Sadly, this uncomfortableness overcame me during the young men's interviews and their expressions of emotional distress. Subsequently, after the interviews, I was compelled to reflect on my identity and awkwardness regarding emotional openness and the differences between myself and the young men.

Although Lewis and Cole's disclosure of mental health, depression, emotions and 'vulnerability' differ from my own experiences and the literature surrounding hegemonic and/or traditional masculinity (Kimmel 1994; Connell 1995; Courtenay 2011), aspects of the two young's excerpts potentially still indicate attempts to recuperate this masculine status. For example, after he expressed emotional openness and disclosures that would have traditionally been "considered a sign of weakness for men, resulting in some form of emasculation" (Ralph and Roberts 2020, p. 97), Lewis says: *"I am going to turn into a slag"* and thus demonstrates sexual promiscuity subsequently recovering a hegemonic masculine status (Paechter 2018). Correspondingly, at the end of Cole's emotional openness and disclosure, he says: *"I picked myself back up and got myself on the right roads, got myself a job and sorted my own life out*", thus displaying control, independence and self-reliance, features that are consistent with hegemonic masculinity (Messerschmidt 1993; 2018). Although this analysis potentially establishes a link with hegemonic masculinity, Lewis and Cole's emotional openness equally indicates contradictory behaviour (Haywood and Mac an

Ghaill 2003). The subsequent section demonstrates additional conflicting attitudes through displays of compassion and empathy.

"Soooo much underpaid"

As stated in Chapter Four, visual methods were incorporated and used to explore various forms of employment and as a discussion stimulation technique. However, most of the visual methods data offered limited complimentary benefit to the research, and conversation with the Ladz was relatively effortless and fluid, yet some of the pictures provided relevant findings.

Among the selection of photos used was a picture of a male nurse. Akin to the call centre picture, the Ladz were shown the picture and then asked to identify the work presented in the image and express their thoughts and feelings about the job. The following excerpts are the young men's replies:

> **Billy**: I've heard about the, um, the conditions in nursing. It's like I, they're on like 20 thousand a year. That's awful ini If you're saving someone's life every day. Its things shock me; things I hear make my jaw drop.
>
> **Ian**: Nurse. Underpaid! Soooo much underpaid. They're saving your life, and football players get paid a quarter of a million just for playing football on a football pitch. They're saving your life, and they get paid pennies. It's just horrible! If I had the brains, I would love to do the job. It is something… just helping people.
>
> **Cole**: I would. I wouldn't mind that – helping people every day of the week. Obviously, I wouldn't want the abuse side of it like when drunks come in, and you're trying to see to them because obviously, it would agitate me. But I wouldn't mind helping someone every day like.
>
> **Tommy**: Nurse or a doctor, is it? Yeah, actually, I would just to try and figure out the cure for cancer. Just to like help people.
>
> **Lewis**: Working in the NHS, nursing or doctor. I'd smash tha job. I was looking after my stepfather's Nan because she had dementia, and I was looking after this other old lady who had cancer. I was down their houses after school every day, seeing them, like if they were ok and tha.

> **Stan**: I wouldn't mind being a Doctor. Just sitting on the fucking till in the chemist or something - you get loads of money.

In these replies, initially, through Billy and Ian's responses, we see resentment towards the perceived mistreatment of nurses and the wage allocation that is considered insufficient in respect of the job requirements and responsibility. Correspondingly, although the Ladz – particularly Tommy and Stan – listened to music with a misogynistic undertone, two favoured musicians among the youths included Stormzy and Dave. Simpson (2017) describes Dave as a 'politically charged rapper'. Dave's music was frequently played in the youth centre media room, and one of the preferred songs was 'Question Time' (Dave 2017). The following lyrics are taken from this song:

> All my life I know my mum's been working. In and out of nursing, struggling, hurting. I just find it fucked that the government is struggling to care for a person that cares for a person. So where's the discussion on wages and budgets? . . . A question for the new Prime Minister.

Comparative analysis of these lyrics and Ian and Billy's response reveals apparent similarity, with all three pieces of data discussing nurses and wages. Although the young men never associated their views with this song, there is an obvious association that again potentially reflects the Ladz' adoption of popular cultural views, as was evident in their terminological use of words such as 'Bro' or 'Broskies'. Furthermore, identity is formed in cultural relations (Willis 1977), and media and popular culture are often considered to influence and shape the "common sense of the people, including their taken-for-granted notions of masculinity and femininity" (Hanke 1998, p. 184). Although the young men's replies superficially offer a limited link to masculinity, the central features of hegemonic masculinity include being unemotional and dispassionate (Collier 1998; Connell and Messerschmidt 2005). Conversely, Ian and Billy's responses and consideration of individuals other than themselves possibly indicate open masculinities (Elliott 2020) or 'new' masculinities characterised by sensitivity, compassion, and empathy (Spector-Mersel and Gilbar 2021). Moreover, evidence of these traits – sensitivity, compassion, and empathy – is also identifiable in Tommy's response and his desire to *"cure cancer"* and equally through Lewis's caring responsibilities and his *"looking after"* people. Dan's nursing response did not correlate with these excerpts. However, as the following reply shows, despite Dan's

previously documented displays of hyper-masculinity (Mac an Ghaill 1994), aggression and violence, empathy and compassion were equally evident:

> You learn different pipe sizes, how to fit them in. It's just learning a new skill in general like. So even if you've got a family member who needs something, you can just help them out in it. I don't mind helping people out like.

Despite the young men's documented collective similarities, Stan's nursing reply reveals disparity with no evidence of compassion or empathy, instead contrastingly demonstrating adherence to the hegemonic masculine trait of individualism (Messerschmidt 1993) and extrinsic reward (Willis 1977).

"Do you all mix together outside?"

In *Learning to Labour*, documentation of girls is relatively sparse (Carter 1984). However, Willis (1977, p. 43) states that the lads viewed women "both [as] sexual objects and domestic comforters", and thus the lads have subsequently been connected with sexism due to their degrading views and behaviour to female teachers and female pupils (Skeggs 1992). As archaic as this may read, as a lad of the 90s, this was my youthful understanding of women. Subsequently, akin to the young men from Mac an Ghaill's (1994) study, social relations and friendship grouping were single-sex and gender-exclusive, generally involving only males. Conversely, and similarly to the findings of Frosh et al. (2002, p. 180-181), "boys who hung around with girls as friends were liable to be constructed as effeminate 'woosies'" and at risk of homosexual taunts.

Despite my predominantly gender-segregated male laddish peer friendship grouping, this code was often broken by what we referred to as the 'nine o clock' club, which relates to the time of night when group members were permitted to leave and meet up with girlfriends. However, as Ward (2015, p. 55) mentions in his study of working-class young men in the South Wales Valleys, these members were often met with ridicule through phrases such as "bros before hoes", meaning male friendship should come before females and sex. Although some readers may find this documentation offensive due to its sexist nature, this is my lived understanding of the

lads' culture – warts and all – which correlates with previous research on this subculture of young men.

In contrast to my laddish youthful experiences and to my astonishment, among the Ladz, gender-segregated friendship grouping was non-existent. The Ladz could often be found together with girls chatting, listening to music, dancing or playing pool in what seemed to be an essentially platonic relationship. Furthermore, the gender dynamics of these friendship groupings often altered and had irregular formations that sometimes included larger percentages of males and, at other times, a more significant proportion of females. I often arrived at the centre before opening and saw Tommy walking to the centre with a few girls. Equally, Stan could often be found playing pool in the company of females discussing non-sexualised topics. Although I had observed the Lads' associating with girls beyond the confines of the centre, due to the significant differentiation between my experiences and the behaviour I was witnessing, initially, I thought the centre itself and the confinement determined this friendship grouping. Subsequently, one night while I was sitting in the pool room surrounded by a few of the Ladz and several girls, I asked the following question: *"Do you all mix together outside of the centre, boys and girls?".* At this moment, the room went deathly quiet, and everyone turned to look at me with what seemed like a gaze of astonishment. The awkward silence was broken by a girl that responded with *"yes"* in what felt like an aggressive tone as if to say: *"of course we do, you idiot"*.

Although there was a broadly identifiable platonic relationship among most young males and females at the centre, the friendship between the sexes was not unproblematic and completely egalitarian. Akin to their predecessors, some of the Ladz – mainly Tommy and Stan – often displayed hyper-masculine (Mac an Ghaill 1994) behaviour and misogynistic tendencies, including calling the girls sluts and physically assaulting and taking their phones off them. However, this conduct was often met with retaliation and physical, aggressive 'laddette' style behaviour (Jackson 2006), with the girls refusing to be subordinated.

"I should be a barber, boy"

Despite the moments of conflict, there were equal measures of tactility among several members of the mixed friendship group. A particularly noticeable prominent form of

tactility often practised by both males and females included styling each other's hair. Stan was one of the Ladz members who seemed particularly fond of this activity. On numerous occasions, I observed Stan either letting girls style his hair and place it in bows or styling girls' hair. Once again, this conduct was particularly puzzling to me. Not so much Stan having his hair done, as this might be considered a flirtatious technique. It was more the fact of him doing the girls' hair. Hairdressing is arguably a feminised profession with an emphasis on effeminate qualities (Hall et al. 2007). Therefore, men engaging in this activity are possibly considered at risk of being perceived as gay (Robinson et al. 2011). Subsequently, based on this notion and Stan's identified hyper-masculine identity that is deemed to fiercely reject all aspects considered feminine (Haywood and Ghaill 2003), I closely observed Stan's engagement in this practice. The following excerpt is taken from my ethnographic notes.

> Tommy and Stan are sitting side by side in the media room with several other young boys playing on the computers in front of them. There is a gap between Tommy and Stan's chairs, and their usual choice of rap music is playing in the background. Chelsea enters the room, grabs a chair, places it between Tommy and Stan and sits on it. They then engage in a three-way discussion, and Stan asks Chelsea: "*Can I do your hair?"* Chelsea smiles and says: *"Go on then"*. Stan then proceeds to plait Chelsea's hair rather proficiently. Stan does not attempt to converse with Chelsea, and there is a large smile on his face, and his tongue is slightly sticking out in what looks like a sign of concentration. After finishing plaiting Chelsea's hair and doing what seems like a relatively good job, Stan gets excited, takes his phone out of his pocket and takes what I later found out is a Snapchat of him and Chelsea. Whilst taking the snap, Stan says: *"Look at this boys, look how mint I've done it. I should be a barber, boy"*.

This scene and general behaviour perplexed me and transgressed all the youthful laddish codes that I was accustomed to, including an apparent friendship involvement with girls (Frosh et al. 2002) and engagement in behaviour that would potentially be considered to have homosexual implications (Robinson et al. 2011). Subsequently, later that evening, I asked Stan about this incident: *Stan, why did you do Chelsea's hair?"*. Based on Stan's prior hyper-masculine (Mac an Ghaill 1994) and/or hegemonic masculine (Connell 1995) displays, I expected him to boast about heterosexual desire and attempts at sexual conquest (Connell 1989). However, Stan merely replied with a smile, so I again said: *"No, serious now, Stan, why did you do Chelsea's hair?"*. Stan

replied: *"Chill out, Rich, boy! I'm not going to be a fucking hairdresser"*. At this point, I felt slightly annoyed and angry at myself and had a positionality and ethical crisis, questioning my ability, strengths and weaknesses, including, would a female ethnographer be able to explore these topics better? Would a middle-class 'outsider' (Merton 1972) do a better job? I felt awkward questioning these young men and continually intruding into a sometimes alien culture. I was questioning them about their taken-for-granted (Sikes, 2006) assumptions. What right do we have to do this? Do we cross the line when we do this? What impact was I having on these young people by questioning them this way? Was I forcing my traditional masculine (Courtenay 2011) 'awkwardness' on them? And making Stan masculinely defend his behaviour – *"I'm not going to be a fucking hairdresser".* Although this was a difficult period for me, and I could not get a clear response from Stan other than his masculine defence, careful consideration of the ethnographic excerpt possibly explains Stan's behaviour.

The apparent explanation is a heterosexuality demonstration, especially considering Stan sends a Snapchat of himself to his male peers. Furthermore, Stan attempts to redefine his behaviour within the masculinised profession of barbering (Ferry 2020) – *"I should be a barber boy"*. Additionally, although Stan's behaviour was peculiar to me and transgressed many of the masculine laddish codes that I adhered to, further consideration of his general behaviour potentially offers an explanation.

Arguably, Stan's behaviour demonstrates the most intensified form of hyper-masculinity (Mac an Ghaill 1994) among the Ladz based on his overt confessions and displays of aggression, violence, sexism and misogyny. Subsequently, one could argue that Stan has acquired masculine capital (Gough 2018) or jock insurance (Pascoe 2003), "that is, young men who have (in whatever way) "proven" their (heterosexual) masculine credentials [and] can engage in this sort of gender transgression and remain beyond reproach" (Bridges and Pascoe 2013, para. 5). Despite this explanation, hair styling practises were a generalised form of behaviour, and as previously stated, it transgressed my lived and subsequent taken-for-granted (Sikes, 2006) assumptions of laddish behaviour. Therefore, I decided to query this behaviour in my interview with Amy – the youngest youth worker who attended the centre as a teenager herself:

> **RG**: I see lots of boys being slightly intimate, hugging and doing girls' hair. What's your take on this?

> **Amy**: Yeah, they seem more comfortable with male affection, not necessarily homoerotic, but many young men are pretty happy to hug each other or sit on one another's laps and show their affection to one another. I remember we had some young men who behaved quite camply and had many female friends and seemed to be quite flirty with the boys, but they got a lot of girlfriends. I wasn't sure if nowadays if young men have cottoned on a bit to this idea and become more physically affectionate in general.

In this response, Amy suggests that the young men may purposely display associated feminine traits or engage in same-sex behaviour to increase their desirability to females. This idea correlates with Bridges and Pascoe's (2014) notion of hybrid masculinities. Hybrid masculinities refer to the "selective incorporation of elements of identity typically associated with various marginalised and subordinated masculinities and – at times – femininities into privileged men's gender performances and identities" (Bridges and Pascoe 2014, p. 246). Although this justification is plausible, with the greatest respect to Amy, it offers a relatively reductive explanation. The Ladz' working-class status and behaviour associates them with protest (Connell 1995) or hyper-masculinity, "which can be described as a strong exaggeration of certain stereotypical male qualities" (Andreasson and Johansson 2017, p. 141). Subsequently, by the very nature of them engaging in hybridised displays of masculinity and incorporating softer displays of masculinity, the Ladz partially deviate from the masculine position that has become customary for this sub-group of young men. In other words, even if the Ladz are adopting hybrid masculinities (Bridges and Pascoe 2014) techniques, this demonstrates a change by itself in relation to how laddish masculinity is commonly understood concerning theory and my lived understanding.

The previous two sections have documented the Ladz engagement with females. Unlike my prior laddish youthful understanding and the single-sex and gender-exclusive male friendship grouping documented in prior related research (Mac an Ghaill 1994; Frosh et al. 2002), the Ladz demonstrate an association with girls. However, this relationship is not entirely unproblematic, and its meaning is potentially questionable as to whether it is evidence of changing egalitarian views or sexually motivated hybrid masculinities (Bridges and Pascoe 2014) techniques. Subsequently, the following section assesses the young men's attitudes towards working with females and gay men.

“A boy can be a ballerina”

In *Learning to Labour*, the lads refer to women as sex objects and commodities (Willis 1977) and use various tropes that identify them as sexist and homophobic (Walker 1985; McRobbie 1991; Skeggs 1992). Furthermore, the lads’ sexist and homophobic perspective is associated with their masculine identity that is constructed in oppositional “relation to various subordinated masculinities as well as in relation to women” (Connell 1987, p. 183). Subsequently, women are deemed “inferior and incapable of doing certain things” (Willis 1977, p. 149), including manual labour and traditionally associated masculine forms of employment. Despite the Ladz’ previous findings that have associated them with the lads, the notion of women and inferiority is omitted from many of the young men’s data in this section, with some of the Ladz demonstrating an opposing view.

The Ladz were asked about their thoughts and opinions about working with women and gay men. On reflection, this was a blunt approach as I somewhat failed to consider that some of the young men might be gay themselves. Nevertheless, this exploration was intended to assess the young men’s views of women, gay men and their masculinity, potentially allowing us to think of an alternative imagined employment future other than male-dominated work. Essentially, are the Ladz capable of working in employment and surroundings besides those dominated by masculine heterosexual males:

> **Dan**: I wouldn’t mind – different, but I wouldn’t mind it. I’m not sexist; it’s just that you don’t really see women plumbing, do you? I don’t know why. If girls do plumbing, it shows an example and makes others feel more comfortable doing it. There’s nothing bad if you’re a girl or a boy. A boy can be a ballerina or a dancer – there’s nothing wrong with it. It’s what you’re into in it. I don’t care or think anything of it. It’s them in it – as long as it’s not bothering anyone – let them do what they want. No difference between a man and a woman is there. If anyone thinks there is, it’s just sexist in it.
>
> **Cole**: It wouldn’t bother me at all working with women or gays. There are gays in my family. My uncle is gay – happily gay and has been married for 15/16 years. They’re no different. Your sexual preference or gender or anything like that doesn’t make odds on your personality.

Conversely to the lads (Willis 1977) sexist and homophobic discourse and in contrast to hegemonic (Connell 1995) and/or hyper-masculine (Mac an Ghaill 1994) associated

ideals, in Dan and Cole's excerpts – particularly in Dan's – we see gender-egalitarian views (Kaplan et al. 2017). Dan states that there is *"No difference between a man and a woman"* and thus disputes the idea that women are inferior (Willis 1977). Furthermore, Dan demonstrates a sense of naivety towards the notion of patriarchy: *"You don't really see women plumbing, do you? I don't know why"*. Additionally, Cole deviates from the homophobic position that is often associated with the lads' category and working-class masculinities (Willis 1977; Mac an Ghaill 1994; Connell 1995; Epstein 1997; Francis 1999) and states: *"Your sexual preference or gender or . . . doesn't make odds on your personality".*

> **Billy**: Yeah, as long as I get my job done. As long as I enjoy what I do, I don't care who I do it with. You have to think dun you, oh, they got the same mindset as me, they wanna do the best, they chose that career for a reason, you let them get on with it ini. Don't judge anyone for who they want to be.
>
> **Ian**: I don't really care who I work with as long as we get along. If you don't get along with someone, then you can't really work with them, can you?
>
> **Wesley:** Yeah, I wouldn't mind. I just want a happy relationship with my like…. teammates. As long as I get along, then I can be happy.

Although a gender-egalitarian view (Kaplan et al. 2017) is less prominent in Billy, Ian and Wesley's responses and these young men seem more concerned about being proficient at their job, considering their previous documented hegemonic (Connell 1995) and/or hyper-masculine (Mac an Ghaill 1994) disclosures, the exclusion of homophobic and sexist discourse is notable.

> **Lewis**: Really dun bother me tha don't. Even if I was working with fucking, any sexuality, it doesn't bother me. They're themselves, shouldn't be judged for who they are. As long as they feel comfortable, it doesn't make me feel uncomfortable. As long as they don't try shit with me, I'm sound.
>
> **Craig**: I wouldn't mind working with anyone. I wouldn't mind working with gays, it's just like they can't be talking about different weird stuff – cos I can't just like keep listening to it, and it's going in my head, and I'm thinking, am I gay? Like, I'd go to bed, and I'm like, "Am I gay?". They might try and make me gay, so that's why I wouldn't like it. I wouldn't mind working with a girl; they just can't be bitchy.

Lewis and Craig's data demonstrates a further departure from the original overt gender-egalitarian views (Kaplan et al 2017) expressed by Dan and Cole. Similarly, to some of the participants from McCormack's (2014) study of attitudes toward homosexuality among working-class boys in a sixth form in the south of England, Dan and Craig demonstrate ambivalence, particularly towards working with gay men. Initially, both young men offer a positive response. However, the expulsion and fear of homosexuality curtail this reply and demonstrates the traditional hegemonic masculine expectation of maintaining distance from homosexuality (Mac an Ghaill 1994).

As stated previously, Stan and Tommy's interviews were conducted together due to their request. The following excerpt is our three-way discussion around working with women and gay men:

> **RG**: Would you work with women, boys? They both respond with *"Yeah"* and laugh. **RG**: What about working with gay men? Both of them laugh and say *"ew"* – an expression of disgust. **Stan**: Fuck that! I'm a homosexual! **RG**: You're what, Stan? **Stan**: I'm a homosexual. **Tommy**: Homophobic? **Stan**: Homosexual! **RG**: So you would you work with gay men then? **Tommy**: No! Cos what if they tried getting on you? Touching your leg and that, trying to touch your cock. **Stan**: I'd be like, "Fuck you, you fucking". I'd blow his fucking head off! **RG**: What about working with women then? **Tommy**: Fair enough, we can shag them. **RG**: Would you rather work in a place with all guys or women and guys? **Tommy**: Guys. **Stan**: Women. **Tommy**: Oh yeah – it depends how fit [attractive] they are. **Stan**: Cos guys try and get on women, don't they. **Tommy**: Ooooo yeah (excited tone). **Stan**: I'm the fucking leader of the pack, and I'll fucking shag them all!

Unlike the previous Ladz' responses that have shown a full or partial deviation from the overtly sexist and homophobic position of the lads (Willis 1977), Tommy and Stan's data shows a distinct and apparent reconnection with their laddish predecessors through homophobic and degrading discourse (McRobbie 1991) that sexually objectifies women and verges on a predatory perspective. Furthermore, the language used by Stan: *"I'll fucking shag them all!"* demonstrates a resemblance with the terminology used by Joey: *"I'm interested in fucking as many women as I can"* (Willis 1977, p. 199). Additionally, Stan reconfirms his status as *"leader of the pack"* that he has proclaimed in previous replies. There is also a seemingly confused understanding between Stan's anti-gay sentiment and his terminological use. For example,

concerning gay men, Stan demonstrates violent disdain and states: *"I'd blow his fucking head off!"* yet Stan refers to himself as *"homosexual"*, thus revealing a contradiction between his views and his linguistic use, which Tommy equally identifies and corrects. It is this muddled use of anti-gay terminology and a general complex relationship with homophobia that the subsequent final findings section aims to explore.

"This game is gay"

In the previous section, the data evidences Stan's aggressive disdain towards homosexuality. However, in an additional reply, Stan deviated from this contemptuous position and the expulsion of homosexuality often associated with working-class masculinities (Willis 1977; Mac an Ghaill 1994; Ward 2018) and central to the notion of hegemonic masculinity (Connell 1995). For example:

> **Stan**: Some gay boys are fit [attractive] as fuck, though, like James Charles.
>
> **RG**: Who's that?
>
> **Stan**: It's this fucking gay boy with a fat arse. He got a fatter arse than your sister!
>
> **RG**: Good looking, is he? Do you think he's good looking, Tommy? (Tommy doesn't reply).

James Charles is an openly gay American YouTube personality, make-up artist and famous social media celebrity. In the excerpt, contradictory to his previous opposition to homosexuality, Stan overtly states that James Charles – an openly gay man – is fit, a term the Ladz use to refer to someone viewed as attractive or good looking. Furthermore, when I asked Tommy whether he thought James Charles was good-looking, he ignored my question. Comparative analysis between this response and Stan's previous violent disdain towards gay men reveals contradictions that almost epitomise the messy, entangled nature of the Ladz homosexuality-related discourse. An additional example of this is identifiable in Craig's data:

> **Craig**: **There's nothing wrong with being gay** cos my uncle's gay and my brother's gay. **There's nothing wrong with it**. Just cos they talk a bit funny and put a bit of make-up on, it's not really that bad. You can't help it if you're gay or not. **There's nothing wrong with being gay**. It's just nasty when other people make fun of them.

> **It's not wrong**. It's just kind of sad for the other people because most people now are gay but try and act straight cos they are kind of scared to admit it.

Similarly to Stan's replies, this response by Craig is equally conflicting and confusing. In the previous section, Craig confessed to a fear of working with gay men based on the notion that: *"they might try and make [him] gay"*. However, in this excerpt, he states that: *"There's nothing wrong with being gay"* almost three times. Furthermore, there are additional inconsistencies in this except alone. For example: *"it's just nasty when other people make fun of them. It's not wrong"*. In this response, Craig initially opposes homophobic discourse. However, he then contradicts this by saying: *"It's not wrong"*, a statement that potentially reflects his working-class masculinity (Willis 1977; Mac an Ghaill 1994; Connell 1995; Ward 2018) and the notion that challenging anti-gay declarations may lead to homophobic abuse (Nayak and Kehily 1996). Furthermore, Craig's views have a neoliberalist construction, including the idea that everyone has to create themselves and their own trajectory through life, and everyone should be whom they want to be. We also see that Craig's uncle and brother are gay, yet he does not outright condemn homophobic discourse, nor does he endorse it – there is a muddled construction of views.

This comparative analysis reveals the complexity of the Ladz homosexuality discourse, which was equally evident in the young men's general use of this terminology. Rather than using this language to refer to a person's sexuality or behaviours traditionally associated with this discourse, including same-sex touch, the Ladz also used it to refer to aspects not associated with these categories. The pool room was a place where this notion was particularly evident. For example, Tommy noticed a girl playing pool left-handed, and he called her gay because she was using that hand. Stan and Craig, on different occasions, both said to their opponents: *"If you miss that shot, you're gay"*. Additionally, Stan and Lewis were playing a football game on the computer. Stan was winning, and Lewis became animated, jumping about, threatening to punch the screen and saying: *"this game is gay"*.

Notably, none of the references to 'gay' relates to same-sex desires or behaviour traditionally associated with this discourse. Thus seemingly, the Ladz' terminological use of 'gay' corresponds with the notion of anti-gay 'banter', which signifies "behaviours or individuals as stupid, weird, and out of place in the peer group" (Wang et al. 2021, para. 2). However, although there is no apparent homophobic context in

the Ladz' use of the term 'gay', a close reading of the data and additional consideration reveals a contradictory explanation. Tommy initially uses this word to refer to a girl playing pool left-handed. Subsequently, we may understand this use of the term gay to refer to 'different' or 'abnormal'. Additionally, Stan and Craig use the term in reference to the possibility of inept ability and *"missing [the] shot"*, and Lewis uses the term gay towards the computer gay in the context of defeat. Subsequently, Lewis arguably uses this term to undermine the game, offset his loss, and thus recoup self-esteem. Therefore, collectively, rather than being anti-gay banter (Wang et al. 2021) or gay discourse where there is "no intent to marginalise or wound people with this use of language" (McCormack 2012, p. 119), the term gay is used by the Ladz to associate perceived 'dysfunctionality' and thus used as a gender policing technique (Martino 2000; Pascoe 2007) which subsequently reinforces the marginalisation and stigmatisation of homosexuality.

In the interest of the youth centre and its integrity, it is important to state that the Ladz' use of homophobic discourse was challenged and deemed unacceptable. Two youth workers that were particularly prominent in contesting negative gay discourse included Martin and especially Amy. The following excerpt is Dafyd – the youth centre manager – view of Amy:

> **Dafyd**: Amy brings something…she's stirring things up a little bit, and I think we need that. She's bringing a much younger and diverse perspective to everything, and she has her feminist views.

In this excerpt, Dafyd suggests that Amy brings a diverse feminist perspective and is *"stirring things up"*, challenging the status quo, or what may be interpreted as 'traditional' working-class laddish ways of doing masculinity which sometimes include sexism and homophobia (Willis 1977; Mac an Ghaill 1994; Connell 2005). The notion of challenging negative hegemonic or hyper-masculine behaviours is evident in Amy's following response:

> **Amy**: Well, some of it is just sort of saying like, "That's gay that is", about something that they think is a bit shit. They don't seem to use too much in terms of sort of more hard slurs, but most of the time when I challenge them on it, it's something like, "Hahaha, this person must be gay", and then you just say, well, "And what if he was?".

In this response, Amy substantiates my observations of the Ladz and their use of gay terminology. Furthermore, rather than deeming this language as merely anti-gay 'banter' (Wang et al. 2021) or inoffensive gay discourse (McCormack 2012), Amy somewhat understands the negative implications and the gender policing qualities (Martino 2000; Pascoe 2007) and thus challenges the young men's use of this terminology. This behaviour by Amy summarises my experience at the youth centre, which I found to be an organisation that aimed to provide a welcoming, progressive and gender-egalitarian (Kaplan et al. 2017) environment where young people could feel safe, secure and comfortable.

Conclusion

This final empirical chapter somewhat broadly demonstrates inconsistencies with the previous two empirical chapters and the protest masculinity (Connell 1995), lads association (Willis 1977) and laddish practices that have been evident throughout the young men's data. The findings in this chapter evidence gender-egalitarian views (Kaplan et al. 2017), physical tactility, sensitivity, empathy and compassion, all aspects that supposedly conflict with hegemonic masculinity (Collier 1998; Connell and Messerschmidt 2005). Therefore, this chapter arguably illustrates that the Ladz are experiencing a change in their masculine identity formation and not merely inheriting locally and historically produced working-class protest masculine ways of being. Instead, their understanding of manhood seems to be influenced by sources beyond the confines of their locality, including popular culture, music and media. In essence, this chapter, combined with the previous two empirical chapters, demonstrates that the Ladz masculine identity consists of both working-class laddish dispositions and softer, more fluid displays. How we might understand and interpret this coexistence is part of the source of enquiry in the following final discussion and conclusion chapter, which returns to the research questions and attempts to answer them.

Chapter Eight:

Discussion and Conclusion

Refresher

This thesis has aimed to explore the school-to-work transition and masculine identity of a group of marginalised working-class young men from the South Wales Valleys that resembled the lads from Willis's (1977) study in the context of social and economic change after the end of heavy industry. Although there has been numerous research relating to working-class young men, education, employment and masculinity (Veness 1962; Carter 1966; Ashton and Field 1976; Willis 1977; Brown 1987; Mac an Ghaill 1994; McDowell 2003; Nayak 2006; Nixon 2009; Jimenez and Walkerdine 2011; Walkerdine and Jimenez 2012; Ward 2015), these studies may be considered somewhat dated in a contemporary context, and recent studies have tended to focus on missing middle participants (Roberts 2018; Brozsely and Nixon 2022). Therefore, I have argued that there is a need to return the focus to working-class young men that have commonly been associated with a negative or complex relationship with education, manual employment aspirations and linked to protest masculinity (Willis 1977; Connell 1995; Haywood and Mac an Ghaill 2013), because future employment changes are potentially set to negatively impact low-skilled, poorly educated young men and manual forms of employment (Frey and Osborne 2013; Mckinsey 2017; Hawksworth et al. 2018). Furthermore, concerning masculinities, I argued for the significance of place specificity (Walkerdine and Jimenez 2012) and recognising that place-based structure and culture matter (Invinson 2014a) and "the industrial and social history of a place affects [the] identity of its inhabitants" (McDowell 2003, p. 96), while also arguing for recognition of social and economic change and external cultural influences beyond the immediate proximity, and therefore considering contemporary marginalised working-class young men's identity construction through a dualistic perspective that considers the significance of local and general influences. Based on these perspectives, this final chapter returns to the findings from this study and compares the Ladz to Willis's (1977) lads, along with considering additional studies and knowledge on the laddish (Mac an Ghaill 1994; Nayak 2003b; Ward 2015) working-class young men in the context of the following four research questions. The questions are explored in a specific order (starting with employment rather than

education) to present a coherent and rational narrative and provide a better overall understanding of the research participants' lived experiences.

> **RQ1:** How do the Ladz understand employment in the context of their biography and changing social and economic circumstances?
>
> **RQ2:** How do the Ladz make sense of education, and how is this understanding constructed and influenced?
>
> **RQ3:** To what extent is the Ladz' masculine identity representative of common laddish understanding, and how is this identity formulated?
>
> **RQ4:** What do the Ladz' employment and education findings tell us concerning future work discussions?

When answering these questions, I also autoethnographically embed myself within this discussion section, sharing my lived understanding as a self-proclaimed and documented youthful lad (Willis 1977) who resides in the related study community. Although autoethnography is sometimes criticised for being narcissistic, self-indulgent and individualised (Wall 2016), I justify my inclusion based on the following citation:

> The freedom of a researcher to speak as a player in a research project and to mingle his or her experience with the experience of those studied is precisely what is needed to move inquiry and knowledge further along (Wall 2006, p. 146).

whilst also arguing that "my personal experience [has] sensitise[d] me to things that others [potentially] wouldn't notice" (Bourdieu 2001, 0: 44: 10). Together with answering the four research questions, this final chapter suggests policy approaches, identifies follow-up research possibilities and offers a concluding argument.

Questions and Answers

RQ1: How do the Ladz understand employment in the context of their biography and changing social and economic circumstances?

Employment Preference

The initial self-evident theme related to the Ladz' employment data is the realisation that, unlike the lads (Willis 1977), none of the young men from this study mention manufacturing as an employment option. On the face of it, this may seem like an obvious difference considering the significant decrease in manufacturing that has seen this employment sector nationally shrink by 17% since 1977 and now accounting for 7.4% of UK jobs (Syed 2019; House of Commons Library 2022). However, these national statistics do not reflect the labour market conditions of the Ladz' surrounding employment area, where manufacturing accounts for 20.4% of employment (ONS 2021c), a figure similar to the 24.3% UK manufacturing employment rate of 1977 (Syed 2019). Yet despite this, the Ladz seemingly dismissal of manufacturing work and comparative analysis somewhat reveals a different conclusion from that drawn by Willis (1977, p. 126) and his claim that working-class culture "knows" the economic realities of the labour market, or at least concerning the Ladz and their local labour market. However, the lack of recognition of manufacturing work may also indicate reduced visibility, especially when considering that the high manufacturing rates relate to the Ladz surrounding employment area rather than the employment structure of their immediate place of residency, which has minimal job opportunities. Although manufacturing is omitted from the Ladz' responses, among the majority of the respondents, there is equally still an obvious attraction to manual labour employment and traditionally associated working-class jobs, albeit skilled and particularly construction work (Shildrick and MacDonald 2007).

Although the Ladz' attraction to skilled manual employment somewhat corresponds with relatively contemporary studies of subgroups of a similar nature, including Nayak's (2003b, p. 13) 'Real Geordies' who had "an appreciation of skilled physical labour" and Ward's (2015, p.45) Valley Boiz who were drawn to "'acceptable' manual occupation", the Ladz' relatively rigid early formulated job preferences differ from Roberts' (2018, p. 93) working-class 'missing middle' young men that "remained largely unsure about what forms of employment they ultimately hoped to attain". Furthermore, a comparison between some of the Ladz and their Laddish predecessor – the lads (1977) – reveals increased aspiration and social mobility through their attraction to skilled labour rather than non-skilled. Moreover, this notion of differentiation is further distinguished among four members of the Ladz, including Billy

and his rejection of manual work and desire to become a chef, Lewis's partial attraction to frontline healthcare work in the form of a paramedic, Wesley's media related preference and Cole's funeral director career aspiration. Nevertheless, the employment preference data mainly shows the early emergence of the Ladz' protest masculinity and working-class identity through an attraction to manual labour (Connell 1995) and hands-on work (Nixon 2006; Nixon 2009) whilst equally demonstrating deviation in Lewis, Wesley, Billy and Cole's job choices which somewhat depart from the manual work preference that is commonly associated with this subgroup of working-class young men.

Identity Formation

The previous section began to demonstrate and discuss the emergence of the Ladz' working-class identity and protest masculinity (Connell 1995) through their job preference, yet also showed some form of deviation among some of the young men. This section extends the job preference discussion by identifying influential factors that determine the Ladz' employment orientation and contribute to the young men's identity construction. Furthermore, I begin to embed myself and my understanding of the area and its residents within this section.

All but two of the Ladz' job preferences and formulations around employment derive from family members and close association. What the findings show is that the young men are predominantly raised in an environment whereby traditional manual forms of working-class employment are the recognised norm: *"I've always seen people working outside and looking like they're working"* (Dan). *"My brother was a plumber"* (Craig), *"Because my dad done it!"* (Tommy). These excerpts and the Ladz' career orientation correspond with Veness's (1962) traditional-direction model, which refers to the situation in which family, friends and community traditions influence a working-class young man's choice of employment. Moreover, notably and consistent with the lads (Willis 1977) and additional early working-class young men and employment discussion (Tolson 1977), male influence features strongly in determining the Ladz' understanding of employment and job preference.

An additional response by Dan – *"Ever since he was ten [brother], he's been fixing motorbikes, so I've been brought with it"* – illustrates the extent to which family and

community structural and cultural influences help formulate and shape the young men's employment understanding and working-class identity or habitus (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992), which includes a specific set of dispositions of thought, action and behaviour acquired during early childhood socialisation which shapes a person's identity, often determining mannerism, values, morals and beliefs (Bourdieu 1990a; Reay 2004) and provide a "feel for the game" (Bourdieu 1990b, p. 108) or an understanding of the world and a person's place within it.

Furthermore, Bourdieu's notion of habitus and 'feel for the game' additionally potentially helps make sense of the employment aspects that the young men dislike and favour because a person's habitus process and content create familiarity and unfamiliarity in social environments and surroundings (Bourdieu 1990b). Therefore, considering the family cultural and structural environments that the Ladz are raised in, whereby active manual forms of employment are mainly the typical job type among immediate family members, the fact that several of the Ladz dislike sedentary employment, namely office work: *"I couldn't be stuck in an office. It would drive me insane looking at the same four walls every day. I couldn't sit there all day with that sense of feeling enclosed"* (Cole) seems to demonstrate further the strength to which the young men's habitus (Bourdieu 1990a) and working-class identity, protest masculinity (Connell 1995) and employment attraction are moulded and constructed within their primary socialisation environments (Chester 2021). Moreover, a comparative analysis of the work aspects that the Ladz favour is illustrative of the documented commonly associated link between a working-class masculine identity, dirt, hands-on work and practicality (Willis 1977; Nixon 2006; Nixon 2009; Slutskaya et al. 2016; Walkerdine and Jiménez 2012): *"My hands gotta be doing something"* (Lewis). *"I wanted to be something like productive, like doing something outside. I like to do stuff with my hands"* (Ian). The differentiation between the two types of work and job aspects is:

> illustrative of a traditional class-based dichotomy between manual work and mental work, including an aversion to middle-class 'pen-pushing' (Mac an Ghaill, 1994) and an inclination towards employment that provides material worth often valued by working-class males, especially in the former industrial heartlands of Britain (Nixon, 2018) (Gater 2022, Findings, para. 2).

The Ladz' employment-related data and the argument presented above corresponds with the MSc research and PhD qualitative pilot study that I conducted in 2018, which I discussed in Chapter One and Four, and explored the employment experiences and relationships of a group of working-class young men who had rejected school and education based on its perceived irrelevance and whereby the findings indicated that community traditions influenced participants' experiences and relationships with employment and working-class masculinity (Connell 1995) and led the young men to favour some, but not all, forms of manual employment, while also dismissing sedentary service sector employment (Gater 2022). Comparative analysis of the two studies' findings demonstrates a remarkable resemblance that potentially reveals generational transmission of an attraction to manual employment among specific members of the Aber Valley and cultural reproduction that stems from community and family cultural and structural conditions, which may be understood by considering the Aber Valley's history, current conditions and drawing on the ideas and South Wales based study of Walkerdine and Jimenez (2012).

As stated in Chapter Four, coal mining was essentially the bedrock upon which the Aber Valley was founded and was previously a significant and largest source of employment in the area. Within the context of heavy industrial work, Walkerdine and Jimenez (2012) argue that the harsh conditions of this form of employment generated a hardness of body, spirit and a form of hard industrial masculinity that "served to keep the community safe through hard-won practices . . . [and] assuming the bodily strength and fortitude to withstand heavy, dangerous work" (Walkerdine 2016, p. 701). Furthermore, Walkerdine and Jimenez (2012, p. 94) then go on to argue that due to the significance of these modes of being, "these embodiments [are] passed down through generations. In all their detailed subtlety, the tiny performances of this masculinity were what one learnt to do, to be". Based on this notion of generational transmission, I want to argue that, concerning employment aspiration, these modes of being have not been ruptured among some of the Ladz and continue to influence employment choices and attract these young men towards manual employment. Although I will further strengthen this argument through the notion of rupture and by returning to outliers in the Ladz group, I first want to discuss the Aber Valley within a neoliberal context and draw on the research of Roberts (2018) and my own personal experiences to support my argument of generational transmission.

Although the Universal Colliery shut in 1923, the Windsor Colliery remained open until 1986, when it became a victim of the "Thatcherite Revolution" (Nayak, 2003a, p. 149) and the result of the 1984/5 miners' strike, accompanying neoliberal policy and deindustrialisation. The Aber Valley has failed to replace the jobs lost due to the coal industry's demise. Subsequently, and in contrast to the South-East England location of Roberts (2018, p.121) relatively recent study where the "young working-class men [were] not hostage to the traditional predispositions held by their counterparts from previous generations" and the study locale had "witnessed profound growth in retail, hotels, restaurants and wholesale" (Roberts 2018, p. 2018), other than a few schools, community resources, several shops, and takeaways, the Aber Valley offers no employment opportunities. Furthermore, as stated previously, the labour market conditions of the neighbouring area and the nearest source of work consist of an employment opportunity structure that shares similarities with the UK labour market conditions of 1977. As noted, manufacturing accounts for a significant source of employment at 20.4%, construction makes up 5.6% and wholesale and retail trade; repair of motor vehicles and motorcycles is the second-largest source of employment below manufacturing at 13% (ONS 2021c).

As previously stated, although the actual visibility of manufacturing jobs or the Ladz exposure to opportunities for such employment and the subsequent impact may be somewhat questionable, drawing on and offering my own experience of the Aber Valley, I would argue that the virtually non-existent employment opportunities of this community, coupled with disproportionately high rates of manufacturing and construction in the neighbouring area, are an additional reason why Dan has always *"seen people working outside and looking like they're working"* or what we might interpret as people employed and associated with manual labour.

As stated previously, I did not return to education and university until I was 33. However, as you might imagine, I am not the only person in the Aber Valley to have gone to university and not even the first in my family. My brother was the first member of my family to attend university. My best friend also attended university, and several people in my age group in school also went to university. Although this demonstrates that some working-class young men in the Aber Valley are consistent with the notion of the ear'oles and do have middle-class aspiration (Willis 1977) – which is worthy of a study itself – what is consistent among all of the mentioned people is other than

some of them having brief spells living in the Aber Valley, none of them currently reside in this area, and the majority never returned after university, possibly due to the limited amount of employment for degree graduates, which is a theme consistent with coalfield communities as documented by Beatty et al.'s (2019, p. 31) The State of the Coalfields 2019 report:

> Areas with a high proportion of manual jobs, such as the coalfields, are unlikely to retain or attract highly qualified workers, who move to the places where higher-grade jobs are more plentiful. One of the main mechanisms through which this occurs is when young people move away to university and then stay away when they move into employment, stripping the coalfields of successive cohorts of bright, well-qualified youngsters.

And further evidenced through the disproportionately high rates of no educational attainment in the Aber Valley, consisting of 34.6% of the population, and a Level 4 and above qualification achievement of 13.6% compared to the England and Wales rates of 23% and 27%, respectively (ONS 2011a; ONS 2011b).

In summary, the overall argument that I want to make is that, unlike Roberts' (2018, p.121) working-class young men study sample, some of the Ladz' employment-related findings suggest that these young men are "hostage to the traditional predispositions held by their counterparts from previous generations" and their habitus (Bourdieu 1990a) has remained consistent with previous modes of being that were initially generated through the harsh conditions of heavy industry (Walkerdine and Jimenez 2012). However, rather than "victim blaming" (Roberts 2018, p. 145), I am arguing that these young men are victims of discriminatory neoliberal policy that creates winners and losers (Joppke 2021) and a lack of regeneration, whereby the Aber Valley has seen relatively stagnant social and economic development since deindustrialisation and the demise of coal mining. Essentially, the Aber Valley has somewhat become frozen in time with previous modes of being going largely unchallenged and unruptured, thus equating to a continuation and transmission of a specific set of working-class masculine dispositions and subsequent attraction to manual employment. To further strengthen this argument and the notion of rupturing, the following section returns to the outliers in the Ladz' group and the young men that were not attracted or had a partial attraction to manual employment and discusses the developments of this process.

Identity Disruption

The employment aspiration data of Billy and Wesley, and Lewis and Cole, to some extent, differs from the previous Ladz and demonstrates only a partial or complete omission of traditionally masculine associated working-class forms of skilled manual employment, particularly construction work (Ness; 2012; Shildrick and MacDonald 2007; Thiel 2007). Therefore, considering the protest masculinity (Connell 2005) shared behavioural commonalities among the Ladz and the cultural and structural intergenerational transmission (Walkerdine and Jimenez 2012; Invinson 2014a) related arguments presented above, the questions then are, why and how have these members of the Ladz become outliers and have differing job preferences?

Firstly, Billy rejects traditionally masculine associated working-class forms of skilled manual employment: *"Construction an tha . . . doesn't interest me"* and instead favours cooking and being a chef. Unlike the previous mentioned Ladz and the male association with their job preference, Billy's employment influence comes from his nan. Therefore, we may understand Billy's different job orientation through a rupturing of established masculine modes of being through female influence. Similarly, and although Lewis demonstrates a partial attraction to manual employment and male influence, his job preference also includes being a paramedic, which largely stems from female influence:

> I like helping people and keeping people safe from the world . . . I like to use my hand a lot like. My hands gotta be doing something because that like the way I been brought up like to show respect, work and yeah be caring an tha. Because my mother and father broke up at a young age, well, when I was young, so I've just been brought up by my mum . . . So I've been brought up by my mother, but she's brought me up the right way.

Additionally, Lewis's stepfather is a paramedic, which Lewis equally identifies as a source of influence for his career choice. Through the transmission of dispositions, including respect and caring, which are aspects affiliated with caring masculinities (Elliott 2016) and representation, both parent guardians seem to have somewhat destabilised the masculine modes of being and attraction to masculine forms of manual employment. However, additional evidence in these two young men's data suggests that they redefine or retraditionalize (Adkins 1999) the type of work within traditional masculine working-class ideals. For example, in Lewis's above excerpt, we

see a muddled attraction to hands-on work (Nixon 2006; 2009) that is combined with the ideas of caring and respect. Furthermore, although Billy favours cooking and work traditionally defined as feminine (Kenway and Kraack 2004), he defines the job role through the traditional masculine dichotomy between mental work and manual work (Willis 1977): *"It'll [cooking] be more practical than theory, won't it. I couldn't sit in an office all day. Cooking there is so many things on your mind. it is more practical needs than theory"*.

Cole's employment aspiration data bears some of the hallmarks of the established modes of being, including a rejection of sedentary work and an attraction to dirt (Willis 1977; Walkerdine and Jiménez 2012; Slutskaya et al. 2016). However, we also see a form of rupturing that derives from the loss of a family member and what Thomson et al. (2002, p. 339) refer to as 'critical moments': events depicted in narrative "considered to be important or to have had important consequences" that leads Cole to believe that he: *"couldn't go into like an ordinary type of job"* and he is instead predominantly drawn towards funeral directing. Additionally, although Wesley demonstrated several connections to other members of the Ladz, Wesley's career orientation also omits skilled manual employment and includes job preferences attached to media and television.

Place Attachment

The previous two sections concentrated on the Ladz' identity construction, showing how the young men's habitus (Bourdieu 1990a), modes of being (Walkerdine and Jimenez 2012) and subsequent employment aspirations are constructed in the context of family, community and peer groups, whilst also demonstrating how a working-class masculine attraction to manual employment and laddish associated (Willis 1977) ways of being may be partially ruptured through particular circumstances. This section demonstrates the reinforcing qualities of community and family and the strength to which these aspects may potentially determine employment opportunities.

Learning to Labour (Willis 1977) does not entirely explore the lads' community attachment, or not in the purest sense. However, among most of the Ladz, place attachment plays a significant role in shaping the young men's employment-related views and willingness to commute and consider relocating for employment purposes.

Place attachment is a concept that often comes with various, although sometimes marginal, differences in how this idea is understood and how it relates. Therefore, this section defines its use of place attachment according to Hidalgo and Hernandez's (2001, p. 274) definition: “a positive affective bond between an individual and a specific place, the main characteristic of which is the tendency of the individual to maintain closeness to such a place”. Although this interpretation is included and is mainly reflective of the Ladz’ community-related data, as subsequent sections will show, whether the young men’s attachment to their community is positive is open to interpretation and dependent upon how one assesses the impact.

Among the Ladz, although there is a limited sense of place attachment in a geographical form, there is evidence of a relatively strong social bond to the Aber Valley among many of the young men. This attachment derives from ontological security (Giddens 1991) together with a sense of close-knittedness that stems from family attachment and the idea that: *“everyone knows each other” and “everyone’s got each other back”* (Billy). Essentially, in a world that has supposedly become individualised (Giddens 1991; Beck 1992; Bauman 1999), among the majority of the Ladz, there is a recognised sense of community belonging that attaches itself through support networks and a fondness for family and kin. This attachment gives the young men a sense of ontological security (Giddens 1991) that derives from the notion of a secure environment and the company of familiar unthreatening others. However, this mental state equally helps generate a “terrified clinging” (Walkerdine and Jimenez 2012, p. 75), in a sense that the young men are torn between a desire to remain rooted in their community whilst acknowledging limited employment opportunities and the necessity to find work that generates a restrictive and condition-based spatially close employment approach.

Whilst wishing not to pathologise the young men’s cultural adoption and ways of being – for I am also deeply attached to this community for similar reasons as the Ladz – one equally needs to be a realist and recognise the limitation of the young men’s community attachment and the structural hindering effect of the area that reduces employment opportunities. As stated previously, the Aber Valley offers these young men a virtually zero work source. Furthermore, the local employment opportunity structure is significantly comprised of manufacturing work (ONS 2021c). Therefore, if the Ladz’ employment ambitions are to be realised, realistically, these young men will

be required to at least commute to work outside their local borough and possibly further afield beyond the secure confines of their community. Although some of the Ladz are willing to commute to work, this is often conditionally based on a significant wage and a relatively short travelling distance, further restricting the young men's employment possibilities.

This employment-related section has essentially argued that the Ladz social reality and employment understanding are largely determined by the intergenerational transmission of historically related modes of being (Walkerdine and Jiménez 2012). The following section demonstrates the education-related effect of these modes of being and employment understanding and their influence on the approach that the Ladz adopt concerning school and their level of academic engagement.

RQ2: How do the Ladz make sense of education, and how is this understanding constructed and influenced?

Educational Juxtaposition

In several ways, the Ladz' school behaviour demonstrated a relatively static configuration and a combination of practices that echo those of their laddish predecessors, demonstrated through school and social conduct that included 'dossing, blagging, wagging' (Willis 1977, p. 26), smoking and taking drugs, along with nonconformist performative masculine (Ward 2015) school behaviour such as classroom disruption and a somewhat unwillingness to engage that derived from educational difficulties, peer group pressure, gender policing techniques (Martino 2000; Pascoe and Stewart 2016) and subsequent macho masculine displays (O'Donnell and Sharpe 2003). Furthermore, some of the young men's behaviour extended beyond the lads (Willis 1977) and included physical confrontations with teachers and authority figures (Roberts 1995). However, despite the Ladz' nonconformist school behavioural displays, rather than demonstrating an outright disdain for school as one may reasonably presume based on their conduct, the Ladz essentially adopted a middle-ground perspective epitomised by Tommy's response: *"It's alright, but it's not the best"*. Subsequently, we were left with a seemingly odd

juxtaposition whereby the Ladz' nonconformist school behaviour places them within the lads' category (Willis 1977). Yet, their view of school represents a centre position that is often affiliated with ordinary Kids – working-class young men who "neither simply accept nor reject school" (Brown 1987, p. 31) – or the "missing middle" (Roberts 2018, p. 78) as they have become more commonly known.

Pragmatism

The source of the Ladz' educational juxtaposition derives from several aspects. The *"alright"* perspective reflects the young men's partial commitment to the teaching paradigm (Willis 1977), whereby, unlike the lads and Mac an Ghaill's (1996, p. 65) Macho Lads who rejected "formal school knowledge and the potential exchange value it has in the labour market", the Ladz recognise the importance of educational attainment and its necessity in enabling them to pursue their chosen career path and job aspiration as epitomised by Tommy's excerpt: *"You need them [GCSEs], you mad head"*. The Ladz commitment to education reflects a labour market change whereby during the lads' (Willis 1997) era, working-class young men who left school with no qualifications were able to find employment with satisfactory rates of pay and some prospect of security with reasonable ease (Roberts 2020), whereas, contemporary working-class young men who leave education with no qualifications are now likely to find themselves in the precariat class and limited job opportunities in minimum wage employment such as "hospitality (hotels, bars, cafes, restaurants) and in retail shops" (Roberts 2020, p. 35). Furthermore, the educational requirements for further education (FE) courses have also increased. For example, as discussed in Chapter One, my youthful entry into FE and onto a Carpentry and Joiner L2 course at the local college that the Ladz are likely to attend was based on no necessity for GCSEs. However, that same course now requires successful completion of the Foundation Carpentry & Joinery course. The Foundation Carpentry & Joinery course requires 3 GCSEs at grade A*- E, including English/Welsh and Maths/Numeracy, or completing Construction Skills Entry 3. Furthermore, Construction Skills Entry 3 requires an Entry level 2 in Literacy and Numeracy.

The identification of marginalised working-class young men engaging in education is not unique in a contemporary context (Weis 1990; Freie 2007; Ward 2015).

However, the Ladz do not merely engage in education for knowledge in its purest sense; instead, their process is measured, calculated and primarily based on their employment aspiration: *"Maths and English . . . just good knowledge, isn't it. I need them to be a mechanic in it."* (Tommy), *"Biology's interesting so I wen tha one about the body and tha and part of paramedics I wanna do"* (Lewis).

> Maths I didn't mind it, but I didn't like it, but I done it cos it was relevant. You got to know things for exams. I want to be a plumber, and you need a D in Maths GSCE, so I tried to get a D in Maths. (Dan)

The Ladz' selective engagement with education resonates with the 'ordinary kids' and what Brown (1987, p. 100) refers to as 'alienated instrumentalism', which may be understood as viewing school "as a 'means' of obtaining credentials to compete for certain types of employment". However, the Ladz' approach to school is not "Justified for getting any job rather than the jobs they want" (Brown 1987, 67), and neither is the young men's approach an attempt to engage with a "normalised discourse of compliance" akin to Roberts (2018, p. 94) missing middle because the Ladz' school behaviour includes non-compliance. Instead, the Ladz approach to education is what I refer to as pragmatic, this being a purposeful and selective approach to education based on employment aspiration that largely derives from the intergenerational transmission and modes of being (Walkerdine and Jiménez 2012). This pragmatic approach to education somewhat demonstrates the strength of the employment-related intergenerational transmission process (Walkerdine and Jiménez 2012; Invinson 2014a), for subjects deemed irrelevant to the Ladz' employment orientation are primarily disregarded and deemed meaningless knowledge. Furthermore, collectively, the pragmatic approach reduces the Ladz' academic engagement to roughly three to four subjects, which is the minimum entry requirement for many of the Further Education courses on which the Ladz hope to enrol, thus leaving no scope for failure or bargaining power.

Pragmatism Consequences

As stated above, within the Ladz' pragmatic approach, educational subjects considered unimportant to career orientation are primarily disregarded, which places a significant strain on the teaching paradigm and the idea that teachers can provide

important, meaningful knowledge, and in return, students are expected to provide teachers with respect and conform to the rules and social relations of the schooling system (Willis 1977; Walker 1985; Feinberg and Soltis 2009). The rejective side of the Ladz' pragmatism undermines the foundations of the modern capitalist schooling system and the notion of compliance with the young men often refusing to attend or engage in lessons deemed irrelevant, which leads to truancy, classroom disruption and even physical confrontations with teachers. Essentially, when the Ladz' pragmatic school approach is threatened or when the young men are challenged and feel undermined, they draw on their traditional masculine modes of being and engage in masculine associated behaviour (Willis 1977; Francis 1999; Jackson 2006) to help cope with the external forces that threaten the practical sense of their working-class habitus (Bourdieu 1990a).

Fundamentally, as Delamont (2000, p. 99) states, the Ladz "make life hard for [some of] their teachers, reject the opportunities for [certain] credentials", yet the young men don't "hate school", they don't "despise [all] teachers", and they don't see "boys who do work as effeminate and weak", for they themselves with their masculine modes of being and behaviour equally engage in some school work. Therefore, I would argue that a standoff better explains the disjointed teacher and pupil relationship in the sense that the intergenerational transmission process has produced what, to the Ladz, is a seemingly natural and common-sense approach to education. However, the Ladz' pragmatic engagement and selective approach to knowledge contradict a teacher's understanding of school and the underpinning teaching paradigm notion that all knowledge is meaningful and worthy of respect and conformism (Willis 1977; Walker 1985; Feinberg and Soltis 2009). In essence, neither party understands the other's meaning-making, and each party's practices threaten the other approach, equating to a sense of inferiority and subsequent conflict.

Pragmatism Reinforcement

As the previous two sections have shown, the Ladz adopt what I refer to as a pragmatic approach to education. This method demonstrates how intergenerational transmission is converted to agency. In other words, the Ladz' understanding of employment and their job orientation largely derives from family and community members, which in turn

determines the young men's selective individual approach to school, including positive and negative engagement. This section focuses on an aspect that reinforces the young men's pragmatic approach and has educational and employment consequences.

Seven of the Ladz openly admitted to some form of medically diagnosed learning disability and/or mental health condition, and there was also a partial suggestion that one of the other two remaining members also suffered from a similar problem. Therefore, whereas Willis' lads were simply categorised as 'non-conformist' or 'anti-school', the Ladz' learning disabilities and/or struggles with mental health often negatively affect their schooling experience and behaviour. For example:

> I didn't get diagnosed with it, dyslexia until the end of school . . . So, I was a bit distracted in school. I was always messing about, and I was always getting in trouble. I could never concentrate because, in school, I could never understand the work (Lewis).
>
> I dunno. It's just I have, um, ADHD, so I can't concentrate, and then I'm writing, and I'll be in a mood; then someone catches my attention, then it takes a good 5 minutes to settle then (Billy).

These excerpts demonstrate that the young men's educational difficulties generate frustration, leading to disengagement and disruptive classroom behaviour. This sequence of events resonates with Jackson's (2002) notion that some young men engage in acts of masculine associated laddish class clown behaviour in an attempt to protect their self-worth. However, rather than being a means of increasing "status within [the] peer group" or an attempt to "deflect attention away from poor academic performance [and] sabotage the efforts and performances of classmates" (Jackson 2002, p. 47), I would argue that the young men's modes of being and masculinity act as a default position (Ward 2015) that they return to and draw on in times of difficulty, possibly because they lack the confidence or ability to draw on other techniques, or possibly their masculine identity makes them reluctant to ask for support.

The Ladz' learning disability and/or mental health condition have additional education and employment consequences. For some of the young men, the diagnosis of these conditions reinforces their educational pragmatism, for example: *"That's why I like creating stuff. I've got dyslexia. My imagination is running wild"* (Ian). *"My sister*

is really creative – she has dyslexia and she like the art type, but me I'm just like – I've got dyspraxia and my art skills are not really good" (Wesley). In essence, these young men adopt a sense of learning disability meaning-making and determine their strengths, weakness and engagement through their condition. The notion of learning disability meaning-making and the idea that the young men make sense of their abilities and behaviour in accordance with their learning disabilities also filters through to their employment understating, for example: *"I just like getting my hands dirty ini. It helps my concentration because I got ADHD"* (Lewis). *"I like taking things apart. It helps with my ADHD"*. (Tommy). What is notable about these excerpts, particularly the employment-related ones, is the fact that an attraction to 'hands-on' work and manual labour has previously been associated with a working-class identity (Willis 1977; Nixon 2006; Nixon 2009) and protest masculinity (Connell 1995), whereas Lewis and Tommy now associate their attraction to this employment aspect with their learning disability.

At this point, and although I know we cannot answer it, I asked myself: did the lads (Willis 1977) have learning disabilities that went undiagnosed due to a lack of understanding? I ask this because there are significant comparative similarities between the behaviour of these young men and the lads from Willis's study. Alternatively, does the Ladz data demonstrate medicalization (Rose 2007), defined as: "interpreting newer and newer aspects of reality, including human behaviour, in medical terms, and treating them as medical problems rather than e.g. social, political or existential ones" (Kaczmarek 2018, p. 119)? If we consider the periodic shift and the neoliberalist Ideologies that have accompanied this change, including individualism, self-determination and self-responsibility (Harvey 2007), then it becomes slightly coincidental that forms of behaviour and views that were once associated with protest masculinity and structural issues, including a position of powerless and poverty (Connell 1995), have now become an individualistic medical problem (Rose 2007; Kaczmarek 2018), or at least in respect of the Ladz' understanding. I am not for one second disregarding the reality of learning disabilities because I have a lived understanding of them. However, this comparative discussion raises questions about understanding behaviours within a contemporary context and demonstrates the ramifications of learning disability diagnosis and how it affects the Ladz' level of academic engagement.

Pragmatism Incubated

Aside from the above argument, the reality of the young men's school behaviour, which includes classroom disruption and verbal and physical confrontation with teachers, has meant that five have been excluded from mainstream school and attend alternative provisions (AP). Although the young men's behaviour may hinder "classmates' efforts and performances" (Jackson 2002, p. 47) and "make life hard for their teachers" (Delamont 2000, p. 99), one questions whose benefit this process serves because there are some alarming statistics associated with this strategy. For example, young people with special educational needs, disabilities and those living in poverty are more likely to be excluded and educated in an alternative provision than their peers (Gill 2017). Furthermore, "only 1 per cent of excluded young people achieve five good GCSEs including English and maths" (Gill 2017, p. 22), and the majority of UK prisoners have been excluded from school (Gill 2017). Based on these facts, it would be easy to present the argument of exclusion and AP's as a state apparatus of social reproduction (Althusser 1970). However, I would prefer to avoid that potentially deterministic association and instead discuss them within the context of the themes that are central to this chapter, including intergenerational transmission and rupturing, combined with my lived understanding of the lads' culture. Therefore, I want to argue that exclusion and AP's act as an incubation chamber.

An incubation chamber is essentially a device that enables organisms to grow by providing optimal conditions. Taking this definition, I argue that APs potentially create a perfect environment for laddish culture (McDowell 2004; Jackson 2006) to thrive and create a continuation of the Ladz' educational pragmatic approach. Firstly, although Dan offered some favourable recognition of AP's, including increased support and smaller classes, which I will return to in the policy approach section, in essence, these educational institutions group together young people with shared difficulties, like-minded school-related beliefs and behaviour, and often, hyper-masculine (Mac an Ghaill 1994) tendencies. From my experience as a laddish (McDowell 2004; Jackson 2006) young man that encountered a similar environment through my classroom disruption behaviour that led to me being demoted and placed in the lowest attainment group for several school subjects and surrounded by individuals that shared my school disposition, this grouping process creates a breeding ground whereby hyper-masculinity (Mac an Ghaill 1994) and a counter school culture (Willis 1977) is fostered

and cultivated, often by young men who are jostling for position and eager to express their identity and self-worth (Jackson 2006) against an environment that corrodes self-respect (Sennett and Cobb 1972).

Secondly, APs sometimes provide a limited curriculum and focus on maths, English and vocational options (Mills et al. 2016), a process that mirrors the Ladz' pragmatic approach to education and "can reinforce marginalisation and disadvantage" (Tate and Greatbatch 2017, p. 36). In essence, APs potentially provide an environment conducive to 'laddism' (Willis 1977; Jackson 2014; Phipps 2017) and the Ladz' pragmatism and seemingly offer minimal means of rupturing these ways of being, a process identified above as being crucial in altering the young men's mindset, destabilising established modes of being and creating an alternative perspective.

Unspoiled Habitus

The Ladz' employment and educational findings and discussion demonstrate a close association with working-class masculinity (Connell 1995). This concluding school-to-work transition section confirms the strength of this masculine identity by discussing the Ladz' service sector employment-related data and considering and comparing the young men's findings concerning relevant prior working-class related studies.

The Ladz' service sector employment-related data mostly revealed that the young men were reluctant to engage in service sector work due to concerns about being: *"spoken to like garbage"* (Ian), an inability to *"keep calm and try and hold anger back"* (Craig), *"getting angry"* (Billy) and a reluctance to *"take shit off nobody"* (Lewis). These excerpts are reminiscent of prior employment-related studies of working-class men that have often demonstrated a rejection or reluctance to engage in service sector employment due to the inability to 'put on a smiley face' (Nixon 2006; 2009), engage in emotional labour (Hochschild 1983) and the associated features of deference and docility, features that are claimed to be at odds with working-class masculinity (Connell 1995) and "the right to stick up for yourself" (McDowell 2003, p. 176). However, the relatively recent research of Roberts (2018, p. 121) has challenged these claims and identified working-class young men that "embrace[d] service work, and its attendant demands".

The disparity between the findings of this study and that of Roberts (2018) raises questions about the source of these differences and how they might be explained and understood. The answer to these questions is potentially found by comparing both studies, location, changes, and labour market conditions. Firstly, Roberts (2018, p.126) argues that his participants "had not merely inherited older generations of men's dispositions towards and understanding of appropriately masculine work". However, some of the Ladz' data does suggest "intergenerational transfers of knowledge from father to son" (Walker and Roberts, 2018, p. 10-11) or male kin, which includes an understanding of appropriate forms of employment.

Secondly, Roberts then goes on to argue that his participants "entered the economy some 25 to 30 years after the process of de-industrialisation began", and thus for his young men, due to locational labour market changes, service sector work "is all they know" (2018, p.126) and therefore, their working-class habitus has adapted to this change. Conversely, the Ladz' immediate spatial labour market conditions are dissimilar and resemble the labour market conditions of the 1970s, with comparatively high rates of manufacturing and construction (Syed 2019) and virtually no substantial service sector work in their immediate community, the Aber Valley. Therefore, rather than the Ladz' habitus remaining "durable in the face of social and economic change" (Roberts 2018, p.126), I argue that these young men's habitus generally has not been subjected to change and challenged or at least in a structural employment-related sense. In essence, the comparison between the two study findings and the regional characteristics strengthens my earlier argument concerning inherited modes of being, and a lack of rupturing, which has caused a continuation of working-class masculinity (Connell 1995) employment-related orientation towards manual forms of employment.

RQ3: To what extent is the Ladz' masculine identity representative of common laddish understanding, and how is this identity formulated?

Masculinities

The previous section and those before have demonstrated and discussed the Ladz' association with working-class/protest masculinity (Connell 1995, p. 110) through

some form of “school resistance”, association with “manual labour”, and “violence” through physical confrontations with teachers, with the findings section, also identifying a link to “motorbikes”. However, despite this association, several of the Ladz’ responses and findings included emotional openness and behavioural practices that contradicted this masculine position and thus raised questions about the young men’s masculinity formation and their ways of doing gender (West and Zimmerman 1987).

The Ladz’ working-class/protest masculinity (Connell 1995) contradictory practises and views featured through multiple facets, including a hugging greeting practice and physical tactility that may be perceived as a feminine practice (Frosh et al. 2002) and thus challenging the hyper-masculine notion of a “rejection of all aspects that are deemed feminine” (Hayward and Mac an Ghaill 2003, p. 97), whilst also demonstrating same-sex touch which historically may be perceived as homosexual behaviour (Blanchard et al. 2017; Ralph and Roberts 2020). Furthermore, some of the Ladz discussed mental health issues and expressed emotional openness and disclosures of vulnerability that would have historically been “considered a sign of weakness for men, resulting in some form of emasculation” (Ralph and Roberts 2020, p. 97) and contradict the traditional masculine (Courtenay 2011) values of being tough and courageous (Cheng 1999). Moreover, the visual methods data and nursing picture revealed sensitivity, compassion, and empathy, aspects that oppose hegemonic masculinity's central features, including being unemotional and dispassionate (Collier 1998; Connell and Messerschmidt 2005). Additionally, dissimilar to prior studies whereby social relations and friendship grouping were single-sex, and gender-exclusive (Mac an Ghaill 1994; Frosh et al. 2002) and women were viewed merely as “both sexual objects and domestic comforters (Willis 1977, p. 43), and whereby “boys who hung around with girls as friends were liable to be constructed as effeminate ‘woosies’” and at risk of homosexual taunts (Frosh et al. 2002, p. 180-181), among the Ladz gender-segregated friendship grouping was non-existent, with the young men frequently mixing together with girls chatting, listening to music, dancing or playing pool in what seemed to be an essentially platonic relationship that was not met with ridicule. Similarly, and contrary to the lads' sexist and homophobic discourse (Walker 1985; McRobbie 1991; Skeggs 1992), which deemed women “inferior and incapable of doing certain things” (Willis 1977, p. 149), including manual labour and traditionally

associated masculine forms of employment, some of the young men expressed gender-egalitarian views (Kaplan et al. 2017), stating that there is: *"No difference between a man and a woman"* (Dan) and thus disputing the idea that women are inferior (Willis 1977), whilst also deviating from the homophobic position that is often associated with the lads' category and working-class masculinities (Willis 1977; Mac an Ghaill 1994; Connell 1995; Epstein 1997; Francis 1999) and stating that: *"Your sexual preference or gender or . . . doesn't make odds on your personality"* (Cole).

Amalgamated Masculinities

Although there is some variation in the young men's responses which are identified and discussed in the findings chapters, and it would be disingenuous to claim that these working-class/protest masculinity (Connell 1995) contradictory practices are entirely representative of the Ladz, there is unmistakable masculinity-related behavioural and attitude changes among these young men that somewhat challenge recognised understanding of laddish culture (Willis 1977; McDowell 2004; Jackson 2006). Therefore, change in itself is not questionable; instead, it is a question of how we explain and understand this change. The following section explores the young men's gender practices, using masculinities theory to explain the Ladz' gender formation whilst also offering my interpretation.

Firstly, we may understand the young men's masculinity practices in terms of Connell and Messerschmitt's (2005, p. 849) hegemonic masculinity theory and through the notion of a locally constructed form of masculinity that derives from "the arenas of face-to-face interaction of families, organizations, and immediate communities, as typically found in ethnograph[y]", and the idea that "men can adopt hegemonic masculinity when it is desirable, but the same men can distance themselves strategically from hegemonic masculinity at other moments" (Connell and Messerschmitt 2005, p. 841).

Similarly, the notion of hybrid masculinities may explain the Ladz' views and opinions. For example, the young men's attraction to manual work and school resistance demonstrates an affiliation with protest masculinity (Connell 1995) and values including toughness and stoicism (McDowell 2003). Whereas expressions of

physical tactility, sensitivity, compassion and empathy and gender-egalitarian views (Kaplan et al. 2017) may be understood as incorporating "elements associated with . . . subordinated masculinities and femininities" (Bridges and Pascoe 2014 p. 246). Collectively, the men's views and opinions, which include toughness combined with emotional openness and the admittance of vulnerability, arguably provide some support for the notion of hybrid masculinities (Messner 2007; Bridges and Pascoe 2014).

However, both these ideas suppose that the Ladz are purposely adopting a sophisticated practice whereby softer masculine characteristics are demonstrated in an attempt to somewhat distance themselves from a protest or hegemonic masculine position (Bridges and Pascoe, 2014). Although I do not entirely dispute this idea and the possibility that the young men may have adopted this approach to present themselves favourably to female peers and me, surely this notion and supposed level of sophistication is undermined by the young men's contradictory open admittance and displays of working-class/protest masculinity?

Furthermore, we may also assume that, akin to Roberts (2018, p. 2), missing middle study sample, the Ladz' "working-class young masculinity is itself in a state of transition". However, transition assumes "change from one state to another" (Collins English Dictionary 2012, p. 608). Yet, the Ladz' working-class/protest masculinity (Connell 1995) generally seems to be in a somewhat relatively static state, evidenced by the fact that many of the young men have a relatively rigid employment aspiration that almost exclusively includes manual labour or have redefined and retraditionalize (Adkins 1999) alternative types of work within traditional masculine working-class ideals. However, they equally demonstrate qualities associated with a softer version of masculinity, including "emotional openness [and] peer tactility" (Anderson and McCormack, 2018, p. 547). Therefore, although I recognise that: "protest masculinity . . . is compatible with respect and attention to women . . . egalitarian views about the sexes . . . and a sense of display which in conventional role terms is decidedly feminine" (Connell 2005, p. 112), I want to suggest that some of the Ladz display what I refer to as amalgamated masculinities, which is the fusion of both working-class/protest masculine (Connell 1995) characteristics and softer masculine attributes (Anderson and McCormack 2018).

My explanation for the formulation of the young men's amalgamated masculinities initially derives from employment findings that demonstrate primary gender socialisation (Pilcher and Whelenhan 2004) and the "intergenerational transfers of knowledge" (Walker & Roberts 2018, p. 8), which initially establishes working-class/protest masculinity (Connell 1995) evidenced through the Ladz attraction to manual labour and subsequent school resistance. However:

> Socialisation is . . . a life-long process and as individuals grow up and older, they continually encounter new situations and experiences and so learn new aspects of femininity or masculinity throughout their lives (Pilcher and Whelenhan 2004, p. 160)

Therefore, I tentatively suggest that some of the young men are assimilating some ideas of manhood and masculinity beyond their primary socialisation and immediate community and internalising softer masculine ideals through popular media, which has included scrutiny upon men and masculinity (Wolfman et al. 2021). The notion of media influence was evident within Billy's response to explaining male peer tactility and potentially in the Ladz responses to the nursing picture that included 'new' masculinity characteristics of sensitivity, compassion, and empathy (Spector-Mersel and Gilbar 2021), which were comparable to the contemporary lyrics of Dave's 'Question Time' song which discussed the idea nursing wage inequality.

RQ4: What do the Ladz' employment and education findings tell us concerning future work discussions?

Futurism

As discussed in Chapter Two, the future of work is a contested terrain with conflicting perspectives and predictions regarding the impact of artificial intelligence and automation on jobs (Frey and Osborne 2013; Arntz et al. 2016; McKinsey 2017; Hawksworth et al. 2018; Leopold et al. 2018). However, despite the competing viewpoints, there is a consensus that new technologies will cause some employment disruption (Welsh Government 2019) and jobs that were thought to be resilient to new technologies, including several of the Ladz' construction work career orientations

(Chui and Mischke 2019; Wallace-Stephens and Morgante 2021) are likely to be affected by new technologies. For example, a recent report by the Royal Society for Arts, Manufactures and Commerce predicts that up to 50 per cent of some individual construction tasks could be automated (Wallace-Stephens and Morgante 2021). This prediction stems from an increased "trend towards modular construction, which is manufactured offsite and more easily automated" (Wallace-Stephens and Morgante, p. 26). Furthermore, construction work is increasingly incorporating new technologies, which means that "even the average construction worker will be expected to use a tablet to access building plans or operate a drone in place of doing a physical site walkthrough" (Chui and Mischke 2019, p. 5). These changes will transform the skills needed in the construction industry, and workers will be required to upskill and acquire new technological and digital skills (Wallace-Stephens and Morgante 2021).

Aside from the fact that the Ladz' pragmatism lessens their engagement with education and reduces the likelihood of them achieving the necessary qualifications to facilitate entry into FE and subsequently achieving their employment goal, the above discussion demonstrates that all of the young men's career orientations are susceptible to new technologies. Even Billy's catering preference is not immune, with Manyika eta al. (2017) suggesting that cooking has a high automation potential. Subsequently, the Ladz are likely to succumb to the upskilling and reskilling notion surrounding the future of work (Bell et al. 2017; Brown et al. 2020; HM Government 2021; Schlogl 2021; Wheelahan 2022) and be required to re-engage with some form of education. Based on the young men's educational pragmatism, it is difficult to predict how they will cope with this requirement. For example, will they recognise the relevance and necessity of upskilling and reskilling requirements and pragmatically engage? Or will they fail to recognise the importance of this process and underestimate the impact of new technologies? A conclusive answer to these questions is impossible. However, based on the findings about the young men, we can surmise that the Ladz' educational pragmatism will play a pivotal role in determining the outcome.

Along with the importance of upskilling and reskilling, future of work predictions equally anticipate an increased demand for competencies that are currently believed to be hard for robots to replicate, including soft skills and social skills (Brynjolfsson and

Mcafee 2012; Davenport and Kirby 2016; Deloitte 2016; Goodhart 2020) and related abilities such as “emotional intelligence . . . sympathy and empathy, relationship-building and negotiation skills, resilience and character” (Haldane 2018, p. 16). The Ladz’ masculinities demonstrate the emergence of these qualities among the young men, which suggests that they have capabilities that could potentially help achieve a successful employment future. However, the young men’s inherited modes of being and socialisation processes (Pilcher and Whelenhan 2004) have largely created a career orientation that nullifies the usefulness of these qualities and the possibility of employment options other than those that have become customary to the young men.

Policy Approach

The previous section and those before have identified barriers that have the potential to be detrimental to Ladz’ ability to achieve a successful school-to-work transition and possibly hinder their chances of employment progress and stability. These barriers include a socialisation (Pilcher and Whelenhan 2004) process or “intergenerational transfers of knowledge” (Walker & Roberts 2018, p. 8), which establishes the Ladz’ career orientation, which in turn contributes to the young men’s pragmatic and selective approach to education, which causes the young men to partly oppose the teaching paradigm (Willis 1977) and brings them into opposition with the rules and social relations of the schooling system (Feinberg and Soltis 2009; Walker 1985). This making it virtually impossible for them to achieve the educational benchmark of five GCSEs at A-C (MacDonald and Marsh 2005), reducing the likelihood of them gaining entry into FE, and ultimately achieving their career expectation.

The cumulative effects of the class inequalities that shape the Ladz experiences of the school-to-work transition, place them in danger of becoming not in education, employment or training (NEET). However, recent UK Government policy discourse aims to prevent this and has centred on the notion of levelling up, which “means giving everyone the opportunity to flourish. It means people everywhere living longer and more fulfilling lives, and benefitting from sustained rises in living standards and well-being” (HM Government 2022, p. xii). The levelling up process focuses on deprived areas and includes raising educational attainment and providing young people with

the skills employers need. Similarly, the Wales Well-being of Future Generations Act aims to improve the "social, economic, environmental and cultural well-being of Wales" (Welsh Government 2021, p. 9). One of the goals of this Act is to create a: "society that enables people to fulfil their potential no matter what their background or circumstances (including their socio-economic background and circumstances)" (Welsh Government 2021, p. 7), which includes a focus on providing school leavers with skills and qualifications, young people developing the right skills and ensuring equal access to decent jobs (Welsh Government 2021).

Although both of these policy approaches centre around the social mobility agenda and reducing social disadvantage (Ingram and Gamsu 2022) and aim to enhance the school-to-work transition of marginalised young men, both strategies are relatively generic in their approach and ignore specificity, and the culturally and community founded education and employment perspectives identified in this study. Therefore, based on the data presented in this thesis, I propose the following policy interventions:

1. The Ladz have established a specific approach to education and employment that will be relatively difficult to change due to its primary socialisation origins (Pilcher and Whelenhan 2004). Therefore, we need to recognise their pragmatic approach to education and consider ways of enhancing and developing this approach. I suggest a collaborative educational strategy whereby these young men select their own subject engagement and construct a personal academic timetable whilst also manipulating this process through career advice around necessary academic credentials and predicted future of work changes. This approach would empower these young men, draw on their protest masculinity (Connell 1995) and harness the masculine traits of "autonomy, independence and control" (Messerschmidt 1993, p. 104) in an attempt to increase their level of educational engagement.

2. Early intervention is needed to increase employment aspiration among the Aber Valley young men. Working-class manual employment orientations are established through kin, community (Veness 1962) and primary socialisation (Pilcher and Whelenhan 2004), which in turn determines their pragmatic approach to education. Therefore, early rigid career dispositions need to be challenged, or 'disrupted' in order to broaden the young men's employment orientations and potentially increase academic engagement and outcomes. Subsequently, I suggest that a

programme be delivered whereby primary school children are given talks and introduced to male figures in employment other than manual labour as a means of demonstrating representation of alternative forms of employment for working-class men. This notion corresponds with Veness's (1962, p. 73) idea of other-directed, where a young person's career orientation is influenced by external sources of information and stimulated by "talks, conversations, pamphlets, broadcasts and so on". However, these male figures will equally need to be individuals the young men can identify with to make the career option realistic. Consequently, I propose a financially supported community delivered programme whereby men in the Valley or similar coalfield areas in employment other than manual labour are recruited to deliver discussions about their employment role and job satisfaction.

3. There is a recognised need for additional support for young men with education and learning difficulties. Subsequently, I propose a relatively radical, possibly divisive approach to these problems. Rather than merely focusing on the difficulties and negative aspects of learning disabilities, we should equally identify the strengths of these issues and try to foster them through tailored forms of academic engagement. For example, dyslexia is believed to enhance critical thinking and abstract thinking and dyslexics "think mainly in pictures instead of words" (Davis and Braun 2010, p. 5). These qualities need to be spoken about and activated. Subsequently, increasing the young men's abilities whilst also preventing the young men's sense of learning disability meaning-making that decreases their academic confidence and engagement. Similarly, there needs to be increased consideration and effort to integrate these young men into mainstream school and among pupils with differing qualities and aspirations, rather than within the alternative provision incubating echo chamber.

Limitations and Future Research

Although I feel that this study makes a valuable contribution to school-to-work transition studies and provides contemporary insight into marginalised working-class young men's understanding of employment, education and their masculine identity, there are some limitations to this doctoral study.

One of the study's main limitations includes the sample size and participant focus. Although this study specifically focused on marginalised young men and those bearing similar characteristics and views to the lads from Willis' (1977) study, a greater attempt to explore young men beyond these traits and those that are actively engaged in school and demonstrate a career orientation other than manual labour could have been attempted. However, akin to my lived understanding of the community, there were a limited amount of young men of this mindset within the youth centre, and the finite amount of time and resources which were severely lessened due to Covid-19 restrictions impeded my ability to build up a relationship and interview additional young men. Therefore, future research is needed to study young men with different educational and employment aspirations from the study sample of this research. This focus might help generate an understanding of how and why the intergenerational transmission process identified in this study is entirely destabilised and ruptured.

Similarly, the finite amount of time, resources and Covid-19 restricted my ability to conduct follow-up interviews that would have made a valuable contribution to this study. For example, why did only one of the young men mention university? Why do the young men mainly mention manual labour? Is it mostly socialisation, role models, and community traditions, or is this orientation evidence of broader systemic issues? Furthermore, the study findings somewhat evidence a change of position in the young men's masculine identity construction, and although I suggest that this is an amalgamated form of masculinities, I also recognised alternative possibilities and the inconclusiveness of this view. Subsequently, future research would do well to explore some of the above questions, particularly masculinity formation, as this undertaking may allow us to establish how and why the changes have occurred and possibly look to foster and enhance these in an attempt to increase the young men's life chances and employment opportunities. Due to the relative success of visual methods both in this study and Gater (2022), I suggest that this future masculinity related research incorporate pictures of various types of manhood. This process would include visual imagery of men in various occupations, different styles of dress, and gay and transgender men, which may provide us with greater insight into the young men's perceptions of 'manliness' and what it means to be a contemporary man in a coalfields community.

The final aspect of 'limitations' that I want to address is the generalisability of this study's findings. Although qualitative research is generally concerned with providing

an in-depth understanding of a specific phenomenon and thus generalisability is often regarded as a limitation or overlooked (Smith 2018), I tentatively suggest that although the findings of this study may not be entirely generalizable, they are possibly transferable. Furthermore, although transferability often relates to the reader making "judgments about the proximal similarity of study contexts and their own environments" (Polit and Beck 2010, p. 1453), I would argue that this study's thick description (Lincoln and Guba 1985), the study sample and sampling approach, and site of study, allow this research to potentially be transferred and replicated. For example, although the Aber Valley has distinct features, its coal mining foundations, deprived economic status, and low levels of educational attainment are shared with other coal mining communities (Beatty et al. 2019), especially in South Wales, UK. Furthermore, the purposive sampling technique that was used drew on the notions of protest masculinity (Connell 1995) associated with the lads (Willis 1977) and incorporated young men that were "relatively detached from the education system and the labour market, whose dress, behaviour and attitudes are apparently anti-social, ungovernable" (Delamont 2000, p. 106). Subsequently, these methodological approaches potentially facilitate the transferability of the findings through purposively identified commonalities (Kirner and Mills 2020).

Final Thoughts

This study contributes to the contemporary understanding of marginalised working-class young men's school-to-work transition and their formulation of masculinity in the context of societal and industrial change. My research in the Aber Valley illustrates a degree of compliance to certain traditional cultural values associated with working-class masculinity, including a general orientation to manual labour (Connell 1995), whilst also demonstrating something of a shift in young men's perception of the relevance of education and masculine identity. Unlike their laddish predecessors (1977), although the Ladz demonstrate a complex relationship with school, they are no longer anti-learning (Jackson 2006; Jackson 2010) and do not reject the relevance of academic credentials (Mac an Ghaill 1994). Instead they recognise their necessity in facilitating employment opportunities. However, for several of the young men, their schooling process is still bound up with the theme of 'Learning to Labour' – albeit skilled labour rather than non-skilled – which I argued resulted from intergenerational transmission (Walkerdine and Jiménez 2012; Invinson 2014a), and a relatively static

regional labour market and minimal regeneration within the Aber Valley. Nevertheless, although the young men share commonalities, there is some evidence of changes in employment orientation among some of the Ladz, which derived from destabilised and ruptured modes of being (Walkerdine and Jimenez 2012). Evidence of change is further pronounced in the young men's masculinities discourse and practises through softer displays (Anderson 2009) of masculinity, that somewhat contradict ideas of protest masculinity (Connell 1995). Although the strength and understanding of this change are relatively inconclusive, there is undoubtedly change among these young men. Therefore, rather than making marginalised working-class young men the scourge of society and labelling them as regressive (Roberts and Elliott 2020), I urge policymakers and academics to consider these changes beyond performative masculinities (Ward 2015) and "selective incorporation" (Pascoe 2014 p. 246), and recognise the possibility to harness and develop these changes to help increase working-class young men's life chances and deliver broader societal benefit.

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