Employability and Social Class in the Graduate Labour Market

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Abstract

Despite the growing literature on graduate employability, little is known about the impact that class background has on graduate labour market outcomes. Whilst it is often asserted that the graduate labour market operates as a meritocracy, research such as Brown and Hesketh (2004), the Milburn Commission (2009) and Ashley (2010) identified class barriers to employment in the graduate labour market. Such barriers undermine equality of opportunity and the 'opportunity bargain' struck between the state and its citizens. However, the paucity of relevant research means that what evidence exists is either largely anecdotal or deduced from statistical databases where data on class background is often poor. This study traces the early graduate labour market experiences of 103 graduates from different class backgrounds and from three universities of differing status. A key concern running throughout the thesis is how, and to what extent, class and educational background become significant to labour market outcomes.

The thesis finds that middle class graduates are generally more successful in the graduate labour market than their working class peers, even amongst graduates with similar credentials and from the same universities. Middle class graduates are more likely to find graduate-level employment and to be employed in professional or managerial occupations. Whilst academic barriers to the labour market affect all graduates equally, middle class graduates are able to augment their employability by drawing on economic, social and non-academic forms of cultural capital. However, the thesis also finds significant intra-class differences, in particular between middle class graduates disposed toward public sector occupations and those disposed toward private sector employment. It finds hope for social mobility in the experiences of certain successful working class graduates on elite educational trajectories but also finds reason to question the assumption that university attendance guarantees labour market success; most notably among working class graduates. This work increases our understanding of class in the graduate labour market and paves the way for further research.

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List of Abbreviations

AGR – Association of Graduate Recruiters

BERA – British Educational Research Association

BSA – British Sociological Association

CBI – Confederation of British Industry

CIHE – Council for Industry and HE

CSU – Careers Services Unit

DfE – Department for Education

DfEE – Department for Education and Employment

DfES – Department for Education and Skills

DIUS – Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills

ESRC – Economic and Social Research Council

HE – Higher Education

HECSU – Higher Education Careers Services Unit

HEFCE – Higher Education Funding Council for England

HEI – Higher Education Institution

HESA – Higher Education Statistics Agency

NAO – National Audit Office

NHS – National Health Service

NS-SEC – National Statistics Socio Economic Classification

OFFA – Office for Fair Access

ONS – Office for National Statistics

PGCE – Post Graduate Certificate in Education

SPSS – Statistical Package for the Social Sciences

UCAS – Universities and Colleges Admissions Service

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Chapter 1

Introduction: Employability and Class in the Graduate Labour Market

1.1 Introduction

At the start of the new millennium, the rise of the knowledge-based economy was heralded as an opportunity to usher in a golden era of social mobility, where brains not birth would determine our fate. Expanding access to universities had become a lynchpin of 'third way' politics; where "equality of opportunity" not "equality of outcome" was king. Never had so many young people been to university and never had the promise of meaningful, well-paid work seemed so tangible, so accessible. The global recession may have put paid to such optimism but the belief that improving access to university is the most important way of improving social mobility, of making society fairer if not more equal, continues to prevail.

In recent years, particularly since the recession, the political classes have begun to recognise that widening participation through expanded access to higher education may not have had the intended impact on social mobility (Milburn, 2009). Indeed, an increase in the supply of graduates and falling demand amongst graduate recruiters has heightened the sense of competition amongst all graduates. The proliferation of degree-holders had already accelerated a shift in graduate recruitment practices, such that graduates are increasingly assessed for social, cultural and interpersonal competencies and require an employability narrative in which to package themselves and their experiences (Brown and Hesketh, 2004), but it has been argued that these new terms of competition favour the incumbent middle classes, especially in professional occupations (Jacobs, 2003; Brown and Hesketh, 2004; Smart *et al*., 2009; Ashley, 2010). It is argued that graduates from working class backgrounds struggle to be competitive in relation to the most prestigious graduate labour markets, raising questions about the possibility of general advancement through education.

This thesis explores the role played by class in the experiences of final-year undergraduate students at three differently-ranked universities as they make the transition from university to the labour market. Specifically, it explores the ability of graduates from different class backgrounds to compete in the graduate labour market and considers how the university experience can have a transformative effect. Theoretically, it shares commonality with

positional conflict theory (Brown, 2000; 2003) and develops its analysis alongside the conceptual framework developed by Pierre Bourdieu (1977; 1984; 1990).

1.2 Policy Context

This thesis emerges in a political environment significantly changed to when it was first conceived. The global recession has cast doubt on the policy of expanding higher education: rising graduate unemployment and concerns about 'over-education' (Green and Zhu, 2008; Walker and Zhu, 2010), as well as the tripling of tuition fees has forced students to consider long and hard before choosing degree courses. However, 'widening access' and 'fair access' remain key strategic policies for improving social mobility (David Willetts, *Ron Dearing Lecture,* 2011), and yet little is understood about how universities 'transform' the lives of students or whether social background remains significant to the employability and labour market mobility of graduates.

In the 1960s there were only 200,000 students in university (Dearing, 1997) but today there are more than 2.6 million students in the UK's universities[1] (HESA, 2011). The most recent phase of expansion came under New Labour when they introduced a target for 50% of all young people going to university. This policy aim emerged from a belief that economic and technological changes witnessed at the end of the twentieth century heralded the rise of the knowledge-based economy (KBE), a belief formalised in the Leitch Review recommendations (Leitch, 2006). Although the explicit 50% target has been scrapped, an underlying commitment to mass higher education remains.

This expansion of higher education was partly legitimated by the commitment to making university access equitable. Through to the 1980s, university was seen to be the reserve of a youthful, bright, middle class, but this began to change as universities increased in size and number. Whereas higher education was once limited to an educational elite it expanded to include entrants from a wide range of social and educational backgrounds. However, the expansion in the 1980s and early 1990s largely benefited the middle classes, increasing the socio-economic gap in university participation (Greenbank and Hepworth, 2008). New Labour's 'widening participation' agenda sought to correct this disparity. Although overall participation rates subsequently increased amongst 'under-represented' groups, there has

[1] 2.1 million are from the UK

been a bifurcation in university participation, with more 'disadvantaged' students attending less prestigious universities and more 'advantaged' students attending more prestigious universities (Harris, 2010). For instance, one study found that just 100 secondary schools accounted for a sixth of all applicants to the thirteen most prestigious universities in the UK (Sutton Trust, 2008). This social stratification within universities has undermined attempts to improve social mobility.

The Fair Access agenda emerged out of a concern that working class students had been absorbed by the least prestigious universities and that this had consequences for their subsequent career success. The Sutton Trust had been an advocate of Fair Access since 1997 but it was not until the end of the New Labour era that attention really turned to the social distribution of the benefits of higher education, which culminated in the Milburn Commission Report (2009). The Fair Access agenda sought to improve the participation rates of less privileged groups at the most competitive, prestigious universities and whilst it had sporadic success, for instance the creation of the Office for Fair Access (OFFA) in 2004, expanding and widening access to higher education remained key policy objectives for higher education.

The prevailing belief was that social justice aims would be best served by tying working class groups into the knowledge-based economy and that widening participation would most efficiently allow government to serve this end. This stemmed from a belief that limited labour market opportunities and earnings potential were structural issues that could be dealt with by raising educational levels. It was argued that expanding the population of young, highly-educated workers would stimulate economic growth through the creation of new technologies and industries, just as the dotcom boom had done for the US, these new industries would lead to the creation of high-skilled, high-paid jobs. This win-win scenario was particularly appealing to governments seeking to reconcile divergent and sometimes opposing interests.

The global recession and the rising prominence of the BRIC nations (Brazil, Russia, India, China) have challenged assumptions about the possibility of a high-skill, high-wage economy and raised further questions about global graduate competition. Whilst it was once axiomatic to suggest that graduates were more employable than non-graduates, falling rates of returns to degrees (O'Leary & Sloane, 2005; Green & Zhu, 2008), increased graduate 'over-education' (Walker & Zhu, 2010) and the growing earnings gap between different degree holders (Chevalier & Conlon, 2002; 2003; O'Leary and Sloane, 2004) all raise questions about the

viability of mass higher education in its current form. However, the argument that access to higher education is an important route out of poverty, and a dynamic force for social mobility, still persists (Milburn, 2009). As such, questions over who benefits from higher education and the implications for social mobility are increasingly pertinent.

1.3 Changes in the Graduate Labour Market

Within this policy context we have seen some significant developments in the graduate labour market. Whilst the era of high-skilled, high-waged jobs hasn't materialised (Brown *et al*., 2006; Brown *et al*, 2011), there have been significant changes in the shape of the labour market, with increased demand for professional and managerial workers, albeit not at the same rate as the expanded supply of graduate-labour (Felstead *et al.*, 2002). Additionally, there have been changes in occupations that were previously open to school-leavers which are now graduate-entry only. In some occupations like nursing, this is a consequence of an increased level of technical skill; whilst in others it is a consequence of inflationary pressures – as the supply of graduates exceeds demand from traditional occupations forcing them to seek non-traditional opportunities – such as in recruitment. As a consequence, the graduate labour market is much changed from the 'traditional' professions that it once delimited.

Elias and Purcell (2004) re-drew the graduate labour market to include 'new' and 'niche' graduate occupations. These occupations include a wide variety of roles that are not strictly graduate-entry but for which a degree has become more important. These categories show how the boundary between the graduate and non-graduate labour market has become blurred and measures of 'graduate' employment have become increasingly ambiguous. Emerging evidence suggests that graduates of less prestigious and post-1992 universities are most likely to find work in 'new' and 'niche' graduate occupations, raising questions about the relationship between the higher education sector and the graduate labour market. Certainly, Milkround[2] employers have been found to focus recruitment efforts on the most prestigious universities (Hesketh, 2000), lending weight to the suggestion that the stratification of higher education is reflected in the labour market opportunities of graduates.

With the onset of the global recession and the subsequent withdrawal of public subsidies for higher education, the relationship between the higher education sector and the labour market

[2] Milkround employers are typically large, blue-chip organizations, part of the FTSE 100 or 250, whose annual graduate recruitment cycle begins early Autumn and often ends in Spring the following year.

has come under increasing scrutiny. There is evidence of an emergent trend towards employer-based degree schemes which incorporate professional work experience, professional qualifications and a degree: an AGR survey found that almost half of all leading graduate employers had, or were considering school-leaver programmes to partially replace their graduate intake (*'Top companies recruiting staff directly from school',* Telegraph, 2011). These seem to offer a third way alternative, allowing students to share the cost and risk of higher education with employers and reflect a broader array of degree formats that are now offered by British universities.

The relationship between higher education and the graduate labour market is thus much changed from its historical relationship. Whilst there are still strong links between certain universities and certain regions of the graduate labour market, such as the well-trodden paths between Oxbridge, the LSE and the City of London, or between red-brick universities and regional professions, the graduate labour market is increasingly diverse and includes an array of different occupations and pathways, markedly different to the past. It is in this policy and labour market context that this research is located.

1.4 Graduate Employability

In the past, most graduates would progress to professional and managerial jobs, and although this is still the case for many at elite universities, evidence suggests that a decreasing proportion of graduates enter traditional occupations, with more graduates entering paraprofessional, lower management/supervisory and auxiliary technical roles (Elias & Purcell, 2004). There is an emergent hierarchy within the graduate labour market, with very different salary structures, benefits and career opportunities, meaning that it is difficult to talk of a single, unified graduate labour market.

The expansion of the universities has intensified competition over scarce jobs; competition over Milkround jobs is particularly fierce (Brown & Hesketh, 2004). Estimates vary but one study suggested that there were eighty-three applicants for every graduate job with leading employers in 2011 compared to thirty-one in 2008 (*Graduate jobs 'rise despite record applicants per post'* BBC, June 2011). These firms are seen to offer the best long-term opportunities, a good starting salary and additional benefits. Academic requirements for

Milkround jobs are particularly high but given the number of suitable candidates, recruitment decisions often boil down to 'gut feel' or 'cultural fit'.

This phenomenon is not limited to Milkround employers as competition over niche, new and non-graduate jobs may be just as fierce. For example, competition for legal training contracts with regional law firms is especially strong meaning that even entry-level paralegal roles often require a law degree as a minimum.[3] As such, it is clear that the degree is not enough to secure graduate employment it needs to be accompanied by other 'hard' credentials such as work experience and the right 'soft' credentials. Even these are subject to inflationary pressures.

Brown and Hesketh (2004) argue that the expansion of higher education has extended the inflationary effects throughout the graduate population meaning that graduates who are able to access the right social networks, who embody the right forms of being and doing and who have access to economic resources required to invest time and effort in unpaid experiences, are best positioned to secure a competitive labour market advantage.

1.5 Research Problem

The belief that higher education offers opportunities to students is a central assumption underpinning policies to improve social mobility. It has often been assumed that the accumulation of human capital transgresses social differences. However, positional conflict theory argues that the ability to realise the labour market value of a degree may be problematic for graduates from working class backgrounds. Their middle class peers are able to deploy non-academic resources to secure a positional advantage, leading to a form of social closure, particularly in professional labour markets where working class graduates may be perceived as 'risky' hires (Brown & Hesketh, 2004; Ashley, 2010). To inform these class-based interpretations of graduate employability, this thesis draws upon empirical evidence to try and address number of different questions:

[3] In recognising this, the University of Sunderland now offers a Paralegal Diploma attached to its LLB.

Primary research questions

- How do the early labour market experiences of graduates from different class backgrounds differ and if so, why?
- How does class background become significant to graduate labour market outcomes?
- How does the type of university attended become significant to graduate labour market outcomes?

Secondary research questions

- How do the university experiences of students from different class backgrounds vary (i.e. extra-curricular participation, socialising, term-time and vac work etc.)?
- How does the type of university attended affect the student experience?
- How do students from different class backgrounds become oriented toward certain career options (i.e. influence of family, friends, educational experiences etc.)?
- How do students from different class backgrounds understand and manage their employability (i.e. employment strategies, work experience etc.)?
- What role do academic credentials play in graduate labour market outcomes?
- What role do other forms of capital play in graduate labour market outcomes (i.e. how do social networks and ways of being and doing become important etc.)?
- Within social class groups, what are the key variables shaping early labour market experiences?

The primary research questions outline the general focus of the thesis whilst the secondary research questions hone in on the specific aspects felt to be significant to graduate employability. The study is able to hold the effect of academic capital constant and therefore understand how employability may be more or less directly influenced by class of origin and by examining multiple universities the thesis is able to consider how university can have a transformative effect on graduate employability. In doing so, this thesis will be able to inform our theoretical understanding of graduate employability as it relates to class background.

1.6 Overview of Chapter Synopses

Chapter 2 provides a review of the existing theoretical debates and locates the thesis amidst the existing literature on social class and the graduate labour market. To begin with, it critically examines competing theories on employability. It considers and contrasts the

theoretical underpinnings, arguments and assumptions made by consensus and conflict theories of graduate employability. In doing so, it considers their conceptualisation of economic processes, the relationship between higher education and the graduate labour market, and their differential accounts of competition between social groups. The chapter then considers Bourdieu's theory of practice and how it may inform the analysis of social class in the graduate labour market, before finally locating the thesis amidst the social class literature and the existing empirical work on social class and the graduate labour market.

Chapter 3 discusses the methods and methodological approach of the research. It outlines the ontological and epistemological concerns of the thesis and how the thesis attempted to reconcile these through the chosen methodological approach. As such, it outlines the main research questions and the research design before evaluating the strengths and weaknesses of the chosen approaches. This includes an account of the research process, the semi-structured interview, the follow-up survey, and how the initial plan evolved through engagement with the research field. The chapter also discusses the analytical approach, the method for coding and analysis, and how they were part of a reflexive analytical approach. It also considers how access to the field was negotiated, ethical considerations and provides an overview of the final interviewee sample.

Chapters 4, 5, 6 and 7 present the analysis of the interviews and follow-up survey of four discrete analytical categories. Chapter 4 considers the university and graduate labour market experiences of graduates from middle class, primarily private sector backgrounds who find employment in the private sector. Chapter 5 examines the experiences of graduates from middle class, primarily public sector backgrounds, who find employment in the public sector. By comparing and contrasting these two groups, it is possible to demonstrate how the *composition* of capital, of traits, characteristics, dispositions and practices, inherited through the family, pre-dispose graduates more or less to certain professional careers. As such, it considers the *political* dimension of the graduate labour market and the similarities and differences across and within the middle class graduate population.

Chapter 6 considers the university and early graduate labour market experiences of graduates on elite educational trajectories[4] from working class backgrounds. This chapter focuses on a sub-group of working class graduates from an Elite University and a Russell Group University, who are on educational trajectories exceptional for their social and educational background. This group of graduates illustrate the importance of social and cultural attributes to social mobility and the role that can be played by the university to provide the social conditions necessary for social mobility in a classed society. As such, the chapter considers how the accumulation of social and cultural forms of capital underpins the social mobility of graduates, allowing them to realise the labour market value of their degrees in relation to prestigious professional and managerial graduate positions.

Chapter 7 considers the university and early graduate labour market experiences of graduates from working class backgrounds. It focuses on working class graduates of a Post-1992 University and Russell Group University who were on modal educational trajectories.[5] The chapter considers how these students encounter their class and educational background in relation to the graduate labour market. In particular, it considers how they fare vis-à-vis national and regional labour markets and examines the consequences of limited social and cultural capital.

Chapter 8 draws conclusions from the empirical evidence and considers the implications for existing theory and policy. It discusses the importance of non-academic forms of capital to labour market trajectories and graduate employability. It highlights the importance of social background, educational trajectory and the institution attended, and considers the implications for higher education policy and future research. It ends with a discussion of recent developments in higher education and the potential implications.

[4] Defined as students with AAB or higher at A-level. A further discussion of the definition can be found in the Methods chapter.
[5] Defined as students with ABB or lower at A-level. The rationale behind this definition can be found in the Methods chapter.

Chapter 2

Theories of Employability and a Review of the Literature on the Graduate Labour Market

2.1 Introduction

This chapter begins by locating the thesis amidst the policy background and the *consensus* theory that informs 'official' interpretation of the relationship between the economy, education and the graduate labour market. This is then contrasted with *conflict* theories of employability. It then considers how we might relate graduate employability to social class through the theoretical frameworks that these positions offer; particular attention is paid to Positional Conflict Theory and how Bourdieu's conceptual framework can help us understand the relationship between social class background and graduate employability. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the existing empirical evidence.

There are two broadly contrasting camps into which we can place theories concerning the relationship between education and the economy. Consensus theory has been described by Brown (2003) as the West's prevailing discourse concerning education and the economy. For its proponents, education is virtuously linked to economic success, meaning that graduate employability is tied into processes of globalisation, occupational up-skilling and the ability of nations to attract high-skill, high-wage jobs. By contrast, conflict theories highlight the limited supply of good, high-skilled, high-waged jobs. Graduate employability is perceived to be a zero-sum game and the graduate labour market a site for labour market conflict between graduates from different class fractions. Underpinning these approaches are very different social, political and theoretical traditions.

The unravelling of the post-War settlement in the latter decades of the twentieth century induced a paradigm shift in the way in which the economy and society were understood, leading to the revival of laissez-faire economic policies under Thatcher and Reagan in Britain and the US, respectively. The economic crises of the early 1970s had amplified the perceived failings of Keynesian economics and acted as a catalyst for the revival of neoclassical economics, under the leadership of the Chicago School. This new economic regime

championed the emancipatory power of free markets and believed that government-intervention hampered the efficiency of economic systems, advocating the broad withdrawal of government from daily life. However, discontent about growing economic inequalities in the 1990s created the political space for the rise of a more benign form of neo-liberalism.

In Britain, New Labour's 'Third Way' argued that the social aims of the post-War settlement – prosperity, security and opportunity – could be achieved, whilst maintaining national economic competiveness in a dynamic, globalising world economy. To do so, government would need to strike an 'opportunity bargain' with their citizens. Government would create the conditions for economic growth and provide educational opportunities for citizens, but it would no longer shelter companies from the competitive winds of globalisation. As part of this policy the British government would aggressively pursue an expanded system of higher education, to create a flexible, high-skilled workforce that could compete in the global knowledge economy. Social justice concerns were re-oriented around considerations over the 'equality of opportunity' so that talent and merit, not birth and class, would be rewarded and within this framework individuals would become responsible for their own employability. Under this *consensus* view, individual and national prosperity would be linked to the educational/skill level of the workforce (Leitch, 2006).

New Labour's pre-occupation with the 'skills agenda' (DTI, 1998; Leitch, 2006) was nothing new. It emerged out of a longstanding concern from business that education was not providing the skills required of a globally competitive workforce (Brown, 1994). However, under New Labour this agenda was pursued with a vigour and intensity that had not been seen before. Technological change and the advent of the internet had realised the possibility of a knowledge-based economy, rooted in high-skilled, high-wage work (Reich, 1991). The expansion of higher education, the notion of lifelong learning, investment in primary and secondary schools and the introduction of market signals in education were all part of a broad commitment to improve education and upgrade skills across the board, to prepare Britain for the economic demands of the twenty-first century and to ensure prosperity and opportunity for the next generation.

The knowledge based economy and human capital assumptions are not restricted to the British or the American context, though they are particularly pertinent in Anglo-Saxon

economies.[6] These ideas have become pervasive throughout the developed world, espoused by international think-tanks such as the OECD and increasingly adopted by emerging economies. However, the way in which economic competitiveness is understood is distinctly Anglo-American. For its proponents, skill acquisition, development and employability go hand-in-hand and no country can afford to be left behind. Thus, amongst developed nations we are told that there is an "educational arms race" (Barack Obama, October 2010) and to stay competitive nations need to invest in higher education. Moreover, we are led to believe that employability is a supply-side problem, one solved by greater commitment to education. However, whilst this view dominates the policy paradigm, a body of academic literature has emerged that presents a more critical account of the relationship between the economy, education and employability.

Conflict theories are critical of the claims made by the neoliberal consensus, in particular about globalisation and its ability to bring about a high-skill, high-wage economy. It offers a more conservative assessment of graduate employability, arguing that employability is a relative concept tied to labour market conditions, the supply of credentialised labour and deep-set socio-cultural differences, which transfigure economic and labour market inequalities into social inequalities. Whilst ostensibly similar, graduates are found to experience education and the labour market in markedly different ways, evident in the burgeoning variety of graduate destinations (Elias & Purcell, 2004) and in the bifurcation of graduate earnings (Walker & Zhu, 2010). Whereas social class is a redundant term for the consensus view, conflict theorists stress its tacit yet pervasive influence on employability.

The following sections consider the merits and limitations of the consensus and conflictual approaches to graduate employability, locate the thesis amidst the social class literature and reviews the existing empirical research on social class, the university experience and the graduate labour market.

2.2 Consensus Theory of Employability

The consensus view of employability is rooted in a particular world-view which resonates with many of the core tenets of neo-liberalism. Employability is understood to be a supply-side issue, and education a route to mobility and prosperity in the globalising world. For its

[6] By this I mean to suggest America, Australia, Britain, Canada and New Zealand

proponents, technological advancement has led to occupational 'up-skilling' (Bell, 1974), increasing productivity (Acemoglu, 2003) whilst making occupations much more 'footloose'. Thus, globalisation creates the possibility of a high-skill, high-wage economy, at least for those nations willing and able to invest in the skills and education of their workforce and so we are encouraged to invest in our human capital (Becker, 1964; Palacios, 2011) and are told that 'learning is earning'. The political consensus that coalesces around these ideas may have been cast adrift by the global recession but given the lack of alternative policy prescriptions, these ideas remain central to the economic and educational policies of western governments:

> "In a global economy where the most valuable skill you can sell is your knowledge, a good education is no longer just a pathway to opportunity, it is a pre-requisite." (Barack Obama, February 24th 2009)

This belief-system lies in an understanding of how globalisation has simultaneously increased the risks and rewards of failure or success in the global economy. Technological change and falling political barriers to capital has seen an acceleration of globalisation in the last twenty years. Transnational corporations (TNCs) seeking out a cost-based advantage vis-à-vis market competitors have off-shored and outsourced labour-intensive operations, just as new competitors have sprung up in emerging economies, leading to an international division of labour, as labour intensive processes have moved to low-cost countries, leading Rosecrance to announce the emergence of 'head' and 'body' nations (Rosecrance, 1999). For Rosecrance countries such as Mexico, China, India and Indonesia, are 'body' nations, carrying out the menial, repetitive tasks of manufacturing and low-skilled services, whilst countries such as the USA, Britain, Germany and Japan are 'head' nations, carrying out high-level, high-skilled tasks and functions necessary for servicing and managing a global economy. Under these global economic conditions it is argued, a comparative economic advantage is rooted in human capital investments made in the workforce, hence the rise of post-industrial, 'knowledge-based economies' (Bell 1976; Drucker, 1993; Stewart & Ruckdeschel, 1998).

For some theorists the shift from low-skilled manufacturing to high-value added service and quaternary industries in the developed world led to the 'up-skilling' of the workforce (Bell, 1974). Whilst some young people may have once walked from school into relatively well-paid unskilled, manual jobs in the industrial regions, such jobs no longer really exist today. Extended periods of education and training are increasingly required to carry out the tasks

demanded by the economy as it is believed that technology has increased the need for extensive periods of formal training – as more occupations become technical, scientific or professional, and as unskilled or semi-skilled work declines with time (Clark, 1962). Governments are thus encouraged to adopt a long-term 'skills agenda' (Leitch, 2006) so as to achieve the skill and educational levels necessary for a comparative advantage amongst other developed economies (Keep & Mayhew, 2001). A chief concern is the need to raise the proportion of the workforce educated to degree level, and so proponents of the consensus view advocate the expansion of higher education.

Given the dynamism of the global economy, skill-sets may quickly become outdated and so it is argued that there is a need to maintain education and training throughout the life course: hence, the rise of lifelong learning (Capeli, 1999). The need for a flexible, creative workforce means that governments are reluctant to choose 'winners', which is why the British government allowed student demand to dictate the market in higher education. Imperfect competition, imperfect communication of market positions and weak market signals mean that this approach was fundamentally flawed. However, for government, over-education is possibly a least worst option, given the hangover from nationalisation and the weakening of international competitiveness in the 1970s. The winning argument is that education, and the ability to acquire skills and knowledge, is increasingly important, especially now given the increasing insecurity in the global economy.

For some, the post-industrial society is marked by an increase in insecurity and risk that has been democratised, as even white-collar occupations become vulnerable to off-shoring (Bauman, 1991; Beck, 1999; Brown & Hesketh, 2004; Giddens *et al* 2006). This has led to the 'end' of the career for life and to the rise of the 'boundaryless career' (Arthur, 1994). This is a significant change as it reflects a shift in the burden of responsibility for employability away from the employer, or the state, onto the individual. It is argued that this shift is offset by an increase in the relative value of human capital, which has led to a power shift in labour-capital relations.

Rather than machines, it is argued that the means of production in the knowledge-based economy are intellectual ones, embodied in the skills, experiences and knowledge of the workforce. This shifts power from employers to employees and breaks the monopoly position held by large companies. Individuals are able to manipulate their skills and abilities to extract

a greater dividend on their educational investments, characterised most strongly amongst the 'highly talented' where competition for their services leads to a 'war for talent' (Michaels et al., 2001). If human capital is the new asset class of the twenty-first century (Palacios, 2011) then all of us have become entrepreneurs. Under this conception of human capital, income inequalities, within and between countries, are no longer problematic because they are a legitimate product of the meritocratic operation of the market.

For the proponents of the consensus view, globalisation undermines national class differences by advancing the logic of the market to labour market competition. It is argued that as a comparative advantage is increasingly rooted in the skills, competencies and talent of the workforce, it makes little economic sense to base recruitment decisions on ascribed social characteristics. For advocates of the consensus view, economic efficiency and social justice go hand in hand with the knowledge-based economy, along what Parsons (1959) called the 'axis of achievement'. It is argued that the requirement for a comparative economic advantage provides opportunities and enhances social mobility for the most able, irrespective of class background, gender, ethnicity etc. Thus, by providing an 'equality of opportunity' in education, governments can ensure that individual rewards are commensurate to their effort and abilities.

In summary, by pursuing a skills and knowledge-based agenda, governments believe they are able to reconcile the need for economic prosperity with social justice concerns whilst also insuring against the inherent insecurity of a globalised economy. The knowledge-based economy thus offers both threats and opportunities to individuals, companies and nations and for adherents of the neoliberal consensus, the best way to deal with this threat and insecurity is to invest in education and skills – human capital.

2.2.1 Human capital

> "For our students there are on average good rates of return to HE qualifications, which have held up despite large increases in participation: over a £100,000 net of tax over a working life relative to a non-graduate. This suggests employers continue to see additional value in graduate skills, knowledge and capability." (Vince Cable, 2010)

It is argued that if we are to gain a comparative advantage in the world economy, to attract high-paid, high-skilled work; to develop a 'magnet economy' (Brown and Lauder, 2006) then we need to invest in human capital, in skills and education. The notion of human capital first emerged post-World War II when it was suggested that investments in health, training and education could explain levels of economic growth that investment in physical capital could not (Becker, 1964). It was argued that extended periods of time spent in education might increase national economic growth, for instance Denison (1962) suggested that an extra year's compulsory schooling would increase economic growth by 0.7%, and it was also suggested that education had an associated wage premium; Becker (1973) pointed to research which showed that US college graduates received an 11 to 13 percent wage premium.

Human capital theory inspired a sub-field of economics concerned with the rates of return to education utilised by proponents of the consensus theory. The graduate premium is an effective political device used by successive governments to make the case for higher education. For instance, under the first New Labour administration, the DfES quoted a lifetime earnings premium of £400,000 for a graduate compared to a student with only GCSE qualifications. In 2006, a government-sponsored report found that the average graduate premium was £160,000 (PWC, 2006) and more recently the coalition government has quoted a headline figure of £100,000 for the average graduate premium (net of tax) (Vince Cable, 2010). As such, it has become difficult to separate the political argument for expanding higher education from the economic one.

Human capital theory is heavily influenced by the neoclassical economic conception of human behaviour which believes that human behaviour is driven by the compulsion to maximise individual benefits. Actions and decisions are believed to be based on economically rational decision-making that utilises market information to make a balanced and informed assessment of probable outcomes. Applied to education decisions, this view argues that students are like *entrepreneurs*; they seek to increase the economic value of their skills and work output and maximise the value of their initial investment. Given the right market conditions, students will seek maximum utility and adjust their decision-making accordingly. This view underpins the decision taken by the coalition government to withdraw much of the public subsidy for higher education and by its decision to force universities to publish information concerning the nature of the student experience and the labour market

experiences of their graduates. Advocates of this view tacitly advance the economisation of everyday life, practically realising a theoretical and ideological view of human behaviour. This basic conception has come to dominate the government's attitude to higher education:

> It is not the role of government to be prescriptive about who studies what…Subject choice is influenced more effectively by equipping students to judge better the routes they take. One of the biggest policy challenges for the HE system is information: making sure that students have easily accessible and intelligible data on the performance of the different university departments. (Vince Cable, *A New Era for universities,* 15th July 2010)

This view is ideologically loaded but is nothing new (Brown & Scase, 1994). The coalition government's higher education policy is not markedly different from that of New Labour, or indeed that of the prior Conservative governments. There has been a steady application of free market principles in education for many years (ibid., 1994). Within this context, universities are increasingly defined in relation to how they enhance the interests of the individual and how they contribute to national economic prosperity, which for individuals comes back to how a university education makes one more employable. Higher education is increasingly seen in terms of how it might enhance the skill-set, knowledge and capabilities valued by graduate employers rather than for any intrinsic value (Boden & Nedeva, 2010).

The human capital argument has also influenced how social inequality has been conceived. The consensus view tends to posit inequality partly as a consequence of educational inequalities and low aspiration. In Britain, this has led to the creation of publicly-funded organisations and educational initiatives such as Teach First, AimHigher and Every Child Matters which seek to advance quality education and opportunities to all, with parallel policies in the US. However, this extension of the equality of opportunity tends to reinforce the view that talent and ability are natural, rather than a consequence of social conditioning. As such, policies that seek to address inequality of opportunity may tacitly legitimise social inequality.

The major criticism of the consensus view is that offers up an overly simplistic understanding of human capital, in particular its relation to employability and earnings. As Brown *et al* (2011) rightly point out, median earnings have stagnated in the US and the UK since the

1970s, thus whilst graduates may still be earning more than non-graduates, an increasing proportion of graduates are experiencing under-employment and lower earnings (Walker & Zhu, 2010), just as others have seen their pay rise at an extraordinary rate. Moreover, it is entirely possible that the expansion of higher education has over-selected those who would otherwise have accessed higher-paid non-graduate jobs. Coupled with the extension of graduate requirements to previously non-graduate occupations, it might be that the graduate earnings premium is being maintained by downgrading average salaries in non-graduate occupations. The consensus view does not sufficiently capture the complexity of the relations between education, employability and earnings.

2.2.2 Notion of Employability

For the consensus view, employability is a function of one's educational level and skill-set, which are matched to different sectors of the economy. It is followed by an assumption that the more educated the workforce the greater the proportion of high-skilled jobs the economy will be able to create. Thus, employability is first and foremost a supply-side issue. It is useful to consider the consensus view in relation to Hillage and Pollard's commonly accepted definition of employability:

> "[Employability is the] capability to move self-sufficiently within the labour market to realise potential…employability depends on the knowledge, skills and attitudes they possess, the way in which they use these assets and present them to employers and the context (e.g. personal circumstances and labour market environment) within which they seek work." (Hillage & Pollard, 1998: 1)

For Hillage and Pollard (1998), investments in human capital (skills and knowledge) are directly proportional to employability. Whilst they recognise other determinants of employability (personal circumstances and labour market environment) these are secondary to educational level. Their recognition that employability is a function of how assets are used and presented reflects some of the concerns of the conflict account but as Brown et al have argued, this definition remains "ideologically loaded" (Brown *et al.,* 2003), and leaves a number of important questions unanswered. For instance, what knowledge, skills and attitudes are valued? How are they to be defined? What *type* of education best serves these needs? For proponents of the consensus view these questions are somewhat irrelevant: the

invisible hand of the market will resolve any inherent contradictions and so the government ought to retreat, creating the conditions for the most efficient operation of the market, allowing individuals to make their own decisions. In any case, it is argued, educational investments are never wasted because they develop skill and knowledge-acquisition competencies highly prized by the dynamic global economy.

Under the consensus view of the graduate labour market, competition is meritocratic, based primarily on differences in talent and education. We find some resonance here with signalling and screening theories. For Spence (1974), signalling theory works on the premise that educational qualifications are a reflection of the quality and disposition of an individual (Spence, 1974), whilst screening theories work on the premise that credentials are a useful proxy for productivity (Bills, 2003). For both these theories, the level and type of credentials held take precedence over subjective differences between credentials holders. Under this conception of labour market competition labour market inequalities are directly correlated to educational levels. However, these ideas are premised upon the effective sorting and selection of students by the education system, processes which are not based on the same criteria as those determining productivity or labour market suitability.

The consensus view of employability focuses on the *absolute* dimension of employability and side-lines concerns about market conditions or about differences between credential holders. The consensus approach to employability is underscored by market optimism, whilst the realities of global competition and changing labour markets are simplified. The recession has raised important questions about assumptions implicit to this approach and made stark some of its inherent beliefs but given a lack of credible alternatives it is questionable whether government policy will shift dramatically. The coalition government has so far been keen to further the market reforms begun under the previous Labour government.

A number of questions are being asked of the knowledge-based economy, in particular its ability to deliver a high-waged, high-skilled labour market, in light of global competition from graduates in rapidly developing countries (Brown *et al* 2011). These questions underscore concerns about the nature of human capital, and the limits of its emancipatory properties, especially in stratified societies such as the UK (Brown & Hesketh, 2004; Milburn, 2009). This has consequences for how we understand the nature of competition in the graduate labour market, especially when higher education has expanded much faster than

the number of graduate positions on offer (Felstead *et al*., 2002; Brynin, 2002). There is certainly growing evidence of labour market congestion and falling returns to education (Wolf, 2002; Walker & Zhu, 2010).

Combined, this body of evidence begins to raise serious questions about the interaction between education, employability and the economy, questions that cannot be adequately answered by the consensus approach. It increasingly appears that the consensus view is based on an incomplete and one-dimensional understanding of the evidence base. A more critical understanding can be garnered from the academic literature, which lends a more complex understanding developed through multi-faceted lens.

2.3 Conflict Theories of Employability

Policy-makers have a tendency to overstate and simplify political arguments, ignoring many of the social and geographical complexities. As Dollery & Wallis (1999: 5) observe, "policy advisors differentiate policy paradigms from theoretical paradigms by screening out ambiguities and blurring the fine distinctions typical of theoretical paradigms". The neoliberal consensus approach offers a partial reading of the academic literature but critical engagement is necessary if we are to understand the realities of the graduate labour market and its implications for social mobility. Conflict theories draw on a multi-disciplinary literature and question many of the core assumptions of the consensus view.

An analysis of the literature reveals a number of concerns regarding the consensus theory. Empirical evidence suggests increasing levels of over-education (Chevalier & Conlon, 2002; Green & Zhu, 2008), a weakening of the educational premium (Wolf, 2002; Walker & Zhu, 2010) and increased skill polarisation within the labour force (Gallie, 1991; Goos *et al*., 2009; 2010; Autor & Dorn, 2011). Taken together this body of evidence suggests that the high-skilled, high-waged economy envisaged by government has not materialised and is unlikely to do so. Furthermore, empirical evidence questions the meritocratic assumptions of consensus theory, with significant observed variations in graduate earnings and graduate labour market outcomes according to socially-determined attributes (Chevalier & Conlon, 2002; 2003; Brown & Hesketh, 2004; Smetherham, 2005; Ashley, 2010).

Brown *et al* (2011) call into question the view that technological change will bring about a knowledge-based economy and usher in an era of high-skilled, high-waged jobs. They show that whilst high-skilled, high-waged jobs have been created, they remain relatively few in number and restricted to a social elite. What is more, they argue, educated labour is now subject to the same competitive processes as those that affected labour intensive manufacturing in the 1980s. They highlight the expansion of higher education systems and the spread of 'best practice' to emerging economies which allow them to compete on quality as well as cost, and they point to the modularisation of knowledge work which is allowing it to be simplified, de-skilled and off-shored. These processes undermine the assumptions of the knowledge-based economy and raise important questions about the legitimacy of the consensus paradigm.

This section will consider the theories and explanations presented by the academic literature. It will consider the theoretical frameworks concerning labour market competition and employability and consider their epistemological and ontological basis. It will then re-situate this thesis in relation to the theory.

2.3.1 Nature of labour market competition

Unlike the consensus theory, conflict theories argue that the competition over 'good jobs' is a source of conflict in the labour market and central to the reproduction of class inequalities. For social closure theorists, access to credentials is the most important aspect of labour market competition (Hirsch, 1977) and the labour market is principally segmented by differences in educational level and type. Positional conflict theory, however, recognises that the value of a credential is linked to its scarcity value and that other resources may act as forms of capital especially if credentials become ubiquitous. Both theories recognise the dual dimension of employability.

Employability has both an absolute and a relative dimension to it. The *absolute* dimension of employability recognises that the capabilities of an individual determine whether or not they can actually carry out the demands of a given role and whether they can do so competently. However, whilst graduates might be competent in many different types of jobs and roles they may not appear to be competitive in the labour market because of their *relative* employability. The relative dimension recognises that good jobs may be scarce in relation to those able to do the job. In such an instance employability becomes a product of how one is positioned relative to other applicants and labour market competition becomes a zero sum game. Employability is thus partly a reflection of how one is equipped to meet the needs of employers and partly how one is positioned within the labour market. This contrasts with consensus theory which assumes that the labour market expands and creates new opportunities to absorb high-skilled labour.

Conflict theories begin with the premise that credentials are a claim to competence and knowledge, and a stake in the competition over jobs. As such, the education system becomes an important tool in legitimating class competition, allowing dominant groups to call upon their resources to increase the chances of success whilst allowing dominated groups the

opportunity to compete, even if success is far from guaranteed. For social closure theorists, credentials are the single most important source of distinction in modern labour markets as they allow powerful social groups to monopolise access to professional circles and legitimately exclude individuals from other classes.

2.3.2 Social Closure Theory

Conflict theorists have traditionally focused on how competition in the labour market leads to the reproduction of social inequalities. Inspired by Weber's writings on social closure (1968), neo-Weberian scholars such as Collins (1979), Parkin (1979) and Murphy (1984) have argued that social groups '[mobilise] power in order to enhance or defend a share of rewards or resources' (Murphy, 1984: 548). They argue that 'status groups' seek to monopolise access to credentials, which have become a pre-requisite for entry into the professions, and that 'status groups' attempt to structure entry requirements to reflect their own characteristics (Collins, 1979). They suggest that the demand for 'certified labour' reflects the 'exclusionary' tactics of status groups, who seek to impose their own definition of competence, so as to restrict entrants and maintain the status of the profession (Collins, 1979). Similarly, Bourdieu asserted that:

> "A number of official criteria in fact serve as a mask for hidden criteria: for example, the requiring of a given diploma can be a way of demanding a particular social origin which, though absent from the official job description, function as tacit requirements." (Bourdieu, 1984: 102-103)

For social closure theorists, credentials are a way of realising market power whilst concealing the social basis upon which social inequalities are (re)produced. However, given the difficulty that dominant social groups have in monopolising access to credentials, the reproduction of social origin is not clear-cut. Dominated social groups are able to counter 'exclusionary' tactics through education, what Parkin (1979) calls 'usurpationary closure'. One of the strengths of this argument is that it moves us away from simple theories of social reproduction, and considers how less powerful groups are able to compete with more powerful groups, reminiscent of Gramsci's 'war of manoeuvre' (Gramsci, 2003). Thus, for social closure theorists, the expansion of higher education is not simply a response to increased demand for higher-skilled labour, as consensus theory assumes, it reflects attempts

by the middle classes (and other groups) to defend, if not improve, their own share of rewards and resources (Parkin, 1979).

For social closure theorists, jobs are scarce, positional goods that cannot be easily expanded. If credentials mediate access to these scarce opportunities then social groups will deploy resources to gain access to the credentials necessary to maintain their own social position. Brown and Scase (1994) point to the introduction of markets to the education system as evidence of the pressure the middle classes have applied to government to allow them to deploy their market power, and in the last fifteen years we have seen an increased concentration of students from the wealthiest backgrounds in elite universities (Harris, 2010). For social closure theorists, degrees from prestigious universities are positional goods, allowing holders to resist the inflationary pressure placed on credentials.

Credential inflation, what Dore called the 'diploma disease' (1976), is the process whereby increasing educational levels undermine the labour market value of credentials. It is argued that the possibility of general advancement through education is an illusion precisely because there are a limited number of good jobs in the labour market and so educational expansion has the consequence of devaluing the labour market worth of qualifications. Thus, we might find that whereas A-levels were once required to access certain occupations in a previous state of the system, a degree may now be required for the same job. Thus, for social closure theorists, educational expansion leads to inefficient labour market competition as more and more people become 'over-educated' for the jobs that they do.

One of the criticisms levelled at social closure theory is that certain occupations have been up-skilled, reflecting technological and social changes in the nature of an occupation (Warhurst & Nickson, 2001; Warhurst & Thompson, 2006). This conflicts with the view that certain licensed professions demand higher credentials simply as a means of maintaining their status (Muysekn & Zwich, 2003). It is likely that both of these trends exist within the labour market, depending upon the occupations that one examines.

Social closure theory moves us beyond some of the limitations of consensus theory. It advances a more critical perspective on labour market competition and for our purposes it contributes to our understanding of how graduates are engaged in competition with one another. However, there are a number of issues and limitations of social closure theory.

Whilst it suggests that competition is a zero-sum game, it fails to move us beyond labour market competition as it is rooted in credentials and fails to appreciate the significant changes that have occurred in the occupational structure. The focus on credential inflation is too simplistic and comes at the expense of a more rounded understanding of employability. It doesn't consider how employability is *socially constructed* by individuals who are socially situated and so fails to appreciate how individuals become oriented to the labour market. Moreover, it doesn't advance a more sophisticated framework for understanding how recruitment and selection in the labour market operates. Looking to address these issues, Brown (2000) advanced the idea of 'positional conflict theory'.

2.3.3 Positional Conflict Theory

> "Positional Conflict Theory represents an attempt to extend the focus on the monopolistic 'rigging' powers of social elites to include an understanding of how individuals and social groups mobilise their cultural, economic, political or social assets in positional power struggles" (Brown, 2000: 638)

Positional conflict theory starts from the premise that employability is not solely about education and that similarly educated individuals are able to draw on other forms of capital to compete for graduate jobs. Stimulated both by graduates who seek a competitive advantage and graduate recruiters who seek to identify potential and to legitimate recruitment decisions, this expansion of assessment criteria further complicates our understanding of labour market competition between graduates. Employers look beyond the credential, considering work histories, extra-curricular experiences, soft skills, social competencies, and cultural fit, amongst others. Whilst such factors may have been less significant when good jobs were plentiful, under a system of mass higher education graduates are increasingly asked to call upon other assets, experiences and resources in an attempt to secure a competitive labour market advantage.

Brown (2003) identifies a distinction between the 'ranking' and 'rigging' strategies of social groups seeking to secure a competitive advantage in the graduate labour market. Ranking refers to the ability of individuals to mobilise social, cultural and economic assets to secure a labour market advantage within the existing competitive framework of the labour market.

Rigging refers to the ability of social groups to influence competition rules, and so 'rig the game' to favour people like themselves, for example, by determining the validity of certain extra-curricular experiences. By pursuing ranking and rigging strategies, Brown (2003) argues, dominant social groups are able to secure labour market advantages.

In terms of ranking, Brown and Hesketh (2004) suggest that dominant social groups are able to invest their social, economic and cultural assets to secure access to experiences valued by graduate recruiters. For instance, they point to the range of extra-curricular activities and internships (many secured through social networks) that middle class graduates are able to call upon in the competition for graduate jobs, allowing them to distinguish themselves from graduates from lower middle class or working class backgrounds. They also argue that the middle classes are able to benefit from their social and cultural seigniorage.

Rigging might not be the explicit strategy that ranking is, as the graduate labour market is organised such that it recognises those characteristics which certain groups take as self-evident proof of competence. The lifestyle and dispositions of the middle classes constitute capital in the graduate labour market because they are attuned to the ways of being and doing of the professional groups to which they aspire. However, groups may also actively seek to rig the game by asserting such self-evident truths of one's suitability, for instance, by calling upon social networks to access valuable forms of work experience so as to plainly demonstrate one's social and cultural accession to the professional group.

Brown (2003) puts forth evidence that suggests diversity policies conceal the social basis upon which graduate employers recruit. 'Milkround' employers have been found to favour the female or ethnic minority version of the middle class, privately-educated male that they have traditionally employed (Brown & Hesketh, 2004; Ashley, 2010). Thus, by recruiting in their own image, or by recruiting for a cultural fit, graduate recruiters may be tacitly rigging the competition in favour of 'people like them', drawn from similar regions of social space. Brown and Hesketh (2004) argue that the search for social and cultural competence is a thin veil for legitimising the selection of graduates from middle class backgrounds and Ashley (2010) finds similar resonance with Legal firms who state a need for 'client ready', 'polished' graduates.

For positional conflict theory ranking and rigging are not mutually exclusive strategies; they are two sides of the same coin, and at the heart of it is the individual. Ultimately employability is negotiated, *felt* interpersonally; it is not enough to have the expected credentials and experiences, employability has to be projected, which relies on a certain homology between the manner and bearing of an individual and the categories of perception being applied. Thus, Brown *et al* (2003) talk about 'personal capital': the ability of an individual to translate "soft" and "hard" currencies, such as cultural attributes and credentials, into symbolically efficacious forms through what Brown and Hesketh (2004) call the employability narrative. In this sense, employability becomes subjective because the categories of perception that recruiters apply to individual candidates are themselves subjective: the same candidate might receive different valuations in relation to different employers.

This theory makes a significant contribution to the graduate employability debate. For positional conflict theory, credentials act as proxy measures of employability because credentials become associated (through reputational capital) with the type of graduate emerging from a particular course or institution, which are typically associated with particular social fractions and may correlate with certain social or cultural characteristics. However, to assess employability on the basis of the credential is to misconstrue the full range of factors constitutive of employability. In a previous state, credentials may have been useful proxies because the system of elite higher education was also socially and culturally selecting; a relationship weakened by the expansion of higher education. Thus, similar degree holders may now differ markedly in terms of bodily hexis, dispositions and attitudes, and so the shift toward the interpersonal assessment of employability reflects the need to identify a certain type of graduate.

The expansion of higher education means there are now constituencies of graduates that do not correlate to the expected models of interpersonal competence; graduates who are not from middle class backgrounds and do not share an elite educational trajectory This may explain the frustration amongst graduate employers who complain about the 'employability' of graduates. It is probably no coincidence that post-1992 universities are most likely to embrace the 'employability agenda' (Boden & Nedeva, 2010) whilst drawing more of their students from non-traditional backgrounds. Thus, it is unhelpful to compare universities that are radically different in terms of their social intake on the basis of universal measures that do

not take into account the social, cultural and economic resources that students bring with them into university and which may ultimately be responsible for their employability.

Policymakers (and educationalists alike) have assumed that universities provide opportunities, without actually understanding how and in what ways a degree level education makes one employable, in practice.[7] This is a challenge faced by both universities and policymakers. If we are to adequately grasp employability as a policy issue we need to move beyond a narrow conceptualisation of employability. Positional conflict theory is helpful in this task as it provides us with an analytical framework that more closely resembles the world as shown by the empirical evidence (Milburn, 2009). It moves us beyond the simplistic analyses of the consensus and social closure theories, and considers how graduates manage their employability within the structural constraints imposed by their social and educational positioning. However, positional conflict theory does have a number of blind spots upon which this thesis seeks to build, both empirically and theoretically.

Much of the work undertaken by advocates of positional conflict theory, such as Brown (2000), has focused on the experiences of middle class graduates, often in relation to prestigious labour markets. However, by focusing on the different forms of capital deployed by middle class graduates in the competition over prestigious graduate jobs, positional conflict theory has tacitly posited the field within its analyses and not taken the field as an object of study. If we are to appreciate how graduates from different class backgrounds are positioned in relation to the graduate labour market, and how the field determines the attributes recognised, then we need to broaden the empirical range of work.

There is a need to understand how graduates from different class backgrounds experience themselves vis-à-vis the graduate labour market, how the experience of university becomes consequential for graduates and how the labour market is configured to recognise the attributes of graduates from different class backgrounds. To do this requires us to compare the experiences of graduates from different class backgrounds, whilst holding educational

[7] Take the social sciences as an example: an undergraduate degree provides few opportunities for interpersonal realisation; contact hours are low, class sizes often large, there are few formative assessments, work experience programmes tend to be non-existent, and so if a student doesn't engage with extra-curricular activities outside of the classroom it is difficult to see how they can develop the skills, competencies and attributes necessary to be 'employable'. Employability may prove to be incidental to the degree: part-time, paid-work or volunteering often leads to employment for graduates because they have built up a body of knowledge, experience and competence in a certain role: the opportunities to advance in social science are few, often colonized by graduates from elite universities, and so unlike medicine, doesn't provide a career pathway for the majority of its graduates.

levels constant. By doing so, it will be possible to understand the extent to which the graduate labour market is aligned to certain graduate constituencies and the consequences of this for social mobility.

2.4 Bourdieu: a theory of practice in the graduate labour market

Bourdieu's theory offers us a way of organising an investigative analytical framework, through which we can return the notion of social class to the employability debate without taking it as a principle construct. That is, it allows us to think *with* the notion of class, to consider the relation between class as an analytical concept and as a descriptive one, and how class might be inter-related with the concept of graduate employability. The notions of habitus, field, practice, doxa and capital, allow the thesis to locate the experiences of individuals vis-à-vis one another and to consider the nature of social class, as it is lived, experienced and realised, interpersonally, within the university and in the graduate labour market. By doing so, it allows the thesis to re-connect the concept of social class to the notion of graduate employability. This section provides an overview of Bourdieu's theoretical framework and how it is useful to the objectives of this thesis.

2.4.1 Habitus and practice

In attempting to break with the subjectivist tendencies of social economism and the objectivist tendencies of Marxist sociology, Bourdieu posits a theory that seeks to reconcile simultaneous tensions through dialectical relationships. At the root of this theory is the notion of habitus. Habitus has been described as the 'conceptual lynchpin' linking the notions of field and capital to a theory of practice (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992: 120). It is one of Bourdieu's most well-known, and widely used concepts, and as it lies at the centre of his attempt to overcome the post-Cartesian antimonies of subjectivism and objectivism, structuralism and constructionism, it is one of his most important theoretical contributions.

Akin to Giddens' notion of structuration, Bourdieu's notion of habitus enables him to theoretically resolve the dichotomy between structure and agency. Bourdieu defines habitus as the systems of "durable, transposable dispositions, structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures" (Bourdieu, 1977: 72). That is, habitus describes the dialectical relationship between agents and the world: agents enter into the world amidst conditioning conditions which lead to the internalisation of mental and bodily schemata and

insofar as agents experience similar conditioning conditions, agents are likely to collude, practically, pre-reflexively to harmonise their dispositions and practices: "each agent [finds] in the conduct of all his peers the ratification of and legitimation ("the done thing") of his own conduct, which, in return, ratifies and, if need be, rectifies, the conduct of others" (Bourdieu, 2000: 145). These common practices and dispositions produce discernible lifestyles, practices and dispositions, rooted in a particular relation to being. In economically divided societies the habitus underpins the creation of class lifestyles, which become significant to individuals by the way in which practices and dispositions become associated with a particular relation to being and by the way in which social perception influences how individuals are perceived throughout social space. It is in the interpersonal, in the everyday lived experiences of agents that habitus emerges, made significant, constantly reified, challenged and evolved in relation to the practical experience of the world, as habitus and the social world become entwined, grafting each to one another.

Through the numerous, minute, unremarkable exchanges that take place between an individual and the world, individuals come to inhabit the world as it simultaneously shapes them, and this dialectical relationship between the individual and the world forms the basis of habitus. The early experiences of childhood are fundamental, formative years, in which durable dispositions are first inculcated. During this early period of learning, through language acquisition and socialisation, individuals develop their social and linguistic competencies. They develop ways of being and doing, tacit mental and bodily schemas of conception, perception and action; ways of thinking, appropriating and conceptualising the world; ways of acting, of performing, of using one's body and linguistic capabilities to assert oneself in the world. In short, children come into being learning how to be amongst other beings but as there is no natural, universal way of being, the socialisation that takes place within the family, and later in the community, pre-disposes individuals toward the social world in particular ways; the social and economic conditions of origin become tacit, taken-for-granted to the way of being.

Habitus is thus the range of durable dispositions, embodied in the practical mastery of the body and in the mental schemata through which beings apprehend the world, objectively attuned to the conditions of their acquisition. The habitus is the site of accumulated history, 'reproducing the acquisitions of the predecessors in the successors' (Bourdieu, 1990: 291), which emerges from particular conditions of existence generating practice tacitly

acclimatised to the conditions from which habitus emerges. Thus, habitus tends to generate practice, reasonable and common sense behaviours that are very likely to be 'positively sanctioned' in relation to the logic of the social fields to which they are objectively adjusted. Likewise, habitus tends to exclude or disregard 'all the behaviours that would be negatively sanctioned because they are incompatible with the objective conditions [of the field]' (Bourdieu, 1990: 56). In this way habitus is a system of structuring, structures, reiterative through the way in which it generates practice re-constituting itself.[8] In a differentiated society, differential conditions of acquisition underpin the emergence of class habitus.

For some critics, the notion of habitus is determinist and reproductionist (Jenkins, 1992) and tends to exclude the individual from its analyses. However, the relationship between the individual habitus and class habitus has been considered at length (Bourdieu, 1990). Whilst it is highly unlikely that individuals will share the same experiences, in the same order, Bourdieu argues that it is more likely for individuals from similar conditions of existence (a similar class) to be faced by similar experiences (see Charlesworth, 2000), than it is for individuals from another class. Rather than sharing the exact same schemas of conception, perception and action, individuals from similar class conditions are 'united in a relationship of homology'. Thus, to talk of class habitus, is to talk of modalities of experience and practice that oscillate around a modal habitus, differentiated from the habitus of other class groups by the relative social distance which is always inscribed in the experiences, perceptions and practices of individuals.

An individual's relationship to habitus is marked by the conditions of its early acquisition and maturation, through accent, pronunciation and bodily dispositions. In a differentiated society these marks become significant as they socially locate the individual vis-à-vis different social fields, manifest in the way individuals experience themselves in social space. This is why Bourdieu talks of the social forces of attraction and aversion, felt inter personally by individuals as they move through social space. However, habitus organises perception such that it tends to select those situations that recognise it, and this exerts a powerful social inertia to practice:

[8] Where congruence exists between the objective conditions underpinning the acquisition of habitus and the objective conditions in which practice is generated, an adherence is established between habitus and field, and the world becomes taken-for-granted.

> "Habitus pre-disposes individuals to people, places and events that are unlikely to challenge it, and likely to recognise it. Providing itself with a milieu to which it is pre-adapted as possible…[and] a relatively constant universe of situations tending to reinforce its dispositions by offering the market most favourable to its products." (Bourdieu, 1990: 61)

This is significant to this study as it suggests that graduates become oriented to those areas of the graduate labour market that are pre-disposed to recognise them and that labour market aspirations are intimately bound to our ability to be. That is, habitus reiterates the social conditions of a given social milieu, by the way in which it generates practice attuned to the conditions of origin, but in doing so it also generates practices that are meaningful to those who are intuitively adjusted to the social practices within a given social space: which is the pre-condition of social recognition and affirmation. However, in differentiated societies, the tacit schemas of perception, conception and action, are also the root of social differentiation; habitus are differentially aligned vis-à-vis different social fields and so the possibility of accessing a social field becomes a function of one's ability to access the requisite forms of capital necessary to appear positively within the field. We can thus begin to see how the notion of habitus might be fruitful in relation to this thesis' investigation of the role played by the social class of origin amongst graduates. Graduates may differ markedly in terms of their self-presentation, verbal and non-verbal dispositions, which may be marked by the traces of the conditions of their acquisition and which may become meaningful in university spaces and in relation to the graduate labour market. Institutional habitus may also have a significant role in reinforcing or challenging an individual's relation to being, though this will depend upon the social conditions necessary for inculcation. To better situate habitus we need to consider it in relation to field and capital.

2.4.2 The Field and Forms of Capital

Bourdieu's field theory conceptualises the social world as a series of fields, "relatively autonomous social microcosms… [that] follow specific logics" (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992: 97). Fields exist in as much as agents (or institutions) are relationally engaged in a form of competition over stakes, around which the field is constructed. By entering into the field, agents tacitly grant recognition to the specific competencies and characteristics recognised by a field, which are always part weapon, part stake, in the struggles within the

field. Capital thus becomes whatever the field is structured to recognise, which can never be completely separated from how the field is socially constituted in the first instance: '*a capital does not exist and function except in relation to a field*' (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992: 101).

For Bourdieu, the forms of capital that operate in relation to a field vary, according to how the field has been constructed, historically such that it recognises specific valences of capital. Whilst he recognises three fundamental species of capital – social, cultural and economic – the relative autonomy of fields means that the specific capital operating in relation to a field vary as a function of the historicity of the field. Bourdieu calls upon the concept of symbolic capital to describe how the field is pre-disposed to grant recognition to certain species of capital:

> '…symbolic capital...is…what every kind of capital becomes when it is misrecognised as capital, that is, to know…it on the basis of cognitive structures…able…to grant it recognition because they are attuned to what it is. Produced by the transfiguration of a power relation into a sense relation…' (Bourdieu 2000: 242)

The positions that agents occupy in relation to a field are in part determined by their habitus, and the extent to which it produces practices and dispositions recognised by the field, which is in part a function of the social homology established between habitus and field. However, agents take up positions within the field according to the field of positions, according to how they are positioned vis-à-vis other agents in the field. The propensity of agents to recognise and preserve the existing distribution of capital within a field, and their propensity to subvert this distribution, is thus a function of the position that they occupy in relation to a field and their trajectory within it. In this sense, students from working class backgrounds with steep educational and social trajectories, who owe their identity to educational success, may become the most ardent defenders of a system that, statistically speaking, is structured to recognise characteristics and properties most closely allied with the habitus of middle class students. There is thus a complex relationship between habitus, capital and field. Fields emerge from historical struggles, and the professions, in particular, share their own relationship to the social and economic fields.

We can thus see the graduate labour market as a series of semi-autonomous fields, defined around specific social and economic interests. The relationship established between certain positions in the social, educational and economic fields is a consequence of the homology established between similar positions within these fields, such that agents and institutions become pre-disposed to recognise agents from similar positions. The recruiting and personnel strategies that organisations within the graduate labour market pursue are thus irreducible from the positions that these organisations occupy within their own fields. As such, a social congruence may be established which is not the product of nepotistic practices but of a natural social affinity rooted in the practices and dispositions engendered by a shared habitus i.e. behaviour borne by and of the field.

For Bourdieu, the agent is not a "cultural dope", as some would suggest, but is socially-constituted to be 'active and acting in the field'. As such, the definition of the legitimate forms of capital operating within a field are, at any given moment, challenged and reified, contested and enforced. The social inertia given to a field, and which the field tends to ensure, may exert a conservative force on the forms of capital it recognises, as such they tend to be durable but may be modified with time, especially in a period of crisis:

> "The definition of the legitimate means and stakes of struggle is in fact one of the stakes of the struggle, and the relative efficacy of the means of controlling the game (the different sorts of capital) is itself at stake, and therefore subject to variations in the course of the game. Thus, as has constantly been emphasised here, the notion of 'overall volume of capital', which has to be constructed in order to account for certain aspects of practice, nonetheless remains a theoretical artefact; as such, it could produce thoroughly dangerous effects if everything that has to be set aside in order to construct it were forgotten, not least the fact that the conversion rate between one sort of capital and another is fought over at all times and is therefore subject to endless fluctuations." (Bourdieu, 1984: 246)

Dominated social groups may mount a challenge to existing power structures by accumulating the forms of capital operating within a field but in doing so they implicitly recognise the forms of capital operating within the field; thereby reproducing the relations underpinning the field. However, by challenging the legitimate forms of capital operating within a field, agents may seek to receive a higher valuation for their own characteristics. For

instance, by laying claim to political arguments, external to the field, such as meritocracy or diversity arguments, agents may hope to alter the social conditions of a field, making it more difficult for a dominant social group to monopolize the forms of capital operating within a field. However, fields tend to be socially conservative and periods of fluctuation limited to crises afflicting the field. Doxa helps us to understand how the social relations constitutive of the field remain relatively stable.

2.4.3 Habitus, Field and Doxa

The notion of doxa refers to the immediate adherence established between certain habitus and the social fields to which it is homologous. As habitus is inscribed with the objective conditions of its acquisition it tends to generate practices and dispositions aligned to the fields to which habitus is homologous. Thus, certain social spaces, interests, sports, professions and occupations, for instance, become aligned to certain class habitus because the habitus tends to generate practices attuned to these fields, and because the conditions of entry are inscribed in habitus.[9]

Underpinning these alliances is doxa, practical belief, which implies tacit acceptance and recognition of the presuppositions of the field. Doxa implies recognition of the stakes of a field, its conditions of entry and its rules, because doxa emerges from habitus, which generates the categories of perception and appreciation that agents apply to the world, and through which the world becomes infused with meaning, purpose, and interest. The analogy of sport is perfectly applicable; removed from the urgencies of the field all sports appear to be absurd, but in the heat of the moment, when the game is pressing, adherence to any sport may be total and unconditional. However, to be drawn into a sport, to be interested, implies some prior inculcation into the sport: an awareness of its rules, its conventions, its history, its main players. The total and complete acceptance an individual is willing to give to a sport, or for that, to any social field, is the very definition of doxa.

Doxa is most naturally occurring amongst natives, that is, between closely allied habitus and social fields. Native membership implies a feel for the game, its tempo, strategies, possibilities, the ‘upcoming’ future ‘inscribed in the present’, in short, the range of

[9] The field thus becomes reiterative to the extent that membership of a social field is contingent upon sharing the practices, dispositions, interests that are congruent to a field and which are necessary to access the field. In a differentiated society, practices, dispositions and interests may be objectively rooted in social and economic conditions that make access unlikely for certain social groups.

probabilities and improbabilities that the game practically discloses to its participants. Where immersion is early and total, *illusio*, or belief, is 'more total and unconditional by the fact that it is unaware of what it is' (Bourdieu, 1990: 67). Thus, Bourdieu argues that 'Belief is…an inherent part of belonging to a field' (Bourdieu, 1990: 67). In socially differentiated societies, the adherence between class habitus and occupational fields may exert a powerful but tacit barrier to social mobility:

> 'Practical faith is the condition of entry that every field tacitly imposes, not only by sanctioning and debarring those who would destroy the game, but by arranging things, in practice, that the operations of selecting and shaping new entrants (rites of passage, examinations etc.) are such as to obtain from them that undisputed, pre-reflexive, naïve, native compliance with the fundamental presuppositions of the field…The countless acts of recognition which are the small change of the compliance inseparable from belonging to the field, and in which collective misrecognition is ceaselessly guaranteed, are both the precondition and the product of the functioning of the field. They thus constitute investments in the collective enterprise of creating symbolic capital, which can only be performed on condition that the logic of the functioning of the field remains misrecognised. That is why one cannot enter this magic circle by an instantaneous decision of the will, but only by birth or by a slow process of co-option and initiation which is equivalent to a second birth.' (Bourdieu, 1990: 68)

Thus, doxa describes the practical relationship, the natural affinity, established between habitus and certain social fields. Entry to a field may be predicated upon certain characteristics, ways of being and doing, but these are merely readings of a way of being, of a totality commensurate with the conditioning conditions that gives rise to habitus. We cannot understand the expression of habitus simply through an analysis of the various components of capital that give access to practices and fields, and therefore understand preferences as constituted by access to particular forms of social, cultural and economic capital as positional conflict theory might have, but equally, we cannot reduce this analysis to conscious deliberation, to simple aspiration as the consensus theory might have. The practical adherence given to practice and dispositions emerges from the social conditioning experienced by individuals, through which a taken-for-granted relation to being is inculcated and as we shall

see, the notion of doxa becomes relevant when we consider graduates drawn from different areas of social space.

2.4.4 Implications for the Study

Bourdieu's theoretical approach and conceptualisation of labour market competition offers a unique vantage point from which to understand graduate employability. It builds upon the different interpretations forwarded by the literature and offers a multi-dimensional framework that resolves some of the contradictions of the existing theory. Through his unifying theory of social practice Bourdieu offers us a way of firmly situating graduate employability within broader social processes. That is, it allows us to re-situate the individual amidst the field, as a particular case, a socially-located instance amongst others. This is especially valuable for a study concerned with processes associated with social class, social mobility and the production of class privilege.

If we are to understand how and to what extent we become socially and psychologically located by our class of origin, then we need to re-situate the individual amidst the social forces impingent upon them. Whilst useful, statistical analyses of class are limited in their power to explain. To have a deeper and richer understanding of social class as it is lived, experienced and realised, momentarily, inter-personally, we need to understand class as it is experienced personally and inter-personally. Through such work we might re-discover the significance of class, as it is experienced through innumerable daily encounters, injurious glances and slights that re-assert the social order and yet lie latent, beneath the public narrative of the social world, and therefore what this means in practice for graduates and their employability.

2.5 Whither the high-skilled, high-waged economy? Evidence from the field

As we have seen, the belief that higher education is a route to prosperity and mobility in a developed economy is a central assumption of the educational policies pursued by the British government over the last twenty years or so. What Brown (2000) has called the political consensus, assumes that higher education is increasingly important in a globalising world, and offers the chance of high-skilled, high-paid work for those who invest in it. However, research on global economic trends suggest that this notion is fanciful, and that global competition is more likely to lead to enclaves of high-paid work alongside regions of high-skilled, low-paid work (Brown & Lauder, 2006; Brown *et al* 2011), raising questions about the future landscape of the graduate labour market and higher education.

There is evidence to suggest that whilst there has been an increase in the number of managerial and professional jobs in the UK, the rate of increase has been outstripped by the increase in the supply of educated labour (Brynin, 2002; Felstead *et al*., 2002; 2007). Far from raising educational levels, the shift toward a service-based economy has created many low-skill, low-waged jobs (Brown *et al*., 2001; Oesch, 2003), leading to the hour-glass economy (Nolan, 2004), where pockets of high-skilled, knowledge work sit alongside swathes of low-skilled work. Felstead *et al* (2007) found significant divergence between the educational levels of the British workforce and the educational level required to carry out the work they were undertaking, with many over-qualified for the jobs they were in. As such, predictions that we will need more degree-educated workers, not less, seem to have been based on an overly optimistic reading of economic projections (Brown & Hesketh, 2004). Some have argued that the skills-based agenda is part of a broader neo-liberal doctrine of disciplining labour, reducing the power of collective bargaining by creating divisions within the workforce which has led to wage repression and returned profitability to financial capital (Harvey, 2005; 2010, Brown *et al* 2011).

This matters because governments, schools, universities and businesses all encourage students to further their education, with the promise of rewarding, well-paid, if not lucrative, employment at the end. By contrast, a growing body of literature suggests that graduates in the UK are increasingly likely to be over-educated for the jobs that they access. Dolton and Vignoles (2000) found that 38% of graduates were over-educated for their first jobs, a similar level as that found by other research (O'Leary & Sloane, 2005). More recently, Green and

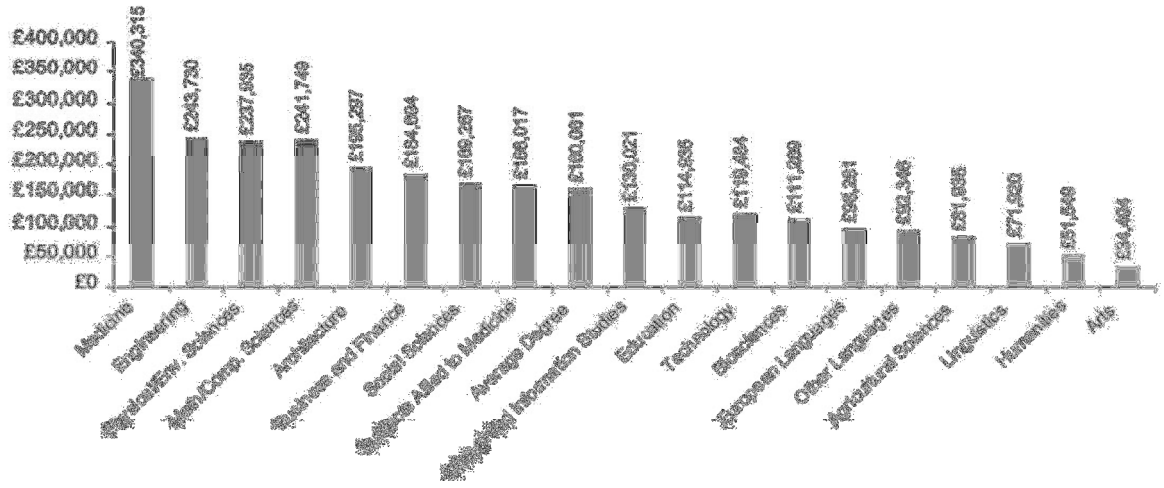
Zhu (2008) found that long-term over-qualification seems to have grown, extended from a fifth to a third of the graduate population. However, there are questions over what constitutes 'over-education' (Brazier, 2005). Some researchers such as Purcell and Elias (2004) suggest that jobs which are increasingly populated by graduates but which do not demand a degree as a condition of entry are changing the landscape of the graduate labour market. Thus, Purcell and Elias (2004) classify these occupations as *niche* graduate occupations. This re-classification of occupations suggests that there is little over-qualification, for instance the government points to DLHE surveys which suggest low levels of graduate unemployment (circa 2-3% prior to the recession), and using Purcell and Elias' (2004) classification of graduate jobs, low levels of over-education six months after graduation (circa 20%).

Another way to look at graduate employability is through the earnings premium. It has been argued that education and earnings are positively correlated (Becker, 1964). If we take the average graduate premium, it seems to have held up relatively well despite the expansion of higher education. In 2006, a government-commissioned report found that the average graduate could expect to earn £160,000 more than peers with pre-university qualifications (PWC, 2006). More recently, the coalition government has quoted a figure of £100,000 net of tax (Vince Cable, 2010). However, research into graduate earnings is scarce, often based on small, incomplete samples, and often does not take into account the full range of direct and indirect costs and benefits of a degree-level education. As such, the government admits that we know little about the 'marginal costs and benefits of HE participation' (Vince Cable, 15th July, 2010). Whilst the graduate premium held up quite well until 2002 since then there has been a modest decline in earnings (Green and Zhu, 2008; Walker & Zhu, 2010; Brown *et al* 2011). There are difficulties comparing graduates and non-graduates under a dynamic system. Primarily, it is difficult to compare what one individual may have earned without university and with, especially given the fact that many new graduates appear to be colonising the most skilled, highest paid non-graduate occupations (Elias and Purcell, 2004). As such, it is not surprising when we find that the graduate premium conceals significant in-group differences.

The PWC report found significant variations in earnings according to the subject studied (Figure 2.1). As we can see, a degree in Medicine carries an earnings premium almost ten times that of an Arts degree and more than twice that of the average degree. Given that practically all graduates of Medicine are guaranteed a well-paid, professional job in the NHS

this should not come as a surprise. Indeed, Medicine and Dentistry are the only degrees fully guaranteed by the state, all other degrees are subject to the conditions of supply and demand in the broader economy. This example demonstrates the need to understand the graduate labour market as a heterogeneous landscape, segmented according to the differential needs and requirements of graduate employers.

Figure 2.1: Lifetime Graduate Earnings Premium by Subject



Source: PWC, 2006

Recent evidence suggests that there has been a bifurcation in the earnings of graduates. Whilst higher earners saw an increase in their earnings between 1994 and 2006, the lowest earning graduates have seen a decrease in earnings (Green & Zhu, 2008). The authors link this fall to over-qualification, which they say increased for males from 21.7% in 1992 to 33.2% in 2006 and for females from 23.8% to 32.1% over the same period. Whilst the average graduate premium may have held, some degree holders may actually experience a negative earnings premium on their degree (Walker & Zhu, 2010; also see O'Leary and Sloane, 2005; Brazier, 2005). This would seem to support the over-education thesis, and certainly raises questions about the ability of the economy to create labour market opportunities and stimulate demand for high-skilled, high-wage employees.

A perspective on the graduate labour market becomes more granular as the data becomes more granular. Research on the graduate premium associated with different degree-holders has found that women earn less than men (Benfield, 2007) and that this increases with time out of university (Smetherham, 2005). There is also strong evidence that the university one

attends is significant to long-term earnings, with attendance at a Russell Group institution carrying an earnings premium of 3 to 6% compared to attendance at a post-1992 institution (Chevalier & Conlon, 2003). If we compare graduates of the same institution we also find that who one is, socially-speaking, is also significant. Chevalier and Conlon (2003) found that middle class graduates of Oxford and Cambridge had an earnings premium 16% higher than their working class peers.

These figures matter because they raise questions about the assertions of the neoliberal consensus. Under a system of expanded higher education, the value of the credential may fall if it loses its scarcity value (Wolf, 2002; Hirsch, 1977) leading to 'credential inflation' (Dore, 1976). Conflict theories of graduate employability seek to understand how the expansion of higher education has led to changing rates of return on education and how it has shaped competition in the graduate labour. These are based on the assumption that well-paid jobs are scarce and worth competing over (Hirsch, 1977) and that individuals and groups employ strategies, which may be more or less conscious, to achieve a comparative advantage in the graduate labour market. Who wins and loses in this competition is not preordained, however those graduates able to exhibit the dispositions demanded by the labour market and call upon credentials and experiences recognised and valued by professionals are most likely to succeed. For the sons and daughters of managers and professionals, academic achievement is an important stage in the reproduction of class position and lifestyle.

2.5.1 University, Social Class and the Graduate Labour Market

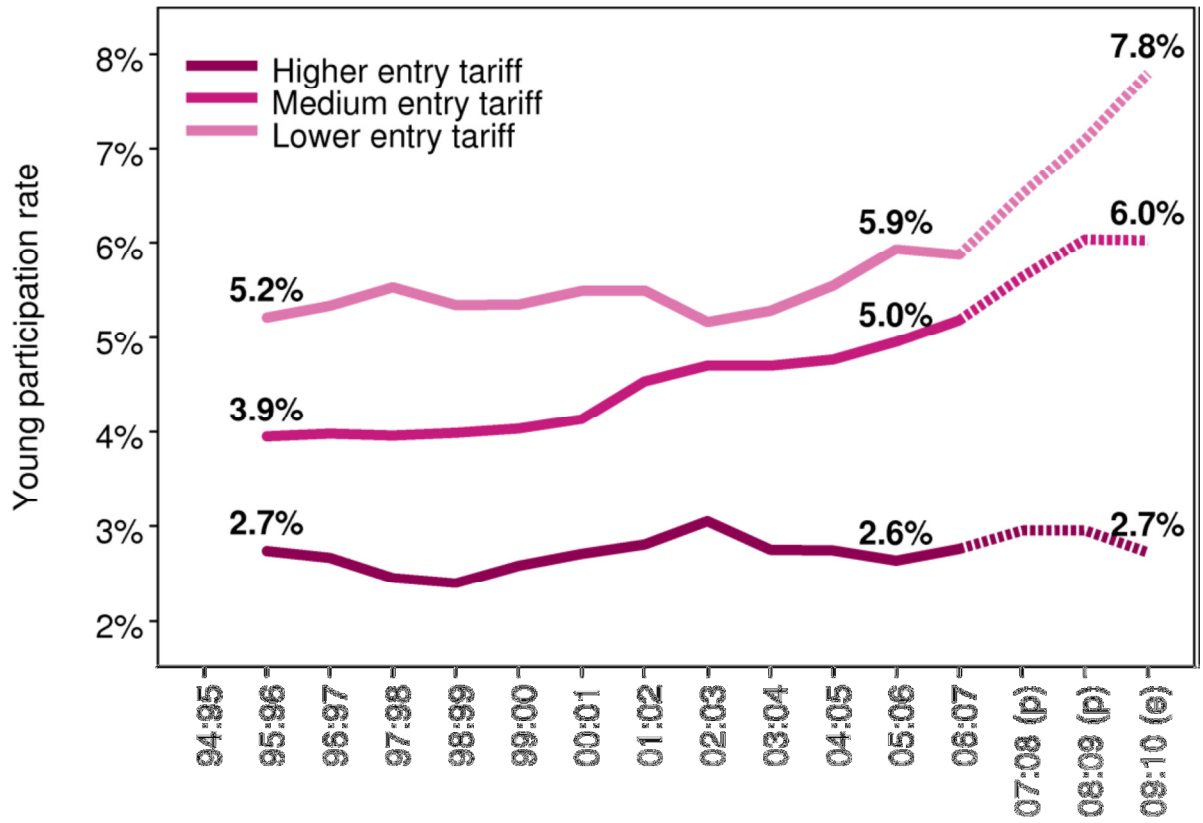
Whilst university participation has increased amongst all social classes over the last fifteen years, students from wealthier backgrounds are still much more likely to attend university than students from less wealthy backgrounds. Moreover, they are more likely to attend the most prestigious universities and this has consequences for their employability in the graduate labour market. Data on the social class of university students is historically poor; students with no social class data are typically the largest group on HESA social class data, and so we are often forced to use proxy data to track participation rates amongst different groups.

Harris (2010) bases his analysis on parental-education – he classifies the UK's population by area, according to the proportion of parents with a degree-level education – on this basis he

finds that 20% of students from the least advantaged 20% participate in university, increasing monotonically with advantage so that 56% of students from the 20% most advantaged backgrounds participate in university. He finds that university participation rates have increased amongst all groups over the past fifteen years but that the increased participation of different groups has not been equally distributed across the system.

Harris (2010) shows that there is a significant and growing gap between the participation of students from different backgrounds at the most prestigious and difficult to access institutions. Using UCAS tariff point score as a proxy for institutional ranking – where the Russell Group and some of the 1994 Group make up most of the higher tariff universities, the remainder of the 1994 Group plus other HEIs and a few post-1992 universities make up medium-tariff universities and where lower tariff universities are predominantly drawn from the Million+ Group of mainly Post-1992 universities – Harris analyses the participation rates at differently ranked universities. Figure 2.2 shows the participation rates of students from the least advantaged 40% of society. It shows that whilst participation in lower-entry tariff universities increased, participation rates at the higher-ranking entry tariff universities remained low and flat.

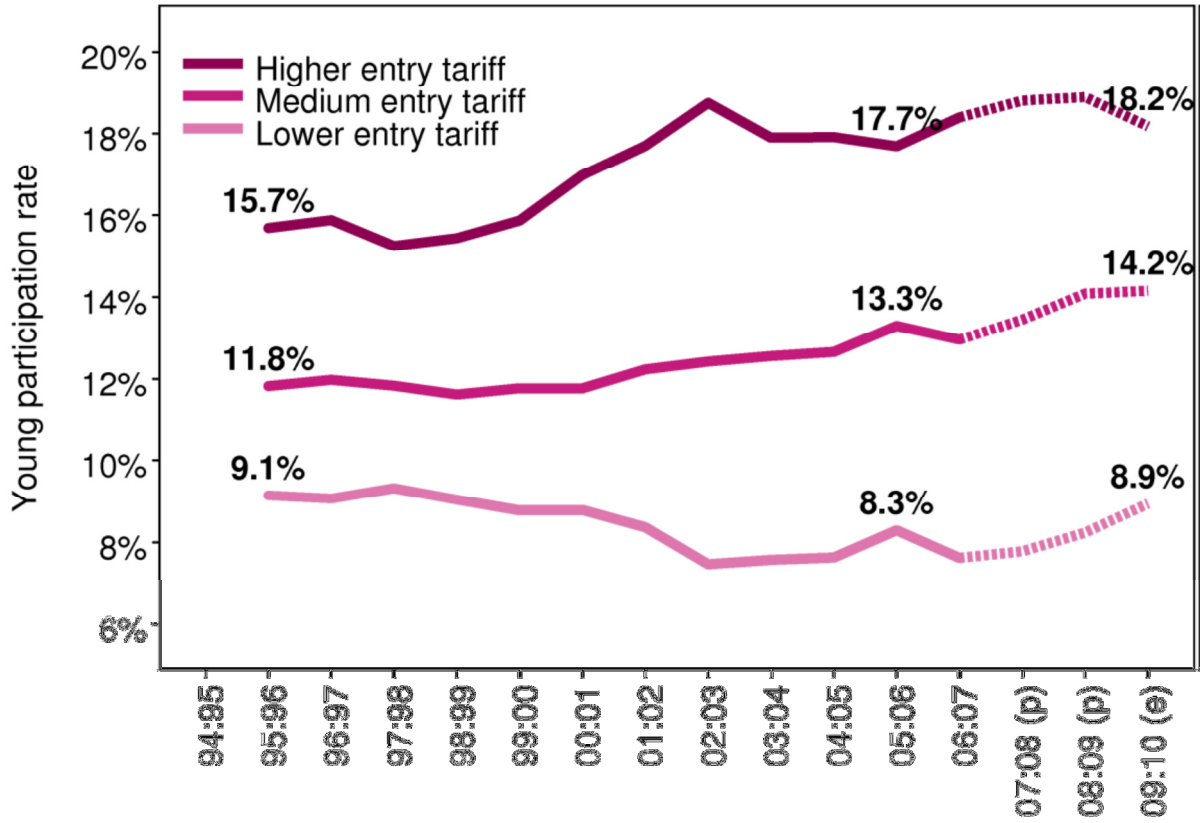
Figure 2.2: Participation Rates of Disadvantaged Young People (Q1 and Q2) in Different Entry Tariff Universities



Source: Harris, 2010

When we compare this with the experience of students from the most advantaged backgrounds we find that this is not a statistical effect of where universities have expanded. In the reverse of the previous chart, figure 2.3 shows that students from the most advantaged backgrounds have actually increased their participation rates at higher and medium tariff universities whilst their participation rates in lower tariff institutions has decreased slightly.

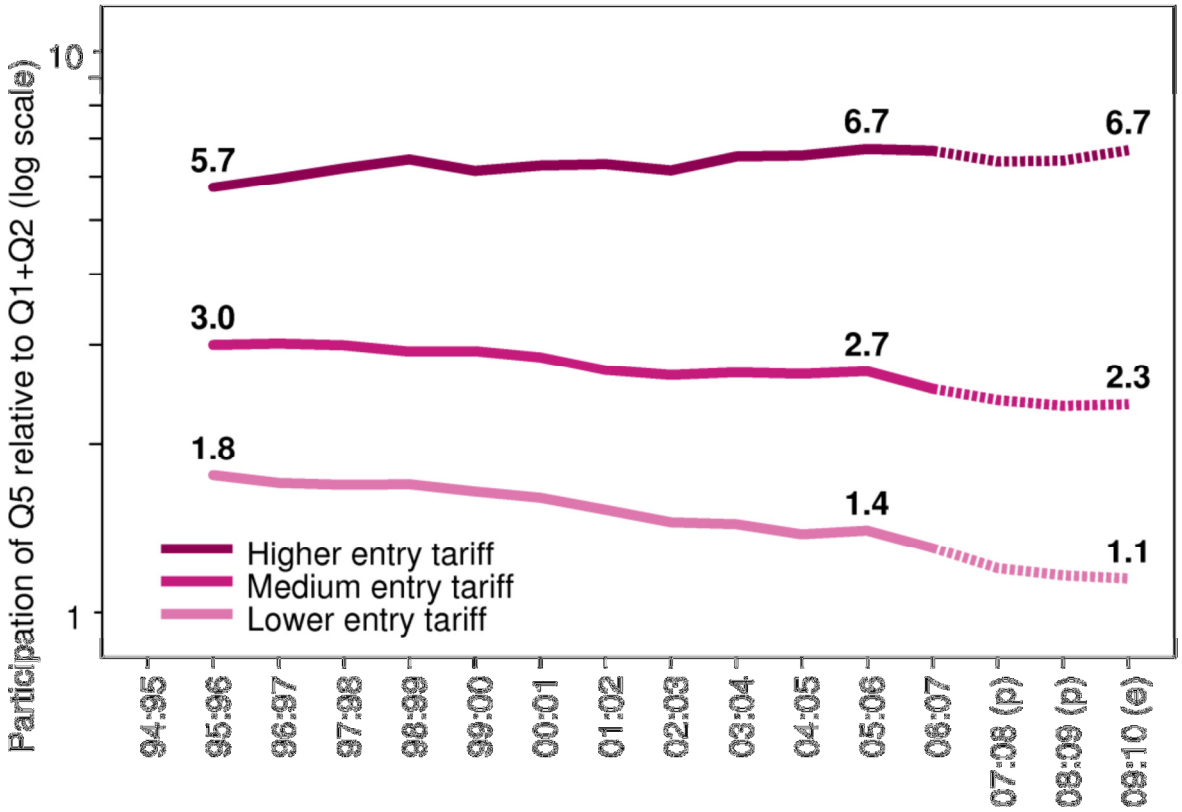
Figure 2.3: Participation Rates of Advantaged Young People (Q5) in Different Entry Tariff Universities



Source: Harris, 2010

The suggestion is that there has been a bifurcation in the university participation of students from different backgrounds. Indeed, if we compare the relative participation rates of different groups we find that the proportion of advantaged students to disadvantaged students has increased at the higher-ranking institutions, just as it has decreased elsewhere. Figure 2.4 shows that the proportion of students from the most advantaged quintile (Q5) to those from the most disadvantaged quntiles (Q1 + Q2) has increased from 5.7 to 6.7 whilst parity has been established in the lower entry tariff institutions. Clearly, the increased participation in higher education has not been evenly distributed. Just as students from disadvantaged backgrounds have increased their participation, they have done so in less selective, less prestigious universities. Simultaneously, students from advantaged backgrounds have increased their rate of participation at the most selective institutions. This bifurcation in university participation is potentially very significant.

Figure 2.4: Proportion of Students from Most Advantaged (Quintile 5) to Students from Least Advantaged (Quintile 1 and 2) Students at Low, Medium and High Tariff Universities



Source: Harris, 2010

If we accept that the selectivity and reputation of the university one attends is very important to employability, then it would appear that the relative position of the most disadvantaged students, as a group, may have worsened over the time-frame presented. Increasingly concentrated in the least selective (and by implication, least prestigious) institutions, and faced with a growing proportion of advantaged students holding degrees from selective (prestigious) institutions, students from the least advantaged backgrounds are likely to be marginalised in the graduate labour market by their devalued academic capital. The implication is that they are more likely to end up in the least competitive and devalued fields of the graduate labour market.

Power and Whitty (2008) are illuminating in this regard. Primarily from professional and managerial backgrounds, the students that they followed from school, through university and into the labour market, exhibited some interesting characteristics. Firstly, and in support of the meritocratic, human-capital model of education, they found a strong, positive relationship between the prestige of the university that they attended and their associated earnings. This

may reflect biases within the graduate labour market toward prestigious universities. For instance, Brown and Hesketh (2004) found that graduates from new universities had a 1: 235 chance of securing a 'fast track' job compared to a 1:8 chance for Oxbridge graduates. Secondly, however, Power and Whitty (2008) found that private school students with lower A level grades were more likely to leave education than attend a less prestigious university and yet still earned more than graduates from state schools who attended less prestigious universities. This might help explain why Harris (2010) finds that the participation rates of students from the most advantaged groups have decreased at the lower entry tariff universities, at one point by more than 10%. Power and Whitty (2008) suggest that the earnings associated with a less prestigious university, especially a post-1992 university, "may be no higher than could be achieved with A-levels alone" (ibid, 2008: 8). They do not consider whether this would be equally true for state school students, who may stand to benefit more, relatively speaking, from a degree at less prestigious institution.

The study did not examine the qualitative aspects of the individuals that it tracked and so does not allow us to understand their relative employability, outside of the educational framework. However, it demonstrates the need to contextualise the graduate earnings premium, and the opportunity presented by higher education, in relation to individual circumstances. There is evidence to suggest that class background may reinforce institutional differences between graduates. For instance, Adnett and Slack (2007) found that background disadvantages gave rise to employment disadvantages. Quoting Chevalier *et al* (2004) who agree that the rate of return to degrees have fallen, Adnett and Slack (2007) suggest that there is a need to understand how the labour market may act as a barrier to wider participation by graduates from disadvantaged social groups. The Milburn Commission (2009) looked into the barriers to social mobility, and whilst recognising the need for better educational attainment found that class of origin still impacted upon access to prestigious graduate occupations.

By examining the hidden hurdles to graduate labour market participation the Milburn Commission (2009) moved policy focus onto new territory, away from the education system and onto the operationalisation of the graduate labour market itself. However, there was already a body of research in this area, some of which informed the Commission's findings. For instance, research into graduate employability has found that extra-curricular activities (Brown & Hesketh, 2004), work experience, geographical location, and verbal and non-verbal socio-cultural markers of class, all become significant in the graduate labour market as

graduates strive to appear competitive, employable and 'client-worthy' (Ashley, 2010). Working class students are much more likely to stay at home, attend a local university, and work part time whilst at university (Moreau & Leathwood, 2006). Many retain strong neighbourhood relations and do not immerse themselves in the university culture whereas middle class students are much more likely to feel at home with the student identity and participate in the university (Reay *et al*, 2009). Archer and Hastings (2000) suggest that this is partly because there is an incompatibility between working class identity and higher education, as university constitutes a departure from traditional working class routes to adulthood and independence (Jones, 2002). Watson *et al* (2009) find that students from working class backgrounds are more likely to encounter their class as problematic, finding that they do not fit in, or that they have to adapt to do so. This may mean working class students are likely to experience an identity-crisis, living multiple identities at university, at home and at work (Walderdine, 2003). Some studies have suggested that living at home allows non-traditional (read working class) students to control the riskiness of going to university (Patiniotis & Holdsworth, 2005) but this may prove to be costly in terms of their relative employability.

Traditional graduate recruiters often expect a graduate's CV to exhibit social and cultural competencies (Brown & Hesketh, 2004; Ashley, 2010) via examples of extra-curricular activities and relevant work experience but working class students are less likely to participate in extra-curricular activities, or have a normative university experience (Reay *et al*., 2009). Working class students are more likely to live at home, and 'day' students (Christie *et al*, 2005) are found to have weak HE-based peer networks and poor awareness of career planning. Furlong and Cartmel (2005) found that 70% of the working class graduates in their sample were in jobs that they couldn't have done without university but many of these were in insecure, temporary employment, characterised by low wages and low levels of prestige. Graduates who live at home have been found to be more likely to end up in non-graduate employment after graduation and for some, over-education maybe a long-term or even a permanent state: regional mobility and the regional labour market become very important in these cases (Dolton and Silles, 2001). Living at home thus affects graduate entry to the labour market (Christie, 2007) but these barriers are typically not understood as class barriers: "While reluctant to identify social class as a barrier, they focus on the more subtle indicators of class that are visible to employers such as accent and area of residence"

(Furlong and Cartmel, 2005: 14). Not all working class students stay at home, many do move out, but they tend to stay in the region and attend less prestigious, post-1992 universities.

Some studies have found that students at post-1992 universities are less likely to be involved in extra-curricular activities. For instance, 23% of students at higher ranking universities were found to have held a representational role in a student club or society, compared to 16% of students in medium ranking universities and 11% at lower ranking universities (Purcell *et al*., 2009). However, there is limited research comparing student experiences, and so we know little about the quality of these extra-curricular experiences. The research that exists suggests that working class students in post-1992 universities are less affected by the social experience of university, 'going through university rather than university going through them' (Archer and Leathwood, 2003: 177 in Reay *et al*, 2009). By contrast, working class students at Russell Group universities are more likely to identify with the learner identities of students (Crozier *et al*., 2008), and the experiences of those at Oxbridge more fully reflect the 'traditional' experience of university (Tett, 2004; Reay *et al,* 2009). There is less research on the middle class perspective of university although Ball (2003) offers an insightful analysis of middle class strategies in the education system and Reay *et al* (2001b) found that middle class students are less likely to question their participation in university and are positively disposed toward the student identity. In general, the middle class perspective has been presented as 'normative' and uncomplicated but some research suggests that the middle class experience is diverse, just as the 'middle classes' are diverse (Power, 2001; Power & Whitty, 2008). The experiences of university are important as they establish how graduates arrive at the graduate labour market; how they perceive, understand and are disposed toward the graduate labour market.

Whilst the graduate employability literature is populated with reference to the importance of social networks, cultural capital, work experience and the like (Milburn, 2009) there has been no systematic investigation of *how* these become important to graduate destinations (i.e. how they are able to act as capital in relation to different careers/companies). Research into the university experience offers some understanding but there has been no systematic link between the university experience and the experience of the graduate labour market. This dearth of research covers all groups of graduates. As with many studies in this vein, Greenbank and Hepworth's (2008) examination of career decision-making focused on final-year working class students at a post-1992 university. In their conclusion they call for further

research "to include students from other universities and from a greater range of socio-economic groups [to enable] the values, circumstances and behaviour of different types of students to be compared" (Greenbank & Hepworth, 2008). This thesis attempts to fill this gap. It aims to build our understanding of how students become differentially located in relation to the graduate labour market and understand how this may be linked to social class.

2.5.2 Class and Graduate Employability

Only a small body of the research on graduate labour market touches on social class and how it may become significant in the graduate labour market. Brown and Hesketh (2004) paved the way somewhat when they suggested that the ability of graduates to appear positively in relation to the assessment processes utilised by graduate employers' favoured middle class applicants. They argued that qualifications were the first tick in the box and that to appear employable graduates needed to accompany 'hard currencies' like qualifications, work experience and extra-curricular experiences with 'soft currencies' such as the right dress, appearance, manner and bearing. They found that middle class graduates with similar forms of cultural capital employed purist or player strategies, variably letting their experiences speak for themselves or manipulating their presentation of self to meet recruiter expectations. They argue that working class graduates are more likely to struggle in this positional competition as they lack the expected forms of capital, not least the forms of appearance and self-presentation needed to be deemed client-worthy or polished.

These socially-determined models of competence have been discussed in various guises before. For example, Jacobs (2003) found that the recruitment processes of the 'big-five' (now the 'big four') accountancies favoured middle class students who were more likely to be considered 'client-worthy'. In the legal field we find that graduates need to exhibit the dispositions characteristic of a *reasonable* habitus, i.e. a relation to being concurrent with that of the profession (Sommerlad, 2007), and so graduates of new universities tend to experience significant disadvantage and encounter difficulties obtaining the training contracts necessary to qualify as solicitors (Shiner, 2000; Vignaendra, 2001). Sommerlad (2007; 2008) and Ashley (2010) have shown how the legal profession tacitly demands attributes and practices that can only be acquired through insider knowledge of the professions, whether discursively (such as the need to have certain forms of work experience) or practically-acquired (i.e.

dispositions acquired through close social proximity to professionals), underpinning the social inertia experienced by the professions (Milburn, 2009).

In a slightly different vein Smart *et al* (2009) showed that the fast-track scheme 'Teach First' favoured middle class graduates endowed with high levels of cultural capital. This is significant as Teach First has partner agreements with many prestigious graduate recruiters where Teach First participants are able to access summer internships and alumni automatically receive a guaranteed interview if they apply. Teach First thus enhances the employability of its already competitive participants, which is part of its appeal, but in doing so it tends to entrench labour market inequalities.

Graduate recruitment at the largest recruiters often involves a number of initial screening stages designed to reduce applicant numbers to a manageable pool for interviewing. To do so, many graduate recruiters either overtly or tacitly select on the basis of the higher education institution attended. Some firms explicitly pursue an aggressive model of recruitment to raise their market profile (e.g. law firms, see Ashley, 2010) whilst others tacitly exclude graduates from less prestigious universities by demanding high A-level grades. For some, the expansion of higher education has led to *tertiary tripartism* (Ainley, 2003), as perceived differences between universities become iterative, leading to a hardening of hierarchies in higher education (Reay et al., 2001a; Archer, 2007). Milburn (2009) found that most elite recruiters focus on a small number of red-brick universities, reiterating previous research (Hesketh, 2000). This raises important questions about the operationalisation of the labour market.

Keep and James (2010) argue that recruitment and selection is an important but under-studied facet of labour market research. They find that there has been little recognition across bodies of literature i.e. education and Human Resources Management, and argue that this has consequences for the advancement of our understanding of these processes. It is largely believed that recruitment and selection operate under a meritocratic model but this assumption lacks the support of a base of solid empirical evidence, the 'literature on career choice and its relationship with information, advice and guidance [being] an important exception' (Keep & James, 2010: 4). As a consequence, 'employability' has become a portmanteau term, exhibiting elasticity in its usage to encompass concerns such as suitability, capability and acceptability. They argue that there is a need to plug the research gaps, move

beyond large scale surveys and “delve into the interplay of different actors, labour markets, practices and incentive structures” (Keep and James, 2010: 34).

To understand how employability is practically realised it is necessary to understand how graduates experience the graduate labour market but to understand the social class implications for employability we first have to understand how graduates arrive at the graduate labour market. This thesis questions the assumption that the graduate labour market operates as a meritocracy and that the effect of social class dissipates as individuals move into university. It does so by exploring the university and labour market experiences of graduates from the same universities but contrasting class backgrounds. The effect of the university and educational success is explored by taking a sample from three differentially ranked universities.

Chapter Three

Methods and Methodology

3.1 Introduction

> "There are various ways in which phenomena can be covered up. In the first place, a phenomenon can be covered up in the sense that it is still quite undiscovered. It is neither known nor unknown. Moreover, a phenomenon can be buried over. This means that it has at some time been discovered but has deteriorated to the point of getting covered up again. This covering-up can become complete; or rather – and as a rule – what has been discovered earlier may still be visible, though only as a semblance." (Heidegger, 1960: 60)

When starting a new project one anticipates the field of study and certain issues that might arise but it is difficult to predict the ways in which engagement with the research field would alter the final research design. There were certain foreshadowed concerns and considerations but reflecting upon the research process one is struck by the innumerable decisions that need to be taken on a day to day basis, and which may radically alter the research path. Of course, certain approaches lend themselves more or less well to the particular task at hand, as Trow observes: "the problem under investigation properly dictates the methods of investigation" (Trow, 1957: 33). However, there is a need to remain vigilant to the potential implications of research decisions, even if it is not always easy to see the full implications of these decisions.

This chapter outlines the methodology taken in this research and highlights some of the key decisions taken along the way. There is always the danger that by re-constructing the methodological process we impart logic and rationale after the fact, in turn concealing that which we intend to make plain. Research methodologies often privilege the conscious articulations of the research process because these are present-at-hand and most accessible, but a significant part of the research process may remain hidden and implicit to the research. Many decisions are made in the face of practical urgencies, yet on reflection there is a

tendency to ascribe rationale to decisions and under-estimate the intuitive aspect of social research.

Whenever we wish to talk about the social world, we often impart evidence to support our claims. As such, how and where we derive our knowledge about the world is important to the validity of our findings. Certain methodologies can invoke a form of social myopia, leaving them trapped within the conceptual cage of their own design and unable to explain social phenomena except through a restricted language. Research ought to construct an understanding of social phenomena in such a way that it represents a break with our common sense understanding but it has to do so without artificially imposing a scientific framework that adds little to our understanding, or worse, denies us the possibility of not knowing what we do not know.

To achieve a reflexive sociology, in which ontological and epistemological positions are laid bare, requires turning the tools of social science unto itself. A beginning point is to consider how the object of research has been constructed through the particular positions being taken. Empirical data is a product of research moments, which are inscribed with the manner of knowing, in the object of knowledge, whenever the research methodology intersects with the research field. Thus, we can never take 'empirical data' for granted. We need to consider it in relation to its method of construction.

3.2 Background to Research Questions

This thesis began its life as a situated concern about the representativeness of 'official' discourses on graduate employability. Governmental data on graduate destinations and graduate earnings are commonly derived from large-scale, statistical data sets that do not provide a sense of the social and cultural contours operating in the university or the graduate labour market. Although orthodox representations of graduates and graduate employability recognise differences according to gender and ethnicity, they tend to reflect a narrow, normative graduate experience. Thus, by defining the scope and nature of statistical research on the graduate labour market, and presenting this research as self-evident, official policy discourse is able to immunise itself to criticisms of representativeness.

When this research first began, there was a very limited literature on social class and the experience of graduates. Indeed, such was the novelty, the stimulus for considering the PhD came from a BBC article detailing Brown and Hesketh's (2004) research, which had highlighted social preferences in the recruitment practices of graduate recruiters. In working life, experience assessing graduates for a management consultancy gave me first-hand insight into the graduate recruitment process. Coupled with my own background and my experiences as a secondary school teacher in a white, working class area of London, where the experiences of my students stood in stark contrast to the experiences of the middle class, grammar and privately-educated graduates of my undergraduate university, I was intimately aware of the gulf between graduates from deprived, working class backgrounds and the tacit requirements of the professional graduate labour market. Seen through this experiential lens, the official discourse on graduate employability appeared misguided and misguiding.

Since the start of the research, many of the issues that I had identified have come to the fore. Motivated by pressure from the Sutton Trust and other bodies, the government commissioned the Milburn Commission (2009) which highlighted significant disparities between the destinations of graduates from different social class backgrounds. A particular focus was access to the professions, which the Sutton Trust had previously highlighted as being particularly inequitable (Sutton Trust, 2007). Since then, the BBC have further pre-empted some of the findings in this thesis in a number of programmes, including Andrew Neil's *Posh and Posher: Why Public School Boys Run Britain* (BBC2, 26th January, 2011) and Richard Bilton's *Who Gets the Best Jobs?* (BBC1, 31st March, 2011).

Whilst the Milburn Commission raised the public profile of the issues being considered there has been very little research on the differential experiences of graduates from different class backgrounds and even less within populations at differently ranked universities (Reay *et al*., 2009, is an exception). The aim of this thesis was to consider the assumption that university offered an employability opportunity for those that attended, as is often asserted by officials. Other studies have shown that graduates understand that the degree is not enough to guarantee employability (Tomlinson, 2008), and that a first class degree is no guarantee of being employable (Smetherham, 2006) but no study had considered how graduates from different class backgrounds experienced their own employability, and so the study wished to understand how graduate labour market opportunities were structured in relation to the class

and educational backgrounds of graduates. As such, a number of research questions were identified.

Primary research questions

- How do the early labour market experiences of graduates from different class backgrounds differ and if so, why?
- How does class background become significant to graduate labour market outcomes?
- How does the type of university attended become significant to graduate labour market outcomes?

Secondary research questions

- How do the university experiences of students from different class backgrounds vary (i.e. extra-curricular participation, socialising, term-time and vac work etc.)?
- How does the type of university attended affect the student experience?
- How do students from different class backgrounds become oriented toward certain career options (i.e. influence of family, friends, educational experiences etc.)?
- How do students from different class backgrounds understand and manage their employability (i.e. employment strategies, work experience etc.)?
- What role do academic credentials play in graduate labour market outcomes?
- What role do other forms of capital play in graduate labour market outcomes (i.e. how do social networks and ways of being and doing become important etc.)?
- Within social class groups, what are the key variables shaping early labour market experiences?

Whilst the primary research questions outline the general focus of the thesis, the secondary research questions identify the specific aspects thought to be significant to the employability of graduates from different and similar class backgrounds. Previous research had found that graduate employability was connected to the experience of university, with work experience and extra-curricular participation particularly important to the employability of graduates (Brown & Hesketh, 2004), whilst other research had found that the student experience of university was marked by class background (Reay & Crozier, 2009). The implications for the employability of graduates are clear. Greenbank and Hepworth (2008) found that working class students' career horizons were heavily circumscribed and that they lacked an awareness of the need to invest in their 'personal capital'. As such, it has been suggested that university

does not offer the same opportunities to working class students as it does to middle class students. However, to understand the implications of such research it is necessary to understand how different groups of graduates become located vis-à-vis the graduate labour market, which under a system of positional conflict is to say, how graduates become located vis-à-vis one another. To this end, it is important to have a qualitative grasp of the experiences, characteristics and ways of being and doing of different groups of students, and understand how and in what ways these become significant to the experience of the graduate labour market.

3.3 Research Design

To understand how graduates become located vis-à-vis the graduate labour market it is necessary to understand how they become differentially placed in relation to the schemas of assessment employed by graduate recruiters and how they are relationally positioned vis-à-vis other graduates. As such, it is important to understand the relative and objective employability of different types of graduates. The initial thought was to carry out a large-scale survey of graduates, akin to the Destination of Leavers of Higher Education (DLHE) survey but with a focus on the class and educational background of graduates. In the end, this was decided against as large-scale, statistical data sets do not allow us to grasp the nature of being as it is encountered and experienced vis-à-vis perceptual schemata that make social nuances, subtle differences between individuals, meaningful. Statistics only ever trace a partial reading of social phenomena and given that it has been argued that this field of inquiry is misunderstood, statistical approaches are inadequate to the task at hand.

It was felt that only a close-up, qualitative study could elicit the subtle, meaningful differences made between graduates In a system of positional conflict relative differences between graduates are made significant but we know little about how and what differences are made significant, and so attempts to statistically locate graduates amount to a pre-categorisation of the field of inquiry, foreclosing upon the possibility of discovering phenomena that the academy hasn't already uncovered, which is why the study privileges a qualitative mode of enquiry.

To achieve this, two main phases of research would be conducted. In the first instance, interviews would be undertaken with final-year undergraduates from different class

backgrounds at different universities, to understand how their experiences of university and work experience differed. These students would then be followed up six months after graduation to find out how their early experiences of the graduate labour market differed.

3.3.1 Interviewing Final-Year Undergraduates

The first phase of the research was the most critical and central to the thesis. The research aim of the thesis was to trace the early labour market experiences of graduates, to see how the experience of university influenced transition to the labour market and to trace the role played by class background. An initial thought was to locate graduates through the university careers service but this was decided against on two main counts. Firstly, it was felt that contacting a wide range of graduates from different class backgrounds would be difficult to do through postal surveys. These commonly receive a very low rate of return and it is difficult to control how responses may be self-selecting on the basis of some hidden criteria i.e. graduate responses may vary according to the disposition to the research and the university, which may be more or less positive as a function of social variables, including background and trajectory, and it would be impossible to know which. Secondly, it was felt that data collected post-university may not produce the quality and depth of material necessary to relocate the graduate vis-à-vis their experience of university.

The research was thus divided into two distinct phases. Final-year undergraduates from a variety of different universities and class backgrounds would be interviewed about their experiences of university, their disposition to careers and how they had prepared for the transition into the labour market. This would then be followed up by a survey six months after graduation to find out how they had experienced the first months of being a graduate. The initial interview would thus take place whilst students were still in the university, meaning that the experience was still palpable and incessant, but it would also allow the research to leverage social networks and seek out students from different class backgrounds if they didn't respond in the initial call for participants, which as we will see proved very important to the composition of the sample. Moreover, this approach allowed the study to locate different undergraduates at the point of departure from university, in relation to one another, and then trace their experiences in the initial transition to the graduate labour market.

There are difficulties with this approach, as there are with all. For instance, Elias and Purcell (2004) have shown that graduate unemployment and under-employment reduces with time out of university, and so even if differences between graduates were to be observed we couldn't be sure of how they might change with time. However, it was felt that initial graduate destinations are a useful proxy for relative positional differences between graduates, and so it should be possible to trace any broad differences in the types of career destinations entered into by different types of graduates, and explain the origin of these differences. That said it would have been very interesting to carry out a longitudinal study (see chapter eight further discussion), although this was beyond the remit of the PhD.

3.3.2 Access to Research Sites and Identifying Interview Participants

Before access could be arranged, it was necessary to identify the research sites and the likely types of research participants that might be encouraged to participate. It was felt that focusing on one university would not necessarily produce the type of detail required to elucidate the differences between students from different class backgrounds, and that such a focus would be too narrow and specific to inform the policy debate. As such, it was decided that three differentially ranked universities would provide the context and diversity necessary to carry out this analysis. The research conducted by Reay et al., (2009) on the working class experience of university provided an ideal template: the research would select one Elite University (collegiate), one research-intensive (Russell Group) university and one Post-1992 University, reflecting structural differences within the sector. It was decided that these universities would need to be outside of London, for two reasons. Firstly, issues of class often intersect with issues of race and ethnicity, and whilst this is an important area for research, the focus on class meant that the study didn't want to conflate racial issues with class-based issues. Secondly, London is home to a significant graduate labour market presenting opportunities that do not exist in the rest of the country, and so London-centric studies might fail to capture the nuances of class as they exist in the national graduate labour market.

Previous studies have sometimes taken university as a proxy for class background but this leaves significant scope for misinterpretation. For this research, different class constituencies of students would need to be identified within each university. This would allow the research to explore differences between students from different class backgrounds, whilst holding the university attended constant. To do this, the study would distinguish between middle class

students and working class students along lines similar to previous studies. Using parental occupation as a proxy, middle class students would be taken as those from Social Class I (Managers, Directors and Senior Officials) and II (Professional Occupations) as based on the Office for National Statistics' new classification of social class: SOC2010. Working class students would be taken as those from Social Class III-IX (Associate Professional and Technical Occupations such as Police Community Support Officers (III), Administrative and Secretarial Occupations (IV), Skilled Trades Occupations (V), Caring, Leisure and Service Occupations (VI), Sales and Customer Service Occupations (VII), Process, Plant and Machine Operatives (VIII) and Elementary Occupations (IX). This approach has a number of limitations[10] but serves as a basis from which insight can be derived.

A third consideration and unit of segmentation involved the degree subject of the respondents. Certain subjects like Medicine and Dentistry were excluded on the basis that they offered an unambiguous and state-guaranteed career.[11] The research would focus on three different types of degree subjects: vocational subjects such as business and law, 'soft sciences' such as those in the humanities and social sciences, and the 'hard sciences' including maths, chemistry and physics. Respondents from each of these disciplines would be targeted and the research would attempt to locate graduates from different class backgrounds in each of these discipline areas, at each of the three universities. An attempt was also made to identify an even gender split across class, university and subject interviewee populations given that the gender dimension has been found to be significant (Smetherham, 2006).

Having established a framework for the data collection the next step was to identify three universities and secure access. As a means of comparison three differentially ranked universities would be selected. As well as academic differences between universities there are also reputational differences; the two tend to converge, and it would be important to identify how universities with different social and educational intakes, different academic requirements and reputational capital, influenced the labour market trajectories of students from similar social backgrounds. An Elite collegiate university, a Russell Group University

[10] For instance, we recognise that students from Class I are more likely to populate the 'middle-class' of Oxford whilst those from Class II are more likely to populate the 'middle-class' of Post-1992 University, and therefore the category middle-class may conceal internal differences that correlate with the university attended. However, being aware of this, the research was sensitised to such considerations and every effort has been made to make these differences explicit where they arise.

[11] Access to these degree courses is the most important social filter. This is revealed in UCAS data, for instance entrants to medicine were thirty-three times more likely to come from a higher professional / managerial background (Social Class I under SOC2000) than an entrant from an unskilled, manual background (UCAS, 2006).

and a Post-1992 University were all selected. To maintain anonymity little will be said about these universities:

Elite University: is a top-ranking, collegiate University with a high proportion of privately-educated students to state-school students. The percentage of students from working class backgrounds is very low; only in ten students are from working class backgrounds.

Russell Group University: is a non-Sutton Trust 13 University[12] with a lower than average proportion of privately-educated students to state-school students (for a Russell Group University). The percentage of students from working class backgrounds is average for a Russell Group University, with around one in five students coming from a working class background.

Post-1992 University: is a mid-ranking Post-1992 University with a very small proportion of privately-educated students. The proportion of students from working class backgrounds is about average for a Post-1992 University, with around one in three students coming from a working class background.

Negotiating access to each of these universities was relatively straightforward. Administrators in the main subject departments were identified and approached with a standard email/phone call asking for final-year undergraduates moving into the graduate labour market. Administrators were important gate-keepers and were able to forward emails regarding the research to undergraduates leading to many of the initial responses.

As the research progressed other strategies were used. At Elite University, the response rate was initially quite low and so whilst carrying out initial interviews flyers (See Appendix 3) were placed in prime locations in each of the colleges. Emails were sent through college administrators, generating more responses. Finally, to target more students from 'working class' backgrounds, contact was established with Widening Access co-ordinators at each college who forwarded emails within each college, specifically targeting students from non-traditional and 'first generation' backgrounds. At Post-1992 University and Russell Group University, responses were more forthcoming through the email system, possibly reflecting

[12] Sutton Trust universities are those that the Sutton Trust considers to be the most prestigious in the UK.

the closer relationship between undergraduates and their research school; the main problem was achieving a balanced sample, with the majority of initial responses from female, liberal, middle class students.

The social and educational background of respondents was a significant barrier to the initial diversity of the research respondents. Targeted emailing managed to coax more students from working class backgrounds but this still had its limitations, and so a different strategy was adopted. Initially, the study hadn't offered any cash incentive but when this was changed to a five pound cash incentive and then upped to ten pounds, the social and educational background, and gender of the respondents significantly altered. Suddenly men from working class backgrounds and from upper-middle class privately-educated backgrounds were interested and responding to the calls for participants.[13] For research to be successful, it has to make itself meaningful and interesting to the participants. Thus, whereas female, liberal middle class students often responded out of an intrinsic interest, male students were more likely to cite cash payments, and respondents from working class backgrounds were more likely to respond to a study looking at their experiences.

This final aspect is interesting. Whilst a call for 'final-year students' is an ostensibly open category, it tends to pre-select the responses by the way in which different students identify with being a student. When the call specifically asked for 'first generation' students, a significant proportion of responses were by students from working class backgrounds, who had cited the fact that they could identify with the research in a way that they would not have done otherwise. In addition, the cash payment seemed to lubricate the willingness of responses and led to more responses by students from Class I, who saw it as a 'cheeky' use of time and said they would not have responded had the payment not been offered. These examples offer some interesting lessons for sampling and show that the categories we used to discriminate between groups are not necessarily those used by the groups we wish to study.

3.3.3 The Semi-Structured Interview as a method of Data Collection

Having identified a framework for data collection and identified willing participants the next step was to collect the data and to do this, the research used the semi-structured interview. It was seen to be a good compromise between the exploratory, unstructured interview and the

[13] Participants seeking to access the graduate labour market were actively sought and students who said they were taking gap-years on graduation were excluded from the interviews.

pre-determined, structured interview, whilst offering the flexibility of the former alongside the rigour of the latter. The semi-structured interview allows the study to elicit complex details about the student's biography: including educational experiences; social background; career aspirations and labour market experiences. In doing so, it provides a theoretically grounded, analytical account of experience that is not pre-constructed through the imposition of narrow, conceptual categories.

The semi-structured interview allows the researcher to demarcate the scope of the interview, through an interview guide, yet unlike the structured interview it is able to probe, follow up, clarify and elaborate. Thus, the interviewer is able to define the interviewee's response to the required degree, and investigate tangents that arise during the interview, meaning the interviewer doesn't have to think up a full range of possible questions to get the required data. By allowing the respondent to reply in their own categories, their understanding and knowledge of the world are allowed to emerge through the interview, whereas the structured interview tends to impose pre-determined categories onto the data leading to epistemic issues. On the other hand the unstructured interview does not guarantee the production of comparable data, which was important in this study as students are competing against one another. In short, the semi-structured interview allows for a more creative interaction between interviewer and interviewee (Kvale, 1996) without compromising the integrity of the data from which analyses can be made.

It is important to choose the appropriate methodology for the task at hand, yet there are a number of issues with the semi-structured approach. For instance, the interviewee's responses cannot be guaranteed to be authentic but then this is the same for all types of research. Goffman suggested that when individuals come together they co-create the schemas of understanding present in the interaction and interviewees may try to comport themselves toward the perceived position of the interviewer and so the interviewer needs to be aware of how they influence the nature of the interaction (Goffman, 1967). This did not really emerge as an issue in this research, in fact students were generally willing to reveal aspects of their own relation to being, and reflect upon them in the interview, with one student in particular remarking 'I can tell you this because I don't know you'. Moreover, the semi-structured interview may foreclose on certain possibilities by the questions that aren't asked; the only defence against which is eternal epistemic vigilance.

The research did consider a number of alternative methods, including using focus groups, participant observation and surveys but for a number of different reasons these were not used. Focus groups were considered as a good way of generating discussion around certain subjects. However, the research wanted to situate experiences and understandings, in relation to social class, and for many people social background is a sensitive issue. Precisely because people don't want to be judged on their background, people may try and present a neutral front, which it is difficult to get beyond if they feel that they are being judged. In a face-to-face setting, where the interviewer has built up a rapport with the interviewee, it is quite possible that interviewees will be more frank and up-front. Focus groups wouldn't give the depth, context and quality of narrative required to create an understanding of individual experiences and to draw comparisons with other respondents.

Participant observation in a graduate recruitment setting was also considered. Whilst this would have been a fascinating exercise it would not have served the purposes of the thesis. The thesis wanted to understand not just how social class became consequential in the act of recruitment but how it was consequential in orienting graduates to different areas of the graduate labour market, for which participant observation would only ever have produced a partial and incomplete understanding. If anything, participants in a graduate recruitment setting would already be over-selected; the bottom-up approach of interviewing students would produce a more diverse sample, showing how students are relationally positioned in the social field.

The research also considered the use of surveys and how they might build up a broader picture of how undergraduates become oriented to the graduate labour market. For reasons already discussed above, it was felt that surveys could not be relied upon to build a comprehensive understanding. Surveys tend to pre-categorise responses, so that rather than allowing categories of understanding to emerge from experience they tend to impose a categorical framework onto the world, which makes it difficult to know what one is missing. Indeed, as the research aimed to elucidate processes that have remained hidden from the scholastic gaze, it is difficult to justify any formulation that would tacitly impose a world-view. Thus, whilst it may have been a useful, complementary method, it did not directly serve the purposes of the thesis and so was not used in the initial phase of research although it would be useful as part of a follow-on study.

3.3.4 Planning and Piloting the Interview Schedule

Before the semi-structured interviews could be undertaken there was a need to design the interview schedule and then pilot it to detect any flaws in the methodology. The questions needed to elicit information that would bear on the original research questions and so constructing the interview guide required thought. A balance needed to be struck between the rigorous collection of key data and an open-ended questioning style that allowed participants to explore tangents significant to the research questions. Moreover, it is difficult to know how respondents react to questions or to know what would emerge as significant in the research and so it was important to test and re-formulate the interview guide in a live setting.

From the literature, previous research and professional experience the study understood that undergraduates arrived at the graduate labour market in different ways and that it was important to understand how. Thus, two sets of questions focused on social and school background and the experience of university and a third set of questions focused on interactions with the graduate labour market, graduate recruiters and work experience (See Appendix 4). Given the setting it was most natural to begin talking about the university experience. The interview then followed through the other questions as felt right at the time and the schedule served as a reference point to ensure full coverage.

The first set of questions had been designed to be open and non-controversial and so covered aspects of the academic experience, extra-curricular activities and the general experience of university. For instance, questions about the amount of contact time, lab or practical time, time spent reading or researching, in a typical week, were complemented with questions about part-time work, sports, clubs and societies that the student might have been involved in, and to what degree they participated in such things. These questions were readily received as they are a central aspect of being a student, but by asking these questions it was possible to locate the experiences of different students within the wider undergraduate population.

The second set of questions covered career aspirations: what companies they were intending to apply to, what jobs they had applied to, if any, their experience of work, internships, interviews/assessment centres, their experience and friends' experiences of internships/work experience, their reasons for wanting to apply to certain employers/choosing a certain career,

their opinions of alternative careers and why they weren't a consideration. The student was also asked to reflect on how their experiences had shaped their understanding of the labour market and how they had been oriented toward certain careers, which proved particularly interesting as the research progressed.

The third set of questions covered social background, previous schooling, experience of secondary school/college and how it compared to university, their parents' experiences of university, if any, their parents occupations, siblings and their current occupations/education, questions about their political persuasion, music, sport and newspaper interests were also gathered. These questions aimed to give a more rounded understanding of the social origins of the student. Father's occupation alone is a poor indicator of social origin and this all-round questioning elicited important information that certainly would have been missed otherwise.

The actual format of these questions was twice piloted and re-drafted. Each pilot sample consisted of five interviews with undergraduates at Russell Group University. Through these pilots, questions were re-phrased, new questions were included, some were dropped, and the general patter and intuitive nature of the schedule was naturalised. Moreover, with practice it only became necessary to refer to the interview schedule in the latter half of the interview, to mop up any questions that were missed in the natural course of the interview. There is a value in this as it allows the conversation to flow rather than being stunted by a pre-ordained structure; the obvious danger being that the interview may spin off in tangents and so the interviewer requires some degree of control and a modicum of good sense.

The final consideration was the need to establish 'buy-in' from the interviewees. It was important that they saw the interview as part of a legitimate piece of research whilst feeling able to make a significant contribution to the research. As such, it was made clear from the outset that the success of the research depended on the insight that they could give and that it required their participation over a period of time and not just for a particular instance. To this end, time was given to establishing a rapport with interviewees, and it proved important that the interviewer knew something of the universities and cities in which the three research sites were located.

3.3.5 Interviewee Sampling

To be able to undertake the analyses necessitated by the focus of this PhD it was necessary to identify and pre-determine, to some extent, the mix of characteristics amongst the interview sample. Given the focus on social class there was a need to interview students from a range of social class backgrounds. This was crudely measured according to parental occupation, based on SOC2010 (see above). However, the study wanted to contrast the influence of university and subject choice within and between different class groups. Therefore, it was necessary to identify a sample that was internally varied along each of these axes. Thus, working class and middle class students were identified at each of the three universities across three broad subject areas: vocational, soft sciences and hard sciences. In addition to this, the study wanted to control for gender influences, and so male and female respondents were identified across each of these sub-groups.

In total one hundred and three undergraduates were interviewed for this research, the split by class background and university can be found in table 3.1 below and profiles are provided in Appendix 5. The number of interviewees was higher than that initially planned. This was mainly because new and interesting themes were emerging in the interviews as different student constituencies were accessed. It was only as the sample built up that we could become more confident in the observations. The final number of interviewees was thus partly determined by the natural half-life of research in a new field, and the practical constraints imposed upon the PhD. The table below shows that there were only seven respondents from a working class background at Elite University; this reflects their broader under-representation at this university level.

Table 3.1 'The Distribution of Interviewees by University and Class Background'

	Elite University	Russell Group University	Post-1992 University
Working class	7	19	13
Middle class	30	21	13
Total	**37**	**40**	**26**

3.3.6 Transcription

All the interviews were transcribed by the researcher (for an example see Appendix 7). In some cases, where dialects were strong, the transcripts have been written to represent the words as they were spoken, to try and give a sense of the individual. Whilst transcribing was time-consuming (it took around two months of solid work) it was a necessary process and allowed the researcher to begin to get close to the data. It was an opportunity to reflect upon the *feel* of each respondent, how they were socially and institutionally situated and how this was reflected in their speech.

The act of transcribing multiple interviews in close proximity to one another proved to be a useful exercise in contrasting different individuals, their experiences, attitudes and dispositions, and allowed the research to get underneath the skin of the institutions being studied whilst reflecting upon the role played by social origin. By following the contours of each individual's experiences, it was possible to gain a sense of the student habitus and how it was positioned vis-à-vis others. As such ideas emerged they were noted, collated and later informed the coding process. The responses to the surveys were later indexed to each respondent so that a full record could be logged.

3.3.7 Post-Graduation follow-up Survey

Having conducted initial interviews with final year students, a survey to follow up on their experiences and labour market trajectories was carried out six months after they had graduated. This allowed the research to extend the analysis beyond the initial transition into the labour market. Previous research has shown that some graduates don't settle on a graduate career immediately after leaving university (Elias & Purcell, 2004; Smetherham, 2006) and graduate under-employment seems to decrease with time. Whilst the study didn't have the time to take a longer term view, a six month follow-up was within the remit of this study. As such, we find that some graduates found employment post-university with some securing employment for the following year, in the initial six-month period.

As we have already stated, methods need to be appropriate to the task at hand. As the respondents had already been interviewed, a number of important themes had already emerged which would be followed up in the coding and data analysis stages of research. To get a sense of how these students had progressed into the graduate labour market whilst remaining within the constraints of the PhD required a less intense method of follow-up. The

survey was used, as it offered the most effective use of time compared with other methods. Given the narrower range of information required, the geographical dispersion of interviewees and pre-established rapport it was felt that a survey-based approach would successfully generate the required information.

The principal aim of the survey was to capture the graduate destinations to see if anything of interest had emerged post-graduation, allowing the study to assess whether graduates had followed-up their intended destinations, whether they had encountered difficulties and how their future plans had changed, if at all. A number of secondary aims included capturing the destinations of their friends, and so broaden the understanding of the research (respondents were asked of their friends' intended destinations during the interview phase), and asking the interviewee to reflect upon their experience of university and the graduate labour market. The questions within the survey reflected these aims (See Appendix 6).

3.3.8 Designing the Survey

To secure as high a return as possible it had to be a relatively short survey (the longer the survey, generally, the lower the return). Thus, it begins with a number of questions with pre-categorised responses that had emerged from the literature and from the initial interviews as appropriate categories. The initial range of questions (Questions 1-7) identified the nature of the destination of the graduate, focusing on work and/or further education destinations. The second set of questions (8-10) focused on the destinations of the graduates' friends. The third set of questions (11-14) focused on the reflections of the graduate and aimed to pull out qualitative reflections on the nature of the experience of university and the graduate labour market now that they had transitioned into the graduate labour market. A final set of questions (15-17) asked about the disposition of the graduates toward potential future phases of research including a CV analysis and follow-up phone-based interviews. Whilst the CV analysis was later disregarded, it was interesting to see how many students (and of what backgrounds) would be willing to submit their CV's to such analysis.

All interview respondents were made aware of the follow-up survey prior to the interview and during the interview itself which allowed for maximum buy-in from the respondents. All were asked for contact details (email addresses and/or mobile phone numbers) at the end of the interview (none declined) and this information was used to contact them during the

survey stage. Contact details were held for all 103 interviewees. At an initial sweep, 45 responded within two weeks. A secondary sweep raised the response to 62 and a third sweep (10 weeks after the initial call) to 81. Outdated contact details meant 12 couldn't be contacted, leaving 10 who failed to respond to all three of the emails/texts. However, of the 22 nil replies, only the labour market destinations of 10 were 'unknown' as the remainder had secured graduate employment prior to leaving university – nine of these ten were latterly chased up.

3.3.9 Survey Monkey

To conduct and record the results of the survey the online website Surveymonkey.com was used. This is a user-friendly website commonly used by many data–collecting bodies, and with which students tend to be familiar. The link to this survey was distributed via email (where email details didn't exist mobile contact details were used to get a usable email) and none reported any difficulty using this survey. It is possible to examine the time taken to fill out the survey, the range varied from 5 minutes to 25 minutes and the average time was 15 minutes. This tool was used when first constructing the survey as the aim was to produce a survey that captured the necessary information but which took no more than 15 minutes to complete. This time period seemed to be an optimum compromise between acquiring data and the tendency for respondents to complete the survey. Fifteen minutes may seem a little high but as personal rapport had already been established during the interview it was felt that the respondents would be willing to give a little more time to a survey than may otherwise have been the case. No incentives were offered to complete the survey except from personal communications.

The data from the survey was initially logged and stored online by the servers of Survey Monkey before being downloaded to the hard drive for analysis. As this data was being collected alongside the initial coding phase, there was a dynamic period in which incoming data informed emergent themes, confirming and transforming them in the process. However, by the time of the second phase of coding, the data had all been collected and collectively informed the analysis in conjunction with the interview transcripts. Data on graduate destinations was particularly interesting as it extended the initial data period and increased the proportion of graduates who had found employment but it was also interesting to see the reflections and regrets of different graduates post-graduation.

3.4 Coding, CAQDAS and Analysis

Having collected a large amount of data the task of analysis was somewhat challenging. However, the coding and analysis stage was not a discrete stage in the research. Initial coding and analysis of the data began as soon as the data collection process began, and continued throughout the research process, as Miles and Huberman (1994) suggest. This allowed the research to develop analytical themes early on, which were tested, challenged and corroborated throughout the data collection process. However, once the data collection period had drawn to a close, the real act of coding could begin.

Coding is at once a simple and difficult task. It is simple in that the procedure of coding is fairly straightforward but it is difficult in the sense that to do it well, and to produce insight, requires reflection and a sound knowledge of the evidence base. Computer Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis Software (CAQDAS) can be used to aid the process of coding, but it does not replace the need for an immersed and intuitive mind. As such, one can argue the advantages of using Nvivo over and above Atlas.ti, or vice versa, but these are not necessarily significant to the quality of coding. The single main reason for using any CAQDAS is that they act as time-saving devices, and are able to hold all the requisite information in one place, which can be called upon in different formats and to segment the transcripts along different themes and codes. However, the choice of CAQDAS does not do away with the need for analysis; for me it remains a marginal, technical decision.

As I have already suggested, the act of coding began fairly early on, at least in a very provisional way. Reflective notes were written during the interviews, supplemented by research notes written after each day of interviewing and which have subsequently contributed to an index of writing on various different themes relating to this thesis. This body of writing currently stands at more than 300,000 words and was very useful in expounding upon ideas and themes pertaining to the thesis. As such, the process of coding and data analysis was a continual process of analysis and reflection, complicated and challenged by findings as they emerged from the field.

The act of ‘coding’ is significant as it is a moment in which prior theoretical and empirical understanding converges into realisable analytical streams and can represent the culmination

of many years of work. Coding began with a review of all the interview transcripts and ended with a third draft of key themes, six months later. During this time, the interview transcripts and survey data were considered and notes were made. These were compared with written field notes and past reading. Themes were then identified, discussed and re-considered vis-à-vis the data, which initiated a fresh round of coding, as themes were collapsed or expanded accordingly. This was an important period of sustained reflection which required re-immersion into the data. Thus, the recorded interviews were re-visited to get a sense of the data, and a sense of the individuals speaking. This reconnected the textual representations with an individual, a being who had a biography, a history, a way of being and doing that was not contained in the transcripts alone. Thus, the act of coding was part of a broader process of analysis which required moving between transcripts, recordings, and other media. The themes that finally emerged grew up around important junctures, or points of interest, many of which were evident early on in the research but which had been developed and refined during this analysis.

Throughout this process, initial analytical formulations were posited and tested. In a process similar to Zaniecki's (1934) analytic induction the data were scanned for different categories of phenomena, relationships identified, refined through the subsequent identification of cases and reformulated where multiple negative cases arose (Denzin, 1970). A clear example of this is in the segmentation of the middle classes. Throughout this process, appropriate, robust explanations were identified according to the highest incidence of confirming cases and the lowest incidence of negative cases (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). The large sample of one hundred and three interviews is partly testament to the desire to test and corroborate the emergent analysis, and to try and detect negative cases that would undermine the validity of the proposed explanations.

This approach has some parallels to grounded theory, in which analytical categories are allowed to emerge from the empirical data through the way in which they appear significant and meaningful to respondents. I was interested to document how graduates were located vis-à-vis the forms of capital operating in relation to the graduate labour market and their understanding of these forms of capital. As such, it was necessary to discover what traits, characteristics, experiences and the like were experienced positively or negatively in relation to different regions of the graduate labour market, i.e. to discover what was able to act as 'capital' in relation to the graduate labour market.

By understanding how graduates experienced themselves more or less positively in relation to different regions of the graduate labour market it was possible to identify the valences of capital operating in relation to different regions of the graduate labour market. Once identified it was then possible to trace how these forms of capital were accessed by graduates, which involved understanding how social, cultural and economic forms of capital could be converted into 'legitimate' forms of capital. This was a long and drawn-out process that required a close-reading of the interview transcripts and the re-situating of the graduate vis-à-vis the broader social, cultural and economic field. Eventually, however, this culminated in an analytical model which mapped the relationships between the different analytical themes, establishing the diverse and complex relationship between social origin, educational background, social and educational trajectories and graduate labour market outcomes.

3.5 Analytical categories

The analysis revealed that graduate experiences were not random but that respondents could be grouped according to commonalities and differences that they shared vis-à-vis others within the sample. Individuals sharing common origins, for instance, maybe united by common experiences that tended to set them apart from others. The use of categories is only ever useful if they provide us with insight but there is always a dynamic tension when multiple influences are at work and so it is important to identify the most salient categorisation, whilst remaining mindful of the competing influences that may make such categorisations over-simplistic. This is why Ball warns us that social categories obscure as much as they reveal (Ball, 2003) and why Bourdieu argues that sociology "*ought* to begin with the question of whether collectives exist and how they exist" (Bourdieu, 1985: 741).

Given the focus of the PhD and the construction of the sample, class is obviously a salient category from which to derive insight and forms the starting point for the sub-groups that are discussed within this thesis. However, what is obvious is that social class does not produce a clear-cut basis for analysis; in Bourdieu's terminology we find that individuals are united in a relation of homology vis-à-vis the broader social field but they may share characteristics common to the field. Thus, to produce the insight we require, we needed to be able to trace how and to what extent the natural affinities and social alliances established within the university space and made significant beyond, were rooted in social commonalities. Thus, as

we shall see, individuals from similar social and educational backgrounds may enjoy coterminous labour market trajectories despite attending very different universities, whilst individuals from the same university may exhibit disparate labour market experiences. We can begin to explain this through the lens of class, educational trajectory and gender influences.

3.5.1 Social Class

Definitions of class are often linked to Weberian-inspired status hierarchies, such as those used and deployed by the Office for National Statistics (ONS). Class categories such as SOC2010 identify social divisions based on the type of work, manual or non-manual, and the skill level (unskilled, semi-skilled and skilled). These class categories are reflected in differences in earnings and social status which become reflected in differences such as housing, schooling, consumption practices and activities, what Bourdieu (1996) has called the 'matrix of preferences'. Some have contested the portrayal of class-based activities and consumption practices (Bennett *et al*., 2009) and it is important to remember that age, ethnicity and gender all complicate how class is operationalised. For this thesis the field is narrowed by the focus on young, British-born graduates and so the distinction between the working and middle class is a useful starting point for distinguishing between graduates.

Much of the existing literature on the employability of graduates has focused on the experiences of middle class graduates. For instance, Brown and Hesketh's (2004) study was focused on a middle class educational elite, just as Power and Whitty's (2008) work was based on a sample largely from the higher social classes. Whilst the analysis of class differences within the education system is not without precedent, this thesis breaks new empirical ground by contrasting the experiences of graduates from the same universities but different class backgrounds. The notion of class is contested (Pakulski and Waters, 1996) but the literature seems to converge around a common-sense categorisation. For instance, both Ball (2003) and Reay et al (2009) base their categorisation of class groups on ONS-SEC2000 categories. Reay et al (2009) identify the working class as being from categories L7-L14 on the ONS-SEC2000, and the middle classes as being from categories L1-L6, which serves a useful starting point for talking about class.

This thesis basis its class categorisations on the Office for National Statistics' recently revised SOC2010. In this study, graduates with parents from Social Class I (Managers, Directors and Senior Officials) or Social Class II (Professional Occupations) on the SOC2010 are considered 'middle class' whilst working class graduates are considered to be those from Social Class III-IX: Associate Professional and Technical Occupations (III), Administrative and Secretarial Occupations (IV), Skilled Trades Occupations (V), Caring, Leisure and Service Occupations (VI), Sales and Customer Service Occupations (VII), Process, Plant and Machine Operatives (VIII) and Elementary Occupations (IX). Father and mother have been treated equally, and so the social class background of the interviewees has been based on the parent with the highest classification. However, it needs reiterating that whilst these categories capture broad differences between the modalities of practice, between the disposition and stances that characterise individuals within them, these categories also conceal significant internal differences. This thesis is not simply about how the middle classes are juxtaposed vis-à-vis the working classes; it is about how the middle classes are divided amongst and against themselves. For this reason, the thesis sub-divides the middle class.

3.5.2 Middle Class Fractions

There are clear differences within the middle class sample that cannot be easily reconciled within the analytical category, the 'middle class'. Initially, it was thought that the distinction between professionals and managers would be a significant fault-line along which meaningful differences could be observed. However, as the research progressed, and as the data began to take shape, this segmentation proved problematic. The emerging empirical evidence suggested that there was an explanatory relationship between social origin and graduate labour market destinations but to tease this out in the analysis required a re-drawing of the categories used to discuss the data.

Power (2000) suggests that the middle classes are divided vertically and horizontally. Vertically, she argues that the middle classes are stratified in terms of their overall volume of assets (or capital) and thus according to their market power over different social fields. At a simplistic level we might reduce this to the measure of economic capital, assets and income, but we can expand it to include social capital and, with more difficulty, to include cultural capital. In the latter sense, Bennett *et al*., (2009) find that high levels of economic capital

allow the professional-executive class to become 'cultural omnivores' and so the volume of the different forms of capital may be inter-woven. However, horizontal divisions are less clear. Variably, these divisions have been described as the division between managers and professionals (Savage *et al*., 1992), between the fields of production, with the old middle class juxtaposed against the new middle class (Berger, 1987) and in terms of the sector of employment, between the private and public sectors (Perkin, 1989).

The distinction made between managers and professionals is rooted in the differential asset-base of occupational groups. Savage et al (1992) firstly identify the petite bourgeoisie/entrepreneurs, as being the holders of property assets, and distinguish between managers, the holders of organisational assets, and professionals holding cultural capital (Savage *et al*., 1992). Power argues that for Savage the division between managers and professionals is 'fundamental to any understanding of the middle classes' (Power, 2000: 136). However, Goldthorpe (1995) has argued that the boundary between managers and professionals was more permeable than Savage et al (1992) claimed, a point taken up by Bennett et al (2009) in their discussion of the 'professional executive class'. Power (2000) suggests that the difference between managers and professionals may be less of kind and more of level. The distinction between managers and professionals proved problematic for this study as it only captured a partial element of the differences observed within the population.

Berger makes the distinction between the old and new middle class. This binary is based on the distinction between the production and distribution of material goods and services (old middle class) and the production and distribution of symbolic knowledge (new middle class) (Berger, 1987), reflecting Bernstein's analyses of class (Bernstein, 1977; 1990; 1996). Again, this binary does not quite capture the observed differences amongst the respondents to this thesis. An alternative is offered by Perkin (1989) when he makes the distinction between the public sector and private sector middle classes. It is argued that these groups derive their economic and ideological support from different sectors of the economy and thus the cleavages between them are much more significant. This binary aptly captures key aspects of the complex relationship between social origin and graduate labour market destinations as it was found to fundamentally underpin the pre-disposition of respondents.

The ideological differences between middle class fractions are significant. Anticipating differences in political dispositions, the interview schedule included a number of questions concerning voting preferences, newspaper consumption, political, foreign affairs and business interests, and so it was possible to see how these varied across the interview sample. A correlation emerged between political dispositions, social origin and the disposition toward the graduate labour market. Whilst gender and subject choice have an effect, the relationship between the sector of employment of parents and the dispositions and inclinations of students was particularly strong. We find that middle class parents furnish their children with specific forms of social and cultural capital that become consequential to graduate labour market orientation and outcomes. Thus, as Power (2000) found, public sector middle class fractions are inclined to be left-wing, Guardian and Independent readers, whilst private sector fractions are inclined more to the right, and read The Times, the FT or The Telegraph; these differences become rooted in social networks, extra-curricular activities, labour market dispositions and ultimately labour market destinations.

Chapters four and five discuss the middle class fractions identified in this research. Chapter four focuses on middle class graduates who access occupations in the private sector and chapter five focuses on middle class graduates who access occupations in the public sector. Whilst there is a strong relationship between the sector occupation of parents and the labour market orientation of graduates this is not an exclusive tendency. For example, we find middle class female graduates with fathers employed in the private sector are often oriented to the public sector and associated third sector organisations, and so this has been reflected in the way the sample has been treated in this thesis.

3.5.3 Educational Trajectory

The notion of trajectory refers to an individual's relative elevation vis-à-vis that which is modal for the social group from which they emerge. In educational terms it has been used by Bourdieu and Passeron (1977) to refer to the relative educational success of individuals from particular social groups. For instance, very few students from working class backgrounds attend any of the elite universities and so they enjoy a steep educational trajectory, whereas working class students at less selective institutions may be more common, which has consequences for how individuals experience themselves within the institution, and amongst their peers. This notion of trajectory is significant for the middle classes, as it may underpin

their own sense of self, but it is particularly salient for students from working class backgrounds who become defined against their educational trajectory.

Educational trajectory is significant to the working classes because it underpins social mobility; a steep educational trajectory often moves the working class student beyond their taken-for-granted habitus and frays the ties to their point of origin. Educationally selective institutions are also typically socially and culturally selective (tacitly, on the social basis of their student membership) and as such, working class students tend to feel out of place at elite universities, a feeling which tends to dissipate (but not always) with time as individuals acculturate to the new social and cultural norms. This is particularly strong at Oxford and Cambridge where cultural immersion and social proximity are guaranteed by the institution. As such, and as we will see, working class students on steep educational trajectories also experience steep social trajectories, tend to share experiences common to their middle class peers and become educationally and socially dislocated from their group of origin.

By contrast, those on less steep trajectories, who stay local, having achieved mid-range A-level grades, tend to experience little social discomfort, maintain local and school-based friendships, and tend to make new social networks inhabited by others like or not too dissimilar to themselves. In this thesis we make the distinction between these groups on the somewhat arbitrary distinction of A-level grades: those with ABB or lower at A-level have been identified as modal trajectory students, whereas those with AAB or higher at A-level have been identified as elite trajectory students. This academic distinction is found to underpin social and cultural distinctions within the working class sample, which cannot be traced back to differences in levels within the working class. Indeed, it was apparent that social and cultural differences are rooted in educational distances realised as social distances. This distinction is particularly significant at the Russell Group University as it underpins broad differences within the working class sample, allows the study to explain how and why some working class students appear to ‘make it’ whilst others at the same institution struggle, and it also informs the analysis of the groups at the Elite University and the Post-1992 University.

3.5.4 University, Gender, Subject Choice and Schooling

Clearly, any research concerned with how graduates from different social classes experience the transition from university to the labour market touches on a number of intersecting influences. In the first instance, it is clear that the selected group is academically differentiated, with different levels of academic capital and reputational capital, in the form of the degree. To hold this constant, the study sought out a wide range of respondents from different class backgrounds at each of the universities in the study. This is important because many previous studies have not had the granularity of data to make informed analyses of class differences within the graduate population and the university that one attends has sometimes been taken as a proxy for class background, which is problematic.

In addition to this, gender, subject and prior schooling were all influential to some degree, but holding these constant was much more difficult. Where possible, the study sought out an even gender split, so that gender could be considered, but doing so across subject and prior schooling became immensely difficult. Thus, social class, university, subject choice and gender were taken as primary drivers of the sample but the effects of prior schooling only emerged during the analysis. These categories have not been taken as primary analytical categories but have been explored within each sub-group, where they appear more or less salient according to the specifics of the sub-group. For example, private schooling emerges as significant for middle class students from public sector backgrounds, whilst gender appears to be significant to the aspirations of middle class students from private sector backgrounds.

Whilst this study has taken class as its focus, it has remained vigilant to other influences. It is clear that individuals are subject to intersecting influences and tensions, and that these find a specific expression in the specific case of an individual, but it is also clear that individuals who are similarly located vis-à-vis one another, in social space, experience these influences and tensions in similar ways, producing similar practices and actions that may not be apparent when we are in the weeds of data collection. It is this that this thesis wishes to explore.

3.6 Ethical Issues

The British Sociological Association (BSA) provides guidelines on ethical practice, which is intended to offer a framework for understanding what type of issues may constitute ethical issues. The BSA ethical guidelines were read prior to beginning the PhD and referred to

intermittently to ensure that the thesis maintained best practice. However, apart from issues of professional integrity there are few clear ethical issues with research such as this. All of the respondents were adults, of sound mind, were involved on their own initiation, and were free to divulge as much or as little as they felt appropriate.

All respondents were asked to read an information sheet providing information on the study prior to the interview (See Appendix 1) and sign a consent form (See Appendix 2). They were made aware of their right to withdraw from the study at any time without reason, of the conditions of anonymity under which they were providing their testimony and were made aware of the aims and objectives of the study. Under these conditions all participants gave their free consent. However, consent is sometimes a grey area and potentially problematic (Burgess, 1985).

Whilst interviewees were made aware of the aims and objectives of the study, it is not always possible to convey the significance that their words may carry when contextualised within a broader project or when presented in an abridged version. As such, respondents may be sensitive to the manner in which their words are presented. The most that one can hope to do is to maintain the sentiment and be true to the internal coherence of a respondent's contribution. In many cases, we discover that any such sensitivity is a deep-seated sensitivity to social objectification which individuals tend to resist. However, many of the respondents were interested in the wider social implications of the study and were aware of some of the political debates around the research.

To protect the identity of respondents, names of individuals, organisations and locations have been anonymised. Where respondents have been quoted in the thesis, each has been identified through a fairly standard formula [gender, university, broad discipline, graduate destination, family background], offering an appropriate balance of information and identity protection. All respondents were made aware of this procedure prior to participating in the interviews and none objected. Moreover, most of the respondents expressed an interest in reading the executive summary of the PhD, a request that will be met once the PhD has been confirmed.

3.7 Representability, Reflexivity and Rigour

Representability, reflexivity and rigour are three of the main scientific concerns for any research in the social sciences. Not all research can meet these criteria at all times and in all ways. The limitations imposed upon research by time, energy and monetary constraints ensure that the validity of research can never be guaranteed. However, the researcher can take a number of actions to ensure that their approach is fair, reliable and robust, producing findings that are rigorous, which would likely be found by other researchers working in the same field. Triangulation and rigour in the collection and analysis of data are important and underpin rigorous, reliable social science research.

Given that this research wishes to explore the consequences of differences between *different* types of graduates, the sample of respondents is not intended to be representative. Graduates have been drawn from certain class backgrounds, certain universities and certain degree subjects so as to inform the analysis. As such, the research sample is not representative of the wider graduate population. All that it can say about graduates is derived from the analysis of this particular sub-section of graduates. However, this does not mean that its findings are necessarily limited to this group of graduates.

The rigour of this research derives from its triangulation of data. This study has considered and contrasted the experiences of different groups of graduates, at different universities and from different class backgrounds. By carrying out one hundred and three interviews it has many cases to call upon to corroborate or disqualify its findings. Indeed, the impetus to carrying out so many interviews came from a desire to test the emergent theories. What is particularly satisfying about this research is that it was possible to see how commonalities across and differences between different sub-segments of the sample became significant in similar ways. As such, we find that we are able to triangulate the findings across the graduate population to individuals who are similarly located.

There are a number of difficulties with this research. Whilst it has been able to demonstrate how graduates experience their own employability, it has not engaged with the realised assessment criteria employed by graduates. Thus, it is reliant upon the identification of factors as they were experienced as relevant by graduates, which is not necessarily a guarantee of the criteria actually assessed for by graduate recruiters. However, as Glaser (1978) suggests, the constant comparison of data and the discovery of recurrent events can

become categories of focus, to be compared across a population, at different times and in different instances.

Reflexivity then is about establishing a scientific practice that is scientifically aware of how it has been constructed. Willig (2001) identifies two types of reflexivity, personal reflexivity and epistemological reflexivity. She suggests that personal reflexivity includes an appreciation of how our personal values and experiences inform our research whereas epistemological reflexivity includes appreciating how the research design delimits the social phenomena that it can uncover and the way in which it might contribute to the construction of the data. To critically evaluate a piece of research we have to be reflexive about our research in both these ways.

Clearly, there was an issue with personal reflexivity, especially by the way in which personal beliefs may inform the data being collected. The use of the semi-structured interview and open-ended questioning was an attempt to overcome this limitation. By doing so, issues and themes arose that had not been considered in the initial research design, and these contributed significantly to the final analysis. However, personal reflexivity can often be an asset to research; as long as one understands that the researcher position is also socially and structurally located then one can appreciate that there exist nuances of phenomena that one cannot witness from one's position. The task that then faces the researcher is to reconstitute the social field, observing and understanding the full range of positions and stances within a field, to try and understand the situated meaning that individuals give to their own practices and behaviours whilst being reticent to adopt these as the final word on the phenomena under study, and to this end the researcher must give thought to their own epistemological reflexivity.

This requires the researcher to be aware of how the research design constructs the research field and the data, and how it might be otherwise witnessed under other methods of inquiry. The aim of qualitative research is to move beyond the facets and semblances of social phenomena, to uncover them, and to reconstitute them within the relationships through which they emerge, made meaningful and significant. As such, whilst this research has a particular focus, it has tried to reconstitute and relocate the individual in time (through their social and educational histories, and the projections that they make into the future) and in social space (by relocating them amidst other individuals, groups, through which their position and

trajectory is made significant), to move beyond the particular instances of individual experiences, which in isolation really reveal little and confirm even less.

In summary, we can be confident that the findings presented in this study are generalisable to the extent that they describe individuals captured in a given moment, which has both a temporal and social dimension to it, such that their experiences and dispositions are the expression of a particular instance of a particular social configuration. The processes that it identifies may be more durable than the empirical instances it describes.

3.8 Conclusion

This chapter has considered the methods and methodology used by the thesis to investigate the impact of social background on graduate employability. In doing so, it has evaluated the methodological approach employed by the thesis, considered its strengths and weaknesses, and the implications for the rigour of the research. It has been argued that to understand the experiences of graduates from different class backgrounds, we have to understand how they are relationally located vis-à-vis one another. In particular, it has been argued that we need to understand how graduates experience themselves vis-à-vis the graduate labour market, as exhibited in the stances that they take, and how these are connected to their ability to co-determine the 'forms of capital' operating in the graduate labour market. To gain the required insight, it has been argued that it is necessary to sample individuals graduates from different class backgrounds, at the same institutions, to determine whether class or educational background becomes consequential to the graduate labour market destinations of graduates and if so, how. By drawing on a diverse sample and using the semi-structured interview, the research is able to provide insight into the processes underpinning the observed differences. The following chapters (4-7) present the analysis of the data collected as part of this thesis.

Chapters 4, 5, 6 and 7 present the analysis of the interviews and follow-up survey of four discrete analytical groups. Chapter 4 considers the middle class graduates who accessed graduate roles in the private sector whilst chapter 5 considers the middle class graduates who accessed occupations in the public sector and third-sector. These chapters explore the relationship between social origin and labour market disposition and the complicating role of gender and degree subject. Chapter 6 considers the university and early graduate labour market experiences of working class graduates on elite educational trajectories whilst chapter

7 considers the university and early graduate labour market experiences of graduates from working class backgrounds.

Chapter 4

Middle Class Graduates and the Private Sector

4.1 Introduction

> "The reconversion of economic capital into academic capital is one of the strategies which enable the business bourgeoisie to maintain the position of some or all of its heirs, by enabling them to extract some of the profits of industrial and commercial firms in the form of salaries, which are a more discreet – and no doubt more reliable – mode of appropriation than "unearned" investment income." (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1983: 79)

More so than any of the other recognisable class fractions, graduates from professional and managerial, private sector backgrounds are pre-disposed to treat higher education as a means to an end; shunning public sector employment, they are most likely to aspire to prestigious, highly-paid corporate and City graduate schemes. Whilst they do not have a monopoly over prestigious private sector careers, their social and educational backgrounds furnish them with the forms of capital necessary to constitute an early and legitimate claim on these positions. For those that do not choose a corporate career, their high volume of inherited capital (in all its various guises) allows those that seek a different path to constitute legitimate claims on other careers. In short, for the sons and daughters of the corporate cadre the graduate labour market is full of opportunity, the relatively low barrier to which is perhaps their own disposition to one or another career.

For those who are not privately educated, for those from lower managerial and professional backgrounds, and for those from less prestigious universities, this sense of command over the future may be less keen, but compared with many of their university peers they remain highly competitive in the pursuit of graduate careers in business. Thus, by providing a social and institutional framework the university acts as a vehicle for realising and legitimating labour market aspirations. Higher education serves a legitimating role which allows these students to circumvent the demands of early business careers, to translate their social origin into

prestigious, highly-rewarded careers, and to join the ranks of some of the most esteemed private sector organisations in the country.

This chapter deals with those middle class graduates who enter private sector professional and managerial occupations. It examines the role played by inherited advantage, explores the relationship between the occupational sector of parents and how this comes to influence labour market destinations, which is particularly strong for a sub-set of this population, and it considers the role played by pre-university schooling, subject choice and gender, all of which come to influence labour market destinations. As such, it is based on an analysis of the thirty-nine students identified in table 4.1 as heading into private sector occupations. It considers how this group is defined vis-à-vis other groups of students and how it is internally stratified along intra-class and academic differences.

Table 4.1: 'The Distribution of Graduates from Middle Class Backgrounds by Sector of Destination, University and Subject'

Sector of destination	**University type**	**Humanities**	**Natural sciences**	**Business / Law**	***Total***
Private sector	**Elite**	**13**	**4**	**2**	***19***
	Russell Group	**3**	**3**	**6**	***12***
	Post-1992	**0**	**3**	**5**	***8***
	Total	***16***	***10***	***13***	***39***
Public sector	Elite	8	2	1	*11*
	Russell Group	7	2	0	*9*
	Post-1992	4	0	1	*5*
	Total	*19*	*14*	*15*	***25***
	TOTAL	**35**	**14**	**15**	**64**

The majority of middle class graduates recruited into professional and managerial graduate positions in the private sector were themselves from families where their parents were employed in professional or managerial private sector occupations. However, within the

group we find a wide range of professional and managerial occupations amongst parents, ranging from the senior executives of multi-national corporations to the middle-management of regional firms. As such, the volume of capital that the sons and daughters are privy to varies significantly, leading to evident stratification within the sample. However, it is clear that the specific composition of their inherited capital – particularly the social networks and dispositions – pre-disposes this group to professional and managerial graduate roles in the private sector.

Students in the Elite University sample were largely from higher managerial and higher business class backgrounds: all of the fathers worked in private sector professional or managerial occupations, many were working in the City or City-related careers, and they represent a socially and economically dominant class.[14] Six of the nineteen mothers were housewives but the rest had successful professional careers in their own right. In contrast to the fathers, seven mothers were health and educational professionals in the public sector, although the fathers tended to be more senior in their careers. Most of this group of students had either been privately educated or had attended selective state schools: amongst them we find some of the most prestigious Public Schools, for example Winchester College and St Paul's, and some of the most successful grammar schools in the South of England. Most of these graduates aspired to a career in the City; fourteen had secured graduate jobs in London-based Accountancy, Banking, Consulting or Legal firms by the end of university whilst the other five were well on their way to securing similar positions in the follow-up survey. Those who were employed were all earning in excess of £30,000 a year; seven were earning more than £40,000 a year. Whilst this sample was male heavy, six of the nineteen were female.

The Russell Group sample exhibits greater internal stratification. For instance, we find a greater proportion of students from lower managerial and professional. Whilst CEO's and Corporate Executives are present amongst the parental occupations, there are more fathers working in middle management or in non-managerial areas of the professions. All but one of the fathers was employed in a private sector occupation. Only one of the mothers was a housewife, the majority were working in professional or managerial positions. Four of the twelve mothers worked in the public sector. In contrast to the Elite University sample, most

[14] This population reflects a particular socio-economic group that have recently increased their presence in the most prestigious universities, dubbed the 'Sutton 13' (Sutton Trust, 2008; Harris, 2010). The Sutton 13 are based on newspaper league tables and include Birmingham, Bristol, Cambridge, Durham, Edinburgh, Imperial, LSE, Nottingham, Oxford, St Andrews, UCL, Warwick and York.

of these families were removed from the networks of the South-Eastern upper middle class. Whilst half had attended private school, these were smaller, less prestigious schools, distributed throughout the North and West of England. Whilst two had been to grammar school four had attended ex-comprehensive state schools. All but one of the graduates who attended private school had accessed a graduate position with one of the large City firms by the time of the follow-up survey. By comparison, three of the six graduates that had attended state school were working as graduate trainees in industry and the other three were undertaking internships and further study to pursue professional careers in the private sector. Average salaries varied but were largely in excess of £25,000 per year, whilst two were earning more than £40,000 per year. Four of the twelve graduates were female.

The group of middle class graduates drawn from Post-1992 University were from lower managerial and professional backgrounds. All but one of the fathers worked in the private sector; one father was an NHS dentist – the mother was a small business owner. Amongst the fathers, four were medium-sized business owners based in the local region, one was middle management and two were professionals in the private sector. Of the remaining mothers, one was a housewife, three were middle management in private sector industries, one was a professional in the private sector, one was a small business owner and one was a professional in the public sector. None of the students were privately educated, which was unsurprising given the region, but four had attended grammar school. The others had attended non-selective state schools. All but one of the graduates had grown up within an hour of the university and all of these stayed local upon graduation. None had been successful in applying for 'Milkround' graduate jobs but found work with small and medium-enterprises (SMEs) in the local area – the average salary was around £20,000. Of the eight graduates, four were female.

It is clear from this initial analysis that there is a strong correlation between initial graduate destinations and the class of origin, status of the secondary school attended, gender and the status of the university, but it is not clear how these relationships operate in practice. To understand how we have to turn to the practical experiences of graduates and situate them amidst the experiences of the broader graduate population.

4.2 Labour Market Dispositions

The observed homology between social origin and graduate labour market destination is not a product of chance but a product of inherited disposition and the opportunities and experiences that habitus makes likely. For some middle class students, the innumerable daily interactions of the family places business firmly on their horizon, which in late adolescence comes to the fore as students begin to consider future careers. Thus, we find students who talk of their 'innate' relationship to business, who picked up their dad's FT at a young age, who were surrounded by business and business people, friends and family of their parents, and who came to pick up the way of talking to business people, of using the linguistic patter, and who came to embody the dispositions, ways of being and doing, stylised by their parents and the friends and family invited into the home. This disposition toward the labour market is part of a matrix of preferences reflected in the disposition these students share toward education:

> [Emma] "I was very much of the view that you worked hard at school to get good grades to get to a good uni to get a good job…the good job was the end result of the hard work…it was one of the key reasons [for coming to university] and that's pretty much cos of my dad's influence he didn't go to university and he started like at the very very bottom and saw people continuously come in above him with a degree and he was like I just don't want you to have to work as hard as I did it took him much much longer to progress like when he went it wasn't assumed now it's assumed that you get a minimum of a degree…"
>
> Female, Elite University, Social Sciences, Strategy Consultant
> Father a Corporate Finance Director, Mother a speech therapist

In this regard, the extension of degree-level education to professions and managerial positions in business may have forced groups who historically had little relation to higher education, to embrace higher education, as it became central to the reproduction of a particular class lifestyle. The pressure to reproduce social origin was very evident amongst students from higher professional and managerial class families, and particularly those from the South East of England. There was widespread acknowledgement of the expectations placed on such students by family and their social milieu, which was especially acute for those who had attended prestigious Public Schools like St Pauls, Winchester, Charterhouse or Eton:

> [Interviewer] "Do you notice any difference between your friends from up north and your 'richer' friends who I presume are southern?"
> [Helen] [laughs] "yeah. Definitely big differences. I think they almost get forced to do things when they're from down south because their parents know about the job market and things… I think getting a job [graduate employment] whilst at uni is expected for them…if I'd had done a three year course, I *should* have done an internship in my second year and some of me wishes I *had* done an internship in my second year cos then I could have only done a three year course and physics is really hard at times…but I wasn't aware of that was how things were done, *get* an internship in your second year, *get* a job in your third year, was the standard way of doing things, I think maybe if I'd had someone saying you have to do an internship maybe I would have got a job in my third year…"
>
> Female, Elite University, Social Sciences, Strategy Consultant
> Father a Journalist, Mother a PA

This interviewee asserts that there *is* a certain way of doing things but in doing so she is ascribing universal recognition to what is a very particular relationship to the graduate labour market, one shared by a minority of graduates, who tend to originate from a distinct region of social space. That graduates from private sector, middle class backgrounds may find their *raison d'etre* amongst the highly-paid, City and corporate professions reflects the way in which labour market aspirations are socially-located:

> [Thomas] "I suspect that aspirations are somewhat dictated by your family background and what schooling you had certainly most of the Winchester boys I know are thinking of the City and aren't thinking about anything else…maybe in some subtle ways it does communicate…"
>
> Male, Elite University, Social Sciences, Technology Consultant
> Father a QC, Mother a housewife

The uneven pattern of this social pressure and the tacit expectations placed on these individuals serves as an example of the dialectic of cultural acquisition: culture is not easily, wilfully imposed upon an individual, only those open to its imposition will internalise its particularities. Thus, even where the pressure is less explicit, students with parents employed

in the private sector, particularly males, tend to embrace corporate careers, even when they cannot succeed in the most competitive spaces of the graduate labour market. One might argue that such success is a question of *aspiration* and that access would be possible were aspirations only altered. However, this is to forget that aspirations share a complex relationship to the possible possibilities inscribed in social origin and trajectory. Whilst students from business class backgrounds may aspire to the careers in question, they are also endowed with all the cultural particularities suited to such careers:

> [Nicholas] "If you're from the South East you're more likely to have parents commuting to the City…like I'm very interested in marketing because my father is involved in marketing…proximity to the city is important…."
>
> Male, Elite University, Social Sciences, Strategy Consultant
> Father a Marketing Director, Mother a TV Producer

Many of the private sector, middle class group at Russell Group University didn't share the easy, native relationship to the City; those that did enter the City, or City-related professions, had been privately-educated and shared social networks and cultural characteristics similar to those observed amongst the Elite University population. For those that were state-educated, their gaze was adjusted to prestigious but less socially exclusive, corporate graduate schemes. Realising City-related careers was made much more difficult by their early social and cultural distance from dominant social groups, a tendency consolidated by their attendance at Russell Group University which reinforced their exclusion from elite social networks:

> [Stuart] "Both vacation schemes I've had I've been physically drained you're constantly watched from the social in the evenings to how you dress and how you interact… a year ago I was very arrogant a year ago I thought I was going to cruise through this and get a forty grand a year job at the end but then Freshfields rejected me and now Eversheds …you have to be the be all and end all and that's ya know going to Oxbridge and I can't pitch at that level…I think I was let down by a lack of advice by my school…It was a poor standard state school and like going to university was expected but doing a law degree was like being top of the school …again I regret my decision coming to Russell Group University…I got three A's… I should have gone to Bristol…Russell Group University was the best one I applied to…looking back I was so naïve I didn't have a clue…it's a lot to do with the reputation your

university holds…but then again maybe I'm using Russell Group University as an excuse"

Male, Russell Group University, Social Sciences, self-funded LPC
Father a large property developer, Mother a housewife

By contrast, none of the Post-1992 University graduates were aiming for prestigious graduate positions. They were concerned with securing a respectable, relatively well-paid graduate position and compared with their peers from working class backgrounds were relatively well-equipped to do so. Their degree subject tended to influence their disposition to the labour market more than similar students at Russell Group University or Elite University but they shared a similar instrumental relationship to university. Again, we find the influence of family significant, with family influencing their disposition toward 'honest careers' in business, as opposed to 'working for the government'. Within the context of their university peers they were well-disposed to securing a graduate position, with the right dispositions, networks and experiences, although their focus tended to be local or regional, rather than international in scope. This was partly because of academic constraints, i.e. lacking the right A-levels, but it was also evident in the quality and density of their social networks, their knowledge and understanding of the City and the corporate world, but also because they lacked the rarefied experiences and sense of self that characterised graduates from the other two, more prestigious universities.

We should not be surprised that labour market aspirations are difficult to separate from social and educational origins because aspirations are adjusted to the social and cultural conditions imposed upon entrants to different occupational fields. Students acquire a sense of how they are located vis-à-vis the graduate labour market through the perceptions and experiences of those around them; friends, family, university peers and alumni all carry information concerning the labour market value of one's credentials, experiences and social background, which has the simultaneous consequence of adjusting aspirations to how one is socially-located. Thus, aspirations may be practically, without conscious intent, attuned to the objective (i.e. statistically probable) entry criteria of different graduate occupations. By tracing the testimony of graduates we can see how the vertical and hierarchical adjustment of their aspirations reflects the ways in which they are educationally, socially and culturally located vis-à-vis the graduate labour market.

4.3 Private Schooling

The specific effects of private schooling are evident in the transcripts, as a particular concentration of social, cultural and reputational forms of capital. It is not possible to generalise but given the sample it would seem that private secondary schools tend to engender particular ways of being and doing which orients their students to the graduate labour market in ways that are uncommon for the majority of graduates. That is, in addition to sharing a business managerial or professional family background, attending a private school (which is possibly more likely for students drawn from private sector middle class backgrounds, see Ball (2003)) is likely to pre-dispose a graduate to *prestigious*, highly-paid graduate occupations in the South-East of England, and to equip them with the social networks and ways of being and doing necessary to realise such aspirations.

The independent effects of private schooling are difficult to determine separate from social origin but it is telling that of the seven Russell Group University students who entered a City or corporate graduate scheme, five were privately educated (the other two grammar school educated), five had fathers working in business (the other two had mothers working as managers or professionals in business). All seven were privately-educated or had fathers employed in managerial-professional positions in business. The only other privately-educated student at Russell Group University was heading towards a career in the media and the only other grammar-school student was training to be a secondary school teacher: interestingly, both had fathers and mothers that were regional accountants.

None of the Post-1992 University sample had been privately educated but amongst the Elite University sample we find eight privately-educated middle class graduates, six with fathers working in the City. All but one of these had pursued a professional City-career: the one who hadn't had secured access to a prestigious corporate graduate scheme. In observing these patterns we begin to realise that there is no hard and fast definition or category that explains labour market destinations. Dispositions are a complex product of social origin, schooling and university, experiences which socially constitute the categories of perception that one applies to the labour market and therefore one's orientation toward different careers. The privately-educated students at Elite University and Russell Group University represent a highly selected group of individuals. An early commitment to education is often a pre-requisite for access to selective private schools but these students reflect the most able

privately-educated students. They are also socially selected, in the sense that they often represent a rarefied stratum of society, who are well disposed socially and economically to secure the labour market advantages necessary to the reproduction of their lifestyles. Those originating from outside the social elite are drawn into this culture and are furnished with the social and cultural capital necessary to realise labour market aspirations.

In the past, the Public Schools provided the elite administrative cadre of the British Empire. Today, they provide many of the 'corporate foot-soldiers' and City professionals, crucial to the running of the international economic regime. As such, private schools remain central to the reproduction of social privilege (Sutton Trust, 2007; Milburn, 2009). Differential academic attainment remains central to the strategies of social reproduction but we find that similarly well-educated individuals from state schools do not translate their credentials into similarly prestigious graduate labour market destinations. It would appear that the social networks, cultural dispositions and aspirations engendered by the social milieu of the private school are at least part responsible for these differences. However, the specific concentration of these forms of capital is only one instance of their distribution; the private school does not hold a monopoly over these forms of capital; they are sited and embedded within social networks. How graduates become positioned vis-à-vis these forms of capital is an important part of explaining how social origins are connected to graduate destinations.

4.4 Symbolic Profits of Culture

Culture is embodied and marked with its conditions of acquisition, producing observable patterns of behaviour and activities associated with particular ways of being. This means that our culture, our behaviours, activities and dispositions, socially locate us vis-à-vis others. This has consequences in our ability to *be*, which is predicated upon how others see us, upon our ability to manipulate our self-presentation in the eyes of others, who cast socially-constituted categories of perception onto us and through which our social self exists. In other words, we are socially-located by how we are perceived by others, which cannot be separated from how we come into being. This becomes consequential to our possibility of appearing positively vis-à-vis different social fields.

In the graduate labour market, the traces of class culture become important in two main ways. On the one hand, our way of being underscores the interpersonal manifestation of

competence that we project, and on the other it underpins our ability to be 'objectively' competent. For example, the invitations that we receive into social spaces, clubs and societies (fields), and our ability to exhibit personability or leadership through *legitimate* extra-curricular activities – through the memberships and positions to which one has been elected – is dependent upon our ability to solicit recognisable forms of contact, which is contingent upon sharing the culture governing such spaces. We can only appear sociable amongst those who recognise us, socially. Thus, 'objective' measures of our social and cultural competence become ways of reading for a particular way of being; a relation to being that is institutionally-certified. This is because certain groups dominate the university-institution and so are able to legitimate their own way of being, as the way of being of a sociable, competent human being, but it is a form of being that is unequally shared by graduates from different regions of social space.

The social inertia of the graduate labour market can be traced back to the inertia of class culture. For instance, we find that many of the measures of social and cultural competence used by companies, are in fact part of a social and cultural assessment that seeks to discover what is euphemistically referred to as 'cultural fit'. Amongst some of the most prestigious graduate employers, social and cultural competencies are more important than technical ability (Ashley, 2010). Those who enjoy an easy, early relationship to the dominant culture are privileged in this graduate competition as the expected linguistic and cultural competencies are tacit to their manner of being:

> [Adam] "I've never done Maths higher than a C and I scraped a C, I struggle, I can barely add but Lehman Brothers an investment bank, third fourth biggest in the world were prepared to take me on and train me as a quantitative analyst – the testing you do it's looking for an innate ability…they presume it's an innate skill…a lot of chat and the illusion of confidence…these guys don't know what they're talking about, the ones in the City, they're just really confident suave men and women, who are really intelligent but it's just really not hard what they do – long hours and I take that back it is hard but they like people like me cos we think outside the box, but we're not going to self-explode or kill others around us…but then again I think what's different is that I was brought up around business, I know what business is…. on my mum's side my grandfather was a minister the Presbyterian…but the brother was head of the shipyard that made Titanic…shipyard people… and then my dad's side…my grandfather was a

timber merchant and my dad spun off from that…my mum owns her own international business…"

Male, Russell Group University, Social Sciences, Trainee in Magic Circle Law Firm
Father a large business owner, Mother a large business owner

An 'innate' relationship to business is not natural but a consequence of an early immersion into the culture of business. Benefiting from a close and personal relationship to the social networks that inhabit certain sectors of the business world, graduates from these backgrounds are suitably positioned to acquire the expected verbal and non-verbal dispositions:

[Nicholas] Actually my grandfather was very high up in Shell…but I just applied through general channels… And definitely I've always talked to my dad a lot about his ideas about marketing and I definitely got that in the interview…before the interview I had a two hour conversation with my dad on the phone just saying give me business buzz words that I can [drop into the conversation]…

Male, Elite University, Social Sciences, Strategy Consultant
Father a Marketing Director, Mother a TV Producer

Being around the *right* type of people these students learn how to present themselves linguistically but also how to inhabit their body in the *right* way. We can observe this through the correlation between *how* people present themselves and the dispositions that they embody, which is not to say that how one dresses has an influence on one's chance of success in the graduate labour market but that it is an *indication* of *who* one is and is therefore reflective of how one is likely to be encountered:

[Interviewer] "Was it easy to see who would get it…"
[Adam] "Yeah!"
[Interviewer] "…and who wouldn't? What's the difference?"
[Adam] "Attire"
[Interviewer] "Attire? In what sense?"
[Adam] "It's a big one. Guys wearing short ties, I know I look a bit of a tramp now but real bad shoes, not very enthusiastic…they may have a first from a really good uni, not an Oxford or Cambridge uni, but it was what they looked like…all the guys had long hair…I don't want to sound pretentious or anything…basically the guys who

didn't get it and who were frowned upon wore like three-button like, the lapels were really short, and like Top Shop suits or skinny ties…you have to wear an eighties like…there were people wearing braces…single cuff shirts were like…you had to wear double cuffs and if you wore single cuffs you were looked down upon, especially at Lehman brothers…"

Male, Russell Group University, Social Sciences, Trainee in Magic Circle Law Firm
Father a large business owner, Mother a large business owner

Clothing and accessories act as cultural symbols that classify the wearer in relation to social classifications, which are read by those attuned to them. For those who share a taken-for-granted relation to the dominant legitimate culture, as it exists within a specific field, any deviation from legitimate cultural symbols are not only note-worthy but revealing about the nature of the wearer. This has consequences for those from dominated social backgrounds, and especially for those who lack the economic capital to purchase at least a material relationship to culture. However, we must remember that material artefacts are only ever signs, which derive their real significance from *how* they are worn (i.e. accessorised, combined and presented on the body) and which cannot be disaggregated from the lengthy social conditioning underpinning the cultural basis of social association. This means that students who lack economic capital but possess the appropriate cultural capital may be able to exhibit the necessary forms of sociability (see Chapter Six and the elite trajectory working class). Students with parents employed as managers or professionals in businesses do not face this disadvantage and those with parent executives or senior professionals, and who attend private school, are doubly advantaged. These students tend to have the greatest amount of economic capital at their disposal and as a consequence are able to fully participate and purchase the experiences and material goods that carry symbolic weight in different social fields. Moreover, access to elite schools endows them with the correct manners and dispositions, expected of someone of their social class, which in turn disposes them well in relation to the exclusive social fields of the graduate labour market. In short, culture underpins the social homology established between different social, educational and employment fields; it is both a pre-requisite for entry and for mobility across these fields:

[Tess] "I was saying this to my mum the other day in the interview they're very interested in where your parents like what your parents do for a living, what school you've been…I think because they're looking for…they want somebody that basically

> can get on with these high powered business clients and someone who sort of fits in with their idea of like who should be working for them… I go to a few like dinners and things with my dad…he works quite closely with the Colonel there and it is all very like what are your children doing…I quite enjoy hanging out with all the rich people [laughs]…as soon as they know that I went to private school they're like oh alright and they seem very interested…they were saying like where've you gone to uni? Russell Group University's not such a big name in their eyes but when they find out I've got a job with PWC they're interested again…it is definitely a big part of it…when they say it's not what you know it's who you know it *is*, it's very much like that."
>
> Female, Russell Group University, Business, 'Big Four' Tax accountant
> Father an Army NCO, Mother a nursing home manager

Bourdieu suggests that the cultural requirements imposed by a field amount to an "admission fee". The more rarefied and prestigious fields of the graduate labour market (such as asset management, management consultancy, corporate law) tend to be relatively culturally homogeneous (Ashley, 2010), reflecting the monopolisation of the field by elite social groups, which in turn makes these fields difficult to access for any who do not share a relation to the legitimate way of being. Final recruitment decisions are increasingly made on the basis of culture, i.e. on the basis of a cultural fit, where the excluded become excluded via their own exclusion: often indirectly, as a consequence of the unease or awkwardness (perceived as a lack of confidence or poor inter-personal skills) portrayed by those who are not naturally, that is culturally, aligned to a social field. For this reason, all else being equal, students from lower managerial and professional backgrounds struggle to appear competent and confident in relation to the more prestigious graduate employers, where they are often competing with a national or transnational elite. However, their command over social and cultural resources may allow them to excel in the competition for regional graduate schemes, and so we find that students from lower professional and managerial backgrounds stand out amongst their university peers from working class backgrounds. An Oxbridge education can make up for the sense of unease but is no guarantee, as they often find themselves on a par with the privately-educated students of the Russell Group universities. As such, organising graduate recruitment along the lines of 'cultural fit' is an important and effective, though not necessarily conscious, means of maintaining the social exclusivity of particular labour

markets, allowing a narrowly defined social group to monopolise access to the social, economic and political resources managed by the field.

If this analysis appears circular it is because culture is defined by the manner of its reification, which realises social distances as personal distances. This is why culture belies an appreciation of its manner of operation. Cultural distance, which reflects social distance, becomes instantiated in the interpersonal terrain made between people, as a "space of appearances", through verbal and non-verbal signifiers. We might see the transition from university into the graduate labour market as a "Bourdieurian moment" (Ball, 2003), in which condensates of capital are made significant vis-à-vis a particular trajectory. In reality, life is composed of infinitesimal instantiations of significance, made between people, and experienced practically, reflexively expressed in the forms of likes and dislikes, dispositions towards groups, spaces, people, institutions. For this reason, the ontological complicity that exists between socially homologous spaces exerts an understated social inertia that tends to reify social divisions. It is possible to describe these effects through the statistical manipulation of social origin and destination data but the processes responsible take place at an interpersonal level, a scale hidden to official data and so the understated cultural manifestation of privilege remains one of the most powerful and yet discrete means of operationalising social privilege.

4.5 Extra-Curricular Participation

One of the interesting implications of the expansion of higher education is that it is not enough to embody the expected forms of cultural competence, one needs to support an application with supplementary evidence such as work experience and extra-curricular activities. Once again students from professional/managerial private sector backgrounds, especially those from privately-educated backgrounds, are advantaged as they are pre-disposed to an awareness of the requirements early on in their university career. Given their high levels of social, economic and cultural capital, they are able to access relevant work experience (Milburn, 2009) and are pre-disposed to participating in extra-curricular activities. Economic capital grants them the freedom from necessity necessary to take extra-curricular activities to a high level but their social and cultural forms of capital secure the social basis of these activities. It is as though they are able to make a virtue of their own way of being;

translating a power relation into a sense relation such that they define the very essence of excellence.

Students from higher professional and managerial backgrounds often arrive at university with a sense of where their degree will take them, and moreover, of how to get there. Let alone their aspirations to political office, the university sports teams or senior positions in the most exclusive and prestigious student clubs and societies, which all bolster their employability, these students also embark upon an early employment strategy: serial visits to recruitment events, fairs, talks are followed by at least one prestigious internship so that by Michaelmas (first term) of their third year many hope to have secured post-graduation employment, generally in the South-East of England and in City-based professions such as investment banking, commercial law or management consultancy. Whether they attend Elite University or Russell Group University they are very distinctive in their labour market orientation; thinking about a career long before many of their peers begin to seriously consider their futures. Being orientated toward particular segments of the labour market, and by being aware, if not fully conscious, of the demands placed on those aspiring to access such coveted areas of employment, they embark upon, and invest in a social and cultural trajectory that makes success much more likely and mitigates the risk enshrined in their project.

At the post-1992 university, students from middle class backgrounds were much more likely to participate in extra-curricular activities than their working class peers. They acclimatise early to the institutional environment and make their mark in formal sports and clubs, in stark contrast to working class students. Formal participation in the university tends to underpin social association within the university, strengthening relationships within groups and formalising the division between groups. Thus, when it comes to 'employability', middle class graduates have been oriented early to formal activities and experiences that allow them to distinguish themselves in local labour markets, whereas their peers from working class backgrounds tend to not to engage with formal extra-curricular activities and are therefore excluded from the symbolic and cultural capital that evidence of institutional immersion often denotes.

Participation in the extra-curricular side of university is not simply a conscious strategy of accumulating experiences for the graduate labour market it is often a natural extension of interests inculcated at school: here again culture intersects with 'employability'. Particularly

for the privately educated, personal and social interests maybe commensurate and so whilst they discursively acknowledge the need for 'CV-points', their interest emerges from the ontological complicity many feel with the culture of elite universities. Thus, university represents more of an unbroken continuation of an educational and social trajectory, which is why we find that privately-educated students share contiguous labour market trajectories despite attending different universities. Oxbridge colleges in particular are geared to serve the interests of the privately educated but Russell Group universities offer a wide range of sports, clubs and societies that tacitly offer social and cultural guarantees: the rowing club, the rugby team, or the student newspaper may be enclaves for the socially privileged by virtue of the socially-constituted interest guiding such activities.

Extra-curricular activities are not value free. It is not enough to participate, one needs to participate in the *right* activities.[15] City-firms commonly ask employees to interview potential applicants from the same colleges and universities: the symbolic nuances of different posts and roles are very real and become significant in relation to these socially exclusive fields of employment. There is a hierarchy of extra-curricular experience and graduates from privately-educated, higher business class backgrounds tend to access the most rarefied forms of extra-curricular experience. In the Elite University sample examples include: rowing for Great Britain, Student Union President, Editor of the student newspaper, the Captains of the University men's and women's swimming teams. Amongst the Russell Group University sample we find: swimming for the National team, Social Secretary of the Law Society, President of the Physics Society and Captain of the Women's Firsts University Netball team. This group of graduates are characterised by the experience of such prestigious positions, and whilst they don't monopolise these activities, they are important as part of a broader

[15] It is, however, difficult to determine whether students from culturally dominant regions of social space tend to occupy the most prestigious student positions because they are dominant, or whether, because they are dominant they are able to define what is prestigious. Certainly, some of the positions that these students occupy are rarefied and so are *sought after*, but whether by association they become prestigious, is difficult to tell. Those who represent their county or country at a sport are competing with a regional or national group of similarly disposed people and so success tends to rely on the skill and character of the individual, and is therefore deemed a legitimate activity in-itself. However, the prestige attached to some student posts, such as being sub-editor of the student newspaper, or occupying a committee position in a student union, club or society, is not obvious and may require some degree of symbolic work to realise: on the face of it these positions maybe nominal and so realising the potential symbolic value of these experiences in graduate recruitment situations relies on the cultural goodwill of the recruiter and on the ability of the graduate to carry out the symbolic work required. In addition, there are those posts that may appear prestigious, in themselves, and which therefore require less symbolic work to be realised. These posts, such as being the Student Union President, being Captain of a university sports team, or being the Editor of the Student Newspaper appear, to eyes that are attuned to these practices, to possess an inherent value: precisely because prior symbolic work has already been done by forerunners of those posts and that access to these presupposes a form of social selection. The probability of an individual rising to a position or post is commensurate with their social and cultural suitability to that post, especially to prestigious positions where nomination requires some broad support from the student population, which in any case tends to rest on the perceived suitability of the individual in question and upon the relationship between self-identity and the perception of others (notwithstanding the cases where a distorted identity of self means individuals self-elect into positions where they would not normally i.e. as a general rule, be found).

presentation of self. Needless to say, the more rarefied forms of extra-curricular experience act as distinguishing forms of symbolic capital in the competition for graduate jobs and graduates from the higher regions of the social field possess the social and economic capital required to realise such experiences.

The realm of practices constituting extra-curricular activities are imbued with traces of the social and cultural backgrounds of those disposed to such activities, which are always underpinned by socially-specific forms of sociability. Thus, it is possible to trace the social and cultural contours of the university experiences of students from different social backgrounds and we find that those from higher managerial and professional business backgrounds are endowed with the social and cultural resources necessary to access prestigious forms of extra-curricular experience.

> [Emma] "While I was at school I did rowing to a high level I rowed for Great Britain…and then when I got here I did [University] rowing…that was pretty much all I did in first year but then got injured at the start of the second year…I started doing some bits and bobs so I started doing [University] pentathlon instead…I had to learn four new sports which was great fun…I had to organise the food and drink for the May ball so I was director of that…I am on the JCR committee for Academic Affairs that side of things…I did fund-raising for the boat club…I am on the committee for [Elite University society] and through that set up my own company…I'm in charge of raising money for the society through setting up businesses… I got to [strategy consultancy] final round…I went to a drinks event…which I got invited to purely by chance because someone from the [Elite University society] committee had been invited I think they get hold of key, who they think are quite good like big dogs in [Elite University] and he was in the Finance Society as well as [Elite University society] and he'd been invited to this exclusive drinks event and it was like if you know someone else that's interested in consultancy bring them along cos we find that high achievers have high achieving friends and all that kind of bull…and he was like oh Emma you're interested in consultancy I'm not that interested in consultancy you can come along as my plus one so I was like awesome…I met people - got on really really well with them they said apply we think you'd get on really really well, we think you'd fit in really well."
>
> Female, Elite University, Social Sciences, Strategy Consultant

Father a Corporate Finance Director, Mother a speech therapist

This is an indicative example[16] of the experience of students from higher managerial and professional private sector backgrounds, in particular those at Oxbridge colleges, and reveals how class and university hierarchies become difficult to separate. Of particular note is the fact that this individual was invited to an exclusive drinks event because she ran in the right social circles and was seen to be a 'big dog' in the university. Such events constitute a form of cultural sifting in which those who appear good on paper, or by association, are assessed for their 'real-life' fit. This is an interesting phenomenon because the ability to construe oneself as a 'big dog', a 'name' or a 'face' is itself rooted in specific forms of sociability.[17] Graduate recruiters consciously pursue those that they believe would be valuable additions to the firm and this is revealing in that it is indicative of the *type* of individual that they wish to recruit. There is ontological complicity between the most prestigious student roles and the societies targeted by City and corporate-recruiters because the recruiters themselves often originate from the university that they recruit at. Some extra-curricular activities have a direct bearing on the ability to appear competent in relation to graduate recruitment criteria:

> [Interviewer] "Did being in [Elite University society] help with your interview?"
> [Nicholas] "A lot about interviews is just the lingo and buzz words that you use cos you basically don't have to have insight into the ideas as long as you can say the right word to go with it you immediately sound like you know what you're talking about and being in an environment where there's a lot of business talk and a lot of lectures by business people is helpful… it's definitely a lot about the chat…I know that definitely your appearance and the way you come across is important…you have to look intelligent."
>
> Male, Elite University, Social Sciences, Strategy Consultant
> Father a Marketing Director, Mother a TV Producer

[16] The student was one of three girls employed by this firm, all interviewed as part of this research. Whilst they were drawn from different subjects all three had very similar class and educational backgrounds. They had all engaged in relatively prestigious extra-curricular activities within Elite University and had some form of relevant work experience. Their composition of these experiences did vary, demonstrating why it is important to take into account the whole person.

[17] Those nominated to positions of authority have to engender sympathy from fellow-students, and those who most closely share the culture of the university, those who embody dominant characteristics, are most likely to appropriate the symbolic titles.

Being a member or better yet being a committee member on one of the business-related clubs or societies acts as valuable leverage in the competition over private sector graduate jobs. Five of the Elite University interviewees were members of such clubs and these furnished them with linguistic and cultural competencies valued by private sector graduate recruiters: all had found jobs in either Consulting or Finance. Similarly, of thirteen with internships and/or experience in business societies, all had found employment in Law, Consulting or Finance by the time of the follow up survey. They are also able to demonstrate a clear interest in their chosen careers, which again, is an important criteria used by graduate recruiters. Evidence suggests that these clubs were directly targeted by the campus recruitment teams and key individuals were often head-hunted. Thus, an early orientation to a business career, expressed through one's extra-curricular activities, can be important to the employability of graduates.

4.6 Social Networks, Work Experience and the Value of Group Membership

Access to coveted positions in the graduate labour market is often dependent upon successful negotiation of the social fields to which they are tied and thus individuals who share a closer social and cultural relationship to the social field enjoy a significant advantage in the competition over these graduate jobs. For instance, access to knowledge of the processes through which these social fields are accessed is not universal – even at Elite University it is socially and institutionally constructed, such that if one doesn't belong to the right social networks one will not come to an understanding of the implicit expectations access to the social field places on those aspiring to it. Thus, to understand graduate labour market outcomes we have to understand how graduates become differentially placed in relation to the social networks that facilitate access.

Graduate jobs in management consultancy, commercial law and investment banking provide particularly strong examples of this phenomenon. Access to these types of jobs is largely managed through the internships that firms offer, and many only offer internships to penultimate-year undergraduates. As a consequence, undergraduates with an early understanding of the graduate labour market are placed in an advantageous position – those with an early understanding of the labour market tend to be from business backgrounds. This is not simply because they arrive at university with an understanding of what they want out of

it (though this is an important aspect of it), students from business backgrounds access socially exclusive networks, which foster aspirations to prestigious careers:

> [Emma] "So I found myself not knowing what to do…but I happened to be dating a guy that was at the University of London and through speaking to him he was talking about internships and Spring Week and all of a sudden I was like *oh God whats an internship what's a spring week!?* And then suddenly the next thing I know he's got an internship with Goldman Sachs and I was like just it was just a big wake up call for me."
>
> Female, Elite University, Social Sciences, Strategy Consultant
> Father a Corporate Finance Director, Mother a speech therapist

> [Interviewer] "Do you think there's a social logic as to how and why people go into certain professions?"
> [Helen] "Yeah…a lot of my friends who are here talk about it being a means to an end this is what I do to get a job whereas some people fall into them …I think there's a lot of pressure at Elite University where you see people around you going into high level jobs and you want to do something have to apply for an internship so I'll do law cos its well-paid…"
>
> Female, Elite University, Social Sciences, Strategy Consultant
> Father a Journalist, Mother a PA

However, of course, there are cultural nuances to the *type* of jobs that are appropriate for these graduates which reflects how they perceive themselves and their social positioning:

> [Simon] "I think everyone's trying to get into Law, Banking or Consultancy…you don't see so many people who want to go into accountancy I think a lot of people see it as below them…to use that phrase failed bankers I think that's what a lot of people see it as…Unglamorous, failed bankers, regional whoring…"
>
> Male, Elite University, Social Sciences, Corporate graduate scheme
> Father a Banking Director, Mother a secondary school teacher

These dispositions emerge from the social context of which these graduates are a part and they are particular to a socially-situated position; this culture finds a certain resonance

amongst the South-Eastern, privately-educated, middle classes. However, students from outside this group may be caught up in the 'slip-stream' of their peers and it is no real surprise that these dispositions are most commonly adopted by those who are most similarly disposed i.e. those from business class backgrounds from the regions, most likely privately or grammar school educated. This is partly because the conditions for realising such aspirations are inscribed in their social relationship to the world. Graduates with parents employed in higher professional or managerial occupations are embedded within dense social networks, of family, friends and friends of the family, with whom they share common ground and through whom they are able to call upon favours:

> [Adam] "My mum was basically a bit drunk at a party and one of our neighbours is a partner in a big law firm in Belfast and he was just like, mum was like well A doesn't know what he wants to do, I was quite into IT then, and he was like well he can come down at Easter I was seventeen, and he said he can spend a week with me…"
>
> Male, Russell Group University, Social Sciences, Trainee in Magic Circle Law Firm
>
> Father a large business owner, Mother a large business owner

Access to initial relevant work experience is an important facet of the *employability* of graduates because it often lies at the start of an investment cycle that sees these early experiences re-invested to access formal forms of work experience. Through this cyclical distancing, the social origins of work experience become obscured and so early experiences can be appropriated as a form of symbolic capital that allows access to more valuable forms of work experience. We find this phenomenon across all three of the universities but it is particularly strong in relation to prestigious graduate roles in professional or corporate firms:

> [Interviewer] "You've got a Vodocom internship?"
>
> [Louise] "Yeah – it's an informal internship…my ex-boss looked over my CV and said it was very academic… my dad has friends in South Africa and he just basically said you know is there anything that would suit her and a friend of a friend came up with this opportunity so it's ten weeks…marketing and advertising…everything that I've done I suppose has been fairly premeditated I have always focused from when I did my GCSEs I've always been very channelled in my decisions…channelled by myself…I'm a driven person…every decision I've made I've considered the options…the family company as well…run by my dad…a compressed gas safety

company…I suppose over the past two summers I've been given my own projects…the first year I did door to door sales, I attracted the small to medium size companies that are on the industrial estates…I was quite lucky as it was my own project to run with and at the end of the ten weeks I'd have to debrief and come up with strategies to move forward with…to the board…and I suppose it's all been…driven towards the future."

Female, Russell Group University, Business, Marketing executive

Father a large business owner, Mother an accountant

This example makes clear the heterogeneous ways in which social background may influence one's employability. If we break down the example we can trace a number of over-lapping aspects. Firstly, we see how *valuable advice* is derived from those attuned to the criteria of assessment applied to CV's. As this advice emerges from informal networks it is not equally possible or accessible to all students: unlike formal official advice, informal advice constitutes a form of *hot* information attuned to specific conditions within a social field. Secondly, we see how weak ties (Granovetter, 1977) become important to accessing valuable forms of work experience. Thus, having been given summer projects by her father's firm (he was the CEO) she embarks upon a marketing internship in South Africa accessed through a friend of a friend. This internship is valuable because of its scarcity value – marketing internships are invariably difficult to access – but it also holds significant symbolic value by the way in which it allows her to appropriate a relation to the transnational elite as opposed to a narrow, local habitus. After this internship she then worked for a Chinese firm in Hong Kong before finally returning to London as a Marketing Executive.[18] The ability to sublimate one's social background amidst the legitimate criteria defining employability is a powerful but hidden mechanism through which social privilege becomes translated into legitimate advantage.

[18] Whilst she suggests that she *channelled [herself]* her dispositions are acutely adjusted to the conditions of her upbringing: reflecting a common tendency across this group of students. Whilst consciously strategic in her decisions (became captain of netball team for CV points) one can only channel oneself according to the cultural framework that one has been inculcated into. Self-motivation may appear to be a product of conscious intent but only to the extent that ontological complicity exists between ones dispositions and the field in which one is immersed. This example then demonstrates how socially-located graduates come to perceive their use of social networks as a legitimate strategy: it is justified because it is a socially-situated strategy and 'everyone else' is doing it. Thus, the social basis upon which certain labour market advantages derive becomes symbolically transposed by a collective misrecognition that perceives *personal qualities* and forms of *excellence* in criteria that derive their significance from their social scarcity value. In this way, there exists a form of market competition in the graduate labour market that allows those with the social and economic capital to appropriate legitimate advantages, which is made all the more legitimate through the way in which those who originate from the most deprived regions of social space are excluded from an understanding of their own exclusion.

The Milburn Commission (2009) recognised that informal access to internships was an important factor in the exclusion of graduates from outside the traditional networks but it didn't fully elucidate the significance of work experience. Certain occupations are accessed by the 'backdoor', media and marketing spring immediately to mind, which is why the respondent above is able to suggest: "I think it's quite a covert process – you knock on the door a bit and get your way in…because they don't have to find people". Access to City occupations is not explicitly nepotistic but it remains socially exclusive. The recession may have heightened this sense of social exclusivity as graduates increasingly call upon forms of capital that they are personally privy to. As one respondent suggested in his follow up survey:

> "I suspect that because it is harder to get roles in large companies through traditional Milkround routes that people are relying on more informal pathways such as family and friend connections"
>
> Male, Elite University, Social Sciences, Strategy Consultant
> Father a Marketing Director, Mother a TV Producer

Thus, as the labour market tightens, positional competition is heightened, favouring those graduates able to call upon non-academic forms of capital. Formal internships with City firms are highly competitive and to be successful one needs prior, relevant work experience, which is where informal access to work experience becomes significant:

> [Charlie] "I did four vacations of working with a small investment company…called Catalyst…my dad does business with the owner and got me an interview with them…after that I did it four times… Barclays Capital…came to Elite University to interview me here…asked about me…walked them through my CV…talked about my work experience…asked me about societies sports …they didn't give me any tests…because Catalyst use…something they didn't know about…that took up fifteen minutes of the half hour interview…one of my friends was told that she couldn't have the internship cos she didn't have enough experience…I suppose it shows willing that's why"
>
> Male, Elite University, Natural Sciences, Financial analyst
> Father a Partner in Accountancy, Mother a medical secretary

In a phenomenon that was widespread amongst graduates from private sector middle class backgrounds, this example clearly shows the material profits of group membership. His father is a partner in a commercial law firm and this has clear ramifications for his ability to access valuable work experience. The example demonstrates the way in which work experience becomes reiterative and why early and relevant work experience is significant to the employability of graduates. Given that many City graduate recruiters recruit mainly final-year undergraduates, and recruit primarily through their internship schemes, if one does not have this early work experience it is difficult to access the formal internships and therefore to access the graduate training schemes. This reiterates the value of social networks, not just family-based ones, but also the school and university social networks that tend to orient graduates at an early stage toward particular careers. Furthermore, this phenomenon is not restricted to the social elite and to City firms; we find evidence of it across the middle class sample at the post-1992 university where social networks mediate access to 'good' work experience and knowledge of the opportunities available to graduates in local labour markets. However, this is mitigated by the tendency for all students at the post-1992 university to undertake formal work experience whilst at university. It is clear, however, that the social inertia behind recruitment into City firms is consequential for the graduate constituencies that the City draws upon:

> [Timothy] "In the recruiting policy they're very much about what they call cultural fit…which is whether you get on with people or not which having done an internship is more important than I realised…"
>
> Male, Elite University, Natural Sciences, Strategy Consultant
> Father a Senior Corporate Manager, Mother a housewife

Internships and work experience offer value for the recruiter because they are early training periods for potential hires, and allow them to identify suitable undergraduates who have a clear interest in the area of work and who share the values and forms of sociability necessary to succeed in the City. As the graduate above suggested, his work experience at a small investment firm gave him the experience to build up certain competencies valued by the investment banks that he interviewed with. The opportunity also gave him the exposure necessary for him to establish a clear interest in the industry and to demonstrate this through the inculcation of certain social and cultural norms. As we have already seen, family contacts, friendship groups and certain societies are important conduits through which recognised

dispositions, language, 'chat', becomes inculcated, so that with time these dispositions may become second nature and a relation to business appears 'innate'. Work experience is a further layer through which certain types of graduates are able to symbolically appropriate a genuine, legitimate disposition towards their chosen career. However, it must be reiterated that the City is recruiting a cultural type and whilst Oxbridge degrees offer an advantage in this regard, they do not guarantee success. Similarly, work experience, or high extra-curricular activities offer no guarantees. Recruiters are looking for the whole package, the ability to be sociable with the team and clients (which rests on the ability of the interviewee to establish a rapport with the interviewer), the ability to carry out the job (technically), and a genuine commitment to the industry.

4.7 Effects of Volume and Composition of Capital

For those who lie outside the immediate social networks of the City or business, access may be made difficult by the social distance that is inscribed in one's trajectory and in one's dispositions. Aspirations may be influenced by those around us but without the necessary social and cultural conditions for realisation these aspirations are misplaced. We find cases of individuals who are disposed toward City or corporate careers but who lack the intuitive feel for business because of their social or cultural distance from the positions they are applying to:

> [Cornelia] "My friend is doing [Business-type course] and most of them go into the City…she's been really unlucky…she's applied for so many… but as I've pointed out to her it sounds really bad but the people who you look at these people and they've come from Saint Paul's Girl's school like I don't know these really top Private schools and they've always had that training from a young age they go through Elite University and then…whereas she hasn't had an as easier ride like you know she was the only one from her school to get into Elite University so you know…she doesn't have as much confidence…"
>
> Female, Elite University, Humanities, Private tutor
> Father a Private Tutor, Mother a retired Teacher

> [Tess] "In the interview they're very interested in where your parents like what your parents do for a living, what school you've been to and I think more so when my

friend had her interview at Grant Thornton she felt that, and if I'd gone in there and said like my parents were on the dole and I went to some crappy school I don't think they'd have given me the job to be quite honest…when my friend had her interview both of her parents are retired PE teachers she sort of felt that the attitude that she got from her saying both her parents were retired PE teachers wasn't very positive…"

Female, Russell Group University, Business, 'Big Four' tax accountant
Father an Army NCO, Mother a Nursing Home Manager

Thus, we find that for those who originate from outside of the business, corporate or City networks, access to prestigious graduate schemes in corporate or City firms is made much more difficult and they tend to end up in less prestigious graduate positions. In this sample, investment banking was exclusive to the middle class graduates drawn from private-schools or City backgrounds and strategy consultancy was exclusive to Elite University graduates drawn from the private schools or business backgrounds. Corporate law was open to those with exceptional levels of academic capital but largely remained the preserve of a privately-educated, conservative middle class. Thus, as well as being educationally-exclusive, the most prestigious enclaves of the graduate labour market are socially-exclusive, meaning that the university one attends does not necessarily constitute a barrier to those who are *suitable* in all other ways:

[Kirsten] "I applied for internships [in finance] last year and got through to the final round of interviews for a company called Goldman Sachs"
[Interviewer] "Yeah"
[Kirsten] "Which is quite a biggy in investment banking...I got down to the final six for that but they only had one position…"
[Interviewer] "Where were the rest from?"
[Kirsten] "Well Oxford, Durham and Cambridge…I think it worked in my favour not being from there and the questions directed to me were why did you decide and how did you hear about the internship?"

Female, Russell Group University, Natural Sciences, Corporate graduate scheme
Father a Quantity Surveyor, Mother an Educational Director

[Lara] "I was speaking to a girl from Bath and she was like I think I'm the only person in the history of Bain that's ever got an offer that comes from Bath like

everyone here is Oxbridge…she'd done loads of internships and loads of work experience…"

Female, Elite University, Humanities, Strategy Consultant
Father a Partner in Law firm, Mother a Physiotherapist

Thus, when we find that graduates from UCL, LSE, Durham, Bristol, Warwick (business school), Sheffield, Bath, Cardiff, are employed by City or corporate firms we tend to find that these individuals are also privately or grammar-school educated, embedded in friendship groups that wrap around the most prestigious graduate firms (i.e. they have close school friends in corporate and City-related careers) and are often from business backgrounds. This raises important questions about the necessary quality and detail of statistical data on graduate destinations. The conduits between university and the graduate labour market are manifold but this complexity should not be allowed to conceal the social mechanisms which underpin the election of the social elite to the most prestigious graduate positions.

4.8 Conclusion

It is clear that so long as academic credentials are only the 'first tick in the box' for graduate recruitment, graduates from the most socially and economically advantaged backgrounds will continue to assert their market power and reproduce their own social advantage. In an unequal society and a labour market of limited opportunities, the devaluation of academic credentials is not felt equally. Firstly, it affects those without academic qualifications, who become excluded from ever greater areas of the labour market through the graduate colonisation of occupations. Secondly, it affects those with only limited social and economic means, who are unable to realise the labour market value of the credentials that they *do* hold. Positional competition amongst graduates favours those most closely aligned to the fields to which they apply and those who are in a position to leverage resources to gain a *relative* advantage vis-à-vis their peers. It might seem perverse but we can learn more about the processes underpinning the labour market experiences of working class graduates from the testimony of upper-middle and middle class graduates, as those who are denied an understanding of their own exclusion struggle to articulate the basis of their exclusion.

Weber (1968) suggested that the social distribution of academic credentials reflected a strategy of social closure, whereby dominant social classes sought to exclude the dominated

classes on the basis of academic credentials, which required the investment of money and time. The state-sponsored expansion of higher education has shifted the nature of social closure, undermining the symbolic efficacy of academic credentials in the process. In its most crude form this new phase of social closure involves the direct translation of economic capital into rarefied cultural experiences (such as the gap year). However, the symbolic efficacy of social background is strongest in its most concealed forms: in the social competencies and dispositions inculcated into sons and daughters by their parents and the social networks to which they are privy (e.g. school networks, to which economic capital may purchase access), or in the secondary rounds of work experience that rest upon prior relevant work experience accessed through personal social networks. This new round of social closure has class consequences but is the product of individual and family strategies, practically attuned to the competitive conditions of the graduate labour market. Collectively, these strategies constitute a secondary form of social closure that denies the institutionally and economically marginalised access to the most prestigious graduate occupations.

The prestigious graduate roles in the private sector are particularly sought after by the conservative-leaning, privately and grammar-school educated middle classes. Those with parents employed as professionals or managers in the private sector are primed toward careers in business by dispositions inculcated through family and social networks. In this competition they are well-placed, situated within social networks that guarantee the characteristics necessary to be a cultural fit and to appear competent, which also underpin access to the experiences necessary to constitute an ‘employability narrative’. In short, graduates from middle class backgrounds, particularly the privately-educated and those with parents employed in professional or managerial occupations in the private sector are able to make a virtue of their class lifestyle and realise prestigious careers in business as a consequence. However, they are not the only group able to do this, and as we shall see it is a common practice across the middle classes underpinning access to occupations in the public sector.

Chapter 5

Middle Class Graduates and the Public Sector

5.1 Introduction

Nowhere is the homology between social origin and graduate labour market destination as overtly political as that which is established between left-wing, middle class graduates and the public sector. A product of public institutions who support a cadre of public sector professionals and managers, through which the rhetoric of the public sector finds an expression, we find that middle class graduates with fathers and mothers employed in the public sector tend to be fervent advocates of government, cynical critics of business and those who pursue 'money for its own sake'. However, the third and public sectors are also refuges for the rebellious, those who find the power of self-realisation through education, and middle class graduates who don't find comfort in the private sector. As such, the public sector is not the preserve of the liberal, left-wing middle class – it makes space for other middle class female graduates from private sector families and graduates from lower middle class backgrounds who have 'made good' through education – but the liberal, middle class enjoy a preferential relationship to public sector professions that make public sector occupations a natural choice.

Middle class fractions are not simply, easily distinguished between those who owe their loyalty to public sector institutions and those who are socially and culturally closer to private sector institutions. This distinction between the private and public sector middle class is based on distinctive rationales of existence, conveyed and reified through the institutions and professional groups that inhabit these contrasting spheres of the economy. However, whilst a father may work in the private sector, it is not entirely unlikely that the mother works in the public sector. This chapter is based on an analysis of the testimony of twenty-five students (see table 5.1) who sought a career in the public sector or third-sector. Many, but not all had one or both parents professionally employed by the public sector.

Table 5.1: 'The Distribution of Graduates from Middle Class Backgrounds by Sector of Destination, University and Subject'

Sector of destination	University type	**Humanities**	**Natural sciences**	**Business / Law**	*Total*
Private sector	Elite	13	4	2	*19*
	Russell Group	3	3	6	*12*
	Post-1992	0	3	5	*8*
	Total	*16*	*10*	*13*	***39***
Public sector	**Elite**	**8**	**2**	**1**	***11***
	Russell Group	**7**	**2**	**0**	***9***
	Post-1992	**4**	**0**	**1**	***5***
	Total	***19***	***14***	***15***	***25***
	TOTAL	**35**	**14**	**15**	**64**

When we examine this middle class group by university we find a number of parallels with the Private Sector Middle Class group discussed in the previous chapter. Again, we find there is a relationship between the status of the university and the strata of the middle classes that interviewees emerge from. Amongst the parents of the Elite University sample around half are senior managers or senior professionals, whilst there are far fewer at the Russell Group and post-1992 University. For instance, amongst the Elite University sample we find two fathers who are senior managers in the NHS, two senior civil servants and a head teacher. By comparison, the Russell Group and Post-1992 University sample includes nurses, non-managerial teachers, lower level civil servants and university lecturers in Post-1992 institutions. This difference in status belies differences in income, opportunities, social networks and even the quality of inherited cultural capital amongst the sample. However, there is not a simple and clear relationship between parental origin and graduate labour market destination.

It is clear that having parents employed by the public sector makes middle class graduates more likely to enter the public sector upon graduation. For instance, amongst the Post-1992

University sample who ended up in public sector occupations, seven of nine working parents were employed by the public sector, compared with two of sixteen amongst the graduates who went into the private sector. The trend is perhaps the strongest amongst the Elite sample where we find fourteen of seventeen working parents (including seven fathers) employed by the public sector, compared to seven out of thirty-one working parents amongst graduates who found roles in the private sector – incidentally, none of these were fathers, and this sample excludes seven non-working housewives. Amongst the Russell Group university sample that went onto public sector occupations, nine of eighteen parents were employed by the public sector (three fathers), compared to six of twenty-three amongst those who went onto private sector occupations – only one of these was a father, the rest were mothers. In the Russell Group sample, gender emerges as a significant factor, with more females from private sector backgrounds choosing public sector occupations.

Gender is an important factor amongst those middle class graduates choosing careers in the public sector. Of nine graduates in the Russell Group sample, eight were female, amongst the Elite University sample eight of eleven were female, and amongst the post-1992 university sample, three out of five were female. There is also a correlation with degree subject, particularly at the Russell Group and Post-1992 University, as students choosing public sector careers also tend to have read for degrees in the humanities or social sciences. Two-thirds of the Russell Group sample had read for a humanities or social science degree, compared to four of the five post-1992 students and eight of the eleven Elite University students – though they tend to be similarly divided within the private sector sample. However, correlation, especially with this size sample, does not equal causation. To understand why middle class graduates choose public sector careers we have to understand how they come into being, amongst others; to do this we need to go back to their testimony.

5.2 The Moral Landscape of Employability

When Smetherham (2005) talks of the moral dimension of positional competition she is seeking to explain the behaviour of university graduates who appear ‘irrational’ against the economic rationality model of human behaviour favoured by liberal economists. She found that the moral and ethical dispositions of graduates influence their orientation toward different careers and whilst she didn’t attempt to locate this disposition in terms of social origin this observation is valuable as it allows us to reconcile observed differences in the

graduate labour market destinations of students from middle class backgrounds. Whilst many of the middle class students from private sector backgrounds were apolitical, or leant to centre or centre-right parties, students from public sector backgrounds were very strongly defined by left-leaning tendencies.[19] We find that this disposition emerges amidst a particular composition of social and cultural capital that acquires its legitimacy in particular social fields and expressed through labour market aspirations. Thus, we find that strong left of centre tendencies often accompany an instinctive hostility toward business. These dispositions matter because they organise the activities and behaviours of students, which become consequential to their employability vis-à-vis different labour markets. It is possible to trace how this social concern emerges through the family:

> [Emma] "I'm going to apply to the Civil Service, and charities and things like that…I have no desire to chase the buck…I am very critical, not critical but I deplore the trait in people who just want to earn money, climb the ladder and exploit people really…I'm not a fan of that at all…"
> [Interviewer] "Are you interested in politics per se?"
> [Emma] "Yep, Yep!" [strongly]
> [Interviewer] "If you had to align yourself with a political party who would you say?"
> [Emma] "Labour"
> [Interviewer] "New or old?"
> [Emma] "Old"
> [Interviewer] "Are you interested in the business world?"
> [Emma] "Nope!" [laughs]
> [Interviewer] "Are you interested in foreign affairs?"
> [Emma] "Yep!"
> [Interviewer] "What do you think of being involved in Iraq and Afghanistan?"
> [Emma] "It's difficult to say really…I don't think we should have gone to war and I think that's a criticism of the Blair government…"
> [Interviewer] "Why?"

[19] Thus, of the graduates with both parents employed in the public sector, nine stated that they would instinctively vote Labour, one the Liberal Democrats, one 'a Left-wing party' and two said that they wouldn't vote. In terms of newspaper readership, all read broad-sheets; eight said that they read the Guardian, two The Times, one The Independent, one the Times Educational Supplement and one The Times, The Telegraph *and* The Independent.

[Emma] "err because I don't think there was enough evidence to intervene and I just think…in the sense that I don't think we should necessarily be warriors of justice and the alliance with America is abhorrent in my opinion especially under Bush…I'm really happy that Obama's got in, I hope we see some changes now…I think it was definitely time for a change… [And later on in the interview when talking about the London Mayor] I loved Livingstone as well, he got chucked out of the Labour party for being too left wing! [laughs]…maybe the financial crisis will give us the chance to reassess what's important in our lives, I think we'll see more state intervention and the state working for us rather than the market"

[Interviewer] "Do you think the business world has too much influence in politics?"

[Emma] "Yes, definitely, yes...definitely…"

[Interviewer] "Do you read newspapers?"

[Emma] "Yes"

[Interviewer] "What do you read?"

[Emma] "Take a guess" [laughs]

Female, Russell Group University, Social Sciences, Researcher social think-tank

Father a secondary school deputy Head teacher, Mother a Nurse

This quote aptly illustrates the relationship between social origin, political disposition and disposition toward the graduate labour market. Her liberal orientation emanates through the social and political narrative that she deploys to locate herself vis-à-vis others. Indeed, towards the end of the interview her projection as a liberally-minded, socially concerned individual is so well embedded and underscored within the conversation that she doesn't feel the need to actually answer the question of newspaper consumption. Such dispositions are consequential to participation in the university as they underpin our preferences, our interests and our dislikes, which moves us closer or farther away from certain experiences, and certain types of people:

[Mary] "I think more than anything they seem to lack any idea about the wider world the information and what's happening around the world…everything is about sports they don't actually concentrate on any…society…they seem to lack awareness of societies…there's no debates at all…it's unfortunate it could be so much better…I think if I wished to talk to anyone about human rights that would be a great difficulty I think they are even unaware of the news I'm not being patronising but I lived with

twenty two people and I think there's something lacking…My second year was in Ottawa…I just wanted a change…"

Female, Post-1992 University, Social Sciences, (aspiring) Human Rights Lawyer working in customer service banking
Father (unknown), Mother a teacher

The university is not a melting pot of cultures, as is often suggested, but often segregated on the basis of culture. This is often concealed to the plural, multi-cultural middle classes who see diversity through the lens of ethnicity and nationality and who are often responsible for producing discourse on the university. However, when we consider the testimony of working class students we begin to realise how university space is often invisibly segregated along the lines of class and culture. Put very simply, our likes and dislikes determine who we share our time with but our likes and dislikes cannot be separated from who we are, and therefore where we come from. They form part of a matrix of preferences that emerge from how we have been socially constituted. The dispositions of the sons and daughters of public sector professionals find an avenue for expression within the education system because they are congruent with the dispositions of politically liberal teachers, who are probably over-represented in state schools and in certain subject areas, and which may be one reason why these students are often found in the humanities and social sciences:

[Hattie] "I've looked at public sector, charities and research jobs here…Possibly the year after that doing a PhD…my supervisors told me to think about it…What I'd like to do in an ideal world like eventually is do something with gender and sexuality equality and rights

[Interviewer] "Ok, so what would you look at you reckon?"

[Hattie] Well I've been looking at charities like Stonewall…I don't really know to be honest… Mum is a lecturer in Gender and Sexuality at X university…"

Female, Russell Group University, Social Sciences, Social Science researcher (PhD)
Father IT manager, Mother Social Science University Lecturer

In contrast to graduates with parents employed in the private sector, graduates with parents employed by the public sector are less likely to see university as a means to an end. Scholastic values are inculcated through the family from a young age, which are realised and affirmed by the education system. This engenders a deep sense of entitlement and belonging,

as seen in their orientation toward the university, in the expectations of their parents and in the unselfconscious way in which they immerse themselves in the university experience. For the majority of this group, social background did not become problematic: 'like a fish in water' they often did not feel the weight of the institutional habitus (Reay & Crozier, 2009). University was a given, and this was as true for the state educated graduates as it was for the privately educated ones. Those who were state, in particular comprehensive-educated, were part of the group of friends at the school who *did* go to university, and good universities at that and so enjoy a very positive relationship to university. This relationship to the university is part of a broader political adherence to the public sector in general.

Political disposition is a good indicator of broader labour market dispositions but we begin to see that the public-private sector split is based on an overly simplistic distinction, which acts to conceal some of the important social cleavages that influence labour market dispositions. Thus, it is not just graduates with parents employed in the public sector that are attracted to public sector occupations. We find that middle class female graduates with parents employed in the private sector are also likely to be positively disposed to the public sector, especially those who have pursued the social sciences or humanities. We also find that the private sector includes some liberal occupations, especially those in the media, the arts or publishing. Three of the Oxbridge sample with parents employed in the private sector state that their parents work in the media or publishing. The public sector also includes some graduates from lower-middle class backgrounds who tend to be less strongly politically aligned.

We also find that the secondary school one attends is significant. For instance, we find that none of the fourteen graduates from the Russell Group University or post-1992 University had been to private school: all bar one had attended local comprehensive or community schools. This picture was slightly different amongst the Oxbridge sample where five had attended private schools, two had attended grammar schools and four had attended comprehensives. This, however, appears to be significant. Of the nineteen Oxbridge graduates who went into the private sector, only one had attended a comprehensive school – the rest had attended grammar or private school. Schooling is a significant factor within the middle classes and we can trace some of the tension that this creates in the testimony of the interviewees:

[Hattie] "I hated Durham…All the people there were just on a power trip it should be like well I've applied to Oxford and Cambridge and there was me there going well I went to X Technology College."

Female, Russell Group University, Social Sciences, Social Science researcher
Father IT manager, Mother Social Science University Lecturer

Thus, for middle class students who lie outside the networks of the wealthy, well-connected privately educated, upper-middle classes, background may emerge as problematic especially in elite, socially cloistered spaces. However, when compared with the testimony of students from working class backgrounds this discomfort is limited; working class students tend to be embedded within local social networks, where university is not taken-for-granted, and where university participation is concentrated in the local, less prestigious universities, which for many represents an extension of college or sixth form. Middle class students are a part of broader social networks, spread across prestigious universities and through which they are able to know and inhabit the networks that constitute these institutions as social spaces:

[Kelly] "My brother went to [Elite University college] about…he graduated in 2002 so I knew Elite University quite well, my father went to Elite University…there's only about five courses in the country doing Human Sciences so I applied to Elite University…second choice was UCL…My ex-boyfriend was at Elite University college…he was the year above…when I told him and his friends that I was applying to go to X college they thought it was a really bad idea they said I was better off going to UCL than going to X college…"

Female, Elite University, Social Sciences, London marketing firm
Father a Deputy Head teacher, Mother a Secondary School Teacher

[Cornelia] "Mum and dad came here…my dad was at [Elite University college] and mum was at [Elite University college] too… I came cos I thought I should do and cos I really enjoy English a lot…all my friends were going… Cardiff, Bristol, Newcastle, Sheffield…a lot to Durham and LOTS to Oxford and Cambridge…

[Interviewer] "How many?"

[Cornelia] "Oh my God its so embarrassing…about twenty…I always forget how many of us there are I keep saying them all over Elite University, I think about

fourteen or fifteen went to Elite University…I'm not going to lie it's a lot easier ride than a lot of my [state school] friends have had…"

Female, Elite University, Humanities, Private tutor
Father a Private Tutor, Mother a retired School Teacher

We can see how friends and family forge a path for these students, putting university within reach, socially and culturally, effectively colonising public institutional space with a distinctive class culture. The value of this should not be under-estimated, as it is the cumulative effect of such individuals, and their social networks, that come to constitute the forms of sociability operating in the university. This has consequences for how they experience themselves vis-à-vis the university environment. However, not all universities are the same and we can trace elements of ontological dissonance at elite universities, especially universities where students from the Public Schools are significantly over-represented and we can trace some dissatisfaction at the more 'working class' institutions:

[Dan] "I got a job in Russell Group University union…all my flatmates are Russell Group University…It was essentially I went to live in Student accommodation and it was just shit…it just wasn't really as ideal as I'd have hoped and basically my best mate from home went to Russell Group University and coincidentally we didn't mean to meet up with each other I bumped into him and he met a few people off his course and I ended up living with them…"

[Interviewer] "Do you think there's a difference between Russell Group uni students and Post-1992 students?"

[Dan] "…Post-1992 is more sport orientated, probably more chavvy kind of people…I think it likes to think it is [more intellectual]…and you get people who are kind of pompous and I'd say I work with them and I live with them, in the bar I work at you get a good feel for the kind of people in the uni and they're a lot more pompous than Post-1992…"

Male, Post-1992 University, Social Sciences
Father a council manager, Mother a secondary school Head of Department

It is possible to detect uneasiness amongst the experiences of certain middle class students at Post-1992 University. This is certainly true for students with above average A-level results for the university, for those with friends at red-brick universities and for those who had strong

non-sporting, extra-curricular interests. Three of the students mentioned feeling 'too good' for the university, with some pointing to the cultural distance between the 'drinking culture' of the university and their own interests. This cultural dissonance marked them from lower middle class students who had a taken-for-granted experience of the university. Moreover, middle class public sector students were able to call on other forms of capital which allowed them to mitigate 'devalued' academic qualifications and, as we will see, ensure that they successfully access the graduate labour market.[20]

Upbringing conditions one toward certain dispositions which become consequential through the price they are able to attract in different social fields. Students from professional public sector backgrounds do not have a monopoly over liberal attitudes, nor are they uniform in this disposition, but they are clearly oriented by their values and as we shall see, are able to make a virtue of this concern by leveraging advantages specific to their social positioning. Their relationship to liberal values is distinct from that of working class students who encounter social concern in its most primordial of states (Charlesworth, 2000). Whilst the working classes are objectified by their conditions of being, in the limitations placed on their social horizons, or in the way they are forced to make a virtue of necessity, the liberal middle classes become possessed by a concern for others, that is not their own. We see this in their orientation toward university, in their involvement in extra-curricular activities and ultimately in their orientation toward the graduate labour market.

5.3 Extra-Curricular Participation

The ontological complicity between middle class students with parents employed in the public sector and prestigious universities can be seen in their taken-for-granted relation to university and through their experience as affirmed, validated individuals. This produces a distinctive pattern of extra-curricular participation that is markedly different to that of their peers from private sector middle class backgrounds and students from working class backgrounds. For instance, they are much more likely to be involved in the arts and liberal

[20] For instance, one student who had been to a private school in Manchester only to opt out to go to a grammar school, had a workshop assembled for him by his Dentist father. This allowed him to gain expertise in manufacturing bespoke parts for classic cars and gave him valuable experience which he leveraged to access a £20-25,000 a year graduate position in a small engineering firm. A second student had a friend who was captain of the University Rowing squad. After a poor first year he changed subjects and involved himself in the rowing squad. He became the vice-captain, during which he rowed at Henley, became the boyfriend of a member of the GB women's rowing squad and spent more time in the south of England. These experiences set him in good stead for a teaching position in the South of England.

politics than their peers from other middle class fractions, and exhibit greater extra-curricular involvement than students from working class backgrounds.

Amongst the Elite University sample students from public sector professional backgrounds are over-represented in the arts, music and charities. Moreover, their activities tend to be concentrated at the college-level, rather than at the university level. Thus, we find a strong tendency toward college sports and the college drama and music scene:

> [Kelly] "In my first year I did a few plays, rowed, sang in a band…did RAG…charities…I wanted to try everything…croquet society, trampolining…I was the welfare rep in the second year…Well doing a play that was quite time consuming…I did four plays in first two years…"
>
> Female, Elite University, Social Sciences, London marketing firm
> Father a Deputy Head teacher, Mother a Secondary School Teacher

> [Alan] "Mostly plays, acting…there's a really good drama scene in Elite University…there's something like eighty student plays a year…I'd always acted at school…I auditioned for something in the second week of Michaelmas in my first year and I've just gone on from there…I've done something like twelve or fifteen plays per year…"
>
> Male, Elite University, Humanities, Postgraduate studies International Development
> Father a Senior Civil Servant, Mother a Housewife

The tendency toward musical and drama interests and liberal-inclined activities such as writing for the Elite University International magazine is significant because it demonstrates how class lifestyles become reiterative within institutions geared to the realisation of such interests. These experiences are important, not simply because they count as symbolic capital in relation to the competition over graduate jobs, but because they are indicative of the type of person that these individuals are; because of how these activities are contingent upon class-specific forms of sociability. Georg Simmel observed that in 'all human associations…there is…a residue of pure sociability or association for its own sake' (Simmel, 1949: 254). However, sociability is not free from social values; in fact, it is often contingent upon some semblance of shared social values. Just as 'the impulses and interests, which a man experiences in himself and which push him out toward other men' (ibid: 254), these impulses

and interests may equally repel him. To the extent that sociability emerges from a classed relation to being, in the sense that sociability emerges from certain social conditions and educational trajectory which tend to inculcate certain dispositions, likes and dislikes, the social alliances amongst undergraduates are rooted in class-specific forms of sociability.

Numeric advantage and institutional presencing is the basis of an institutional class culture. Given the over-representation of students drawn from a small social elite, Oxbridge tends to consecrate upper-middle class culture, in particular that of the public schools, as the legitimate culture of the institution. Students from peripheral private and grammar schools are positively disposed toward this culture and are quickly inculcated but students from comprehensive schools often experience a form of ontological dissonance. One consequence of this dissonance is a sub-conscious retreat from those spaces perceived as being socially elitist and a social relegation to the more devalued spaces within the university. The sense of this social segregation is most keenly perceived when they transgress social boundaries:

> [Harriet] "I've got friends at [Elite University college] that's the only other college I visit for any length of time…there's definitely a different feel at places like [Elite University college] I think most people are from public schools you do definitely feel it and I've got a friend who's from Newcastle there and he definitely feels it even in his own college ya know he feels like a bit of an outsider …very strong broad accent…all his college are extremely posh ya know…"
>
> Female, Elite University, Humanities, IELTS teacher
> Father an English Teacher, mother a Housewife

A similar dissonance exists in certain spaces at Russell Group University but is often less discernible because Russell Group tends to draw more students from the middle-regions of social space. Certain institutions such as the Russell Group University Rowing Club or the Law Society are dominated by privately-educated students from the upper-middle classes. Students from lower-middle or working class backgrounds tend to exclude themselves from active participation in these spaces. Amongst the middle class interviewees from public sector families we find very active participation in the extra-curricular side of university. Once again many of the interests had been carried on from secondary school:

[Louise] "I have done a *lot* of sailing…I was social sec in my first two years because in my first year the girl dropped out after a couple of months"

[Interviewer] "Normally that's a second year job isn't it?"

[Louise] "Yeah so I was like this fresher who didn't have a clue trying to organise them and then I was President this year which was really hard but really good and really changed me…we were the first university to have our own sailing school accredited and like…if you do a weekend course it's one hundred pounds cheapest in the country…I also did kayaking and windsurfing…I've done team sailing as well"

Female, Russell Group University, Social Sciences, Postgraduate Studies
Father a Conservationist, Mother an Aromatherapist

We find that left-leaning, middle class students differentiate themselves from those who are career-minded, and who see university as a means to an end. These differences are not always consciously articulated but we find that these groups are socially segregated within the university. For instance, it is telling when we discover that their friends are interested in similar careers and share similar backgrounds:

[Louise] "Since being here I've realised my background quite a lot… I've ended up living here with nine people who went to comprehensives and they're the only people I know here who went to comprehensives…I did find in the first year when I was living in halls people were like oh you went to a comprehensive school they were quite sneaky about it…"

Female, Russell Group University, Social Sciences, Postgraduate Studies
Father a Conservationist, Mother an Aromatherapist

If we trace student sociability across the space of the university we find individuals from similar social groups enjoy similar interests and university experiences. Those who straddle different social groups are often very insightful:

[James] "No one from [Elite University college] seems to be that career-minded…a lot of people seem to be taking the year off next year…one got a training contract…another doing masters…there's one guy from PPE going to work for a bank…a few applied for law training contracts and consultancy but didn't get it…a lot of people are taking years out…I don't think its representative of Elite University

more widely…and a lot of my friends are from English and the Arts and they tend not to be city-leaning…the people from swimming tend to have more career stuff like that guy James, one of my friends a mathematician is doing a finance internship, another is going off to work for BP"

Male, Elite University, Social Sciences, Management Consultant
Father an Actor, Mother Manager in family property business

Social alliances within the university become organised along social and cultural lines, through shared interests and dispositions. These social alliances allow one to exist as a sociable being, recognised and affirmed, and mutual recognition is important for self-esteem and a sense of belonging within the institution. It is small wonder that students gravitate to those who recognise them. Social alliances thus act to positively consecrate social divisions within the university but they also exclude those who do not share a similar relation to being.

The basis of social segregation is not simply constructed on decisions to participate in those activities that interest us. It is rooted in more fundamental social differences that relate to how we are, to be around. This has a biological element to it, just as much as it has a social or cultural element. Class is inscribed in our bodies, in our skin and hair, in how we subconsciously command space and time, in how we perceive ourselves amongst others, as a social better or social inferior. We infraconsciously perceive our social positioning amongst others, and react biologically to self-perceptions of inferiority, experienced as a form of social anxiety, with a quickening pulse, pale, clammy skin, and the gearing up of our flight or fight mechanism. It is this experience of self that subconsciously guides our experience and perceptions of social space, such that social space becomes imbued with a meaning not obvious to the casual observer. The anxiety prevalent in the discourses of students from lower-middle class and working class backgrounds when they speak of attending university, of the discomfort that they experience in certain spaces, is tellingly, almost completely absent in the testimony of middle class students, and particularly those from upper-middle class backgrounds.

The configuration of social alliances are consequential to graduate labour market outcomes through the way in which they orient an individual toward certain potentialities, toward certain practices or behaviours, leads to the acquisition and reiteration of certain social and cultural attributes that receive differential values in the graduate labour market. There is thus

a complex inter-play between social origin, its influence on sociability, university peer-groups and the institutional framing of social interaction, which influence and orient undergraduates toward the labour market.

5.4 Symbolic Capital

The disposition toward the labour market is often posited in terms of aspiration but we find that aspiration is rooted in practical forms of sense that emerge from being-in-the-world. The orientation to the labour market emerges via a practical sense of how one is situated vis-à-vis the labour market, which tends to arise from how one is located in the social field, in relation to social networks and the like. For public sector, middle class graduates the orientation to certain choices, possible possibilities, is rooted in their deep-seated liberal tendencies and the dispositions associated with their background.

One methodological difficulty with this group is that many public sector professions increasingly require postgraduate education and so the timeframe of this project does not fully capture the labour market outcomes for this particular group. However, we find an early tendency to lean toward certain types of occupations, as evidenced in the types of work experience that they become involved in. Of the six students at Russell Group, two had found work experience with a Government department, one had worked with a homeless shelter and development project and two had worked with schools on teacher placement schemes (both had also worked a summer with engineering firms). Three of the five students at Post-1992 University had work experience in schools and a fourth had experience with early years child development. Of the students at Elite University, four had worked as teachers or tutors, and one had work experience with the NHS. Two had done vac schemes with law firms, though these were not the Milkround vac (vacation) schemes (one in Ghana; one unpaid in local town).

Generally speaking, the traditional vac scheme was entirely absent from the experiences of this group of students. This is interesting given that their choice of work experiences reinforces their disposition toward the labour market. Unwittingly, choices made in university become significant to graduate employability and so the absence of formal corporate internships hamstrings their opportunities in relation to ‘corporate careers’ whilst their experiences in public service environments equips them with the experiences necessary to

embark upon public service careers. Upon graduation these experiences predispose graduates toward certain careers; how students identify and embark upon work experience is important to our understanding of graduate employability.

This group of student are confronted by a range of possibilities. However, their social and cultural dispositions circumscribe the range of possibilities, limiting them to those that find resonance with their own social origin:

> [Alan] "My dad speaks fluent French he spent much of his childhood in France… Every time I go to France I pick so much more in the first two days than I could by cramming…in a few weeks I'm going to work at a music festival just outside Geneva so that's going to be another immersion for two weeks and I have to speak French to be able to do it…In the summer I'm going travelling in West Africa and maybe Southern Africa because I've always been fascinated by Africa, my mum was born in Kenya and whenever I've been there I've had a great time…when I was in school I went to Tanzania for a month…with World Challenge…which was pretty good at seventeen, good fun…and I did an African politics module for one of my final papers and it was one of the most interesting papers I've studied…I want to do an African studies masters… I'm thinking of flying into Dhaka in Senegal, and then going into Mali, somehow making my way overland to Nigeria perhaps depending on how Cote d'Ivoire is and how Ghana is…it's going to have to be quite dynamic responding to how the situation is on the ground…spend a bit of time in Nigeria and then hopefully fly down to South Africa in time for the World Cup…I mean I've got to earn the money first which is what the next five months is all about…because I've got reasonable French that'll help… I'll apply here…at LSE, SOAS and Yale…but unless I don't get funding I won't be able to afford sixty thousand dollars…
>
> [Interviewer] "Where do you see it ending up?"
>
> [Alan] Development I think…whether working for an NGO…I'm not sure exactly…partly I think what the travelling and Masters will be about is tightening down what I want to do… Producing white papers…I'd be happy anywhere within reason…I think it's increasingly unlikely that I'd be posted in Africa…I think the policy is to indigenise the policy makers out there…but if I was posted in Paris or New York I'd be perfectly happy…I don't have anything to tie me down, I don't get

homesick… I was born in London…lived in New Jersey for four years…and then came back here…"

Male, Elite University, Humanities, Postgraduate studies International Development
Father a Senior Civil Servant, Mother a Housewife

In many ways this is an excellent example of how social origin can have multiple, indirect influences on the orientation to the labour market. Whilst it is a very distinct and specific example, it is useful as the distinctiveness helps highlight the processes that are occurring, which may be less obvious in other examples. The influence of this graduate's father and mother is made clear. Indeed, his plans for travelling leverage these influences to his advantage and later allowed him to secure a prestigious scholarship to study an MA African Studies Masters at Yale, after which he planned to be involved with African health policy. What is interesting about this example, is that it demonstrates how social networks (in this case family) can constitute a form of capital by the way in which they disclose cultural attributes which may also constitute a form of capital in relation to the right field. Although it required familial input and effort, his father's French origins and fluency in French made language acquisition much easier – he gained an A at A-level French – but it also opened up the possibility of independently travelling Africa. Economic resources were also significant as free accommodation at his parent's house in Surrey allowed him the time to work and save up. What is more, he had already been able to constitute an interest in Africa through his mother's origin (Kenya) and through a World Challenge trip to Tanzania, a typically middle class affair given a cost of around £3000. These experiences later became significant in succeeding on the African studies module of his Geography degree, orienting him further toward Africa and allowing him to constitute a socially-constituted interest, as academic capital. Thus, we can see how social and economic forms of capital become sublimated, able to constitute symbolic forms of capital that can be leveraged to access opportunities and experiences and, in relation to the right field, i.e. in relation to individuals and institutions disposed to recognise such forms of capital, to exhibit a form of *excellence*. The following example illustrates how social background becomes sublimated amidst the experiences and opportunities that are taken for granted:

[Susan] "This year I also applied to the Foreign Office…I got through to the first interview round and if I'd got that I would have done that instead of the MPhil…I might apply and do that again…My mum's in academia so it doesn't completely

> appeal…I can imagine getting trapped into Elite University and never leaving…end up a bit naïve…Last summer I ended up working in Ghana for a commercial law firm…I've got an internship at the Times in India…I just sent a CV and waited for the ones that got back to me…most don't get back to you but one or two do and they say yeah we've got an internship…"
>
> Female, Elite University, Humanities, PhD (Civil Service applicant post-PhD)
> Father a Senior NHS manager, Mother a University Lecturer

Internationally adventurous, academically gifted, linguistically competent, and although unsuccessful in her first application, she demonstrates many of the qualities valued by the Foreign Office. Devoid of the social context from which she emerges these traits become perceived as individual, *natural* traits, when in fact they are rooted in a specific social and cultural configuration that is not random but socially constituted: "every summer we go for four weeks trekking around the world, we're going to Uganda this year…in the past we've been to Cuba, Dominican Republic, Malaysia, Thailand, Jordan, Middle East, Tunisia, Egypt, Morocco, The Gambia…" It is no surprise that she so readily embraces foreign experiences. It would be a struggle for a working class graduate not to appear parochial in comparison. This example aptly captures the social logic behind positional competition and highlights something of the social and cultural barriers facing graduates from economically impoverished and socially marginalised backgrounds.

Symbolic capital constitutes one of the best hidden mechanisms through which social privilege is reproduced. However, it is never free from the categories of perception that when applied to socially-constituted criteria (such as certain experiences, prizes or sporting/cultural activities on the CV) recognise them as evidence of universally recognisable qualities (such as leadership, teamwork) or as constitutive of a *legitimate interest*, and so symbolic capital takes on different forms in relation to different social fields. The convertibility of social, economic and cultural forms of capital is thus a function of the field to which they are applied, which is why graduates become oriented toward fields to which they are already oriented by the way in which their composition of capital makes certain futures more or less probable. However, this is not to say that the students above had a strategic relation to their future but that their future emerged as the right course of action, through the way in which the diverse aspects of *habitus* produces pre-reflexive, practically intuited strategies of action:

[Emma] "I think my year out gave me a lot of direction actually without that I don't know if I'd have known what I wanted to do and it was a spur of the moment thing like I just needed some work experience I needed something on my CV for people to look at and go yeah she's worth employing or whatever…I went to Welsh Assembly Government and worked for constitutional affairs and legislation management…as an executive officer I did some project management…briefing the First Minister…I ended up doing my dissertation on devolution actually… It was very much geared towards the acquisition of a fast stream position…there was a placement group of individuals who met on a monthly basis and there was a focus on acquiring a fast stream job at the end of the kind of process…mainly from [Russell Group City]…not from Russell Group University because they don't offer the placement in the degree scheme there's not a chance to have a sandwich year so I had to ask I had to quit uni for a year basically yeah whereas other universities do offer a placement scheme…It helped…even just like my mocks in the second year I was getting mid two ones…and now my marks are seventy five seventy eight…taking that year out has made so much of a difference it's matured how I think so much…you learn so many life skills especially in office based situation… I did a couple of weeks working in a private office in the minister for Work and Pensions because I had my ex-boyfriend his brother was Fast Stream and had been working in the private office for a number of years and wanted to compare how London was different…and even though WAG were paying me they were like yeah take a week off go on see what it's like in Westminster because they're very focused on career development and helping you as much as they can…so I just shadowed the fast streamer down at the private office…"

Female, Russell Group University, Social Sciences, Researcher social think-tank

Father a Secondary School Deputy Head teacher, Mother a Nurse

This testimony is revealing about how middle class fractions become aligned in relation to the graduate labour market. We can see how her background gives her the confidence vis-à-vis public institutions (i.e. the university department and the civil service office) to assert herself – another point of distinction between middle class and working class students – and although she doesn't make the explicit link we can see that she shares social proximity to the Civil Service Fast Stream (ex-boyfriend's brother) and cultural proximity to the public sector (father a deputy head, mother a nurse who just completed a degree in public health). In many ways, she is following her father's footsteps as he read for a joint honours Sociology and

Politics degree at a Russell Group University, reads the Guardian and voted labour – her mother is similarly disposed. Thus, we can trace the development of her liberal political and social orientation, which in turn orients her in education and the labour market, distinguishing her from middle class graduates who emerge from private sector backgrounds.

It is also acutely revealing about the tacit cultural dynamics that underpin the employability of middle class graduates. We see that this girl was acutely aware of the absences on her CV: she expressed regret at having not participated more fully in extra-curricular activities and her disposition toward the need for work experience was seen as a way of 'making up', of making herself more employable. The fact that she perceived this as problematic is itself revealing. Such concern emerges less frequently amongst working class respondents who were more concerned about *getting* the degree. The fact that this appeared concerning to her, meant that she reacted to it but securing the work experience was not straightforward: she called on contacts in the university and had to demonstrate the value of the work experience to her School to be able to take time-out from her degree. That this work experience was not made available through the degree-course gives her an immediate labour market advantage vis-à-vis her peers but it also translated itself into an academic advantage: she got more firsts in her exams which she attributes to the year out writing policy and ministerial briefs. Upon graduation she leveraged the experience to access a position in a centre-left, Westminster-based not-for-profit think-tank. Thus, it becomes possible to trace how her social networks and dispositions made this experience and destination more probable for this young graduate. We can trace such influence amongst many of the students considered in this chapter:

> [Kristy] "All my family are medics…when I was choosing what I wanted to do at uni I didn't want to choose medicine just cos the rest of my family do it…now it turns out I do want to do medicine…do the fast track course… my mum's a GP my dad's an orthopaedic surgeon…I have four sisters…eldest is a dentist, second oldest is doing GP training, third is at London at Queen Mary's doing medicine and my twin sister is at Leeds doing medicine."
>
> [Interviewer] "So it's true when they say like ninety percent of people in medicine are from medicine?"
>
> [Kristy] "Yeah you've got so much contact with it at home."
>
> [Interviewer] "Did your mum and dad advise you what you should do?"

[Kristy] "They were very keen for me to do medicine…they do think of it as one of the best…one of the careers where you have got a lot of job security…professional status and particularly later on you'll be earning higher salaries…I've tried to do quite a bit of medical work experience…I spent a week at a GP surgery shadowing the work of a GP…back at home...worked at the micro-biology ward in Lincoln…I worked as a healthcare assistant in a psychiatric nursing home last summer for two months…work experience at X residential home…I think getting into medicine…it's almost quite playing the game…getting into medicine is jumping through hoops, you have to tick boxes like work experience you've done…the job which everybody wants most is healthcare assistant in a hospital but that's hard to come by, otherwise healthcare assistant in a nursing home is good…volunteering in a hospice…"

[Interviewer] "Who gets on the medicine fast track courses?"

[Kristy] "…universities…are quite keen on soft skills like empathy…if you've shown positions such as head of a charity or something that will help get on the graduate scheme…"

Female, Elite University, Natural Sciences, Medicine Fast-track course

Father a Surgeon, Mother a GP

The Milburn Commission (2009) highlighted medicine as being one of the key public professions dominated by graduates from wealthy backgrounds. Here we can see why. There is a complex interplay between parental aspiration and guidance and the forms of capital necessary to actualise a career in medicine: access to the *right* type of work experience is mediated by the *right* social networks; academic requirements are complex and subject combinations not always on offer to state school students; *soft skills* are socially and culturally-constituted. This example shows how social background has a pervasive and irreducible impact upon graduate labour market destinations. This is because social background describes a relationship to certain other factors that, taken alone, would not guarantee the same outcome but within the composite whole, have a forcing effect *because* they are inter-linked with other commensurate properties. It is not enough to want something one also needs the commensurate social networks and cultural dispositions to guarantee success. As we have seen, graduates from public sector professional and managerial backgrounds are endowed with liberal, middle class dispositions which allow them to express a legitimate form of *social concern* that serves them well in relation to liberal, public sector and third-sector occupations. Of course, they are also endowed with social networks

embedded within the public sector and so they are more likely to be *au fait* with the institutional intricacies of the public sector. Unless there are other stronger impulses, these tendencies orient graduates toward careers in public and third-sector occupations, and because the conditions of realisation are inscribed in the social networks that made such aspiration possible in the first place, they are likely to succeed:

> [Sarah] "I started looking at the Civil Service…only because both my dad and my sister work in the civil service and my dad's adamant that I'm going to follow him."
> [Interviewer] "What scheme?"
> [Sarah] "My sister just got in through the interviews and stuff but I was looking at the like Fast Stream Civil Service…I took some tests that you'd do and I did the numerical one my numerical ones way better than my literacy and I passed with flying colours…so it was a bit of I've got an hour to do something… It's easier technically when you know people…I know I could go into the City but…
> [Interviewer] "So you want to get into policy then?"
> [Sarah] "Yeah, it's a bit stupid really cos it's just for my dad really."
>
> Female, Russell Group University, Social Sciences, Civil Servant
> Father a Civil Servant, Mother a School Assistant

> [Cornelia] "I've always been interested in teaching and I love English…so I've been doing tutoring…I have quite a lot of tutees… it's a really good way of earning money… I want to teach English…I have thought about Teach First but I think I'm a bit too late...didn't get on the ball with that one which is a shame…everyone says its very very challenging…I've always loved it [English] I have an enthusiasm for it which I suppose helps doesn't it!?…I think I've always had [teaching] at the back of my mind…I really want to do sixth form teaching…from what my parents tell me they say sixth form teaching is really rewarding…To be honest if I could go and be a tutor forever I would!"
>
> Female, Elite University, Humanities, Teacher / Tutor
> Father a Private Tutor, Mother a retired School Teacher

> [James] "I was thinking of doing the PhD but ah sort of want the break…So ah'm gunna teach, do the PGCE and get my NQT."
> [Interviewer] "Why teaching?"

[James] “Because I don’t want an office job and when I did the teaching placement I found it very interesting”

[Interviewer] “What did you do for that?”

[James] “I taught some secondary school classes in physics.”

[Interviewer] “How does that work?”

[James] “I sort of went in and there has to be someone a qualified teacher…They had supply teachers and I went in and took the classes for physics…My dad…did some Open University course he teaches A level computing or IT in Nottingham…my mum at the moment she’s working she was working in a school as a lab technician now she’s on a Navy base something to do with the tall boxes that they get on the aircraft…works with retired guys from Navy.”

Male, Russell Group University, Natural Sciences, PGCE

Father a Civil Servant, Mother a Lab Technician

This group makes clear some of the conditions that are a prerequisite for careers in the public and third sector. The strong tradition of public-service is deeply embedded and reflected in their liberal social and political orientation, in their desire to pursue academic interests, in their dispositions towards the arts, and in their desire to make a difference and put monetary concerns to one side. In these ways they are diametrically opposed to graduates from business-backgrounds. However, this is not to say that they have nothing in common, individuals are a composite of multiple elements, complex patterns of likes and dislikes. Liberal or conservative tendencies, whilst reiterative, tend to lie somewhere along a spectrum and so certain individuals following certain paths may share certain properties but once again we need to return to the whole: reading the Guardian does not make one a liberal: similarly, wanting to make money does not make one a conservative. They are proxy measures, and certain tastes may be historical relics, reflecting previous stages of a social trajectory and carried forward into the new social configuration. Thus, we have to be very careful of making sweeping statements. However, there is a sense, a feel, for how this particular group of graduates become disposed toward the labour market, which emerges from how they are to be around.

As graduates from public sector backgrounds tend to be oriented toward professions where academic capital receives a high valuation – teaching, the civil service, medicine, academia (indeed even law which does not lie too far beyond their horizons), the role of social

background tends to be secondary, discrete and sedimented in dispositions. It is reiterative by the way in which these dispositions orient individuals toward certain extra-curricular and work practices and other like-minded individuals: hence, at Oxbridge they are not part of the 'City' crowd and don't embark upon early internships. We have also seen how certain experiences and resources provided by these social backgrounds may be converted into forms of symbolic capital, which allow graduates to constitute a legitimate interest in a given field and secure a competitive advantage in the graduate labour market. At root these advantages are based on a relative freedom from economic necessity, liberal friendship groups and family employed in public sector occupations. The habitus is constituted by durable dispositions, and as long as individuals maintain access to the grounds of realisation, these dispositions are affirmed, inter-personally realised, and reified.

5.5 Conclusion

Amongst the interviewees in this research middle class graduates with both parents employed in the public sector were the most likely to pursue employment in public sector occupations. The disposition to public sector occupations such as teaching, the civil service or the medical professions, is situated within a broader set of liberal dispositions that see them treat university as an end in itself and reject the naked pursuit of money (and thus private sector occupations). As such, we can see why Power (2000) suggested that middle class fractions are best divided along the lines of their sector of employment, and that these different fractions derived their ideological and economic support from the different sectors of employment. However, whilst all of the thirteen middle class graduates with both working parents employed in the public sector had found work in the public sector, we find another twelve middle class graduates working in the public sector who didn't have both parents employed in the public sector.

Being female and studying a humanities or social science type degree appears to make one more likely to pursue a career in the public sector and as we explored the testimony we found that these students were also much closer to graduates with both parents in professional public sector occupations, in terms of political and cultural orientation, social networks and labour market orientation, than to middle class graduates with both parents in private sector occupations. Of the twelve, only two had been to private school, five had one parent employed in the public sector and four had parents in liberal private sector occupations such

as the media and publishing. Only three (all female, all social sciences) had both parents employed in the private sector, of which two sets of parents were self-employed and one set of parents were both in lower managerial roles. This group shared few similarities with the conservative, private sector, privately-educated group of middle class graduates and more similarities with the public sector, state-educated group of middle class graduates.

In contrast to working class interviewees we find that middle class fractions share a number of similarities which distinguish the middle class experience of university and the graduate labour market from that of the working class interviewees. For instance, the middle classes share an early and easy relationship to the university and as such do not experience 'cultural dissonance', a characteristic experience of the working class at prestigious universities (Reay *et al*., 2009). They do not have to participate in paid-work, though a few at the Post-1992 and Russell Group Universities did. As such, they often enjoyed a 'normative' experience of university, participating in extra-curricular activities and living amidst middle class social networks. Many had school friends at prestigious universities and large friendship groups within the university. We find that these social networks and extra-curricular activities underpin labour market strategies, work experience, internships, knowledge of the labour market, which give the middle classes a general advantage vis-à-vis working class graduates. However, these labour market strategies are tailored to the demands of the occupations that the different graduates enter.

Whilst private sector, middle class graduates pursue an early and aggressive approach to the labour market those from public sector backgrounds tended to be more relaxed. This is partly a measure of the occupational fields to which they are oriented as teaching, the civil service, medicine and charities tend not to operate the same intensive internship schemes as city or corporate firms. Moreover, access is still mediated through extra-curricular activities and academic achievement and as such the middle classes exhibit intense institutional involvement. As a measure of their cultural and political dispositions, those from strong public sector backgrounds were much less likely to be disposed to very competitive sports and societies and instead to artistic and music activities.

We can see how the relative composition of social networks, cultural dispositions and economic capital situate different groups of students in relation to the university and align them in relation to the graduate labour market. The binary between public and private sector

origins is somewhat artificial as it conceals a number of indeterminate positions (such as how media and the law straddle the social divides) and so we need to recall that individuals are positioned, relative to one another, in social space. These positions become realised in the graduate labour market through differential levels of employability, which is always a relative function. Graduates are thus primarily positioned by their academic forms of capital, and secondarily by their social, cultural and symbolic forms of capital. The division between liberal, public sector oriented middle class graduates and conservative, business-minded, private sector oriented middle class graduates represents a broad spectrum within which graduates tend to find a niche. Competition within these segments draws on the differential resources and assets that separate individuals; it is here that middle class graduates as a whole tend to be advantaged vis-à-vis working class graduates.

Chapter 6

The Elite Trajectory Working Class

6.1 Introduction

If any of the groups identified as part of this research ought to be proof of the emancipatory power of education it is those graduates on elite educational trajectories from working class backgrounds. Endowed with a strong academic record and an unbroken educational trajectory, these graduates share few of the academic barriers facing their less well qualified peers. Their relationships with educational institutions, whilst not unproblematic, are largely positive, with many benefiting from sponsors amongst teaching staff. Having accessed elite, high-ranking universities they are well situated to capitalise on their academic capital. Whilst they experience the economic challenges typical for students of working class backgrounds, they are socially and culturally closer to the middle classes.

Elite educational trajectories move working class students beyond the educational and social spaces that are typically associated with working class students, allowing them to realise steep social trajectories. In any given year, around a half of Oxbridge undergraduates are privately educated, despite making up only 7% of all secondary school students (Milburn, 2009). However, only around one in ten Oxbridge undergraduates are from 'working class' backgrounds and at other Russell Group universities there may be no more than one in five. As such, admittance into an elite university is, ostensibly, admittance into a socially rarefied environment. For the socially aspirant, this provides ample opportunity to develop social networks, tastes and traits typically associated with the (upper) middle classes, and as access to socially exclusive fields is contingent upon sharing social and cultural forms, admittance into an elite university is often a precursor to a steep social trajectory. As a consequence, elite trajectory working class graduates are often marked by a physical and social departure from their class of origin.

This is not true for all elite educational trajectory students as educational success is no guarantee of social mobility; the fraction of the working class from which an individual is drawn and the university that they attend, are both consequential to social mobility. For

graduates strongly tied to their class of origin access to an elite university can entail a painful dislocation, marring their social experience and limiting their social acceptance into the institution. At universities that do not guarantee the social proximity necessary for cultural inculcation, social differences may be magnified through the reiteration of differential class lifestyles leading to a segregated experience and in such cases, individuals may fail to realise the full labour market value of their credentials.

Access to economic capital is a key differentiator between graduates from different class backgrounds. Compared with similarly-educated peers from middle class backgrounds, working class students are relatively close to economic necessity which places constraints on their activities. Economic capital underpins extra-curricular involvement and access to other experiences, such as paid and unpaid internships, vital to securing employment in today's graduate labour market. These differences also reflect differences in the quality of the social capital that working class graduates are able to access. As a consequence, their CVs may appear somewhat inadequate to successfully compete in the most competitive fields of the graduate labour market.

This chapter examines the experiences of elite trajectory working class graduates. It situates their experiences vis-à-vis their class of origin and their middle class university peers. In doing so, it aims to illuminate the processes underlying the experiences of elite trajectory working class graduates and re-situate this understanding within existing theoretical and empirical work.

Analysis of the different working class graduates revealed that A-level grades served a useful proxy for identifying broad differences within the group. Those who were highly academically selected tended to exhibit traits that set them apart from their less educationally accomplished working class peers. Those who had multiple A's at A-level tended to be more aspirational and self-assured and so a minimum of AAB at A-level was identified as being an indicator of an elite trajectory. Whilst there are difficulties with this categorisation (see methods chapter), this serves as a useful dividing line. At the time AAB represented the threshold grade boundary that might allow access to an Oxbridge college. Many of the elite trajectory working class students at the Russell Group University had applied to Oxbridge or Durham and we find many other similarities between the two groups. In total, this research

identified seventeen elite trajectory and twenty-two modal trajectory working class graduates. The university and subject distribution of these students can be seen in table 6.1 below.

Table 6.1: 'The Distribution of Graduates from Working Class Backgrounds by University and Subject'

		Humanities	**Natural Sciences**	**Business / Law**	**Totals**
Elite Trajectory	**Elite**	**4**	**3**	**0**	*7*
	Russell Group	**3**	**2**	**5**	***10***
	Post-1992	**0**	**0**	**0**	***0***
	Total	**7**	**5**	**5**	**17**
Modal Trajectory	Elite	0	0	0	*0*
	Russell Group	5	3	1	*9*
	Post-1992	4	0	9	*13*
	Total	9	3	10	**22**
	TOTAL	**16**	**8**	**15**	**[39]**

6.2 Academic and Reputational Capital

Elite trajectory working class graduates are an interesting group. They are bestowed with relatively rarefied pre-university credentials and stand to benefit from the reputational seigniorage of high-ranking universities. They are academically similar to many of their middle class peers but originate from very different social, cultural and educational contexts. For these reasons, a situated analysis of their experiences allows us to consider the relative merits of the Fair Access and Widening Participation arguments. By comparing their experiences with their middle class peers we can begin to re-constitute the notion of graduate employability and consider how the notion of human capital sits alongside the empirical evidence.

There is a tacit argument made by some policy-makers and educationalists that all degree-holders are equal and in a sense they are correct. Just like the national currency, degrees are state-backed assets. All degree-holders are formally equal before the law. However, degrees are taken in specific subjects and ranked according to criteria of assessment. The

consequence is to produce a segmented hierarchy of degree-holders, horizontally differentiated by the subject chosen, and vertically segmented by their academic grading. What is more, degrees are issued by different institutional bodies and these issuing bodies (universities) are perceived differently across social space. A first-class degree carries very different levels of 'reputational capital' according to where the degree was read and how it is perceived by the beholder (Smetherham, 2006).

The 'symbolic efficacy' of credentials is tied to the recognition that credentials receive in relation to a social field. The mercurial properties of reputational capital are thus a function of the heterogeneity of the categories of perception applied by different individuals. However, certain universities have established reputational seigniorage and their reputation is broadly recognised across society regardless of the class, race, gender or nationality of the beholder. Holders of similar pre-university and degree credentials are united, in the first instance, by their relationship to academic and reputational forms of capital. As such, by comparing the early labour market experiences of individuals with similar levels of academic capital, we can identify how non-educational factors become significant to graduate labour market outcomes.

Certain universities enjoy a preferential relationship to certain labour market segments, reflecting the homology of positions established between the higher education field and the economic field (Brown & Scase, 1994; Hesketh, 2000). Universities act as 'feeders' to specific areas of the economy and even specific organisations within the graduate labour market. This may be because employers find that graduates from a certain university meet their technical requirements and so regularly recruit on a particular campus. Others may recruit from specific prestigious universities for the reputational capital that the company inherits (Ashley, 2010), or it might be that certain universities are useful proxies for recruiting a certain class of individual. The narrow focus of recruitment activities by many graduate employers (Hesketh, 2000) conceals significant internal variation, according to the industry, economic sector and size of the organisation concerned, revealing something of the complex relationship between higher education and the graduate labour market.

The relationship between the higher education sector and the economy is not however clear cut. The diversity of graduate labour market outcomes within a particular university's graduate cohort suggests that universities are not organically tied into the labour market. Certainly, if we focus our analysis on certain segments of the graduate labour market we

discover that academic capital is not enough to guarantee employment and that credentials need to be accompanied by the right interpersonal guarantees, the right dispositions; forms of self-presentation etc., the right social guarantees – as evidenced through extra-curricular activities, work experience and social contacts, and the right technical guarantees – as evidenced by one's academic history and tests that an organisation might employ. Thus, whilst graduates are formally equal in law, they are differentiated by their ability to call upon forms of academic, cultural, economic and social capital and their ability to legitimately deploy these to leverage an advantage in the competition over graduate jobs (Brown & Hesketh, 2004).

In summary, academically speaking elite trajectory working class graduates are very similar to their middle class peers of the same universities and subjects. They share the same A-level grades, although there is some evidence that working class graduates are more likely to have undertaken 'softer' subjects, and they share similar degree classifications. As such, they are similarly positioned in relation to the academic demands of the graduate labour market. Through a close reading of interview testimony we can trace how, and in what ways, social background, amidst other factors, such as gender, becomes significant for these graduates vis-à-vis the experience of university and the early experiences of the graduate labour market.

6.3 A Classed Experience of University

The homology that is established between class habitus and different social fields underpins the forms of sociability, ways of being and doing, operating within a field, such that individuals from commensurate class habitus tend to be equipped with the ways of being and doing necessary to be recognised and affirmed in relation to a field. However, in a stratified society habitus becomes defined by its relative position in the wider social field, such that the modalities of practice, activities, tastes and dispositions, become associated with a particular class position, or social condition. The difficulty facing social transplants – individuals who move beyond the social sphere of their upbringing – is that they do not enjoy a natural, legitimate relation to the social fields in which they find themselves, but neither do they fully enjoy a legitimate relation to their class of origin. Socially mobile individuals encounter the objective social value of their ways of being and doing and so for working class graduates social class becomes problematic. The ability to reconcile divergent individual and class trajectories, and the manner in which it is done, becomes a defining feature of their

experience of university and the graduate labour market, and in turn determines the tacit social limits placed on their aspirations.

> "He calls the knaves, Jacks, this boy!" said Estella with disdain, before our first game was out. "And what coarse hands he has! And what thick boots!" I had never thought of being ashamed of my hands before; but I began to consider them a very indifferent pair. Her contempt for me was so strong, that it became infectious, and I caught it.
>
> I took the opportunity of being alone in the courtyard, to look at my coarse hands and my common boots. My opinion of those accessories was not favourable. They had never troubled me before, but they troubled me now, as vulgar appendages. I determined to ask Joe why he had ever taught me to call those picture-cards, Jacks, which ought to be called knaves. I wished Joe had been rather more genteely brought up, and then I should have been so too.
>
> Great Expectations, Charles Dickens (2003)

Literature on the working class experience of university tends to focus quite narrowly on difficulties faced by working class students in middle class institutions. Lacking the cultural capital necessary to appear positively in relation to middle class students (Charlesworth, 2009), it is argued that the working class experience a mismatch between their own background and the institutional culture of the university (Brown & Scase, 1994; Skeggs, 1997; Lynch & O'Riordan; Archer, 2003; Reay & Crozier, 2009). Whilst middle class students are prepared for university from a young age (Brown & Scase, 1994), working class students experience themselves like a 'fish out of water', especially at elite institutions (Reay & Crozier, 2009), they feel uncomfortable in universities (Brown & Scase, 1994) and find little affirmation in social space (Sani, 2008). However, working class students do not uniformly feel out of place at elite universities. Socially and culturally selected, the working class students that attend such institutions are not representative of their class background (Reay & Crozier, 2009) and their educational trajectory may reinforce early but discrete social differences, which become reiterative within the socially rarefied environment of elite universities. However, they may still encounter their class as problematic, as recognition rests upon shared forms of sociability, which is contingent upon access to social, cultural and economic forms of capital.

The potentiality for realising oneself as a competent, desirable professional graduate is bound up with a class lifestyle characterised by a freedom from necessity. For many working class students, the urgencies of the academic game circumscribe their experiential possibilities, imposing upon limited time, competing with paid work, and leaving little time for extra-curricular activities. Moreover, working class lifestyles do not easily lend themselves to the formal modes of participation of the middle classes, valued by graduate employers (Brown & Hesketh, 2004). Participation in clubs and societies may be curtailed by an inability to solicit recognition, to appear positively in relation to the social groups who inhabit and determine the grounds of recognition operating in these social spaces. Thus, for many working class students, the university experience reflects an existential issue, which comes down to a classed relation to being. This is why it is necessary to separate the working class into those on elite trajectories and those on modal trajectories, and why it is important to distinguish between students at different institutions, which organise social space in different ways.

Students don't arrive at university as a *tabula rasa.* They arrive with dispositions and interests attuned to the practical modalities of the habitus from which they emerge. Prior habituation pre-disposes students from different class and educational backgrounds toward certain practices, certain preferences that originate in their prior inculcation into a classed habitus. These preferences are part of a broader "matrix of preferences" (Bourdieu, 1996: 179), which in their totality constitute a class lifestyle, a relation to the world that emerges from a particular position in the world. The dispositions, preferences and prejudices to which students are habituated, shape the experience of university, and the cognitive resonance assured by a doxic relation to the world, practically, intuitively, guides preferences where no prior social mandate exists, such that social origin and trajectory become inscribed in the type of activities that students became involved in – which is at the root of the social divisions observed in the universities in this study:

> [Jamie] "I think it's more obvious in Law…you only notice the people who are kind of the cliquey people who probably mam an dad is a judge or a barrister…that's the way they gi out like."
> [Interviewer] "So they give an impression?"
> [Jamie] "Yeah a real impression"
> [Interviewer] "What is that impression how do they give it off?"

[Jamie] “ah dunno…err kind of ah wanna say obnoxious kind of just kinda like im better than you kind of thing really…”

[Interviewer] “Do they talk to you?”

[Jamie] “No…but I haven’t really, ya just notice in the lecture theatre they’re all kinda together.”

[Interviewer] “Do they keep a distance?”

[Jamie] “From everyone really yeah apart from their own little group.”

[Interviewer] “Do you notice any differences in the way they dress?”

[Jamie] “Ah you’ve got like the [laughs] what they call the Abercrombie gangs…Abercrombie and shirts unnecessary shirts like…”

[Interviewer] “What do you mean?”

[Jamie] “Just like pure they’ll turn up to a lecture like in shirt and trousers to a lecture kind…like my mate’s in Durham doing Law and they’ve got the same there like the Abercrombie law people who are like thi just kind of…they wear there Abercrombie’s and obviously Abercrombie is an expensive make an they just ah dunt really just that’s what they wear that’s their kinda what ah suppose defines the group ah suppose a like a mod and rockers kinda look…you’ve got yer distinctive thing which yu’d wear…when ah went to Durham there wa this huge difference to Russell Group University.”

[Interviewer] “What’s Durham like?”

[Jamie] “Oh it’s like the Elite University rejects that’s the way everyone looks at it like…ah think Russell Group University is there’s a massive different amount o styles but more mainly just smart casual whereas Durham is more a wanna say jumper and a shirt which ya’ve got on [Laughs and points at interviewer] dya know what ah mean?”

[Interviewer] “Ah know exactly what ya mean”

[Jamie] “…the jumpers, the shirts the like what dya call the trousers wi the like the lines like really owd school tweedy not tweedy what dya call it…the cords they love their cords as well and their brown shoes…ah’m tranna think what the girls up in Durham looked like ah’ve ya ever heard o Ra’s is it Ra Ra’s or ahr no its another thing they’re called the Jack Wills girls as well which is at a lot of unis in Britain they’ve got….like Durham is pure Jack Wills they’ve got there Ug boots on wi what do they call the like baggy trousers…like tracky bottoms really baggy wi the scarf an Russell Group University’s got a few but like ah know mi mate who ses err like Law in Durham is purely Jack Wills girls that’s how he termed it.”

Male, Russell Group University, Social Sciences, Paralegal in regional law firm
Step-father a Roofer, Mother an Administrator

The extension of class lifestyle through the educational system is a phenomenon witnessed across all the different social classes in this research: interests and preferences inculcated through the family and school prove to be durable despite the transition from school to university. The university provides opportunities for realising a variety of interests and so a variety of class lifestyles may be accommodated but the university is geared toward certain student constituencies more than others. At Elite University, middle and upper-middle class, privately educated students dominate the social space and assert the legitimate ways of being and doing. It would seem that this is also the case at Bristol, Durham and some of the other universities popular with this particular constituency. At Russell Group University, however, their presence is curtailed and specific to certain social spaces, such as the University Rowing Club. University spaces may be socially competitive but this ignores the fact that they are constituted such that they tacitly recognise middle class ways of being and doing but do not recognise working class ways of being and doing. As space is practically encountered through being, we find that students gravitate to spaces and activities in which they are able to be affirmed and recognised:

[Interviewer] "Do you do any sports or clubs?"
[Dean] "Ah do…ah go to gym ah do weight-training and ah do boxing, at D's gym."
[Interviewer] "Where's that?"
[Dean] "Off A road…its propa dahn to earth in a school hall rather than crappy like at uni…"
[Interviewer] "Do you do anything else at uni?"
[Dean] "Naow ah dun't ave time"

Male, Russell Group University, Social Sciences, Paralegal in regional Law firm
Step-father a Joiner, Mother a Hair-dresser

6.4 Russell Group University Experiences

Although there are differences, the university experiences of elite trajectory working class students at Russell Group University were much closer to working class students on modal trajectories, socially and culturally-speaking, than they were to the middle classes. Thus, we

find elite trajectory working class students who spend much of their non-study time working part-time, going to the gym or socialising with friends in houses, pubs and clubs. Their lifestyles were largely extensions of what they had undertaken whilst in sixth form or college, and they saw no need to become involved in the more middle class sports and societies. For the majority, part-time work did not seem to detract from academic study, which they prioritised, but did deny them the possibility of investing in formal extra-curricular activities.

Whilst these students do get involved with some of the societies and sports on offer, participation is limited to membership: there is little evidence of taking leadership positions or other positions of responsibility. Within the Russell Group University sample, the tendency to take up positions of responsibility is an inverse function of the *social distance* between the individual and the dominant culture of the institution. However, this is not simply a function of time and economics it is also a product of the sense of legitimation and confidence that familiarity bestows onto those with a history of participation. For example, we find that the committee positions for the prestigious Law society tend to be dominated by privately-educated, middle class students who tend to feel authorised within the public space of the Law crowd when compared with similar working class students.

A small number of the Russell Group University sample did participate more fully in the university and these students were distinct from the broader working class sample in that they had lost their accents, had fully immersed in the university experience and tended to be drawn from the upper regions of the working class. They had a wide group of friends, and were able to socialise with the privately-educated, middle class students. It is not a coincidence that these same students secured prestigious graduate jobs. Through these students it becomes possible to see how participation in the university is linked to cultural distance and how high achievement may consecrate social identity allowing one to feel a sense of belonging:

> [Mark] "I applied for Oxford and Durham I went into both applications not expecting an offer…I didn't even get an interview from Oxford…Durham same again… I was predicted four A's…they were non traditional A levels though… My psychology was the fourth highest in the country…without trying to sound arrogant I got A's in all my modules…I know a lot of people who are from similar backgrounds as me a lot of my friends are from the Valleys and they really resent people who have been to private school don't give them a chance and immediately make presumptions about them…

> I'm a bit cautious so when it comes to them I'm fine…I have as many friends who went to private school as went to state schools… Everyone I've lived with have been from the South."
>
> Male, Russell Group University, Social Sciences, Trainee Lawyer (Magic Circle)
> Step-father a taxi driver, Mother a cleaner

This student maintained a large group of privately educated friends and over his three years at university had lost his accent so much that his brothers remarked upon it when he went home. However, whilst his mother and step-father were in working class occupations, his mother had left Scunthorpe at a young age to travel America, an experience that is atypical of working class areas. The access to university consecrated his learner-identity and the move 'down South' allowed him to break from his friends at home. Essentially, university instituted a social break in his trajectory which allowed him to realise latent dispositions. He is a very good example of how university may be socially transformative for some students. It also demonstrates how individuals defined by their parental occupation may actually exhibit ways of being and doing atypical for their background and share tendencies, dispositions and preferences more typical of the middle classes. Bourdieu found that many of the working class students of the elite French universities were part of the 'sunken middle class' and here it seems that certain students classed as working class share experiences and family origins atypical for their background. Some of their parents were on the cusp of the middle classes:

> [Lulu] "My mother worked in the tax office until she had kids…then she had us so she just stayed home…now she works as a literacy assistant…primary schools…and my father was a miner and is now working up at X…he's the supervisor."
>
> Female, Russell Group University, Natural Sciences, PhD researcher
> Father a Pit Supervisor, Mother a Primary School Literacy Assistant

These examples begin to show how talking of the elite trajectory working class may be somewhat misleading. Elite educational trajectories are not the same as elite social trajectories. Where an elite educational trajectory is not joined by an elite social trajectory, working class students are more likely to encounter their class background as problematic in middle class social spaces, but where it *is* accompanied by an elite social trajectory, working class students are likely to exhibit more normative experiences of university. Coming from the higher regions of the working class decreases the social and cultural distance between

students and the university: those who exhibit strong dissonance are more likely to have parents from low-paid, unskilled or semi-skilled manual occupations:

> [Dean] "Ave allous wanted to bi a lawyer…"
> [Interviewer] "Did you have much support cos its tough to get into?"
> [Dean] "Yeah, everyone told me that…it is a bit strange cos mi mam, wi er background and am first un to gu to uni' in ma family all the other erm mi brothers a bricklayer and mi owder [older] brother 'is a plumber so its very…mi dad a dun't see mi step dad is a joiner so ya can see naw were am goin wi this…and so thi wo like thi dun't ave any good experience so I ant ad much support thi dunt know what its like like mi mam wen shi rings up an asks ar am doin shis like…shi dun't understand if a sey am stressed cossa revision but if a sey I'm knackered after a shift at w'rk shi like shi seys like shi understands…"
> [Interviewer] "yeah yeah"
> [Dean] "d'ya know wotta mean?"
> [Interviewer] "yeah yeah shi can't understand how…"
> [Dean] "No shi can't understand cossa'er background it's a different life…"
> [Interviewer] "What duz yer mam do?"
> [Dean] "mi mam shi w'rks at a shop but shi's a trained hairdresser but it's all different…it depends on what background ya come from…like a've all ma flatmates all their parents went to uni"
> [Interviewer] "yeah yeah"
> [Dean] "So they understand…"
> [Interviewer] "What do their parents do?"
> [Dean] "Most of them are professionals"
>
> Male, Russell Group University, Social Sciences, Paralegal in regional Law firm
> Step-father a Joiner, Mother a Hairdresser

The Russell Group University sample demonstrates how class identities may exist side-by-side with little real engagement across social divisions. However, at Elite University we find a greater tendency for inculcation into the dominant culture, underpinned by the social proximity guaranteed by the collegiate system.

6.5 Elite University Experiences

The collegiate system of Elite University strongly frames the student experience and encourages extra-curricular participation. Colleges tend to mimic the House structure of private boarding schools, creating a greater number of opportunities to be involved in clubs and societies. However, the university is dominated by a large, privileged, privately-educated or grammar-school educated student population and so the initial transition from a state comprehensive and/or working class background to the university can often be a traumatic experience. The collegiate system however provides the structure for the constitution of a student identity, much stronger than that exhibited by similar students at Russell Group University:

> [Helen] "It's varied over the years…first year was working or going out…it took me ages to get used to writing essays…first year I was probably doing fifty hours a week, seriously loads, loads of work and less and less over the years following…First year I kind of did a lot of college sports I did college netball college football and then I did university cricket as well…and then I dropped those and just did university football which I've done up to third year…"
>
> Female, Elite University, Natural Sciences, Medicine fast-track
>
> Mother an HR administrator in NHS

The collegiate system provides the social proximity necessary for cultural inculcation and there is a strong social and collegiate identity of being an undergraduate at Elite University which cuts through notions of class. In a sense, as Bourdieu argued, attending an Oxbridge college is something of an act of consecration. For students at Elite University, university tends to disclose itself as a realm of opportunities that they can actively participate in because they are able to access the forms of sociability necessary to solicit engagement in university spaces. As there is congruence between their own dispositions and the dispositions of those around them, they may feel like they have arrived. This sense of belonging is incredibly strong and reflects both the institutional approval given to their educational trajectory, which tends to consecrate their social identities, and the social approval that they receive through interaction with their fellow students. Whilst some may struggle to begin with, many find that the educational consecration allows them to assume social equality with their middle class, privately educated peers:

[Interviewer] "How was the transition from that to here?"

[Helen] "Absolutely crazy, mind-blowing, really rough compared to all the Etonians and the rars…but after a few weeks you realise we're all equal…"

Female, Elite University, Natural Sciences, Medicine fast-track
Mother an HR administrator in NHS

The sense of social inclusion does not emerge immediately. With the exception of one of the working class sample at Elite University (who was privately-educated) the students all talk of the initial cultural shock but without exception all of the students talk of being comfortable by the end of their third year. In some ways this is because they adopt mannerisms and dispositions that were not theirs to begin with. In other ways, it is because they have adapted their lifestyle to Elite University, finding niches where they are affirmed, where they find common ground with other students:

[David] "Second year this is what I kind of see as the transformation of [Elite University] I became the JCR social secretary and I think I was quite good at it actually organised lots of random social events ran lots of social events…"

[Interviewer] "What do you mean the transformation of [Elite University]?"

[David] "Well I just like obviously I realised [my] preconceptions were preconceptions and they weren't well founded and I've made such fantastic friends I've always felt internally quite confident but coming to Elite University shakes that in the first instance…"

[Interviewer] "Was it useful that role?"

[David] "Yeah it was really useful I mean by that point I'd become a lot more confident in my own shoes at Elite University…it was useful because like you're forced to meet so much more people like I'm probably the only one in my year who knows everyone in the first year because by the third year you kind of retreat…I have to meet people, have to be good at small talk and I always took my role really seriously…like when I organised bops or whatever I'd see myself as an ambulance manager…if people were alone and not looking like they were having a good time…I saw my role as making fun…doing odd things…forced into that situation and really liking it"

Male, Elite University, Humanities, Trainee Lawyer in Magic Circle Law Firm

This quote demonstrates how the institutional environment creates opportunities for engagement through the way in which it guarantees social proximity. At Russell Group University, there are fewer institutional frameworks for bringing students together and so there is less of a sense of shared studenthood. Amongst the Elite University sample, by contrast, working class students tend to enjoy an integrated student experience. They participate in clubs and societies, take up committee positions, play sports, eat and drink with their fellow students in communal halls, and with time adopt many "middle class" traits. The initial experience of Elite University reflects the ontological dissonance between working class students and the institution:

> [David] "On the Open day and interview I really hated it"
> [Interviewer] "What was it about it?"
> [David] "erm this is going to sound stupid because I don't really think I have an accent but one of the things was an accent like you come and predominantly people have nice southern English accents and that's really quite off-putting and obviously the architecture and a feeling of almost not belonging here…everybody seems so posh you know what I mean…"
> [Interviewer] "When you were around people how did that feel?"
> [David] "You just feel not good enough you feel you're not quite able to make a decent contribution to conversations even if its about nothing serious even if its just that's the kind of thing… I never had an accent but I noticed it…I felt more of an association with as you say a Valley boys accent I find it much more comforting coming here and then you have these accents which are horrible, alien and foreign, but that's just perception again…"
> [Interviewer] "In terms of conversation you said you couldn't enter into conversation, why was that?"
> [David] "Well again it's just regional accents that are you feel that individuals because they are from different social classes have different experiences and its almost as if I mean I don't know how to describe it when you're in conversation with someone and people are polite and everything you'll say something to them and they'll go yeah yeah and then continue the conversation with somebody else and I felt

it was going to be that situation as if people would kind humour you and that's how I did kind of feel at first"

Male, Elite University, Humanities, Trainee Lawyer in Magic Circle Law Firm
Father an Entertainer, Mother a Care-worker

Even for an eloquent, insightful graduate, this quote demonstrates the difficulty of putting experiences that are practically, pre-reflexively encountered into words. It shows how class becomes *felt* inter-personally, pre-reflexively and how that has consequences for how we experience ourselves vis-à-vis different social groups. Socialised individuals are sensitive to the nuances of interaction, verbal and non-verbal cues, through which we become aware of ourselves because of how we perceive ourselves through others, that is, how we experience ourselves in the company of others. Social distances become instituted as personal distances realised interpersonally and cited in the everyday language of likes and dislikes (Charlesworth, 2009). However, a defining feature of Elite University is that admission to the university acts as a form of social consecration and the collegiate system provides the social conditions necessary for realising an affirmed relation to being.

Turner (1960) argued that social mobility in Britain is best characterised as a form of sponsored mobility rather than contest mobility. The entrenched British class system meant that it was not enough to be talented or hard-working, access to elite social positions was by invitation and so social mobility was contingent upon the ability of an individual to solicit contact and establish social alliances with the socially elite. Selection into Elite University is an invitation to join the social elite as its graduates share in its reputational capital but also benefit from the close association with the social networks that Elite University guarantees. Working class students benefit from this close association by the way in which they are caught in the 'slip-stream' of their middle class peers, which has a number of mutual, reinforcing consequences: accents are smoothed over or lost; tastes and aspirations change; bodily presentation changes; in short, working class students acclimatise to middle (if not upper-middle) class ways of being and doing.

The mutual reinforcement of selection and acculturation allow working class students to realise more middle class ways of being, which become consequential to their labour market aspirations and their ability to access socially exclusive fields. Thus, an Elite University degree still acts as an 'admission fee' to elite social positions, not simply because of its

intrinsic reputational value, i.e. it is not directly convertible into labour market positions, but because it is a proxy for social and cultural characteristics, that have been selected for and rarefied through the university experience and which receive a high valuation in relation to socially exclusive occupational fields. That we do not find the same propensity towards these experiences at Russell Group University is not surprising given that the student population is more homogeneous, the institutional habitus is less well defined, social proximity is not guaranteed and working class students are more vulnerable to the social and economic conditions of their class origin.

Economic capital is an important aspect of the university experience, especially between individuals from different class backgrounds. The generous Elite University bursaries (£10,000 over three years) allow working class students to be free from part-time, term-time paid-work and to participate more fully in the extra-curricular side of university. They also underpin the possibility of changed consumption habits:

> [David] "My spending habits have changed…basically in my first year I still had fun…but I had six grand in savings after my first year, I've spent it all since in the last two years but whether that's a reflection of confidence…I find I'm much more liberal with money now…I've still got three grand in savings…I've been on holiday with my girlfriend…with my family…I spend a lot more freely now…I mean like this [points to coffee and food]…I'm a lot more careless about spending…"
>
> Male, Elite University, Humanities, Trainee Lawyer in Magic Circle Law Firm
> Father an Entertainer, Mother a Care-worker

Whilst the bursaries might not stretch to the Varsity Ski trip, they allow students to escape from the practical imposition of paid-work and to engage in the social activities of college and university life. This is important as access to social networks is contingent upon shared practices and activities. However, to share the forms of sociability prevalent amongst wealthy students: the propensity to go for dinner; to attend 'formals'; to travel or to participate in new sports; is dependent upon a favourable economic regime, which the Elite University bursaries support more so now than in the past. None of the Elite University students worked during term-time but at Russell Group University half of the elite trajectory working class students worked part-time. Paid-work is not necessarily damaging but tends to remove students from

the university space and is part of a wider set of practices and preferences that inhibit the inculcation of middle class values.

It is important to recognise that certain working class students can have a 'normative' experience of university but it is equally important to recognise the diversity of experiences and groups within the university. As we have seen in earlier chapters, privately-educated students at Elite University dominate the most prestigious extra-curricular activities. Thus, there are certain areas of the university, certain colleges and activities that are 'not for the like of us', spaces that are *othered*, not just by working class students but by many of the more middle class, state-school educated students. Of course it is not a simple, sharp divide but a series of social steps from relatively open social spaces to the most socially competitive spaces where all but an invited elite are excluded. If we trace the working class experiences of Elite University vis-à-vis those of other social classes at Elite University, we can detect the tacit social boundaries delineating the range of possible social experiences open to them.

6.6 A View from the Foothills

Students from working class backgrounds and state schools are ostensibly 'included' in the institution but the terms of their inclusion remain socially and culturally contingent. What one does cannot be separated from who one is. Elite University may provide ubiquitous opportunities for participation but there remains a hierarchy of extra-curricular activities. Prestigious activities are scarce and the competition to access them is often intense. As such, there is a classed hierarchy within the university and even some of those areas that might be thought conducive to the working class culture are found to be socially exclusive:

> [Nathan] "I joined the Labour club…felt morally obliged…but I didn't enjoy it…I support Labour because they support my interests most closely…I went there and thought it was very elite very middle class kids actually still having a social elitism cos they were like oh do you not remember the by-election of I don't know Kidderminster in nineteen eighty six and its like no, do you know what I mean, I thought it was that kind of because our family are quite monied we're so Labour rather than having a real interest in people…It's fucking horrible…I don't know if you remember but they campaign in [local working class estate] you'd be so pissed off that these people were knocking on your door…"

Male, Elite University, Humanities, aspirant Corporate Lawyer
Father an NCO in RAF, Mother an Administrator

To be successful in the most competitive spaces of the university may consume vast amounts of time and money, and working class students tend to place academic achievement above all else. Thus, we can see that the socially circumscribed forms of participation are partly a practical accommodation to the principles of insurance. As Brown and Scase (1994) found, certain groups of wealthy, particularly privately-educated students seem more willing to risk their academic success because they are more assured of a social return on their academic capital. As one student put it: "my [Eton] friend who is going into the Elite University Union has given up a grade to do all this stuff but I think he'll still like with all the experience he's getting will go into a top job." Students from working class backgrounds cannot be so sure of such success because they don't have the social, economic or cultural resources to ensure success or to make a success of failure; whereas for the upper middle classes failure becomes another anecdote for the dinner table or the interview, for the working class it is a social indictment.

There is a secondary aspect to the participation in Elite University that is not unrelated to 'finding one's place'. As we have already seen, social beings are attuned to the pre-reflexive, pre-discursive social landscape of institutions which informs them of their social value across different spaces. Through this practical sense, individuals self-consciously withdraw from certain social spaces and participate in others. Elite University students from working class backgrounds participate in the university but they do so in the least socially competitive areas, avoiding the activities, clubs and societies most strongly aligned with the dominant upper-middle class students. We find that they often participate in non-traditional clubs and societies or in activities where they have a clear social mandate:

> [Interviewer] "So whilst you've been here what have you been involved in?"
> [Edward] "I have been on the JCR committee, I've had two roles on that…I was diversity rep in my first year…in my second year I was [Student Union] rep…I also was badminton captain in my second year, I rowed in my second year for men's thirds, I was also president of Chinese cultural society…we set up mandarin lessons and did cookery classes and film nights and stuff like that…I was on Target Schools committee…rejuvenated access events for students to go back to their old

> schools…ran shadowing schemes and stuff like that…for two and a bit years…I was the college co-ordinator…coordinated events through all the colleges…I am also an Aim Higher mentor…at a [local] school…introduce them to higher education…even if they want to do vocational routes if that's right for them…I was also involved in a social enterprise called Elite University Tutoring… I got into politics as well… I was working with [Local MP] and the CLP and stuff…"
>
> Male, Elite University, Humanities, Teach First teacher
>
> Father a Chef, Mother a Child-carer

We find that participation in the more competitive and prestigious clubs and societies, such as in the Student Union, the Conservative Association, the Entrepreneur society, the Varsity sports teams, or the whole host of student dining societies, are almost entirely absent from the experiences of students from working class and lower middle class backgrounds (a common exception is women's football – certain sports teams generally may be less socially selective than the societies). Such activities are more prominent in the experiences of the middle class students, especially the privately-educated who arrive at Elite University and hit the ground running.

In summary, elite trajectory working class graduates integrate into the universities that they attend but their integration remains socially and culturally contingent. As a group, they tend to be distanced from the most prestigious and socially competitive extra-curricular activities of the university and their involvement tends to be more superficial than their middle class peers. Examples of positions of responsibility are largely restricted to the Elite University sample. However, the patterns of university participation become important to graduate employability, as they allow candidates to evidence suitability, capability and acceptability (Brown & Scase, 1994). What people do is a reflection of what people are, for themselves, and for others, and so one's class of origin and trajectory become inscribed in the activities that we take part in, which can be read by those who are attuned to the cultural nuances of activities, experiences and practices. In graduate recruitment, extra-curricular activities have become increasingly important because they are useful proxy measures for a *type* of person, which the face to face interview can confirm or reject but which reduces the number of *unsuitable* applicants when used as part of CV screening. As we have seen here, if participation in extra-curricular activities is an important element of recruitment, then elite trajectory working class graduates are often well-placed to demonstrate their social

involvement but this involvement is always marked by the manner of its acquisition, i.e. the tacit boundaries that social class places on social involvement, which may become consequential in certain regions of the graduate labour market.[21]

6.7 Social Networks and the Cultural 'Slipstream'

The experience of university is important because the groups that one socialises with can become consequential to employability. Middle class students are embedded in professional and managerial networks, and they stand to benefit from the hidden advantages that such networks provide; they derive social profits from the seigniorage of their cultural background. Sharing an early relation to professional or managerial culture they are much more likely to embody the ways of being and doing associated with a professional or manager and are more likely to be at ease in their company. Social networks can be a source of advice and knowledge about university and the graduate labour market: including potential careers, how to present a CV, what to include, the hidden social codes and expectations of recruitment etc. In this way, social networks constitute a valuable form of symbolic capital which differentiates candidates on a hidden social terrain but networks are also more direct sources of capital through the opportunities, work experience for instance, that they disclose (Granovetter, 1974). They are also important catalysts of a class culture: property ownership in the South-East for instance constitutes a hidden subsidy for graduates as it lowers the threshold to participation in the graduate labour market of the South-East. Thus, for working class students, accession to middle class networks is often an important pre-emptory step to securing prestigious graduate employment which tacitly demands what the universities do not formally offer to all, as Bourdieu suggested: .

> "Outside the specifically scholastic market, a diploma is worth what its holder is worth, economically and socially; the rate of return on educational capital is a function of the economic and social capital that can be devoted to exploiting it" (Bourdieu, 1984: 134)

[21] In some of the more competitive positions in the graduate labour market, where competition is largely restricted to Oxbridge graduates, the subtlety of the hierarchy of experiences becomes significant. Certain graduate recruiters will ask current employees, who are alumni of certain colleges, to attest to different roles and experiences on a candidate's CV, to give a flavour of the demands imposed by such positions, so that the suitability of a candidate can be adequately assessed. Thus, at the pinnacle of the graduate labour market, in the more competitive spaces of the City, at certain financial institutions, in certain Management Consultancies, or in the Foreign Office, where a social elite - privately-educated, Oxbridge - dominates, the subtlety of the internal Oxbridge hierarchy becomes significant.

Academic capital may define the division between modal and elite trajectory working class graduates but they also differ, quite markedly, socially and culturally-speaking. Whilst this cleavage is largely tacit prior to university, how these students experience themselves vis-à-vis the university, the social networks that they become involved in and their differential acculturation to middle class ways of being and doing divides the working class graduate population. This combination of adaptation and inculcation to middle class culture is important because it lies at the root of the relative employability of elite trajectory working class graduates:

> [Nathan] "Being surrounded by certain types of people…whose parents had very good jobs…was probably a positive impact…"
> [Interviewer] "Did you notice a difference in the type of people at Stamford and Elite University?"
> [Nathan] "There's a lot more people with my kind of background at Elite University"
> [Interviewer] "Do you think going to Stamford helped you adapt here?"
> [Nathan] "Yes definitely…it helps with the range of people you're meeting…it's all about bullshit confidence…it works both ways…I think it benefited me."
>
> Male, Elite University, Soft Science, aspirant Corporate Lawyer
> Father an NCO RAF, Mother a College Adminstrator

As we have already seen, by providing the possibility for engagement, by insisting upon social proximity and by consecrating all those who enter the hallowed quads, Oxbridge colleges provide the institutional conditions necessary for social transformation. This is important because success in the graduate labour market is contingent upon the ability to *be*, to possess the social dignity necessary to carry out professional and managerial roles, to instil the confidence in others that social competence assures and to be what others expect. Social transformation is a crucial element of the labour market successes of working class students, allowing them to embrace, what would have otherwise been improbable labour market destinations. Thus, social networks may raise aspirations not just because they provide explicit and tacit forms of knowledge (which contrasts with official knowledge that always remains abstract, frozen in time, socially stale and therefore somewhat unreal) but because they provide the grounds necessary for the realisation of certain possible futures, that is to say, once caught in the 'slip-stream' of their middle class friends working class students are able to acculturate to middle class ways of being and doing:

[Mark] “Everyone I’ve lived with have been from the South and it’s so rare to meet anyone from the North…I’ve got friends from Wales whose accents have changed…when you go into the law firms and the city everyone does tend to be the same everyone does have this South East accent though I do think the northern accent is becoming more prominent… To be honest if my accent’s changed it’s not been a conscious decision I didn’t mean to and I don’t want people not to know where I came from…”

Male, Russell Group University, Social Sciences, Trainee Lawyer (Magic Circle)
Step-father a Taxi Driver, Mother a Cleaner

[David] “The people I hung out with [from home] most went to university…nobody has a graduate recruitment kind job…I’m the only with a City type job…closest friends from uni are at Slaughter and May, Linklaters [Magic Circle Law Firms]…Civil Service Fast Stream and PriceWaterhouseCoopers in management consulting…I didn’t choose them on that basis…”

[Interviewer] “Do you think Friends are a big influence – if you don’t have friends going into corporate you tend not to, if you do you are more likely to?”

[David] “I think that’s definitely true…I never felt the pressure to get a job, I felt the idea, the influence…then my friends started getting internships and so I felt compelled to get something sorted…”

Male, Elite University, Humanities, Trainee Lawyer in Magic Circle Law Firm
Father an Entertainer, Mother a Care-worker

Social proximity provides working class students with a practical understanding of the nuances of culture as they operate in the graduate labour market and within elite universities working class students become practically accommodated to these demands. The expression of this classed relation to being is none more so explicit as in the ways of dress:

[Mark] “Suits”

[Interviewer] “Where did you get your suits?”

[Mark] “This is another thing I was really conscious about especially on the vacation scheme for two weeks as vain as this might sound it was one of the worst things about the two weeks I had my suit that I got from Burtons but I wore the same suit for the

whole two weeks but other people I mean some of the guys had new suits every couple of days and I met on those two weeks my first friend from Eton I'd never met anyone from Eton he goes to Cambridge and he's had such a public school background he's one of the King's College choristers and his suits were always changing and there was another guy who was always talking about people's shoes but I just wore I mean my shirts changed but I just wore the same suit for the whole time and that was erm I didn't like that…I felt like I didn't belong there as much…we had conversations about people's suits and what they were wearing I've only got one suit and I wore the same suit to all my interviews…I must have gone twenty plus times…my shoes are top man, slip on black ones not these expensive ones that people were wearing…I was very aware and I think other people were aware that my suits were changing…I mean I wore the same suit when we went out in the evenings."

Male, Russell Group University, Social Sciences, Trainee Lawyer (Magic Circle)
Step-father a Taxi Driver, Mother a Cleaner

It is not so much that dress guarantees success in the labour market but it is a very apparent aspect of a whole appearance, a relation to being expected by recruiters for professional graduate jobs. It includes the whole relation to being, that is classed, at its base level economically, but as we have seen, it is also classed in more subtle, complex, interpersonal ways, which take into account the whole relation to being, how one comes across verbally and non-verbally.

Access to middle class networks allows elite trajectory working class students to acclimatise to the relation of being demanded by professional graduate occupations, which allows them to appear positively in relation to the criteria employed by graduate recruiters. However, whilst the Elite University sample were guaranteed social proximity to middle class networks, and were able to solicit contact and recognition within the university, the Russell Group University sample was more heterogeneous. Thus we find that many of the Russell Group University sample retained strong traces of their social origin. The difference between these social trajectories becomes significant in relation to graduate labour market outcomes:

[Dean] "You need to be a different person to do commercial than to do legal aid with commercial ya're likely to be on a salary of sixty thousand with legal aid you're likely to be on a salary of sixteen to twenty five thousand… if ah wo from London or

anything an I ad mates who wo toffs not criminal ones who ad kids when thi wo sixteen perhaps a'll be into commercial law cos that's wot a've bin exposed to for all ma life an ah wun't know any different…"

[Interviewer] "What type o' person goes into commercial law?"

[Dean] "Ya' need to be very competitive…ya' need three as…a two one or a first…"

[Interviewer] "There's not much difference between people who apply for commercial law is there really in terms of qualifications?"

[Dean] "No and its same wi extra-curricular experiences as everyone has done mock trials everyone's done innocence project…"

[Interviewer] "So how do you distinguish yourself then?"

[Dean] "Climb Mount Everest [laughs]…ya gotta look good on paper…for that it's your academic qualifications an' what ya've done apart from student life…"

[Interviewer] "What is it then?"

[Dean] "I dunno if I knew a'hd ave one."

Male, Russell Group University, Social Sciences, Paralegal in regional Law firm

Step-father a Joiner, Mother a Hairdresser

Whilst many of the students in this sample had high aspirations for the future, only four of the ten had actually secured jobs for when they finished university. Apart from the law students, who had undertaken vac work, from which two had secured training contracts, none had undertaken any internships during their years at university and this was clearly a barrier to a job straight after university, which is where the working class differ from the business factions of the middle class students and where they are similar to middle class students from public professional factions. However, in the follow-up survey, all were either employed or in further education. The Oxbridge sample were all headed towards relatively prestigious careers or were already on relatively prestigious graduate schemes, these included: paid role in TV production, Graduate Entry Medicine with bursary, Teach First, Law Training Contract with corporate job (n = 2), and two who were completing their Masters, one who had PhD funding and the other with experience in Development. All had been united by a desire to have a 'breather' between university and work – even one of the students heading to law had deferred entry to the Graduate Diploma in Law for a year – but then all had quickly re-engaged in the labour market and had found doing so less problematic than their peers from the Russell Group university.

The Russell Group University sample was slightly more diverse. Of the ten graduates, three were paralegals, two were doing their LPC (one with a corporate training contract), one was on a funded PhD, one had secured a graduate position in a sustainable development role, another was on a management graduate scheme, one was a sales assistant and one was an editorial assistant. The student with the training contract exhibited significant acculturation in his interview; he had privately educated friends, had lost his accent and had embarked upon work experience from a young age. The other law graduates were drawn from unskilled and semi-skilled manual working class backgrounds, exhibited limited acculturation and circumscribed engagement with the extra-curricular side of university and had been unsuccessful in their applications for law training contracts.

Clearly, the Elite University degree has a higher valuation in the graduate labour market, leveraging access to the more prestigious regions. It is difficult, however, to separate that part of the degree that allows one to access prestigious employment because it is a guarantee of a technical competence and that part which acts as a guarantee of social competence. If we consider the experiences of academically similar but socially different students we see how social competence and therefore social background, and trajectory, become important to labour market outcomes. This is a complex consideration because students from similar backgrounds acquire different forms of social competence, which receive different valuations in different areas of the graduate labour market. However, individuals sharing similar social and educational origins and trajectories are united in a relation of homology, and so it is possible to identify some common characteristics across the group.

6.8 Divergent Labour Market Trajectories

The social destiny of those on elite trajectories, unlike those on modal trajectories, is not tied to the particular conditions affecting their social class as social class of origin doesn't adequately describe the volume and composition of capital that they possess. Whilst they remain conscious and aware of their social origin, their trajectory has often removed them from this social milieu, which has consequences as they try to reconcile the social distances inscribed in their trajectories. For a certain fraction of elite trajectory students, this leads to the rejection of class background. They adopt a right-wing conservatism, see any lingering thoughts of being working class as somewhat inauthentic and embrace traditionally right of centre occupations. For others however, the social distance inscribed in their trajectory is

guilt-inducing and leads them to embrace the romanticism of the left-wing working class, in what may be seen as a way of reclaiming their social origin, alienated as they are from the family and childhood from which they emerge but also from the social group to which they are now aligned. Not possessing an authentic, that is to say, an early, relation to middle class culture, these individuals make a virtue of their working class background, embrace middle class liberalism and embark upon communitarian careers.

These factions of the working class may seem divided against themselves but both are products of an attempt to accommodate an alienated being, which is never sure of being accepted. Thus, unlike the middle class factions, or even the modal working class factions, who are aligned to certain segments of the labour market, the fate of those on elite trajectories is not preordained and can only really be understood by examining the manner in which their new forms of capital were acquired (as to do so is to understand the social and cultural orientation of their capital). However, the working class do not enter universities as a *tabula rasa*, they originate from fractions within the working class who are aligned to certain social spaces and vertical segments, and this may influence the composition of their inherited capital, which may influence the manner of the acquisition of new forms of capital. That their trajectory frees them from the constraints of their class does not mean that they are free of their class – they are intimately bound to it and it shapes their whole trajectory, defines the manner of their acquisition of new forms of capital and orients and circumscribes the range of options open to them.

This is why we find that factions of this group enter diametrically opposed areas of social space. On the one hand, those who reject their class assume dispositions of the economically and politically dominant class group. They embrace the notion of 'moving up' and deny the guilt that such a transition often evokes. Thus, we have those who embrace the corporate world and its private sector professions – in particular the corporate solicitors, consultants and accountants who sit in the vanguard of the corporate sector. Their right-wing, conservative dispositions honed to the rigours and lifestyle of the corporate managers and their auxiliaries:

> [Mark] "I decided to be a lawyer after my A levels…at each stage since in the first year I decided I want to be a solicitor at the end of the year I wanted to be a corporate solicitor… I knew I was disadvantaged because of my school so I just worked hard to

be the best…so when I got here I know I had a lot more work experience than people here and they were coming from London, Birmingham and Manchester… I do seven miles every morning…it sounds a lot but I can't work otherwise…it takes me about an hour…In my spare time I see my friends a lot…I study a lot… I'm not really worried about finance…I start on thirty seven, moves to forty four and sixty six once I'm qualified… It's because of my brothers why I got so focussed on Law because now it's just my mother and my brothers and she does struggle financially…Which was another thing when my training contract came through the post my mum had never seen anything like it and it was quite nice."

Male, Russell Group University, Social Sciences, Trainee Lawyer (Magic Circle)
Step-father a Taxi Driver, Mother a Cleaner

However, working class graduates tend to lack the social and cultural capital to access the most prestigious regions of the graduate labour market. In this sample, they are entirely absent from the strategy consultancies and investment banks, where *client readiness* is an important facet of employability (Ashley, 2010), and where social networks and internships are important mediators of access to employment. Such careers are reserved for a particular type of graduate, one who is well connected and culturally suited to such careers:

[Interviewer] "Who are the forty percent going into jobs from finance?"
[Fred] "Of the ones I know…either they go down the sporting route, represent the uni…like one who was Eton educated, with a wealthy family behind him is going into investment banking…he's going to be president of the Union next term…he's quite driven in what he wants like it's his second time going to the Union…one of the worst hackers I've ever seen…he's your best friend as long as you vote for him."
[Interviewer] "So you said if you play sport for the uni…"
[Fred] "It's down to two groups like you've got your Eton-educated, kind of upper class people, either they go into the sporting kind of things erm or they know what they want and they kind of go into one of the political groups so either try for the Union or they could go for Conservative Association…they are the ones who are noticed in university…"

Male, Elite University, Natural Sciences, PhD researcher
Father a Painter and Decorator, Mother a Lettings Agent

This is not *simply* a matter of aspiration: those graduates in investment banking, and to a lesser extent consulting, were primed for such careers by their background. For instance, access to both rest upon prior work experience and this requires an early orientation to the labour market, and the social networks necessary to realise such ambition. Those graduates interviewed as part of this sample who had secured jobs in the City had used family, and friends of the family, to leverage access to informal internships in banking and consultancy which then allowed them to access formal internships at a later date. Thus, the absences of the working class are not *simply* a matter of aspiration. It is difficult to overestimate how much of aspiration is guided by a practical sense, an intuitive feel, and how little is a conscious strategy. Instead we find the working class are concentrated in areas where their academic capital receives a high valuation, such as in corporate law.

On the other hand, there are those who attempt to reconcile their divergent lifestyle by assuming a renewed but dominant relationship to their class. These are the students Reay and Crozier (2009) recognised as pursuing 'communitarian careers'. Amongst them we find a motley bunch of occupations, which includes those commonly aligned with liberal, middle class areas of social space. This liberal, politicised fraction are embraced by the public sector professionals, the teachers, social workers, civil servants, and are closely allied to the third sector, charities and other such organisations. They are able to make a virtue of their class of origin and use it to legitimate their interest in such careers. In some ways this division between right and left, private and public, is an over-simplification of matters but it is evident that this is the choice that sits open to those on elite trajectories. Which side they fall upon may be a matter of personal conjecture, and may not be clearly resolved at all, but in the final analysis the choice represents a strategy of reconciliation between their class of origin and their social trajectory:

> [David] "Coming here and doing reasonably well gave me a lot more confidence and just like we'll come on to jobs later but whatever you're going to infer from what I'm going to say well that's fine I got a training contract with a City firm…One thing I should probably mention there I applied for Teach First in the summer because I felt kind of, which is why it probably came up, morally obliged to do something like Teach First given I'd benefited so much from Elite University…I applied for it, deferred the first year…but I didn't get it…my girlfriend sat me down and said you know you'd hate it…you know it's not what you want to do and I was you're right

and so I cancelled it…you are doing it for the wrong reasons and you know you are…"

Male, Elite University, Humanities, Trainee Lawyer in Magic Circle Law Firm
Father an Entertainer, Mother a Care-worker

In many ways the disposition toward research, teaching, academia, the civil service, legal aid, and other such areas, is a reflection of the composition of capital possessed by elite trajectory working class graduates. Academic credentials have a high exchange rate in these areas and are not socially exclusive in the same way that the Foreign Office, corporate law, corporate accountancy, management consulting, investment banking, marketing, or even the media are. Moreover, these occupations feed into the dominant identity of elite trajectory working class graduates, who are able to make a virtue of their background. This fraction contrasts with the smaller fraction that rejects their class of origin but both factions are caught up, to some degree, in the slip stream of their middle class peers, which, as we have seen, is an important aspect of their success in the graduate labour market.

6.9 Making a Virtue of Working Class Background

Elite trajectory working class graduates share similar dispositions and are similarly oriented to the graduate labour market as many of their peers from public sector middle class backgrounds. Both groups of graduates are likely to share a similar disposition toward academia, partly because of the selection that has taken place at prior levels of education, and are positively disposed toward careers in the public sector. In this regard they are different from graduates of private sector middle class backgrounds, who tend to treat higher education as a means to an end and are oriented toward private sector careers. Even the more conservative, elite trajectory working class graduates mention considering masters degrees.

The public sector middle classes differ in that they are able to translate the advantages of their social privilege to realise careers in the most competitive graduate schemes of the private sector. Thus, whilst we find some public sector middle classes in strategy consultancy and investment banking (primarily the privately educated ones) none of the working class graduates express interest in these careers. We tend to find the working class adjust their aspirations to realisable careers in some of the larger management consultancies, which are less socially selective, or in commercial law, where academic capital receives a high

valuation. Outside of the elite regions of the graduate labour market, elite trajectory working class are more likely to be oriented to public sector occupations, where they are able to make a virtue of their background and where academic credentials receive a fair valuation:

> [Interviewer] "What made you consider Teach First?"
> [Edward] "Well I hadn't considered it until I went to a presentation before Christmas and I was just blown away by what it was I've always been interested in access events and education and improving social mobility via education…it wasn't something I'd considered before I was going to do a Law conversion course my parents wanted me to do it I think they see teaching as a waste of an Elite University degree…"
> [Interviewer] "So all the access course stuff helped?"
> [Edward] "Yeah, when they asked tell me a time when you've demonstrated leadership, or teamworking, I had plenty of examples to call upon…"
> [Interviewer] "Did you apply for anything else other than Teach First?"
> [Edward] "No…I was quite keen on Teach First…I didn't do the [Fast Stream] because I was very busy and it was an intense application…"
> [Interviewer] "Were you interested in working in business?"
> [Edward] "Not really no I just wanted a job where I feel like I am actually trying to make a difference."
> [Interviewer] "Politics?"
> [Edward] "Yeah I am really interested in politics."
>
> Male, Elite University, Humanities, Teach First
> Father a Chef, Mother a Child-carer

For the majority of working class graduates, social background is something to be overcome, a limitation imposed upon them, made manifest as a lack of time or money, the wrong culture, or mannerisms, a need to reconcile divergent pressures, and disparate social groups, made consequential through labour market outcomes. Whether it is consciously expressed as such or not, we can see, by tracing the social practices of students, how the experience of university is informed by their class as a particular relation to money, paid work, social networks, education, which becomes consequential when they compete with wealthier, better connected students for a relative labour market advantage. However, for those who possess the capacity to have an instrumental relation to identity, those who are able to manipulate their presentation of self without being trapped by the vulgarity and naivety of their attempts,

their background may offer a unique distinguishing feature that may be manipulated to produce a legitimate advantage in the graduate labour market. The specific social and cultural effects of laying claim to a working class background are manifold but may give specific advantages when competing with many other, similarly qualified graduates. It becomes clear that no other group are so closely tied to the idiosyncratic vagrancies of the higher education system than the working class aristocracy who, by making a virtue of necessity, are able to turn class disadvantage toward profitable ends. Ironically, it is those who are least trapped by the conditions of their class that are able to turn it to their advantage:

> [David] "I had four interviews and got something from three of them the one I didn't get anything from was [Magic Circle Law Firm]…I don't think I was informed enough then…two female partners…neither were [Oxbridge]…everyone says [MCLF] interviews are SO lovely…but I had a horrible interview…like you know how on forms you're meant to make yourself distinctive on mine I thought you get rejected from so many law firms as it is I might as well make myself look distinctive… so I said im from a lower socio-economic background I said my teachers told me not to go to Elite University…and I knew some people wouldn't like that but I figured that's what makes me distinctive…it makes me look like I had quite a strong character…but I was taken to pieces on this they said how on earth could you consider doing commercial law if why aren't you becoming a teacher trying to change people's lives and its just a mind…and they really like spat at me as well and like whatever I knew I hadn't done too well by that point …I knew I didn't come off as committed to law I think they saw me as poor boy wants to make it rich not kind of being committed to law kind of thing."
>
> [Interviewer] "Driven by money?"
>
> [David] "I think that's what they think…I knew I wasn't on the ball that day…I had [Silver Circle Law Firm] a couple of days after and I did much better, I was much more myself…"
>
> [Interviewer] "Did you say the same things to all of them?"
>
> [David] "Yes…the Magic Circle Law Firm one really was very different…"
>
> Male, Elite University, Humanities, Trainee Lawyer in Magic Circle Law Firm
>
> Father an Entertainer, Mother a Care Worker

We find that for those on elite trajectories class background may not be problematic, and precisely because they are not trapped by its limitations they are able to symbolically constitute their background. This gives them a certain aura amongst the privately-educated, and amongst those from the upper reaches of social space, which may be manipulated to their advantage, especially if they wish to pursue prestigious graduate careers in the professions and management. However, it receives a particular value when competing with the liberal middle classes, who lay claim to the 'liberal professions' – teaching, charitable work, social work, the civil service and the like – and who lack the natural, legitimate relationship to those they purport to help. Thus, for a minority of working class graduates, a discourse of employability constructed around their background may be a recipe for success in the competition over graduate jobs. However, without the concomitant social trajectory, class background may remain problematic even for elite trajectory working class graduates.

6.10 Elite Educational Trajectory without Social Trajectory

For those who slip through the net, on elite educational trajectories but without the requisite social trajectory, their class may become problematic, and indeed under an expanded higher education system these individuals may have increased in number. Whilst far from being class conscious, these individuals encounter their class in a pre-reflexive, pre-discursive manner, which can be traced throughout their testimony. It is useful to distinguish between working class graduates who enjoy an elite educational, *and* social, trajectory, and those who embark upon an elite educational trajectory but embody few of the hallmarks of an elite social trajectory.

In reality most individuals lie somewhere between these states of being, with social trajectory marked by the fraction of the working class from which they derive and the number of connections with individuals from social spaces outside of their immediate social group. As such, the type of secondary school is also important, and therefore the social milieu of their secondary school and that of their school friends, but also their geographical origin and therefore their geographically-guaranteed social distance from the dominant social groups of certain regions, and the nation. If we are sensitised to these subtle variations then we are able to trace the current social condition of the graduate vis-à-vis their social origin and trajectory.

This distinction between elite social trajectories and elite educational trajectories is important as it delineates a range of phenomena that are significant to graduate labour market outcomes. Those who lack the requisite social trajectory find that certain social spaces are closed off to them. Students may be on elite educational trajectories without embodying the social capital and cultural dispositions necessary to be able to realise the potential labour market value of their credentials. Without the commensurate social and cultural capital, academic credentials receive a lower rate of return in certain fields of the labour market, which is why the tendency of such holders is toward areas of the graduate labour market where credentials have an above average exchange rate in the competition for jobs or toward those areas that are less 'socially competitive', where they are not directly competing with the socially, culturally and economically privileged i.e. in less prestigious areas of the professional services, such as accountancy, or in certain corporate fields like retail management.

6.11 Conclusion

The findings presented in this chapter begin to demonstrate how universal categories such as 'graduate' are wholly inadequate and why we need to take a more nuanced approach to notions such as 'employability'. Working class graduates on elite educational trajectories are in the vanguard of the beneficiaries of the widening participation agenda, however as we have seen, educational achievements do not simply, and easily, translate into labour market outcomes.

The transition from education to employment takes place through academic, institutional, social, cultural and economic filters creating a spectrum of possibilities. This means that students who are academically and institutionally similar but who originate from different social backgrounds may differ markedly in terms of their orientation to the graduate labour market. Students from similar social origins tend to share certain commonalities, such as access to economic resources, types and densities of social networks, dispositions, which attenuate their experiences during university, such that there are certain commonalities in how they arrive at the graduate labour market. This chapter has begun to delineate some of the *observed* commonalities and demonstrate how they are significant.

The widening participation agenda is premised upon a belief that higher education can be a force for social mobility but insofar as social mobility is socially and culturally contingent,

higher education can only be a force for social mobility if it provides the institutional conditions necessary to acquire the social networks and dispositions upon which *employability* is based. Exceptional academic success may be the basis of the labour market success of elite trajectory working class graduates but there is not a simple and direct conversion rate between credentials and the labour market. Their experiences demonstrate the limitations of academic capital and show how commensurate forms of social and cultural capital underlie the successful transition into the graduate labour market.

The graduate labour market exists as a series of fields, in which different species of academic, social and cultural capital exist. Thus, how graduates are academically, socially and culturally situated becomes significant to how they are oriented to the graduate labour market, and to their probability of success in relation to different careers. The positional nature of competition means that we cannot understand a particular group's experiences in isolation; we need to understand how they are situated vis-à-vis other graduates. Thus, it is important to construct the relational positions of graduates who are situated differently in terms of their academic, social, cultural and economic resources.

Chapter 7

The Modal Trajectory Working Class

7.1 Introduction

Whilst privately-educated, upper-middle class, Oxbridge graduates define the very essence of excellence in the graduate labour market, state-educated, working class, modal trajectory graduates constitute a negative foil, in the literary sense, against which all other graduates appear positively. They possess few rarefied characteristics or qualities to mark them from others. Socially ascetic and culturally conservative, they exhibit few of the traits required to be competitive in professional graduate employment and as such are consigned to the least competitive regions of the graduate labour market. However, while we may view them as victims of positional competition and credential inflation, they are also its harbingers, extending it to local labour markets where they squeeze out non-graduates. They are a group on the margins, both socially and economically speaking, and as such, inform and deepen our understanding of the graduate labour market.

In a labour market where the supply of qualified labour has accelerated faster than the demand for graduate labour, where a third of graduates are 'over-qualified' for the jobs they do, compared to around a fifth fifteen years ago (Green and Zhu, 2008; Walker and Zhu, 2010), graduates from new universities, with little more than the degree, are likely to be the primary victims of 'over-education'. Modal trajectory working class graduates are vulnerable to the effects of credential inflation because the degrees they hold are relatively ubiquitous and because they lack the economic, social and cultural capital necessary to realise a competitive advantage in the labour market. Unlike their peers on elite educational trajectories they live relatively marginalised institutional lives and as the habitus exerts a centripetal force on their modalities of practice, they are slow to adopt middle class ways of being and doing. As such, their accent, language usage, manner and bearing all betray their class of origin, which can have consequences for their ability to appear competent in professional labour markets.

In some ways working class graduates appear to be willing victims of credential inflation; they remain ensconced in local networks, close to family and friends, limiting their ability to access the networks and cultural forms necessary to move into professional and managerial occupations. In spite of its effect on employability, they do not deny the habitus. The example of the peasantry in Dutch Indonesia during the 1950s and 60s offers an informative parallel for the practices of working class graduates. Here peasants were being encouraged to adopt modern technologies to increase agricultural production but this would mean taking on debt to finance new technologies and abandoning the fair price valuation of products in favour of a market price: in turn, this would dissolve the communal safety net of the village that had existed for generations. Geertz argued that the peasantry distrusted the newly created markets, having little experience of them, and so refused to take on the risk of investing in new technologies to increase agricultural production (Geertz, 1963). Geertz found that the creation of a market was not enough to guarantee participation as different levels of knowledge and confidence in a market determine individual practices in relation to the market and that those who are unsure of the conversion rate of capital are disinclined to invest in strategies or practices, especially ones that in turn undermine existing capital. Higher education may be central to the reproduction of the middle classes but they are also furnished with the contacts and dispositions of the professional classes, whilst the working classes are largely ensconced in local networks, cultures and labour markets. For them, the habitus offers an insurance against truncated trajectories and uncertain futures and whilst this conservative strategy may undermine the chance of social mobility it also limits their exposure to the risk associated with pursuing higher education.

Previous studies have described how studenthood is very different for working class students (see Reay et al, 2009) but few have actually considered the implications for employability.[22] Whereas the testimonies of middle class students are rich with institutionalised experiences, of people and projects, the testimony of modal trajectory working class students are marked by the absence of such experiences, by a none involvement, which becomes consequential to their ability to 'appear' in relation to graduate assessment criteria attuned to middle class modalities of practice. We can trace the effects of this in their labour market experiences.

[22] Notable exceptions include Brown & Scase, 1994; Pitcher & Purcell, 1998; Brown, 1999; Furlong & Cartmel, 2005.

Pitcher & Purcell (1998) asked whether we should talk of *a* graduate labour market; for the modal trajectory working class the right question is whether it is useful to talk about a graduate labour market at all. Modal trajectory working class graduates are socio-culturally bound to those areas of the graduate labour market that they are able to access.[23] They may ultimately be excluded from the competition over traditional graduate jobs due to low academic grades, an absence of the right type of work experience or the wrong type of extra-curricular experiences, but they are fundamentally excluded through interpersonally constituted processes which form the basis of social alliances, affinities and aversions within the university and the labour market.

The experience of working class graduates is not unique – many new university entrants from lower-middle class backgrounds face similar problems. However, the issue of employability is particularly acute for working class graduates as they are most disadvantaged in regard to social, cultural and economic forms of capital. Whereas university is central to the interpersonal realisation of middle class forms of being, for the working classes it is at best a neutral space, such that it should be no surprise working class graduates struggle to evidence the forms of sociability necessary to constitute legitimate competence in relation to traditional graduate careers. Their relegation to para-professional and non-traditional graduate occupations is evidence of their wider social exclusion and none involvement in universities. The processes responsible for their marginalisation will be considered in the rest of this chapter.

The modal trajectory working class were identified according to criteria already detailed in previous chapters. Modal trajectory graduates were considered to be those with non-elite credentials and have been identified as those working class graduates with A-level grades below the AAB threshold (See table 7.1 below). This group is united by a commonality of experience rooted in opportunities circumscribed by their volume and composition of academic, cultural, economic and social capital. Their experiences are thus both different to the middle classes, who enjoy greater levels of economic, social and cultural capital, and working class graduates on elite academic trajectories.

[23] Graduate destinations are not simply a consequence of competitive pressures – of a demand-supply relationship that pushes the least competitive graduates to the least competitive regions of the graduate labour market. They are a consequence of social and cultural attunement, of the internalisation of social positioning and trajectory – of which labour market dispositions are one outlet.

Table 7.1: 'The Distribution of Graduates from Working Class Backgrounds by University and Subject'

		Humanities	Natural Sciences	Business / Law	Totals
Elite Trajectory	Elite	4	3	0	*7*
	Russell Group	3	2	5	*10*
	Post-1992	0	0	0	*0*
	Total	7	5	5	17
Modal Trajectory	**Elite**	**0**	**0**	**0**	***0***
	Russell Group	**5**	**3**	**1**	***9***
	Post-1992	**4**	**0**	**9**	***13***
	Total	**9**	**3**	**10**	**22**
	TOTAL	**16**	**8**	**15**	**[39]**

7.2 Devalued Academic Credentials and Labour Market Segmentation

The group of modal trajectory working class graduates are, by definition, academically unremarkable. They possess decent A-level grades and degrees from mid to high-ranking universities. Whilst graduates of Russell Group University benefit from some reputational seigniorage in comparison to graduates of new universities, their degree lacks the symbolic efficacy of a degree from an elite university and is no guarantee of an interview let alone a graduate job. In a market place of well-educated peers and rising educational requirements, credentials not only circumscribe educational options but also where graduates are able to access the graduate labour market.

University choices[24] amongst this group were generally restricted to relatively local universities. For instance, three-quarters of the working class students at Russell Group University were from local regions whilst all but one of the working class group at the Post-1992 University were from the local region. It is interesting that only middle class students bemoaned their university choice, finding the university to be 'below them', whilst working class students and their school friends, placed great value on their ability to access even the

[24] There is an entire academic field based around the effects of pre-university schooling, the attainment of pre-degree qualifications and the ways in which social class impact upon university choices but this won't be revisited here.

least prestigious university – possibly an indication of the symbolic value that degrees carry in labour markets where few hold such credentials.

We also find that their A-level grades affected the subjects that they could access. Certain subjects at Russell Group University like Law required AAA at A-level to access whilst others like Physics BSc or Sociology had been accessed with BBC. This difference and the categories of perception different class fractions apply to subject choices skew the student population and concentrate certain types of students in certain courses (Reay *et al.*, 2001a). For the Russell Group University group this explains why they were skewed to the social sciences (excluding Law) and the BSc program in the sciences;[25] the requirements were generally lower at the Post-1992 University and so modal trajectory working class students were found across courses. With the expansion of higher education, graduate employers are increasingly using A-level and even GCSE grades to screen graduate applicants, meaning that how one performs at school remains significant to the long-term employability of graduates.

Exclusion from certain segments of the graduate labour market is organised, to some extent, around the relative distribution of credentials. GCSEs, A-levels and the class of degree can all be significant and modal trajectory working class graduates were quick to realise the limits of their credentials. The interviewees were all well aware of the academic barriers segmenting the graduate labour market and had adjusted their aspirations accordingly. Their labour market aspirations were adjusted through a series of negations, away from the most prestigious regions of the graduate labour market, to areas perceived to be accessible. These graduates had a rudimentary understanding of the structure of the graduate labour market and were able to identify the prestigious graduate employers relevant to their interests (e.g. the Big Four accountancy firms, Private equity firms, the Civil Service Fast Stream, Teach First), some had even met them at careers events, but the academic requirements meant many excluded themselves from even applying:

> [Interviewer] "Have you considered applying for any of the big corporates?"
> [Stuart] "I looked at a couple but at the moment I'm a borderline two one two two on that and some of them ask for A's and B's at GCSE which I don't have …"
>
> Male, Post-1992 University, Business, Insolvency Case Administrator

[25] The sciences offered two different tariffs according to whether one enters the MSc program or not, the students in this sample entered the BSc program, and if they showed promise could upgrade to the MSc program later in their degree

Father a TV repair Technician, Mother a Secretary

> [Interviewer] “So is that what you want to do rather than the big companies? Have you thought of them?”
> [Marcus] “I have done but those companies tend to want high degrees like a two one and a high number of UCAS points which I don’t think I fit the bill for…”
>
> Male, Post-1992 University, Business, Unemployed
> Father a Nurse, Mother a Care Assistant

This was part of a broader realisation that labour market competition was based on criteria to which they had previously been ignorant. It was only when these students were exposed to the graduate labour market that they began to appreciate the valences of capital operating in different fields, a fact lamented in the follow-up:

> [Allie] “I remember when we had our initial interview, and I can remember thinking "oh okay, the follow up interview is in six months.... I am pretty sure I will have secured a Legal job by then at least!" I mean I was not the most optimistic about my chances but I had thought at least a Legal Secretary job would be available. But who knew, even they require courses and qualifications, and typing speeds of 60 words per minute (which I unfortunately do not possess as my averages have come out at 50 words per minute!). Hopefully, fingers crossed, I will soon find an ideal job, I've just got to keep looking I suppose.”
>
> Female, Post-1992 University, Social Sciences, Paralegal in regional law firm
> Father Unemployed (ex-Baker), Mother a Housewife

Their post-graduation experiences had deepened their understanding of the graduate labour market and through a combination of experience and research they re-oriented themselves to areas of the graduate labour market where they believed they had a chance of employment:

> [Ian] “At the moment I’m sort of applying to stuff that I did in my placement really cos I just wanna get, I’ve changed my opinion from I want to get an ideal job first to I’ll get a job and work my way up and switch from there … I sort of had a vision of this ideal job coming at the end as well and it’s never really materialised that kind of

thing cos you realise there's a lot of people around you doing a similar thing and there haven't been as many ideal jobs as I thought there might be…"

Male, Post-1992 University, Business, non-graduate role: Business Support Officer
Father a Fitter, Mother a Shop Worker

Restricted, indeed negative choice-making was a phenomenon witnessed across the interview sample but it was particularly marked amongst the modal trajectory working class. This correction of aspiration is part of a broader process of attunement between individuals and the labour market. Academic credentials are the most visible asset class in the graduate labour market but this attunement also takes place at a social and cultural level and can be seen as an adaptation to the entrenched educational divisions and barriers existent in the graduate labour market. Certainly, graduates were aware of how they were positioned vis-à-vis graduates of more prestigious universities:

[Interviewer] "What do you think graduate recruiters are looking for?"
[Allie] "A high degree, or a first…one thing I think they're looking for is a red-brick uni cos like there's jobs in Post-1992 city and if students from local Russell Group University and Post-1992 University are both applying for jobs they're going to pick people from Russell Group University…"

Female, Post-1992 University, Social Sciences, Paralegal in regional Law firm
Father Unemployed (ex-Baker), Mother a Housewife

Academic segmentation is particularly efficacious where credentials receive a high level of convertibility. Notwithstanding the significant social and cultural forms of selection (Ashley, 2010), the legal profession is a good example of a profession riven by educational differences. Magic Circle and Silver Circle law firms offer LPC sponsorship, £40,000+ starting salaries and rapid career progression and so are able to cream off law graduates with excellent A-levels (AAB+) from elite and Russell Group universities. Regional law firms may also offer LPC sponsorship and £20,000+ starting salaries and so tend to attract those who couldn't / chose not to access corporate law firms. However, law as a university subject has expanded much faster than the demand for lawyers and so many law graduates struggle to access traditional legal work, instead they compete for para-professional legal work and the growth of the graduate paralegal is an indication of the failure of supply-side policies.

As the supply of law graduates increased they began to compete with non-graduates over non-professional legal work. Paralegal positions were once seen as a supporting position but increasingly are seen as a stepping stone to a professional legal career and the demand from Law graduates has pushed up the entry requirements to paralegal positions. Such is the state of Law that many paralegal roles expect a minimum of a 2.1 law degree and an LPC qualification. In this study four of five elite trajectory working class law students from Russell Group University were in paralegal positions in regional cities a year after graduating and only one had accessed a legal training contract. The effect is to force Law students from the least prestigious universities onto the LPC/BVC qualification, and into other paraprofessional roles or out of law altogether.

The rapid expansion of universities thus changes the nature of the competition in the graduate labour market, at all levels, affecting those with the most devalued qualifications most severely. With graduates now crowding out those non-graduates who would have once accessed *niche* and *non-graduate* positions, a degree appears to become even more important, even if it is not really required to carry out the job. In other words, even as the labour market value of the degree falls, the labour market cost of not holding a degree may increase.[26] To use an economics term, if the opportunity cost of not doing the degree exceeds the cost of doing it, it is rational to do so even if the overall value of the degree falls as a consequence.

7.3 Degree Subject and Vertical Segmentation

There is an interesting divide within higher education between liberal, academic courses, which encourage abstract thinking, and vocationally-oriented courses, whose syllabi are more closely allied to the labour market. Whilst Elite University offers Economics and Management, only the classic, professional vocational subjects such as Engineering, Law and Medicine are clearly aligned with the labour market. Russell Group University offers a number of business subjects at undergraduate level but subject choice is generally restricted to the same classical subjects. By contrast, Post-1992 University, an ex-polytechnic, offers specific courses such as Accounting, Banking and Finance, or Environmental Management

[26] This may help explain why the graduate premium appears to have held despite the rapid expansion of higher education. The graduate colonisation of the most prestigious, best-paid non-graduate jobs denies non-degree holders, restricting their earning ability and inhibiting their career progression. As an example, we need only think of graduate trainee schemes in retail that favour graduate-level managers over managers that rise through the ranks –who are often treated as second-class citizens, placed on different trainee schemes, with lower salaries and fewer benefits.

that have very clear relationships to the labour market and which become consequential to graduate outcomes.

Vocational courses are clearly related to certain areas of the labour market and so the skills, attributes and experiences of graduates on vocational courses are geared towards a specific area of the graduate labour market. Thus, many of the vocational courses at the Post-1992 University include a period of working in industry. This is true for engineering-focused degrees, business degrees and environmental/earth science type degrees, all of which promote a sandwich year in industry. These courses are clearly geared up for the labour market and interviewees on these courses tend to see a degree as a route to better employment, pay and prospects. Thus, for many working class students at the Post-1992 University, we find that their labour market aspirations and destinations are closely allied to their degree subject. It not only gives them the skills and knowledge but importantly, the work experience necessary to meet the entry conditions of corresponding graduate employers.

By comparison, the labour market destinations of working class graduates from Russell Group University have little relation to the areas that they studied. Whilst many of those from middle class backgrounds are able to realise their interest in a given area, the lack of work experience, and other forms of capital, inhibit the ability of working class graduates to realise their aspirations, at least in the immediate term. Thus, many of the modal trajectory working class Russell Group University graduates are in an awkward position. They lack the social and cultural capital necessary to make a virtue of social science and humanities degrees, and so it is difficult to secure professional employment, and because their degrees do not offer any work experience, they lack the specific knowledge and expertise needed to access specific graduate positions. Thus, in contrast to their middle class peers, none of the modal trajectory working class graduates in the social sciences or humanities at Russell Group University had accessed graduate-level positions in the first six months after graduation.

Degree subject is only really important to the employability of working class graduates from the Post-1992 University because of the work experience offered by many of the vocational courses. Those who have studied Geography, English or History are in very similar positions as the Russell Group University students. Furthermore, if we compare the experiences of similarly educated middle class graduates with the experiences of the working class graduates, we see that the labour market is not simply meritocratic; delineated along

measures of academic performance. It is geographically-bound and socially and culturally constituted. The ability of middle class graduates to draw upon resources other than their credentials allows them to gain access to relatively prestigious and well-paid areas of employment compared to their university peers from working class backgrounds.

7.4 Non-Academic Forms of Capital

In some sense it is false to discuss the notion of labour market segmentation in relation to academic credentials. The labour market value of a credential is determined by the uses to which a credential can be put and the expected labour market value is determined by the modal experiences of holders of a given credential. The ability to realise such value is then dependent upon sharing the social and cultural attributes common to such holders and where this is not the case, that part of the credential dependent upon social dignity (rather than technical ability), will be revealed in the divergent labour market trajectories of holders. Thus, given similar levels of academic capital graduates become segregated and the graduate labour market is segmented by non-academic forms of capital.

For Holmes (2006) credentials are a warrant, a claim to skill and ability that must also be backed by the interpersonal manifestation of competence. As Brown and Hesketh (2004) discovered, graduates are perfectly able to 'look good on paper' and yet manifest few of the expected competencies when in person. This is because employability is not simply about being good on paper, about technical proficiency, or even potential, it is about looking right, sounding right, feeling right. It is about the human connection established between employer and employee, which at its most fundamental level comes down to a shared sense of being. This is why employers perceive value in certain experiences, certain universities or schools, certain forms of extra-curricular experience and work experience, because they understand the social value of such experiences, and may have indirect, if not direct exposure to such experiences.[27]

As the number of graduates has expanded with the expansion of higher education, it might be expected that graduate recruiters would recruit from a wider pool of universities. Evidence suggests that this is not the case (Hesketh, 2000; Brown & Hesketh, 2004; Ashley, 2010).

[27] This helps explain the improbable labour market trajectory of the upper-middle class graduate, able to defy the academic limitations of an averted educational trajectory, who is able to access the most competitive City graduate jobs in spite of their academic grades, demonstrating that the ability to transpose social origin into a sense relation constitutes a tacit process underpinning the reproduction of social hierarchies.

Rather than recruiting from a wide pool of diverse talent, employers target those universities able to provide a critical density of talent, graduates that are technically and socially suited to the organisation. As such, graduate recruitment is stratified in much the same way that society is stratified, and the social logic pertaining to society prevails amongst graduate recruiters. The 'cultural fit' between graduates and graduate employers euphemistically describes the social and cultural expectations placed on graduates. Graduate recruiters are practically attuned to the modalities of practice, educational background, work experience, extra-curricular experiences, which evidence the 'right' type of graduate and these may become objectified in CV-assessment criteria determining the ability of graduates to access the interview stage and demonstrate their interpersonal competence.

The nature and type of work experience that a graduate holds becomes significant to graduate outcomes but work experience is more or less significant in different regions of the graduate labour market, and like educational qualifications the labour market efficacy of work experience is predicated upon its relative scarcity value. For working class students on vocational courses (including business, law, or the engineering type degrees) at the Post-1992 University or science degrees at Russell Group University, work experience is institutionally-embedded, whilst for those students who read academic courses, accessing relevant work experience is difficult because most of their social networks are locally-embedded and because their university experience does not guarantee the social conditions necessary to facilitate the broadening of these networks.

For many of the working class students in the Post-1992 University sample, a key component of the degree was a sandwich year. These are years spent working in an industry relevant to the area of study. They were most common amongst the business school students, who saw work experience as leverage to access their chosen career. Many of the engineering and law students also undertook work experience, the latter as part of a practical module which incorporated work alongside study.

7.5 Institutionally-Embedded Work Experience

Institutionally-embedded work experience was seen by many of the students as a valuable opportunity. They often enjoyed the experience, even if it wasn't directly relevant to what

they were doing and for many was an opportunity to develop work-based competencies outside of university and without the pressure of being in a 'graduate job':

> [Marcus] "I thought it was really valuable…like my telephone manner was quite bad at first but following on from this placement I improved a lot…I was a bit nervous…I didn't know how to deal with the queries but as time went on I grew more and more confident how to deal with them…"
>
> Male, Post-1992 University, Business, Unemployed
> Father a Nurse, Mother a Care Assistant

> [Anna] "I worked in Adidas in my third year, I worked in sales…that placement year it was absolutely fantastic I couldn't fault it at all best experience of my life to be honest great people great community travelled the UK and Ireland…it was based in Stockport… during my first launch we went to Portugal for a week…there were other people who were just office based…I absolutely loved it…and then I got a small account base for Northern Ireland and regularly attended sports shows over there… it worked out quite well because I took ownership of women's and running gear"
>
> Female, Post-1992 University, Business, Unemployed
> Father self-employed Shoe Repairer, Mother a Bar Worker

Anna demonstrated a real passion for her placement and applied for a graduate trainee position which she was unsuccessful in. However, the placement had allowed her to pull together her studies and experience in a customer facing role in her local supermarket, into a legitimate employability narrative. Without this placement she would have been unable to present relevant work experience for the jobs she was applying for and whilst she didn't have a job at the time of the follow-up survey she was in a position to apply for relevant positions.

The university and its personnel play an important role in mediating access to work experience and internships. On courses where work experience is offered as part of the overall student package, access to work experience tends to be relatively meritocratic. However, the quality of work experience is variable and some students who are able to leverage access through their own networks often find higher value added experience, though this is not always the case. In other instances, university staff proved to be a valuable resource:

> [Christine] "I did notice applying to different companies if you were applying from certain unis they tended to stick to an area of uni if say they had students from one uni before and if it was good they'd go back there…I think that's why there were so many students from Strathclyde…I got it through a lecturer…I wasn't having much luck I'd applied to one in Newport, one in Manchester, one in Derby and I was like I'm not getting much response and if I am it's negative…and he was like I had a student who went to [company]…and so I applied there…not everyone has an industry year…"
>
> Female, Russell Group University, Natural Sciences, Temping
>
> Father a Fire Officer, Mother a Shop Worker

This example demonstrates the value of institutional sponsors. Elite trajectory working class students often find that they are supported by teaching staff, at secondary school, in the sixth form and even at university. However, many students on modal educational trajectories lack this support: very few mention institutional champions. The young woman above is an exception. She benefits from her relationship with her lecturer who she mentions at numerous points in the interview. Not all students benefit from such relationships and one should not discount the importance of such social alliances, of the opportunities and experiences that they disclose, of the personal invitations that extend the cultural sphere of the university to individual students. Furthermore, it is apparent that the distribution of such alliances is not socially equitable. As has been argued, students from private-school, professional and managerial backgrounds, particularly those from the public sector, are much more likely to engender support from university staff, because such alliances, friendships, are based on common forms of experience, whilst modal trajectory working class students are more likely to fall below the radar.

The Post-1992 University group benefited from the fact that work experience was offered to all those on vocational courses. Many of the students recognised the need to have work experience on their CV, and how it might prove useful in the labour market, and for a small proportion of students (around twenty percent depending upon the course) the year in industry *did* prove to be very valuable and despite the recession led to an offer of employment:

> [Ian] "There's about four or five people that I know have employment…one is working at [newspaper] which he did on placement, one is working at KPMG in London [also placement] and one got one at Corus after doing a placement…"
>
> Male, Post-1992 University, non-graduate role - Business Support Officer
>
> Father a Fitter, Mother a Shop Worker

However, placements weren't happy occasions for all the students. A significant proportion believed that sandwich year students represented a form of cheap labour to their employers, which because they lack the experience can be manipulated to undertake mundane, repetitive tasks that required little education other than literacy and numeracy. There is thus a question of quality control, as not all work placements offered the same opportunities. Although some did offer significant opportunities, which progressed as the students became more competent. These issues are partly linked to how students found their work placements. Whilst many applied via the university, a significant number found their own:

> [Marcus] "I worked at a hotel in Hull…in the accounts department…my role was doing the payroll, doing the cash, doing the daily banking, preparing budgets for meetings, taking telephone queries …I actually got it myself not through the university I actually went to the job centre I was finding it hard to get a job and ma mum was like get yersen to job centre and there was this advertisement for this job in Hull I went down there the following week [for an interview]…I got a call a few days later like we'd like to offer you the job…"
>
> Male, Post-1992 University, Business, Unemployed
>
> Father a Nurse, Mother a Care Assistant

These experiences of work may not bring about direct benefits (post-graduation employment) but they did enhance the CV of these students, allowing them to demonstrate an interest in a particular sector. However, given the ubiquitous nature of such degree-holders, work experience is by no means a guarantee of success and minimum requirements appear to increase just as the average work experience of the graduate population increases. What is more, work-based courses structured in relation to a particular area of the labour market may in fact impinge negatively upon employability if local supply exceeds local demand.

The value of work experience is that it gives the student a relative advantage in the labour market, but as many of the students are socially and geographically localised, they do not, and in many ways cannot, move away and so they are bound to the regional labour market. At the same time more graduates emerge with similar experiences and so it is difficult to establish a relative positional advantage without access to social and economic capital. Thus, as well as credential inflation, working class graduates compete with experience inflation. Whilst middle class graduates can deploy social and economic capital to secure rarefied, prestigious experiences, and so position themselves positively in relation to labour market competition, working class graduates become relegated to the least competitive regions by virtue of their limited economic and social resources.

In this labour market context, entry-level positions become the least worst option: roles that once would have been accessed post A-levels now demand a degree as a condition of entry. However, this also demonstrates that without a degree working class students would be excluded from ever greater areas of the labour market although with one they are unable to realise the types of employment that might have been guaranteed in a previous state.

Work experience did not form a part of many of the degree programmes pursued at Russell Group University and because working class students at Russell Group University didn't pursue internships or formal work experience outside of the university, relevant work experience was significant in their interviews by its absence. Russell Group University students did, however, participate in part-time, paid-work.

7.6 Economic Necessity and Part-Time, Paid Work

For many modal trajectory working class students, the experience of university is coloured by the imposition of part-time paid-work. Whilst it might seem to be a distraction from studying, for many of the working class (and lower-middle class) students it is also important to their sense of being and belonging. As well as being a source of ready cash, paid work is a conduit through which social networks are established and identities reinforced; many identify themselves as workers as well as students. That work is a debt-avoidance strategy and that working class students are more sensitive to indebtedness than their middle class peers is already recognised, but the importance of part-time, paid-work to the esteem of working class students has often been ignored:

[Interviewer] "Was that cos you realised you were skint?"

[Anna] "No not at all I just really missed working I quite enjoy it and I like having my own money I could have probably survived on the student loan but I enjoy having money in my bank account that I perhaps I can go out and buy a new top and not think I'm going into negative." [laughs]

[Interviewer] "So when you say you miss working is it just the money or anything else?"

[Anna] "… just the team the group of people it was so much fun and I kind of hoped it'd be the same working here…and there's so much banter cos its such a small store there's four aisles I think to the shop and you know everyone instantly and its all predominantly students that come in there and I used to work Mondays, Wednesdays and Friday evenings, Monday and Friday being two of the busiest nights for going out so I'd soon get to know the students coming in and you'd meet them on the nights out and they'd be like oh its Sainsbury's girl and ya know its that whole kind of community that I missed about working…"

[Interviewer] "It puts you at the centre of something?"

[Anna] "Yeah…so even though if I hadn't because I didn't do that many sports and things I needed that to get me away from uni."

Female, Post-1992 University, Business, Unemployed

Father self-employed Shoe Repairer, Mother a Bar Worker

It is clear that work provides this girl with an identity, through the way in which it underpins her social network. From the testimony there is a consistent suggestion that part-time, paid-work is part of a broader class lifestyle, carried on through from Sixth form. However, it is difficult to determine to what extent work experience fulfils an economic utility and to what extent a social one. Whilst many of the students face similar economic situations the fact that not all the students engage in part-time, paid work suggests that work is a source of esteem, and part of a specific cultural configuration that orients them toward work. However, this commitment to work is not without its difficulties. It does detract from the time spent on university study and isolates the individual from other students who do not work. Thus, many of the students talked of the difficulties juggling paid work alongside university study:

[Katie] "I've got a part time job at the moment in Primark just working at the weekends but its getting a bit hard now, last year I was in the tennis club…but this year just working on the weekends and that's it just uni work and that's it."

Female, Russell Group University, Social Sciences, Recruitment consultant
Father a Postman, Mother a Teaching Assistant

[Ellen] "I worked part time as well…Wetherspoons on City Road…When I first started it was two days a week two nights a week but then it gradually turned into three a week and usually ended up four times a week"
[Interviewer] "So it started to take over?"
[Ellen] "Yeah gradually…and then I'd try to go to the gym and do a bit of swimming…"
[Interviewer] "Did you think about joining any clubs or societies?"
[Ellen] "I did at first erm but then what with uni work and erm working I didn't really have as much time to do them as I wanted…"
[Interviewer] "Yeah of course yeah so were you working twenty five hours thirty hours a week?"
[Ellen] "Twenty five sometimes thirty hours a week"
[Interviewer] "Plus your fifteen or twenty hours here?"
[Ellen] "Yep…and then I'd try and go out with my friends once a week as well…"

Female, Russell Group University, Social Sciences, Unemployed
Father a Mechanic, Mother a Receptionist

The second respondent is exceptional in this study in that part-time work had an overtly detrimental effect on her university grade. Achieving a third class degree, she regretted the time spent working whilst at university but found it difficult to reconcile the cost of being a student with her income, a common dilemma faced by many of the students. However, moderate levels of part-time paid work can have a positive effect on the esteem and financial position of working class students, and it may even have a positive effect on relative *employability*. Part-time work may be significant if it is packaged as part of an employability discourse, to demonstrate a given competency, or if it is aligned with the labour market area one is applying to. The extent to which it can contribute to graduate employability is thus a function of the quality and nature of the part-time paid work being undertaken. That said the majority of part-time work undertaken by students is low-paid, manual, repetitive service-

based work and the (economic and cultural) necessity of part-time work is partly responsible for the social and cultural inertia that we witness in regards to the experience of university. Those able to find regular, relevant, part-time, paid work are certainly in the minority and its overall effect is detrimental to the ability of working class graduates to realise ways of being and doing concomitant with professional graduate occupations.

7.7 What Normative Student Experience?

The university experience of modal trajectory working class graduates is markedly different from that of their middle class peers. This is particularly clear when we explore the experiences of students at Russell Group University, where middle class students participate and often take leadership positions in sports clubs and societies, but where modal trajectory working class students lead an institutionally marginalised experience. These distinctive experiences can be traced back to the institutional conditions and the proliferation of class lifestyles. Whereas the cloistered environs of the Elite University colleges encourage participation and reproduce traditional public-school lifestyles, the openness and informality of Russell Group University allows multiple, parallel class lifestyles to be played out. Thus, students at Russell Group University (and Post-1992 University) may share the same physical space but they do not necessarily share the same social spaces and some students at the Post-1992 University faced a real physical departure from the university because they lived at home.

These differences become consequential to employability in certain regions of the graduate labour market, especially where extra-curricular activities form part of the assessment criteria. Many graduate employers scan CV's for evidence of extra-curricular participation, awarding points to a CV according to whether they have participated, adding if they have taken on positions of responsibility within these groups. If a CV can pass a threshold score the individual will be invited to the next stage of the recruitment process and so participation in extra-curricular activities is deemed to be a proxy for the *right type* of graduate. Whilst participation in extra-curricular activities is taken-for-granted by the middle classes, particularly the upper-middle classes and those from private schools, it is often a secondary concern for these working class students:

[Interviewer] "Since you've been here what sort of things have you been involved in? You've lived at home right?"

[Allie] "Yeah…extra-curriculars wise?"

[Interviewer] "Yeah"

[Allie] "In first year I joined a gym for three months and that was it…I've been a student rep and this year I was also faculty rep as well…"

[Interviewer] "Any sports?"

[Allie] "No."

[Interviewer] "Any societies?"

[Allie] "I joined the law society but I've always been in the audience it's something I don't have confidence for…mooting, it's something I'm not quite confident with to be honest, I've sat in the audience and watched them instead…"

Female, Post-1992 University, Social Sciences, Paralegal in regional law firm

Father Unemployed (ex-Baker), Mother a Housewife

In a sense, this is a continuation of a class lifestyle honed during A-levels. Working class students often engage in term-time paid work and prefer to socialise with their friends when they are not working: extra-curricular activities are seen to be a drain on time and energy. For the middle classes, and certainly those from Grammar or Private schools, extra-curricular activities are seen to be a natural extension of their sixth form lifestyle and many will continue interests from school into university. Whilst many of the working class students participated in extra-curricular activities at school few continued these on into university, begging the question why.

We need to remember that class lifestyles are informed by access to resources, and it is possible to see how access to social networks, economic capital, and the freedom from necessity that this provides, combine to shape participation in university. Extra-curricular participation is about participation in social networks, which maybe inherited from school and brought into the university, or which might be created through shared, common interests: which are rooted in a shared relation to being. Many of the working class interviewees had strong friendship groups at university but these were with family, school-friends, and individuals like themselves:

[Ellen] "My two housemates were both my best friends from back home… and they came here with me….some of the other went to [Local universities], no one went exceptionally far…"

Female, Russell Group University, Social Sciences, Unemployed
Father a Mechanic, Mother a Receptionist

[Charlie] "I found that speaking to people in my accommodation they're from [rural working class region and towns] they could easily commute in from home on a daily basis but instead they choose to stay in Russell Group University city"
[Interviewer] "Why do you think that is?"
[Charlie] "Probably the same reasons as me they're running away from their socially deprived backgrounds I suppose, highly depressing, elements of crime, deterioration of standards"

Male, Russell Group University, Natural Sciences, Unemployed
Father Unemployed, Mother Unemployed

The social networks that one moves in are important because they shape the nature of the experience that one has, and they inform one's expectations of what that experience ought to be. As we saw in the last chapter, being surrounded by middle class students, and being embedded in their networks, significantly alters the experience of working class students. The effect of slip-streaming is not limited to those on elite trajectories; it is also significant for some of those on modal educational trajectories:

[Sam] "My friend who I went cycling is in the RAF Corp at Russell Group University and he wants to be a pilot…he always says chemistry is a back up for him which is a hell of a back up to have…my other friend is in the Navy Corp and he wants to be a pilot engineering is a back up for him…my best friend a chemist wants to be a teacher or a dentist I think you can do dentistry in a year less…my lab partner wants to do medicine and she's just taken a five hour exam to do that…I don't have that much doubt in myself that I can do what I want to do I just don't know what I want to do."

Male, Russell Group University, Chemistry, Law Conversion course
Father a Skilled Manual Worker, Mother a Taxi Driver

Institutions have an important role to play in establishing these positive relationships as they can frame extra-curricular participation making it more or less likely according to how they structure social space:

> [Interviewer] "Do you think the opportunities are well advertised?"
> [Anna] "To be honest no as harsh as it is to Post-1992 University, the other thing is like you said with sports and societies everything happens in the HUBS which is here whilst I am at collegiate crescent which is over the road and no one mentions societies all you have is the gym there, no one talks about anything else and no one I know is actually a part of a society anything except from law society which is only thing we had there…"
>
> Female, Post-1992 University, Business, Unemployed
> Father self-employed Shoe Repairer, Mother a Bar Worker

This type of experience was common amongst modal educational trajectory working class students, though it was not limited to them. We tend to find that modal trajectory working class students don't participate in student societies or sports teams and don't know people who do. This is a symptom of their social marginalisation within the university. Common halls of residence may bring individuals together in a shared living space but the sheer number of students in such spaces and the lack of organised activities within the halls allow social cliques and class lifestyles to propagate. It is possible to find parallel student experiences amongst students who share common living space and those who have stayed local, maintain networks outside of the university or with friends from school at the same university and this isolates them within the university. As a consequence, working class students are more likely to be 'day' students. They may attend a university, attend lectures and seminars, receive a degree, but they are not fully "there". This is even stronger for students who live at home:

> [Interviewer] "No one you know is a part of a society?"
> [Allie] "No I've my degree I don't know anyone else off other degrees well no one I know has talked about it unless they're keeping it hidden but a lot of my friends from university who are also from [local towns] so that could be another reason I don't know what it actually is but there's only a few of us who are from here…"
> [Interviewer] "So people from [local towns] just go home?"

[Allie] “We finish university, maybe go eat and then go home we don’t end up staying late late cos there’s nowt to do is there?”

Female, Post-1992 University, Social Sciences, Paralegal in regional Law firm
Father Unemployed (ex-Baker), Mother a Housewife

The decisive factor determining participation seems to be the relation to class lifestyle. The social segregation that we see in universities is partly a consequence of different tastes, which segregate groups of students. Those few working class students who do participate share a lifestyle much closer to the middle classes. Typically, they have middle class friends, belonged to institutions from a young age (church, sports teams, youth clubs etc.), a nuanced interest in particular areas such as music or sport, and they generally derive from the upper regions of the working classes: parents being either skilled workers or part of the supervisory cadre. This shows why class can be a blunt concept to work with, and why it is better to think in more nuanced terms, but it also shows why it is necessary to understand how a common experience of social processes may unite individuals in a relation of homology.

Limited participation in extra-curricular activities is an indicator of the social distance between working class students and the orthodox university lifestyle. That is, it is part of a broader divergence in class lifestyles, between the regionally embedded lifestyle of working class students and the institutional lifestyle of middle class students, which has consequences for the forms of cultural capital these students are able to bring to bear in the competition over graduate jobs. However, different regions of the graduate labour market are attuned to different class lifestyles and so the differential experience of university is part of the practical attunement between groups of graduates and the labour market. Participation in extra-curricular activities may not be a decisive factor in labour market success but it is correlated with a particular relationship to university, work and social networks, and can be an important proxy measure for the type of graduate that employers value.

How students participate in university is also a reflection of how students from different backgrounds understand what university is for. Working class students on the more vocational courses at the Post-1992 University are rather instrumental in their view of university; whilst accessing university was a consequence of A-level success, they see the degree primarily as a means to a better-paid job (and a way of escaping the conditions of their background). They are much less interested in politics and foreign affairs than many of their

contemporaries, are more likely to read the tabloids or business papers, and are more interested in the business world. By contrast, the working class on more academic courses (at both universities) are less instrumental and see the degree as an indulgence in a passion; they are fatalist in relation to their educational trajectory and struggle to anticipate what the future may hold. They are more likely to read broadsheets and have an interest in social and political affairs, and are closer to the liberal middle class in this regard. For these students, employability and a graduate job are incidental to the degree but they are seen as legitimate compensation for extended study.

7.8 The extra-curricular experience trap

Whenever the modal trajectory working class students were asked "what else have you done outside of the degree" the common reaction was to identify a few society meetings, or maybe a non-university sports team, or even a nominal role as a student representative. These experiences lack symbolic efficacy because they are undemanding and uncompetitive, and because anyone can access them most students gather such simple experiences incidentally through the university experience. This is significant to employability because what we find is that, like academic capital, the ability of extra-curricular activities to count as significant symbolic capital is always relative to the experiences of other candidates. As gap years became increasingly common, elite graduate recruiters began looking for students with that little bit extra. For those who have rowed the 'Amazon backwards' (Brown & Scase, 1994; Brown & Hesketh, 2004). Thus, whilst the literature talks of credential inflation, we also need to consider the rarefaction of non-academic experiences amongst different groups of students.

Employability becomes rooted in the experiences made possible by the conditions imposed upon different individuals. These conditions are relatively more restrictive for working class students than for middle class students. As a consequence, what they perceive to be valuable experiences may consign them to rejection because these experiences are perceived for what they are, by recruiters who are attuned to the CV's and practices of the mobile, affluent, middle classes. We have already shown how interaction with the university sports, clubs and societies varies between working class and middle class students but there is another area in which these groups of students are different. Whilst middle class students are somewhat attuned to *valuable* experiences, and generally avoid investing time and money in devalued enterprises, students from working class backgrounds are less sensitive to these nuances and

we find that they are more likely to pay for experiences and courses that offer to improve employability:

> [Susan] "I went and did the Student Development Courses…I've completed all three of the SDC modules…one is personal effectiveness training…one is presentations, and listening as well…the other is leadership as well…"
>
> Female, Russell Group University, Humanities, Sales assistant
> Father a Construction Site Foreman, Mother a Nurse

> [Interviewer] "Have you done anything to put it on your CV?"
> [Marcus] "Yeah when I went to that London ah've put it on the CV there…"
> [Interviewer] "Did you have to pay for that?"
> [Marcus] "Yeah I paid a hundred and sixty pounds plus my travelling fees and hotel expenses…the actual conference itself was just for one day…it started at ten o clock in the morning and finished about eight at night…I had a mentor and they had all these students and graduates…from all over Scotland Ireland…"
>
> Male, Post-1992 University, Business, Unemployed
> Father a Nurse, Mother a Care Assistant

Attendance on these courses is part of a broader range of experiences that modal trajectory working class students tend to pursue, in the belief that they improve their employability. These courses form part of the employability package increasingly offered by post-1992 and red-brick universities (Boden and Nedeva, 2010). However, as Brown and Hesketh (2004) have argued, as graduate employability is partly a function of positional competition, it is difficult to advance the employability of one group without undermining the employability of others. The real issue facing working class graduates is that graduate employability has become rooted in non-academic experiences which require investments of social, cultural and economic capital. However, the relative value of these experiences is an inverse function of their ubiquity and thus the ability to distinguish oneself from others, which is at least partly a function of one's ability to access such resources.

Valuable opportunities become disclosed through social networks, which have the secondary effect of aligning the experiences of graduates to the market conditions operating within specific occupations. However, different social networks are aligned to different areas of the

graduate labour market, and so graduates who share a social relation to professional and managerial occupations are able to seize the opportunities, demanded at any moment by the graduate labour market, through the way in which social networks disclose opportunities. Additionally, economic capital makes access to experiences possible and frees students from the necessity of paid work (which also tends to act as simplistic capital because the part-time paid work accessed by working class students is largely mundane and repetitive). Thus, to the extent that background describes a relationship to social networks and economic capital, the ability to access *valuable* experiences is a function of class background.

This tendency towards social reproduction becomes taken-for-granted through the way in which it becomes organised vis-à-vis socially situated conceptual categories. That is, those students who inhabit competitive social networks tend to be more aware of the demands of graduate recruiters, the nature of the competition, and so can make allowances for this knowledge, within their own time, energy and resource constraints. However, students from working class backgrounds who have little informal contact with the middle classes, are less aware of the relative social value of their non-academic experiences. Some realise this upon graduation when they realise what the *real* demands are:

> [Ian] "To begin with I applied to the big companies like Boots and err the big retail stores for management positions that included finance and things like that…the reason I got turned down for those was because they've started increasing what they want out of students as in they want them to have had leadership positions outside of university so for example head of the football team captain of the hockey team which I haven't really had they're looking for the best of the best basically which is getting quite competitive because of the number of people doing business cos I do business and accounting it covers quite a range of things…it doesn't really help that I don't know what to do and there's so many people applying for the positions…if you haven't got certain set criteria and it keeps increasing then you're sort of locked out of the first stage…Two one minimum degree but I've been to quite a few recruitment fairs and they give the impression that the two one degree is a tick box basically and then they want to know about you…a two one degree and then it's about leadership and showing initiative which I haven't had…and once you've ticked those boxes it's your work experience…"
>
> Male, Post-1992 University, non-graduate role - Business Support Officer

Thus, as well as being constrained by their academic credentials, which exclude them from applying to certain areas of the graduate labour market, working class students find that they are less competitive than their peers because they haven't accumulated the same level of extra-curricular or work experiences. In this way, working class students lack the personal capital necessary to be competitive. With time they may access graduate-level employment but the evidence here suggests that working class students struggle to escape the limiting effect of their simplistic forms of capital, which consigns them to the least competitive regions of the graduate labour market.

Their relative inability to realise their credentials is also a product of their relative immobility. Students may move from towns or villages to local cities for universities and this certainly improves their chances of graduate-level employment but fewer working class students move beyond their region of birth. With many graduate jobs concentrated in the South-East of England, this significantly limits their ability to realise a graduate career. However, the propensity to be geographically mobile is a product of economic, social and cultural capital: those with the means and the social contacts are much more likely to move and this increases their chances of accessing decent graduate-level jobs.

7.9 Geographical (Im)mobility

The geographical dimension is an expression of how graduates are socially situated. As Adonis and Pollard observed, where one grows up still largely determines where one will die (Adonis and Pollard, 1998). Geographical location describes one's proximity to graduate labour markets and is an important aspect of employability. The majority of good graduate jobs are centred in the South-East of England and because of this proximity to the South-East is an important factor mediating access to graduate-level employment. Access to such work is linked to access to accommodation: for the economically marginalised, the cost of living is a major barrier to those wishing to move to the South-East, and this affects all working class graduates from outside of London:

> [Rebecca] "I think if you come from money you can, you have certain experiences that other people don't have for example certain jobs I wouldn't be able to take

because I wouldn't be able to fund myself to live in certain places…for instance if I applied for a job on sixteen grand I wouldn't be able to take it whereas someone with family support would be able to, also if you come from money things just seem to flow for you…"

Female, Russell Group University, Humanities, Marketing Assistant in SME
Father a Fire Officer, Mother a housewife

Geographical mobility is also a function of the social capital that individuals can call upon. In the short term, friends and family can provide somewhere to stay, a cheap, or even free bed to sleep on. They also provide the social impetus to migration as they offer a ready-made network for socialising and getting to know the area, and they may be able to disclose existent opportunities, which reduce the risk of moving. It is clear that those graduates with a parental home in the South-East are advantaged – and this is clear throughout this research. The effect, however, is to reiterate the social divisions made between the regionally-embedded working class and the rest of the country. The middle classes are much more mobile, because they have greater access to economic resources and geographically-diverse social networks. Where working class students do have a wider social network rooted in the South-East, whether through family, or friends, the effect is significant and orients them to the graduate labour market in a very different way.

The majority of the working class in this study were from outside the South-East, from the regions, from Wales, northern England, the Midlands and the South-West. This was partly a consequence of the selection of the research sites (Universities all outside of London) and partly a consequence of the tendency for working class students to stay local (more of the middle class students were from the South-East). Thus, in the first instance the regional working class are embedded in multi-generational familial networks that are clustered around particular locales, in regional towns and cities. Many of the regional towns offer few opportunities for the graduates that the local universities produce and so working class graduates struggle to constitute their background positively in relation to a localised graduate labour market. However, the move to the city can represent a change in fortunes. Being possessed of the opportunities on offer, and embedded in student networks that tend to stay local, this move may become permanent.

The significance of such moves cannot be underestimated, as professional and managerial occupational niches are located within the city setting and many regional towns and villages have lost their historic industrial functions, which may have once guaranteed some opportunities for the aspirant working class. For those that do return, the majority of opportunities are rooted in the public sector, for instance, in teaching or social work roles, or in the least prestigious, least well-paid occupational niches of the private sector.

7.10 Experience of the Graduate Labour Market

A fundamental aspect of exclusion is that one is often unaware of the extent of one's exclusion. We find that modal trajectory working class graduates only really begin to understand the limitations of their education once they have graduated and even then they remain unaware of the range of uses to which a degree can be put. As we can only compare our experiences with those we come into contact with – family, school and university peers – and as we derive our own expectations from their experiences and expectations, the market devaluation of credentials appears to be a state of the system, rather than a particular instance of personal devaluation. As a group, modal trajectory working class graduates straddle the hazy boundary separating graduate jobs from non-graduate jobs: they know few peers who had accessed corporate graduate trainee schemes and have little contact with such employers. However, whilst they struggle to directly compete with similarly well-educated, middle class graduates they do edge out non-graduates from certain occupations and fare better in niche occupations where the degree and work experience are recognised.

The experience of modal trajectory working class graduates reveals both the objective and relative nature of competition in the graduate labour market. Objectively they are excluded from the most prestigious graduate occupations because they lack the necessary credentials. Relatively, they lack the social contacts and economic capital of the middle classes necessary to exert market power in crowded labour markets. Moreover, their employability in relation to middle class professions is hindered by their close relationship to the working class habitus, which tends to reify social practices that are divergent from the 'normative' experience of university. As a consequence, the social and economic marginalisation of working class students compounds their academic achievement. It is a phenomenon accentuated by the recession:

[Susan] “A degree doesn’t help you get a job, particularly at the moment. I left education at a time when there was no jobs for my degree scheme. I've found that I'm either over-qualified with people not wanting to hire graduates in case they are only looking for work temporarily or under-qualified.”

Female, Russell Group University, Humanities, Sales Assistant
Father a Construction Site Foreman, Mother a Nurse

When we compare the experiences of this group of working class students to their middle class peers we are able to see how these experiences become *relatively* consequential. Academic credentials provide a base-plate from which extra-curricular experiences and work experience may be layered to build a discourse of employability. Students from professional or managerial backgrounds come to embody cultural attributes, inculcated through the home and family, which are valued in corresponding areas of the graduate labour market i.e. are able to act as cultural capital in relation to concomitant professions in the labour market. Though they benefit from the extension of degree-level educational requirements to historically non-graduate jobs, there is no such homology for working class culture in the graduate labour market and therefore they are more reliant on the convertibility of dispositions, credentials and experiences acquired through the university. However, because the working class lack the market power of the middle classes, and because the university offers to middle class students what it offers to working class students, it becomes exceptionally hard for working class students (except for those on elite trajectories) to gain a competitive advantage in the graduate labour market:

[Interviewer] “What do you think graduate recruiters are looking for?”
[Anna] “To be honest I think it is hard to distinguish what they are looking for sometimes cos after the generic you need to secure a two one in your degree you need to be good at organisation, good team work, you need to have your own initiative, yes we know all this but how on earth do you expect me to stand out from the rest of other people all are going to put exactly the same thing in their CV just worded completely differently…”

Female, Post-1992 University, Business, Unemployed
Father self-employed Shoe Repairer, Mother a Bar Worker

Surrounded by like-minded individuals it is difficult to see how one is positioned within the broader graduate population and so working class students become closely tied to the particular configuration of capital gained via educational institutions and oriented to areas of the labour market corresponding to their degree. As such, they have a practical awareness of how to capitalise on their experiences, skills and knowledge, without realising how these situate them in relation to others. When we re-construct the relationships between the different classes we see that working class students experience significant structural and social marginalisation from the graduate labour market. They are not ignorant of this fact and yet they lack the objective distance necessary to fully grasp the nature of their own marginalisation. However, students are often aware of how they are objectively, academically situated, and this knowledge influences their early orientation to the labour market.

The credentials and experiences of working class students are often fairly ubiquitous and for this reason they lack the rarefied academic capital necessary to distinguish themselves from other candidates. Prestigious graduate employers are looking for graduates who will hit the ground running, who are 'client-ready' but the university experiences of working class students don't allow them to demonstrate such competencies. They lack the extra-curricular experiences in which to frame their employability and so they become side-lined in graduate recruitment. However, even where graduates had relevant work experience, the proliferation of sandwich courses and the lack of viable graduate jobs meant minimum requirements were being extended and graduates increasingly pushed to the margins of the graduate labour market. Some graduates become aware of this, and lamented the fact in the follow-up survey:

> [Ian] "I applied for a finance job at [Russell Group University] I think I did well but I think I didn't get the job because I didn't have enough experience…I think they were looking for someone with two or three years' experience…it was a normal job…Before there used to be from what I can tell the jobs the normal jobs and then the graduate jobs but now because the graduate jobs are filling up so much so many people competing for it that erm I'm sort of having to go for normal jobs…I'm a bit in between both of them…I sort of stopped looking for a while and then I started looking at normal jobs…I started looking at DCSF…but then again I've been pillar-boxed in as they ramped up all the experience requirements and so I have to go in with my admin experience off my degree, the degree is just a starting point…all of my friends are thinking of doing masters in order to get round the problem…"

Male, Post-1992 University, non-graduate role - Business Support Officer
Father a Fitter, Mother a Shop Worker

Even from his partial and limited experience it is apparent to this student what has gone on in the local and regional labour market in recent years. If one reads the testimony of similarly placed students the same issues arise. The over-supply of graduates may have implications for all graduates but the effects are felt particularly keenly by modal-trajectory working class graduates. The combination of low GCSEs and A-levels, a need to engage in paid work experience and a lack of engagement with broader university life combine to place the majority of working class students at a disadvantage in the competition over graduate jobs. Their early experiences of the graduate labour market led many to question the validity of a degree, and question why they were led to believe in a future that was not possible. The final consequence is that these students altered what they had originally hoped to get out of university. Whilst many stated that an aim of going to university was a 'well paid job', 'career prospects' and 'opportunities', they were somewhat disillusioned with what the labour market finally offered them:

> [Allie] "When you're in school everyone makes out if you don't go to university you're not going to be earning much but then you get to uni and you realise it isn't that easy if you had gone to work at [local shopping mall] you'd be on fifteen or sixteen grand now and without ten grand of debt probably be a supervisor…"
>
> Female, Post-1992 University, Social Sciences, Paralegal in regional Law firm
> Father Unemployed (ex-Baker), Mother a Housewife

This realisation was sharpened by the recession but there is evidence to suggest that many of the occupations being entered into had been occupied by similar graduates before the recession. As Bourdieu once said, for working class graduates, graduate jobs are 'like a mirage', as one moves toward them they disappear 'over the horizon'. This certainly rings true for the respondents in this study:

> [Allie] "In my second year I applied for vacation schemes at every firm in Post-1992 City and [local city] and I didn't get any of them, apart from Irvin Mitchells where I got through to assessment centre…but no one told me what to do, so I didn't know what they were looking for…I asked my careers adviser for some advice and she

wanted me to come down to centre of town for a five minute meeting but it was in January in the middle of exams…so I didn't have time to go down for just a five minute meeting…In second year I went through a stage where I was applying for like fifteen vacation schemes only got kind of a yes from Irvin Mitchells but I messed that up and then training contracts all of them were like no no one would consider me and then I realised the reality of it of how difficult it is."

[Interviewer] "So when you first came to uni you thought you'd do a law degree and then get a job?"

[Allie] "…and get a job yeah I actually thought no one told me about the LPC I thought it was just a law degree I didn't know it was this competitive either if I could go back and know it was going to be this competitive I wouldn't have done it."

[Interviewer] "What would you have done instead?"

[Allie] "Genetics or pharmacy, I wouldn't know what I would have done I probably would have considered doing a genetics degree instead…"

[Interviewer] "How has your opinion of university changed since you came here?"

[Allie] "Well before I came here I thought it'd be really different but it's just the same as school just the same as everything else to be honest and I thought university equalled jobs but it doesn't…education is just something that is pot luck really…if you're going to get a job you get a job if you're not you're not…it's made the world seem more realistic to me when I was younger I was like when I grow up I want to do this you think when you grow up you're going to become what you want to become that is not true you don't become what you want to become you become what the world wants you to become I realise the world is more difficult, the world is more hard job-wise and stuff…my sister spent five months looking for a job to do with a degree but the job she's got now she could have done without a degree…at the time it was my second year and then I was like oh my gosh…it is hard…I'm glad I've stayed at home…main thing for me now is getting a job not having fun…good thing is I have some savings…"

Female, Post-1992 University, Social Sciences, Paralegal in regional Law firm
Father Unemployed (ex-Baker), Mother a Housewife

It is interesting that this student notes: "you think when you grow up you're going to become what you want to become that is not true you don't become what you want to become you become what the world wants you to become." It is a lamentable fact that unrealised

aspirations were most likely to colour the testimonies of working class graduates. The social inertia of society tends to inhibit statistically improbable trajectories, and so it is with working class graduates that certain dreams of professional employment are pipe-dreams, imagined in a world where the real constraints of the labour market are unrealised and indeed unrealisable. When friends, family, peers are all struggling to get employment it is no wonder that more working class students do not want to go to university. Local labour markets struggle to absorb the expansion in graduate numbers and so many working class graduates are forced to move out of their local areas, seeking work elsewhere:

> [Stuart] "My mates are living on dole an after a few months it's just getting em down cos they can't get anything…I've got a better chance, even if it's just shitty bar work, I've got a better chance of getting it in Post-1992 city than I have in Scunthorpe…"
>
> Male, Post-1992 University, Vocational, Insolvency Case Administrator
>
> Father a TV Repair Technician, Mother a Secretary

The opportunities that they encounter are not the ones that they thought would have been guaranteed by a degree. There is an issue when individuals base education decisions on experiences that were true under a previous state of affairs or on experiences that can never be their own. The modal trajectory working class remain embedded in local networks, and they can see the consequences of the over-production of graduates in their everyday lives. Few graduates have more than a restricted and partial view of the graduate labour market but the view that they do have, the horizons that are disclosed to them, is telling about how they are situated vis-à-vis the graduate labour market. For many, a degree offers better employment than might have been hoped for in the local town but the fact remains these niche graduate occupations represent the least prestigious occupations in the graduate labour market.

7.11 Conclusion

Whilst there are some notable exceptions, modal trajectory working class graduates are the least competitive of the groups in this study. Academically-middling they are formally excluded from the most prestigious regions of the graduate labour market, and lacking the requisite dispositions and social networks they find themselves relatively uncompetitive when they come up against other, better endowed graduates. As a consequence they are most likely to find themselves relegated to the least prestigious graduate occupations, in low-paid sectors with few immediate opportunities of advancement. Perversely, however, they are more likely to state that they went to university for better opportunities and to get a better job.

It is not fair to judge their early graduate destinations as evidence of their long-term prospects. However, a number of studies have found that early graduate destinations can become long-term, and a failure to enter a graduate career early on can lead to lifelong exclusion from professional and managerial occupations. Many of the students had arrived at university with the hope of securing a 'middle class' career but had re-calibrated their aspirations as the labour market realities became clearer. This awakening led many to question the labour market value of the degree (though rarely the experience itself) and to re-think the approach that they took to university. There was some evidence of improving prospects for some individuals in the follow-up survey but these were in the minority.

There are some interesting patterns which reinforce the analysis. For instance, of the twenty-two working class graduates in the modal trajectory sample who replied to the follow-up survey, 45% were earning less than £10,000 per year, 63% less than £15,000 per year and 90% less than £20,000 per year (with no significant difference between the Post-1992 and Russell Group University samples). Of the twenty-two, four were unemployed, one was interning, and three were in jobs that required a degree. By comparison, of twenty-eight middle class graduates at the same universities whose destinations were known, 32% were earning less than £10,000 per year but of these, with the exception of one, all were undertaking PGCEs or were working as interns in professional firms. In total, 64% were in graduate-level occupations and 35% were earning more than £20,000. It is certainly telling that seven of the thirteen middle class Post-1992 University graduates who replied to the follow-up survey had secured jobs requiring a degree whilst only two of the thirteen working class Post-1992 University graduates had.

It is clear that graduate labour market outcomes are intimately connected to the *type* of person an individual is, the experiences and networks that they can call upon, their dispositions and their orientation toward the labour market. Modal trajectory working class graduates enter into the labour market without the middle class orientation to the labour market. Whereas the middle classes are able to embark upon internships or vocational training, the working classes lack the economic capital necessary to support such strategies and so they find themselves in whatever jobs are available. A redeeming feature for the Post-1992 University graduates is their access to work experience which sets them in good stead for employment, albeit not the type graduate of graduate employment they had envisaged. The general effect of these processes is to reinforce social (dis)advantage through labour market outcomes.

Chapter 8

Discussion and Conclusion

This thesis examined the early labour market experiences of graduates from different class backgrounds at three differentially ranked universities. It finds that outcomes are more than the sum of credentials and hard work. Access to social, economic and non-academic forms of cultural capital is found to be important and graduates from middle class backgrounds are more likely than graduates from working class backgrounds to access the forms of capital recognised by the graduate labour market. This leads to observable differences in graduate labour market outcomes. However, the complex relationship between higher education and the graduate labour market means that class differences are not simply reproduced.

In the first instance, patterns in graduate labour market outcomes are a product of the academic requirements demanded by certain occupations. These academic barriers are tangible and affect all graduates regardless of background. Graduates with more prestigious credentials are more likely to access professional or managerial occupations and are more likely to find traditional graduate employment: the proportion of middle class graduates employed in professional or managerial occupations was 100% at the Elite University, 79% at the Russell Group University and 69% at the Post-1992 University. This compares with figures of 100%, 56% and 31%, respectively, for working class graduates. However, labour market success is also predicated upon exhibiting the 'right' combination of competencies and experiences, privileging middle class graduates.

Middle class graduates have greater access to economic capital, are able to leverage their social networks to augment their employability, and are more likely to exhibit ways of being and doing associated with professional and managerial competence. As such, intra-university comparisons find that middle class graduates are more likely to access graduate employment (79% of Russell Group University middle class graduates were in graduate employment compared to 22% of working class graduates) and work in professional or managerial occupations (see figures above). These observations can be attributed to significant differences in economic, social and cultural capital. However, such comparisons conceal

subtle in-group differences. This thesis identified distinct class fractions within both the middle and working class groups.

An interesting distinction within the middle classes was that between middle class graduates with parents employed in the public/third sectors and those with parents employed in the private sector. For instance, 80% of graduates in the public sector had one or more parents employed by the public sector and almost 60% had both parents employed by the public sector, which constituted all of those with both parents employed by the public sector. All of the graduates in the private sector had at least one parent employed by the sector and 74% had both parents employed by the sector, constituting 85% of graduates with both parents employed in the private sector. The same pattern did not emerge for working class graduates. The sector of parental employment is significant because it reflects systematic differences in social and political orientation, which for graduates give rise to discernible differences in their inherited labour market orientation, social networks and cultural capital.

The graduate labour market outcomes of working class graduates are acutely tied to the institutions they attend and their experiences therein. Unlike many middle class graduates, working class graduates do not inherit forms of social and cultural capital that can be easily realised in the graduate labour market. As such, differences between working class fractions can be traced to differences in educational achievement and trajectory. Through the acculturation of middle class behaviours and alignment of practices, working class graduates benefit from the institutional proximity to middle class peers and become caught in their 'slip stream'. The benefits are clear to see: 65% of elite trajectory graduates were in traditional graduate employment and 94% were in professional or managerial occupations. For modal trajectory graduates mediocre credentials and low levels of inherited social and cultural capital are compounded by socially segregated institutional experiences. Consequently, they were found in the least competitive regions of the graduate labour market, typically in non-graduate employment and in occupations that did not require a degree-level education.

These findings add to our understanding of how class background, higher education and the graduate labour market interact. They raise some important questions for the academic field but also for public policy, particularly around the role of higher education in promoting social mobility and its relationship with the (graduate) labour market. These and other questions are addressed in this final chapter.

8.2 Re-Thinking Graduate Employability

Hillage and Pollard's (1998) received definition of employability states that "[Employability is the] capability to move self-sufficiently within the labour market to realise potential" (Hillage and Pollard, 1998: 1). On this basis, it might be argued that all labour market destinations are the consequence of 'potential'. As such, it is not the most useful starting point for a critical analysis. The social distribution of graduate opportunities is an important question of social justice, especially where these opportunities may be structured according to social and educational background.

Official policy formulation treats the degree as value neutral and does not recognise the differential rates of return to different types of degrees; the focus remains high-level, on the overall state of the graduate labour market, and the earnings and opportunities for graduates as a whole. There seems to be some merit to this view, more or less, according to the region of the graduate labour market with which we are concerned but the opportunities guaranteed by degrees are rarely simply a labour market conversion of academic capital. As such, educational policy has remained largely blind to the realities of labour market competition and ignorant of the mechanisms through which social mobility is achieved.

Graduates are not just academically divided; they are differentiated by the nature of their participation in university, their pre-work experiences and their interpersonal presence. We might consider these to be social and cultural criteria as they are based on experiences such as *valuable* work experience, participation in clubs and societies, positions of responsibility, representation in university-level sport, foreign travel, foreign languages etc., all of which are contingent upon one's social networks, access to economic capital and habituated pre-dispositions. The criteria vary from employer to employer and between sectors, but the general effect is to add a social dimension to recruitment.

In the last few years valuable work experience has become of paramount import across all strata of the graduate labour market. A survey of leading graduate employers recently found that a third of all entry-level graduate positions had been taken by students on work experience with that company, approaching half of all entry-level positions in investment banking and corporate law, and that undergraduates with no work experience stood little to

no chance of securing graduate employment in 2011 (High Fliers, 2011). The ability to access work experience thus acts as a significant barrier to labour market participation for graduates located outside of professional networks, as is reflected in the inequitable distribution of valuable work experience across the graduate population.

The opportunity to access valuable internships is often contingent upon social contacts, which privileges those from professional and managerial families who are able to call upon their 'weak ties' (Granovetter, 1974). This thesis found that students educated at public schools were most likely to embark upon early professional work experience, followed by other privately educated students and middle class students more generally. Students from working class backgrounds were more likely to have undertaken part-time, paid work but were unlikely to undertake work experience outside of their degree (Law students were notable exceptions). As such, the 'employability' of graduates varies as a function of their ability to access valuable work experience, which is itself subject to a social logic that may be hidden.

Whilst competitive formal internships are ostensibly open to all, it was found that successful access to formal internships could be leveraged through early work experience. Students who had been able to access *informal* professional work experience prior to university, or in the summer of the first year, proved highly competitive and were able to secure formal work experience later in their degree. Without exception, these graduates had all secured access to prestigious graduate schemes upon graduation. As such, we find that objective employability may arise from an initial social advantage that is obscured through the series of progressions or cycles of capital conversion, away from the initial realisation of social advantage. Ultimately, the employability of graduates from professional backgrounds appears self-evident.

Graduates from outside professional networks are disadvantaged in three key ways. Firstly, they are less likely to be pre-disposed to professional work experience as they do not see it as a crucial element of future employability, concentrating instead on the degree. Secondly, those who do seek work experience need contacts and are more reliant on 'institutional networks' to provide them access to such opportunities; middle class students derive their opportunities through family, friends, neighbours, and through a wider network of secondary contacts. Thirdly, partaking in valuable work experience often detracts from other practices,

such as academic study or holiday work, and may incur financial costs, making it prohibitive to those without family support.

We can make a similar argument regarding extra-curricular activities. The disposition and ability to participate in extra-curricular activities is partly a function of free time, and so we find significant variation between students from middle class backgrounds and working class backgrounds, who differ in time spent working part-time. A secondary explanation is linked to the institutional habitus and the class habitus of students. Given free time, middle class students, especially privately educated / grammar school educated ones were much more likely to participate in university sports, clubs and societies, and take up positions within these, whereas working class students were more likely to engage in informal sports and socialise with friends outside of the institutional setting. As a consequence, the practices and activities of middle class students were much more likely to 'count' as evidence of employability in relation to recruitment criteria.

Like work experience and extra-curricular participation, non-academic criteria of assessment become ways of reading for a certain social type. This is reiterated in the face-to-face assessments, whereby graduates are assessed on the basis of social and cultural competencies, such as team-working, leadership, communication skills, confidence and so on. More research is required in this particular area but the evidence suggests that the interpersonal assessment of graduates favours those from middle class backgrounds (Brown & Hesketh, 2004). In the final analysis, recruitment decisions often come down to a 'cultural fit'. We see strong evidence of this in the testimony of graduates applying to prestigious graduate schemes, especially in those cases where elite trajectory working class students experience their class background as problematic.

It is only by comparing the experiences of similarly educated graduates that we can see the possible impact of class background. Amongst the Post-1992 University sample, for example, middle class undergraduates were more likely to be involved in middle class networks. This helped reinforce high labour market aspirations but they were also likely to hold the forms of capital necessary to realise their degree. For instance, middle-class students were more likely to have leveraged networks to access valuable work opportunities. A further defining feature was labour market mobility; the propensity to move and the distance moved was proportionally related to the social class background of the graduate. These factors build up

to reflect how social, economic and cultural privilege became important to the 'employability' of the graduates in this study.

Non-academic valences of capital are important to the overall analysis as they have become increasingly important to the differentiation of graduates, which occurs on the basis of social and cultural characteristics that are not equally probable for all graduates. As such, it is difficult to escape the conclusion that these criteria are proxy measures for the selection of a social type, which tends to reify existent social relations as opposed to cutting through them on the basis of some abstract, objective notion of technical competence. However, these valences of capital are not unconnected to the employability strategies pursued by graduates.

Social groups may rig the game in their own favour by deploying social, cultural and economic assets, which allow them to leverage access to valuable experiences and ultimately re-define what counts as 'valuable' in the interview room. However, this rigging is not an overt class strategy but a consequence of multiple, individual strategies that amount to a class strategy. The actions of any one individual could not constitute a paradigm shift in graduate recruitment but if a thousand individuals embarked upon a year's free work experience in investment banks and then applied to graduate-entry positions upon graduation they would significantly alter the competitive boundaries of that year's recruitment cycle; if a whole class of individuals were to do so, they might alter the entire landscape of the graduate labour market. It follows that the practical orchestration of class practices is one of the most important phenomena in the graduate labour market. Collusive sociality between dominant social groups negates competition from other groups by forcing recruitment criteria to reflect properties that are often specific to a particular graduate fraction. Like players in a football team, individuals who are socially and institutionally connected practically harmonise their practices, which locate them as a class of individuals without being orchestrated as such. This helps explain how graduates can be caught in the 'slipstream' of peers, being able to realise a destination that is atypical for someone of their background.

The emergent conclusion is that the degree is, and may have always been, a way of reading for a particular social type. However, with mass higher education the relationship between academic credentials and social types may have weakened, forcing assessment onto new terrain. Academic credentials do possess a symbolic value but a value that varies across the graduate labour market and in different social fields.

8.3 Segmentation of the Graduate Labour Market

The notion of employability varies across the graduate labour market, in different sectors, at different levels and between different organisations. As such, there is no singular definition of employability. Indeed, the distinction between absolute and relative employability means that whilst there are certain credentials, characteristics, traits and experiences that could be objectively identified as operating in relation to a given labour market, the credentials, characteristics, traits and experiences realisable at any given moment may fluctuate as a condition of the existent market conditions. This is why Brown and Hesketh (2004) talk of the 'duality of employability'.

In the first instance, labour market competition is determined by the objective demands of different employers, who establish the base recruitment criteria. These vary across industry sectors and between competitors within each sector (see figure 8.1 below). The criteria that they use effectively segment the graduate labour market according to degree type, level and A-level grades. If we look at the table below we see significant variation within some industries. Generally speaking, within sectors the minimum academic criteria increase proportionally to salaries, benefits and prestige, reflecting internal hierarchies of employers.

These recruitment criteria establish objective barriers to entry to different graduate occupations and segment the graduate labour market, effectively aligning universities to different employers. Competition over these jobs is thus limited to candidates able to meet these minimum requirements. However, given that most positions are over-subscribed, the real discriminators between candidates depend upon the applicants to a given position. It is this secondary, relative aspect of labour market competition that determines the relative employability of candidates. To gain a competitive edge over others, graduates deploy various forms of capital. This realises social inequalities between graduates, according to the forms of capital recognised by a given industry sector and employer. Thus, candidates may be employable but not competitive when compared with other candidates.

Figure 8.1: Educational Requirements, Salaries and Universities Targeted by Firms in Different Industries

	Corporate Law Firms	Graduate Accountancy Firms	Consultancy Firms	Financial Service Firms	FMCG Firms (e.g. Nestle)
UCAS points range	300-340	260-340	240-340	240-320+	300
Degree range	2.1	2.2-2.1	Any-2.1	2.2-2.1	2.1
Salary band	£35-39,000	£25-31,000	£20-38,000	£24-50,000+	£26-29,000
Universities targeted	Oxbridge, Russell Group	Russell Group, Post-1992	Oxbridge, Russell Group, Sutton 13, Post-1992	Oxbridge, Russell Group, Sutton 13, Post-1992	Oxbridge, Russell Group
NOTE: This table was constructed from data acquired in January 2008 during an analysis of the publicly available recruitment criteria of 250 leading graduate employers across 13 industry sectors. Not all firms gave full disclosure and so this should be treated as an indicative sample of ranges.					

Graduates thus find that their academic credentials, experiences, dispositions and values receive different valuations across the graduate labour market. Elite trajectory working class Oxbridge graduates may not be competitive in relation to prestigious finance and consultancy firms because they do not naturally inhabit the social networks necessary to constitute a 'legitimate interest'. By contrast, graduates who have attended private schools tend to be aware of the demands of the labour market early on, have high quality social contacts in relation to the City and are furnished with the economic and cultural capital necessary to constitute a legitimate interest through extensive work experience, relevant extra-curricular activities, which recognise their early pre-disposition. Access points to these professions post-graduation are far fewer in number meaning that early access may be a key discriminator between graduates in the longer-term.

Social networks are an important mediator of access to forms of capital that are realisable in the recruitment process, for instance, social networks mediate access to work experience, explicit and tacit knowledge of the graduate labour market, and other 'weak' social contacts, which cumulatively influence a graduate's employability. Significantly, social networks also mediate access to practices, such as extra-curricular activities, and dispositions, subtle verbal and non-verbal cues, accent, pronunciation, vocabulary, that underpin the perceived interpersonal competence of an individual. As such, how an individual is socially-located becomes central to the ability of graduates to appear positively in relation to the graduate labour market. The natural limits to an individual's habitus thus help define the natural range of suitable graduate occupations open to a graduate.

This study has used Bourdieu's notion of capital to conceptualise the relationship between different social, cultural and academic characteristics, as it allows us to move beyond the specific instances in which characteristics count as capital. As we move away from the particular instance, to the group level, it is possible to see commonalities in the different forms of capital and given the right data we might be able to objectively map out the graduate labour market.[28] This would require significant quantitative data, at a detailed level, but given this it would be possible to map out, at a given moment, the relationship between educational institutions, class of origin and labour market destinations.

An interesting outcome of seeing the graduate labour market as segmented is that we realise graduates are not in open competition with one another. Competition is limited to applicants to a given occupation, who are academically and socially-determined in the first instance. Thus, it is useful to think of graduate occupations as social fields. Within each field, we find dominated and dominant positions, which are assumed by different types of individuals. Applicants to City firms are predominantly privately educated, middle or upper-middle class. As such, the relative employability of graduates within the City is a function of their relation to the academic and social characteristics of a given occupation. Elite trajectory working class applicants may not appear competitive as a consequence of the social and cultural criteria tacit to the field, which functions as a social admission fee. However, these same working class graduates may appear competitive at Teach First, because they have a

[28] The Civil Service Fast Stream were due to release data on the social class of applicants throughout the recruitment funnel in April 2012 but this never occurred. A Freedom Of Information Act request in August 2012 was subsequently turned down on the grounds that it would unfairly bias this researcher and that it would be published in due course – no date was set for publication.

legitimate relation to the employability narrative, or in corporate accountancy, engineering, graduate managerial trainee schemes, where they have a relative competitive advantage compared to the modal applicants i.e. middle class Russell Group graduates.

Moreover, we cannot simply understand the situation and orientation of graduates in relation to other graduates, we need to appreciate what other options could have been pursued. In regional labour markets, the degree may grant access to employment that would not otherwise have been accessible. Thus, modal trajectory working class graduates may find that whilst they are formally excluded from national graduate labour markets, they are able to exercise a localised form of social closure, insulating themselves from competition with non-graduates. This layering of occupational fields, in geographical and social space, makes it difficult to talk of a unified graduate labour market. In reality, we find processes of domination and exclusion at all levels; the same graduate may be subject to social exclusion whilst simultaneously realising the exclusion of others in other fields. This forces us to recall that capital operates in relation to a field, and that at all times agents manipulate how they present themselves, to receive their highest valuation within a field, but they do so not under conditions of their own choosing.

8.4 Rational Actor Theory, Class and the Institutional Habitus

Human capital theories often assume that individuals act in an economically rational manner and that graduates seek to maximise their returns to education. In reality the pursuit of interest may take many forms, not simply economic ones. For instance, social recognition and affirmation of identity are extremely important to psychological well-being and practically underpin the way in which individuals engage with others. As such, we cannot understand graduate labour market outcomes as a direct expression of utilitarian behaviour.

This study found that explicit utilitarian behaviour is limited to a minority of students, though they do exist and may be on the increase. For a majority of students the 'pursuit of CV-points' or 'social networking' is part of a broader lifestyle, a form of sociability (Simmel, 1949), to which the accumulation of social and cultural forms of capital are incidental i.e. students tend to assume a taken-for-granted relation to their lifestyle. Practices and dispositions within the university cannot be separated from early social conditioning. We find that different middle class fractions become disposed to the graduate labour market in

different ways because of differences in their early social and political conditioning. As such, we find that habitus politically orients students, through the way in which it conditions the categories of perception and appreciation students apply to the world, through which the world becomes significant, meaningful.

The dispositions, practices and values of students and graduates are thus intimately bound. Within the university and the graduate labour market, political dispositions orient individuals to spaces (and thus organisations, occupations and careers) in which their dispositions are recognised, affirmed and realised. Through cognitive harmonisation they become taken-for-granted and tacit to behaviour. As such, we realise that the assumptions made by rational-actor theory are based on a particular instance of human behaviour which is neither uniform nor dominant in our study. If we return to habitus we can re-situate the individual amidst the social, political and moral discourses to which they are sensitised and thereby motivated to action.

This thesis has demonstrated that the extension of class lifestyles into the university helps explain observed differences in graduate destinations. Rather than being a melting pot of cultures, the university is a socially stratified institution producing subtle forms of social segregation as the student constituencies coalesce around shared practices, values and dispositions. Reay and Crozier (2009) have argued that the experience of being a student, i.e. the nature of studenthood, is informed by the 'institutional habitus'. However, the 'institutional habitus' describes common modalities of practice within an institution; social outliers are not randomly distributed, we find that they are distributed according to the logic of habitus. Whilst gender and ethnic origin are formally recognised, the role of the classed habitus and the tendency toward class endogamy is often understated, if not missed entirely by much of the literature and yet it is important to any understanding of the experience of university and the graduate labour market.

Habitus has a wide and durable effect on how we experience ourselves vis-à-vis the world. In the first instance it conditions us toward certain possibilities, practices and activities, by the way in which it informs our dispositions and values, and through which we are socially located by who we are for others. That is, by what we represent to others i.e. how we become seen more or less positively, as intelligent, creative, family-oriented, a grafter, erudite, astute, lazy, indifferent, boring, interesting, sporty, intellectual, cultured, down-to-earth, and all

those other adjectives used to describe our character and which can never be separated from the social position of the observer and the observed. Thus, we become fixed in the conceptual categories applied by others, classified and categorised, but as these categories are always applied from somewhere; the effect is to locate us within social space, according to how we are perceived by those who are socially conditioned to perceive us in a given way i.e. by how dispositions, practices and values are socially-affiliated to certain positions and by how habitus engenders a located perception of them. As Bourdieu suggested:

> "...judgements which claim to apply to *the whole person* take into account not only physical appearance as such, which is always socially marked…but also the socially processed body (with clothes, jewellery, make-up and above all manners and behaviour) which is perceived through socially constituted taxonomies, and thus read as the sign of the quality and value of the person...The…[body]…is the principal prop of a class judgement which fails to recognise itself as such: it is as if a concrete intuition of the properties of the body, grasped and designated as properties of the person, motivated the global perception and appreciation of the intellectual and moral qualities." (Bourdieu 1988: 201)

The question that needs posing is: why do individuals not adapt to the socio-cultural conditions of the university and the graduate labour market? Why do the working class not become middle class? There are a number of different, but not unconnected answers to this. We need to remember that the habitus is durable, bound by deep social relations, which make a claim on the individual (and which define the individual). The habitus is a source of affirmation and recognition for those attuned and harmonised to the practices and dispositions that it recognises; when we are fixed by the gaze of others we also receive recognition and the ability to solicit social contact, which is a collective source of esteem amongst others. Moreover, the harmonisation of practices and dispositions within a social milieu underpins social cohesion, made possible through social proximity[29] to others. The effect is to arrest divergent dispositions and practices, through all those "calls to order" that habitus operates i.e. through the momentary, infinitesimal acts of recognition and affirmation (or the lack of); experiences that habitus makes palpable, incessant and meaningful. For students drawn from culturally dominated backgrounds there is always a tension between the social demands of

[29] Which shared social and economic conditions tends to guarantee.

the institutional habitus and the social demands of one's social habitus, which lay claim to an individual, just as the individual lays claim to it.

Habitus has a deep, resonant effect that remains tacit to the behaviour and discourse of undergraduates, which demands that we trace the experiences and practices of students in relation to one another. It pre-disposes undergraduates to patterns of activity within the university that effectively segregates students on the basis of interest. Modal trajectory working class students at the Post-1992 University or at the Russell Group University exhibited little integration with their middle class peers, instead socialising with 'people like them'. There is thus a reiterative effect on their practices: going to the pub, clubbing, studying, going to the gym, seeing friends and family and working part-time become, for them, 'the student experience'. It is perceived to be normative because that's what everybody else they know does. As social groups coalesce around shared practices and values they create the social conditions necessary for the reification of durable dispositions and in universities with significant working class constituencies, working class forms of studenthood can co-exist alongside middle class forms without being problematic.

Differential residence fees partly explain this segregation as they can lead to an initial segregation of students along the lines of willingness (and ability) to pay.[30] Thus, we find that the student population is initially divided by their halls of residence which act as the social focal point for the first year, leaving an early impression on the types of undergraduates one is likely to encounter. This residential divide is important, as it establishes the early social conditions of being at university, priming students for the next two or three years. However, even in cases where residential differences do not trace social differences, social distances may be realised as personal distances made between individuals who do not share a common social and educational background.

Social distances realised between students are rooted in differences in practices, values and dispositions. These differences are made significant through the interpersonal terrain, through the way in which different groups presence themselves in the institutional space, configuring sense relations into power relations. Middle class undergraduates are able to determine the

[30] Residential fees can differ by £1000 per annum across different self-catered halls at Russell Group University and single occupancy rooms at Post-1992 University range from £70 per week to £111 per week (self contained flats can be double this).

forms of being valued within the institutional space by presencing themselves, reinforced through the practical alliances that they form with staff and teaching personnel. This raises questions about the ability of individual's whose habitus is over-determined by economic necessity and cultural marginalisation, to be able to solicit contact amongst affluent, culturally dominant social groups. Whilst privately-educated middle class undergraduates were able to move freely through the institutional space, those from working class backgrounds felt the nature of their presence differentially across the university.

Certain spaces at the Russell Group University, such as the Business and Law Schools, the Rowing Club, the Rugby Club, were defined by the presence of privately educated, middle class undergraduates which had the effect of closing them off to students from outside this milieu. At the Elite University, institutional space is dictated by the privately-educated upper-middle classes but there are social differences within and between the colleges and the University, creating social niches for those from culturally dominated backgrounds. The propensity for individuals to publicly presence themselves within institutional space is an inverse function of the social distance between an individual and the social space in question. Thus, at the Post-1992 University and Russell Group University, modal trajectory working class students withdraw to spaces in which they are able to solicit recognition, such as the School of Social Sciences, part-time, paid work or at home with friends. This is why we cannot understand part-time, paid work solely in terms of economics, as it provides the possibility of being able to solicit contact with others, something which may not be possible in an institutional environment which proves injurious (or worse, indifferent) to those lacking the relation to being, necessary to appear positively.

It is important to recognise that middle class undergraduates do not *feel* the need to work part-time to be able to be part of a 'community' as the institution provides the conditions necessary to realise their own relation to being. This demonstrates why it is important to contrast different experiences, as it allows us to see how different forms of studenthood arise and how they become taken-for-granted by different student constituencies. However, these forms of studenthood are not value free: those groups who are able to ally their practices to the institution find it much easier to present their practices as legitimate, in turn defining the 'normative' university experience and accruing the profits of seigniorage. In terms of positional conflict theory, we can see how dominant social groups are able to 'rig' the recruitment game by colonising institutions, which allows them to symbolically appropriate

their own practices and interests as 'legitimate' practices and interests. Moreover, if it is the case, as I have argued in this thesis, that relative graduate employability is inseparable from the social networks to which one is privy, the practices and experiences that one call upon, and the dispositions and values that one embodies, then how institutions organise their institutional space, such as the contrast between collegiate campuses and city campuses, can ultimately affect the employability of their graduates. Given the political focus on widening access, this should be an area of concern for all higher education institutions.

8.5 Elite Social Trajectories and 'Slip-Streaming'

At root, our behaviours are durable and pre-reflexive, leaving stubborn traces of our social trajectory and origin. Our ways of being and doing, are tacitly, mimetically harmonised to those around us, who in turn are drawn to us, such that we adopt a relation to the modalities of practice of the groups to which we belong. Native membership of a social group tends to guarantee a taken-for-granted relationship to the dispositions, practices and values tacit to the group. However, for those who leave their social milieu to move into other social spaces, there is a need to reconcile one's behaviour with one's social milieu. The greater the social distance between social origin and the social environment to which one arrives, the more likely social background will be encountered problematically and the greater the urgency there is to resolve the disjuncture.

To successfully acquire a new mode of being we have to be subject (and open) to the same social conditioning. As we have already seen (Chapter 6) elite trajectory working class graduates are often embraced by, and embrace, middle class culture. Their steep educational trajectories have removed them from their class of origin, through a series of steps made throughout primary and secondary school – getting the highest marks in class, the best grades, awards for academic success, acts of distinction which raise them above and beyond their peers – which are then consecrated by access to university, allowing them to realise a social identity amongst a middle class social milieu. This realisation is rooted in a harmonisation of social and cultural practices, which I have termed 'slipstreaming'.

This phenomenon is not limited to working class graduates but it is especially pertinent in their testimony. Those who find themselves in social proximity to peers from higher social classes, tend to inculcate the practices, dispositions and values of their peers which becomes

consequential to social mobility as the adoption of 'middle class' ways of being is a precondition of access to many professional occupations. However, it has a less obvious and more durable effect on an individual, through the way in which it shapes their social network and the practices, activities and dispositions that they take-for-granted in everyday life. Thus, we see a positive identification with typically middle class cultural practices, and a steady erosion of the link to the working class habitus. Interviewees suggested that consumption activities like 'going out for dinner', coffee or taking taxis were all part of a broader cultural recalibration. Moreover, we can trace discernible effects on the verbal and non-verbal characteristics of these students. For instance, they suggested their accents had softened, their vocabulary and way of talking had changed and they had become aware of the importance of a casual uniform. These changes trace the acculturation of middle culture, which grants them the cultural "admission fee" necessary to access corresponding social fields, and which is evident in their orientation to the graduate labour market. The labour market success of working class Oxbridge graduates may owe more to the undergraduate collegiate system than the simple conversion of academic capital into the labour market.

The notion of slipstreaming is important as it highlights the way in which social mobility may be contingent upon prior access to social networks. As we have seen, the graduate labour market is socially and culturally, as well as academically segmented. Access to the professions is often contingent upon sharing the right forms of social and cultural capital and 'slipstreaming' describes the processes by which working class students are able to adopt middle class ways of being, influencing their dispositions, practices and values, which in turn grant them access to socially exclusive occupational fields. In effect, these working class students *benefit* from the cultural seigniorage of their middle class peers, even whilst it simultaneously excludes many of their school peers.[31] This phenomenon is found across the student population, especially on the fringes of social groups, complicating the relationship between class, culture and the graduate labour market.

8.6 Gender and Ethnicity – the Missing Dimensions?

Gender and ethnicity add a further complexity to the analysis presented so far. Whilst they are pertinent influences the analysis of gender and ethnicity is not mutually exclusive from the analysis of social class. Ethnicity alters the categories of perception and appreciation that

[31] This can leave them in a moral dilemma, as evident in their disposition to graduate labour market careers (see chapter 6).

individuals apply to the social field; students from the Indian sub-continent and Arab backgrounds tend to orient toward engineering, business, law, medicine, and medical related degrees. For instance, 52% of young Indian students from higher professional/managerial backgrounds were accepted onto these degree courses compared to 24% young white students from the same class background, the proportion for routine class is 44% to 22% (UCAS, 2008). The educational strategies of different ethnic groups may thus be very different to those of the white population. However, ethnicity was not a key consideration of this thesis, and so there is little that we can say with certainty. More can be said about gender.

Gender can be understood as an aspect that is tacit to the social field, determining the positions and dispositions open to men and women. However, these positions tend to be determined in the first instance by the relationship to class culture. Thus, the dispositions and modalities of practice of men and women may diverge, but they do so within constraints imposed by class habitus. Smetherham (2005; 2006) found that gender was significant to the labour market destinations of the graduates in her study and argued that gender helped explain the disposition toward different careers. However, her study did not investigate the class cultural differences that existed within her sample, which can explain some of the differences in labour market orientation.

As we found in this study, differences within the middle class sample are partly attributed to the fraction of the middle class from which they originate. Both men and women from strong liberal backgrounds with professional or managerial parents employed in the public sector are likely to be pre-disposed toward the public sector. However, given an indeterminate position, i.e. a father from private sector and a mother from public sector, men tend to be oriented toward private sector occupations whilst women tend toward public sector destinations, reflecting Smetherham's argument. By contrast, female (particularly Elite University) graduates from strong private sector professional families were more likely to be oriented to careers in the City: where the gender dimension is broadly between investment banking (male-dominated) and corporate law/strategy consulting 'female-friendly', which can be traced to the influence of social and educational background. This disposition seemed to be particularly explicit amongst privately-educated students, where schooling may reinforce such dispositions. Amongst graduates from working class backgrounds, the gender divide does not appear to be as significant. Instead, labour market dispositions tend to be more

closely linked to degree subject, academic capital and class background, which exert a similar pre-configuration of the forms of capital for working class men and women.

The dynamic between class of origin and social trajectory introduces a further effect. Elite trajectory working class and lower-middle class graduates (men and women) tend to assume liberal political dispositions and be oriented to graduate careers in the public or third-sector. This reflects their particular composition of capital as such individuals are over-selected educationally-speaking and tend to have a close relationship to the education system. As such, whilst gender is a significant facet, further work is required to untangle the relationship between social origin, trajectory, schooling, gender and the disposition to the labour market.

8.7 Limitations to the Study

Readers of this thesis will likely have their own critique and there is much to critique to be sure, but let me pre-empt a couple. The focus on social class is controversial for some, and although I have tried to assuage those who would argue that class doesn't matter, I agree with Charlesworth (2004) and Gilfillan (2009); class is an ontological question which is rarely reflexively considered. Where we come from does matter, where we grow up and under what circumstances positions us, without us ever being fully, reflexively aware of how, because we know nothing else and so take it as granted. This to me is the fundamental point of class positioning.

That said the focus on class leaves other considerations aside. Fellow researchers have criticised the absence of an overt consideration of gender, sexuality, masculinity, and all other subjectivist divisions. I do not choose to exclude these from the focus of research however there was not the space in this thesis to do these considerations justice and other researchers have already highlighted some of the concerns (such as Smetherham, 2006). Further research might elucidate the nuances of gender and sexuality, as they matter within and between class-groups, and this would certainly help deepen our understanding of how individual biographies intersect with labour market outcomes.

Another important short-coming of this thesis is its focus on a relatively limited sample. Further research would need to broaden the base of respondents, so as to produce a representative sample of class groups across higher education, and the introduction of the

social class question into the Destination of Leavers of Higher Education (DLHE) survey may just produce that statistical base. Along with class data released by the Civil Service Fast Stream and the possibility that corporate contractors to the public sector will be asked to capture and release such data it is an interesting time to be researching social class and the graduate labour market.

In following the experiences of disparate groups, and in trying to understand the impulses and motivations that drove them, by putting oneself in the shoes of others, I tried to understand something of the lives of others. I have tried to present an authentic, genuine academic account of the field.

8.8 Future Research

This study has attempted to shed light on the processes through which social class becomes significant in relation to graduate labour market outcomes. It fails to live up to the original expectations of the researcher in innumerable ways, but alas this is the fate of all research that is close to our heart. There are two particular areas in which I would have liked to see this explorative research expanded but for which I did not have the time.

Firstly, there is a need to create a statistical base to this research. Statistics on the social class background of students are hampered by the extent of the missing data, whilst statistics on the social class background *and* labour market destinations of graduates are to date relatively non-existent. The DLHE provides information about graduate destinations according to subject and institution, but there is no built-in capacity for tracing social origin. Moreover, the statistical data provided by the DLHE does not allow us to accurately trace the graduate labour market: more information is required on the salaries, benefits, responsibilities and career progression of graduates so that a more sophisticated analysis of graduate destinations can be established and in 2012 there is a trial question being introduced to the DLHE on social class.

A further related point concerns the nature of the graduate labour market. Whilst I have attempted to provide a bottom-up snapshot of the graduate labour market as it emerged through this study, data on the social class and educational background of applicants and entrants to different occupations and organisations would allow us to statistically construct

the graduate labour market. This would be an attempt to objectively construct the social relations immanent to the graduate labour market, allow us to trace the relationship between social origin and graduate destinations, and so understand the objective nature of social mobility in modern Britain: a true exercise of reflexive sociology.

This statistical base would also necessitate the need for a longitudinal study, tracing the labour market experiences of individuals from different backgrounds beyond the initial transition to the labour market and throughout their careers. Such a study might show how early social advantage becomes more or less important with time, how social advantage is passed onto the next generation and how social mobility varies by industry, geographic region and social grouping. This would deepen our understanding of social mobility and reduce our current myopia around the graduate labour market.

There are natural limitations to any study, and the PhD is no exception. Whilst three years seems like a long time to study one area of interest, it is naturally bound by the human limits of time, energy and of course money. Moreover, as an 'apprenticeship', time spent 'in the field', researching, is inhibited by the time spent reading, and discerning the academic limits and arguments already present within the field. As such, this thesis is not, and cannot possibly be the final word on social class and graduates. However, it does build on the prior academic literature, extending the field somewhat, and opens up a range of future research possibilities.

8.9 Policy Implications

The Widening Participation agenda has served the interests of higher education as a whole and unlike the Fair Access agenda it is value neutral in relation to the different types of institutions. Moreover, many in policy circles accept that Widening Participation ought to be a central plank of any government's attempt to raise social mobility. By comparison, the Fair Access concept has proved to be divisive. Fair Access focuses its attentions on structurally disadvantaged groups but it focuses on their ability to access selective, research-intensive universities rather than higher education *per se*. The belief is that access to selective universities is unfairly weighted against non-traditional groups, such as the working class,

and that access is crucial to promoting social mobility, especially into the professions.[32] It emerged as a serious public policy concern during the Laura Spence affair in 2000.

The suggestion that we might have fair access without widening participation has been seen as a challenge to the higher education industry and Post-1992 universities in particular. Institutional actors have responded accordingly. For instance, in 2009 Universities UK argued: "Widening participation forms a key part of Government policy but it still appears that in public debate the focus is on the issue of fair access…We would urge Government to focus on the wider context" (Universities UK written Evidence to IUSS Select Committee, 20th July 2009). However, the two policies are not necessarily incompatible and the Milburn Commission (2009) asserted as much; the suggestion was that both wider access and fairer access were needed if social mobility is to be stimulated through education, which is not strictly true. Whilst fair access is imperfect this study has shown the value of accessing elite universities to working class graduates. By way of contrast, the labour market value of widening participation may not be in realising traditional graduate occupations for all but in helping avoid devaluation as A-levels become increasingly ubiquitous.

Both the fair access and widening participation agendas rest on the belief that education is a route to social mobility but by treating employability as a supply-side issue, they both fail to adequately address the realities of labour market competition. Widening participation in particular, is guilty of embracing the consensus view of employability. With assertions such as the following typical: "The increasing profile of widening participation…can only lead to benefits for those from disadvantaged groups" (Submission by HEFCE to the Education and Skills Select Committee 'Inquiries into Higher Education' 9th January 2007). Whilst it is difficult, from a social justice perspective, to dispute the sentiment of this statement, it imposes an experience that is not necessarily that of the groups Widening Participation is intended to benefit.

[32] The Sutton Trust has been one of the more vocal advocates of the fair access agenda and has been dubbed a 'trail-blazer' in the policy field (Westminster Hall Debates, 5/11/08). Supporters include Barry Sheerman, the last Chairman of the abolished Education & Skills Select Committee, and now Chairman of the Children, Schools and Families Select Committee, who counts Sir Peter Lampl, Chairman of the Sutton Trust, a personal friend. Sir Martin Harris, who was until recently at the head of the Office For Fair Admissions (OFFA), an influential quasi-autonomous government organisation, is of course an important advocate of the fair access agenda, and Alan Milburn, the coalition government's 'Social Mobility tsar' has many sympathies with the fair access argument.

The Widening Participation agenda problematises the nature of higher education participation, asserting it as a universal social aim. In reality, the decision to access higher education is fraught with indirect economic, social and cultural costs that the policy agenda tends to miss. For students from working class backgrounds the economic and labour market benefits of a degree tend to be mitigated by a lack of social and cultural capital, leading to lower economic returns and higher levels of under-employment (Pitcher & Purcell, 1998; Furlong & Cartmel, 2005; Smetherham, 2006; Boden & Nedeva, 2010). There is evidence to suggest that Widening Participation has benefited the middle classes more than the working classes which ought to be troubling to those promoting Widening Participation for social justice reasons (Callender, 2004; Reay, 2005).

At first glance, the Fair Access agenda seems to be well grounded and much better versed in the realities of graduate labour market competition than the widening participation agenda. Echoing the arguments made by positional conflict theory, it is argued that degrees from prestigious, research-intensive universities are catalysts of social mobility because they provide the holder with scarce reputational capital, giving them a competitive edge in the graduate labour market. For instance, the Sutton Trust identify significant institutional and social barriers to knowledge, with one survey showing that 51% of state educated students believed there was no difference in earnings between HEIs, compared to 35% of students from independent schools, and 68% of poorer students compared to 38% of better-off students (Sutton Trust, 2008). We see a similar dispersion of understanding amongst the different class groups in this study, with working class graduates less likely to appreciate the nuances in earnings potential. The Sutton Trust argues that raising attainment and awareness will improve social mobility amongst the most disadvantaged students. However, as with the widening participation agenda, there is little appreciation of how going to university actually improves employability, except that the degree creates opportunities.

There are clearly issues with this conception of employability but the fair access agenda does touch upon an interesting phenomenon. As we have found in this research working class graduates of elite universities are, generally, more employable in relation to prestigious graduate employers than modal trajectory working class graduates. These differences in employability do not simply end at the 'reputational capital' of the degree (Smetherham, 2006). Elite trajectory working class students benefit from research-intensive universities because of the social proximity it gives them to middle class students. The networks that they

forge at university provide them with readily accessible social capital, and social proximity to the middle classes encourages the inculcation of a normative, behavioural paradigm (Brown & Scase, 1994). That is, elite trajectory working class students adopt 'middle class' aspirations in relation to the graduate labour market and are able to realise them because of the inculcation of middle class ways of being and doing, which allow them to be recognised vis-à-vis the recruitment criteria of the graduate labour market. Social mobility in relation to the professions is thus contingent upon the acquisition of middle class ways of being and doing, which is not equally probable for all working class undergraduates at all universities.

There is a dilemma for government in that students from working class backgrounds are already over-selected in relation to university access. To match the proportion of students from the wealthiest backgrounds at the elite universities we would need to increase the number of working class students entering these institutions seven-fold (Harris, 2010) and on the most selective courses, like medicine, we would need thirty to forty times the current number. Educational driven policies will never overhaul social mobility so long as entrenched social inequalities exist, as the Russell Group argued: "you cannot solve decades of socio-economic inequality in this country by simply widening the gates of admissions to universities".[33] The nature of positional conflict theory is that powerful social groups deploy resources to ensure the successful transfer of social position to their offspring and even as the government has committed resources to widening participation, the most advantaged in society have tightened their grip on the most selective universities whilst investing greater time and money to maintain labour market dominance.

The problem facing students from lower socio-economic groups is whether to access university and incur the debt and deferred earnings associated with a degree without any guarantee of recouping benefits in the future, or to forego the degree in search of employment. Without a degree individuals are consigned to areas of the labour market that are ever more devalued, especially as more occupations become graduate-entry only.[34] However, the degree is no guarantee of future employment and may incur long-term costs if

[33] Quoted in the Innovation, Universities, Science and Skills Committee's "Eleventh Report : Students and Universities" 20th July 2009

[34] The extent to which the colonization of occupations by graduates has displaced non-graduates is unclear, which should make us question the extent to which the graduate premium is based upon falling or stagnant wages for non-graduates. As such, the current measures of the graduate premium might conceal inflationary pressures on graduate earnings. Brown *et al*., (2011) found that modal earnings for college graduates in the US had not increased in real terms for thirty years, despite an increase in the earnings premium for college graduates compared to high-school graduates.

an appropriate job cannot be found. Given fee rises, more students may question the validity of pursuing a degree and under such conditions, work-based degrees, such as those offered to school-leavers, may become more attractive to students and if this sector of the labour market were to expand it may mark a new era in higher education.

There is a further issue here that has been paid scant attention. The state support for social mobility gives tacit approval to the cultural and economic practices of the dominant social groups in society. That graduates should move to where there are jobs is seen to be axiomatic, yet the effect is to institute an internal 'brain drain' from the regions to the south-east of England; were this to occur across national borders we would be accused of poaching talent. The pressure being brought to bear on the professions by the Social Mobility Taskforce may undermine the ability of the privately-educated, upper-middle classes to impose the 'legitimate principle of their own legitimation', opening up the City professions to greater competition and transparency. However, social and cultural boundaries have a tendency to trace economic boundaries and so disrupting the tendency toward social homogenisation in our elite universities has to be part of the effort to raise social mobility across society. That said the real issue facing government is whether it can stimulate demand for graduates outside of the South-East, without tying them into the public purse and without acting as a vehicle for class interests in the process.

The commitment to social mobility and the meritocracy is a laudable aim for both government and higher education. However, by treating employability as a supply-side issue, higher education policy misconstrues the nature of employability in the graduate labour market. As a consequence, the Widening Participation agenda is unable to appreciate the significant labour market barriers to graduates from lower socio-economic groups and thus their reluctance to embrace higher education. As the Fair Access agenda does not possess an adequate conceptualisation of employability, the government's ability to promote social mobility through education will remain limited. Furthermore, there is the danger that in pursuing policies to promote social mobility we are extending market principles of competition to protected social enclaves, uprooting and supplanting the culture of working class communities.

8.10 Implications for Employers

The global recession has triggered a number of interesting developments in the graduate labour market. A particularly interesting development has been the rise of work-based degrees amongst some of the more prestigious graduate employers. KPMG was the first of the big-four accountancy firms to announce a school leavers' programme starting in September 2011. Initially, this programme will take on 75 students, who will complete a six-year programme during which they will secure both a degree and a chartered accountancy qualification. In addition, participants will start on a salary of around £20,000 per year, combining work and study in six month blocks. It is hoped that this scheme will enrol 400 students, replacing almost half of the usual graduate intake and diversifying the nature of its intake. PWC, Deloitte, Grant Thornton and Ernst & Young have all followed suit in 2011 under similar conditions to KPMG's. This is significant, as alongside Teach First, the big four accountancy firms recruit the largest number of graduates in the UK each year. The shift toward school-leavers represents a trend seen in other professions.

The legal profession is a classic example of rapid credential inflation and overt class discrimination. For instance, it has been estimated that 55% of law graduates are 'under-employed' in non-graduate jobs (CEBR, 2011). In recent years, entry requirements to paralegal and legal secretary positions have increased rapidly such that many now require a law degree, if not an additional post-graduate qualification. In a recent online poll, two thirds of Law graduates said that they wouldn't have taken the LPC had they known how few training contracts existed (The Law Society, 2011). Outside of Oxbridge/Durham/UCL, only a minority of graduates progress to a law training contract; the majority end up in paralegal/legal secretary roles, or exit the profession altogether. However, in 2011 a number of firms, including the national firm Irwin Mitchell's, announced partnerships with ILEX, who offer part-time courses alongside legal work, to provide entry into the legal profession. It is doubtful whether City firms will follow suit, given that many secure work based on the prestige associated with recruiting graduates from prestigious universities (Ashley, 2010), but for students who would otherwise have chosen a BA in Law at a Post-1992 University, these partnerships offer a very competitive package, especially when faced with four years of study now costing more than £30,000.

This trend toward recruiting more school-leavers may not lead to the replacement of graduate training schemes but it certainly reflects growing anxiety about the value of a degree and a willingness on the behalf of employers to offer an alternative to university. A recent poll of 500 leading UK employers in accounting and finance found that 35% planned to recruit more school leavers in the future, compared to only 14% wanting to recruit more graduates (AAT, 2011). This reflects research by the Association of Graduate Recruiters (AGR), which found that 27.3% of the leading 200 graduate employers offer school leaver programmes with a further 18.5% considering school leaver programmes, an increase of a third on 2010 (The Telegraph, 2011). Whilst a degree grants access to areas of the labour market that would otherwise be unassailable, it tends to do so only to the extent that the graduate labour market demands the degree credential. It is not yet clear how these school-leaver schemes will change the face of graduate recruitment but they represent a potentially significant development. Work-based degrees, such as that now being offered by Pearson Publishing, may prove a popular way of mitigating the risk of investing in education and training, benefiting both students and employers.

8.11 University Fees and the Implications for Students

In terms of social justice, the expansion of higher education to non-traditional groups has not democratised the risks associated with the investment in a degree. The middle and upper-middle classes have re-focused their participation on the most prestigious institutions (Harris, 2010). This educational strategy is not without precedent (Power & Whitty, 2008) as it mitigates the risk of pursuing a degree; prestigious universities act as safe-havens and we see similar strategies in relation to the subjects chosen by different class groups.[35] By pursuing such educational strategies the middle and upper-middle classes have been able to insulate themselves against the inflationary pressures being exerted on the degree credential. Indeed, it is part of a broader strategy of risk-management, which condemns those who are least able to manipulate the education system, i.e. by leveraging cultural and economic capital, to the least prestigious and least competitive regions of the higher education system.

[35] Proportionally, students from class I are 580% more likely to access Medicine and Dentistry than students from class V (50% more in physical sciences, 80% more in Engineering, 85% more in Architecture). Students from class V are 50% more likely to take on a creative arts and design course, 10% more likely to access business and admin courses (at the least prestigious universities this may be much higher), 115% more likely to choose education, 30% more likely to choose law and 50% more likely to choose sciences combined with social science (UCAS statistics, 2006).

Whilst the global recession led to record levels of graduate unemployment and under-employment, many of the respondents at the Elite University were able to quip that one had to wonder what recession? Although it was clear that competition for corporate and City jobs was more intense than in previous years, the restricted supply of jobs had visited devaluation on those least able to insulate themselves against competitive pressures i.e. graduates from higher-ranked but not elite universities, and graduates without valuable work experience. Elite University acted as an institutional enclave, sheltering its graduates from the worst vestiges of the global recession. Coupled with the intensified pursuit of work experience and CV-building activities by middle and upper-middle class students, the burden of risk was effectively displaced onto other students in higher education. Cuts to recruitment budgets meant a narrowing of recruitment activities to a few core universities, as more firms only recruited "safe bets", and anecdotal evidence suggests that many City lay-offs adversely affected non-Oxbridge employees, as companies sought to reposition themselves to gain a reputational advantage. In other words, the recession accentuated the social and institutional differences between graduates, as evident in the inequitable distribution of risk and reward within the graduate population. Andrew Mellon, a millionaire and US Treasury Secretary during the Great Depression, once observed, in a depression 'assets return to their rightful owners', suggesting that the wealthy re-assert their dominance when all other social groups suffer.

If the educational and labour market strategies of middle and upper-middle class graduates can be seen as defensive, risk-management strategies, as they seek to defend and reproduce their social position, then the strategies of working class and lower-middle class graduates can also be seen as risk-management strategies. This is not to argue that these strategies reflect conscious intent; they are practical, discursive strategies that emerge from a practically-situated sense. The decision to stay close to home, to attend a local university, to work part-time, to invest time in home friends and family rather than university friends, are part of a broader social insurance policy that offers practical and material support to working class and lower-middle class students. That is, because they lack the social and cultural capital to be assured of a labour market return on their investment in education, they are less likely to commit to the university culture. Academic investments are prioritised over and above social investments because academic credentials are a store of long-term value, whereas social networks need continual work and re-investment; the adoption of a ceaseless effort of sociability which is rooted in common access to economic, social and cultural forms

of capital. As such, whilst it may appear that their practices are counter-intuitive and antithetical to their employability these actions are social insurance policies, through which they insulate themselves from the worst vestiges of a volatile labour market.

The assertion that individuals are responsible for their own employability thus appears to ignore the significant social, institutional and economic barriers to employability and tends to extend what is a particular social and cultural instance, to the rest of the graduate population. Although a key concern for many students, only a minority of students are explicitly utilitarian in relation to their degree. However, the introduction of top-up fees reiterates human capital assertions, privileges the interests of employers and the economy, and heightens the riskiness of investing in a degree. Unless they are assured of a profitable return, students may be deterred from many years of loan payments, especially if they are likely to find themselves employed in non-graduate but middle-income occupations. As such, more employer-led degrees, and closer ties between students, universities and employers, may allow the financial burden and risk associated with the degree to be shared.

Debt-aversion coupled with higher fees may adversely change the pattern of participation amongst students from working class and lower-middle class backgrounds. It is likely that they will pursue more ascetic lifestyles, living at home for instance, which will undermine the 'social inclusivity' of British universities. As we found with elite trajectory students, social and cultural barriers to employment are often significant, and so the introduction of higher fees may further ossify the social structure, inhibiting social mobility.

8.12 Final Conclusion

This thesis has attempted to analyse the relationship between graduates from different social and educational backgrounds and their early experiences of the graduate labour market. It has focused on the transition from university to the graduate labour market. In doing so, it has been able to model the relationship between the experience of university, social background and early labour market destinations. It has been argued that social class background is durable and informs the university experiences of undergraduates, disposing them to certain social milieus, practices and behaviours which become consequential to graduate labour market outcomes.

By comparing similarities and differences within a disparate group of undergraduates, this research has been able to describe and analyse the consequences of different class and educational backgrounds. It has been argued that class groups tend to share coterminous labour market trajectories partly because class background defines the nature of the experience of university. Thus, it has been asserted that graduate recruitment into the professions favours middle class graduates because they are able to symbolically convert their experiences and practices into legitimate evidence of competence, whilst exerting their market power to accumulate experiences and opportunities necessary to achieve a competitive labour market advantage.

In comparison, educationally-similar graduates from working class backgrounds tend to be less competitive because they are disadvantaged in relation to the economic capital, social networks and opportunities necessary to achieve a competitive labour market position. However, differences in graduate labour market outcomes are not simply direct expressions of social and economic capital they are more nuanced expressions intimately tied into the self-identity of graduates, their understanding of the graduate labour market and their ability to access the knowledge, experiences and ways of being necessary to achieve a competitive labour market advantage. As such, it has also been shown that different segments of the graduate labour market realise different entry requirements, structurally locating the graduate population vis-à-vis homologous positions in the labour market.

This is not to present a static and incontrovertible account of the relationship between higher education and the graduate labour market. The relationship between social origin and labour market destinations is linked to structural differences in the ability of different groups to challenge for competitive graduate positions. However, whilst superior market power and established social homology make success more likely, there are no guarantees. Social closure is not orchestrated in some grand conspiracy; it occurs as a consequence of the practical strategies of individuals, and given the ambiguous nature of competence and the inefficiencies associated with cultural inheritance, it is no guarantee of social reproduction. However, social fields are durable; entrants to the professions are forced to pay its cultural "admission fee", to grant recognition to the field, which in turn recognises those that recognise it. It is upon this basis that the social mobility of elite trajectory graduates from working class and lower-middle class backgrounds is achieved, but it is also the mechanism through which the majority of graduates from these backgrounds are likewise excluded.

As such, whilst the graduate labour market conceals labour market strategies, attempts to reproduce and challenge the social order, it also conceals the social basis upon which the labour market is established. This operates both with and against dominant social groups, who are unable to rely on their inherited economic, social and cultural wealth, but actually have to bring it to bear alongside academic credentials. Ultimately, the notion of legitimate competence is not free from challenge and by attempting to legitimate what is always particular, through the 'symbolic universalization of particular interests' (Bourdieu, 1998: 389), dominant social groups unwittingly advance the universal.

Inevitably, successful labour market strategies are emulated and reproduced, forcing the dominant to extend their strategies of class reproduction to ever more circuitous lengths or to defend the strategies by which they reproduce their social advantages. These strategies become less efficacious as they are revealed and as more of the dominated class fractions challenge the social order by emulating the practices of the dominant. When strategies of legitimation become inefficient, dominant social fractions may support more direct "calls to order" which risk exposing the class interests of the dominant but which, if successful, institute a fresh round of social closure. It is through this lens that we must understand higher education and the graduate labour market, so that we might appreciate the interests at stake and understand how educational policy more or less serves the interests of different constituencies.

Appendices

Appendix 1: Interviewee information sheet pre-interview

Participation information sheet

Researching experiences of the Graduate Labour Market

I have invited you to take part in my research as a finalist preparing to enter the graduate labour market. Before you commit to this research please read the following information concerning the research and I will answer any questions that you may have. If you are happy with this research I will ask you to complete a consent form and we can begin the interview.

Who am I?

Daniel Gordon, a PhD student in the School of Social Sciences at Cardiff University. I am being supervised by two members of the School of Social Sciences, a Professor and a lecturer. The research is being funded by the Economic and Social Research Council through a PhD studentship. If you have any further questions feel free to ask or contact me later on GordonDA@cf.ac.uk

Why am I doing this research?

The Labour government plans to increase the proportion of young people going into university and as schools and colleges are incentivised to recommend university to their students it is important to understand how graduates experience the labour market after university. I am interested in this research because I am from an area where people do not traditionally go to university and I would like to find out whether non-traditional students fare as well as traditional students in the graduate labour market.

Who is taking part?

I am conducting interviews at three universities differently ranked in the university league table. A sample of twenty to thirty is being drawn from each, with a similar sample of students from non-traditional and traditional backgrounds.

What is involved?

Initially, I will carry out an interview lasting between 45 minutes and an hour. I would like to find out about your activities and experiences of university, your future plans and how you have decided upon them. I will follow this interview up in around a year's time to find out how you have experienced the initial experience of the labour market. This will likely be a survey or a short (15 minute) telephone interview.

What will be done with the information?

The interviews will be transcribed and used as data in my thesis. They will be read and used only by myself. I may use extended quotes from the interviews to inform the PhD. Some of these transcripts may contribute toward academic articles and you are more than welcome to see any of my work before it is published, just ask.

You are free to withdraw from this project at any time, without giving a reason.

All data will be kept secure; you will not be identifiable in the research; names will be changed.

Appendix 2: Consent form for student interviewees

Cardiff University
Cardiff School of Social Sciences
Glamorgan Building
King Edward VII Avenue
Cardiff CF10 3WT

Consent Form

'Careers and recruitment in the graduate labour market'

Name of Researcher Daniel Gordon

	Please initial
1. I confirm that I have read and understood the information sheets enclosed and had any questions about the research answered to my satisfaction	
2. I give my consent to take part in the study and understand that I can withdraw from the research at any time	
3. I understand that the data from this research will be used for three things: 1. PhD thesis 2. Academic research papers and presentations 3. A summary report to be circulated to all interested participants or other interested parties.	

Name of person participating in study……(Print name)

Signature……Date……
Name of researcher……(Print name)

Signature of above……Date……

Appendix 3: Flyer advertising research at select university

Finalists – earn £10/hour discussing your career plans!

I am a PhD researcher at Cardiff University researching the impact of the economic downturn on the career choices and opportunities of those about to graduate.

The interviews that I am conducting will focus on your experience of university and perception of the graduate labour market and how it has affected your career-decisions. I am also interested in your experience of applying for jobs, whether you have decided to pursue further study or take a year out and your reasons for your decisions.

I am in and around the University over the next couple of weeks interviewing finalists from all schools – if you would like to participate, or find out further details, please contact me on:

Email: GordonDA@cf.ac.uk
Mobile: 07834268756

Thanks,

Daniel Gordon

Career interviews Daniel Gordon GordonDA@cf.ac.uk 07834268756	Career interviews Daniel Gordon GordonDA@cf.ac.uk 07834268756	Career interviews Daniel Gordon GordonDA@cf.ac.uk 07834268756	Career interviews Daniel Gordon GordonDA@cf.ac.uk 07834268756	Career interviews Daniel Gordon GordonDA@cf.ac.uk 07834268756

Appendix 4: Interview schedule for student interviews

Interview Schedule

- **Outline university experience, extra-curricular experiences, work experience, travelling and family-based opportunities that impinge upon career planning and probability of success in job market**
- **Identify future plans and examine decision-making process**
- **Identify social and cultural markers of origin in social space and trajectory**

1. **University and subject choices**
    a. When and why did you decide to go to university?
    b. What do you expect to get out of having a degree? Job? Money? Security? Just enjoyment?
2. **University life**
    a. How many hours each week were you studying? Reading alone? In libraries? Lectures/seminars?
    b. Other than study what have you done at university?
        i. Extra-curricular? Volunteer activities?
        ii. Sports? Clubs? What sports? Level? Position?
            1. Do you regularly practice any sports?
            2. Do you regularly practice any musical instruments? Have any competence in music? Singing?
        iii. Societies?
            1. What position did you achieve? What did you actually do?
        iv. Student politics?
            1. Do you belong to any political party? Trade union?
    c. Have you done/expect to do any travelling?
        i. If so, where? When?
    d. Have you had any work experience whilst at university?
    e. Did you work part-time?
    f. Have you done any unpaid work experience?
    g. Have you done any internships? Did you apply for any internships?
    h. Did you do anything explicitly to add CV points? Did you have any idea what graduate recruiters were looking for, apart from a degree?
        i. Academic credentials enough?
        ii. Do you need lots of extra-curricular activities?
        iii. Need to know the right people? Internships?
        iv. Specific to your chosen career? How do you get on? Have an advantage?
3. **Future plans**
    a. Have you made any job applications?
        i. Were you invited to interview/recruitment centre?
        ii. What was it like? Where were the other applicants from?
        iii. How do you think you did in the interview/exercises?
        iv. What were the recruiters looking for do you think?
    b. Why did you apply for these jobs? (Alternate according to career choice – if Accountancy why/why not a leading firm, if Law why/why not a Magic Circle law firm, if Teaching why/why not Teach First/GTP, if retail/civil service why/why not graduate management/Fast Stream?)
    c. What influenced you when applying for jobs? OR Why did you apply for the postgraduate course?

i. What are your friends' plans after graduating? (5 closest – 40 interviewees x 5 friends = 200 sample)
ii. Did your parents advise you on careers? How?

4. **Social background**
   a. What occupations do your parents do?
   b. Did they go to university? What was their highest educational qualification?
   c. Did their parents go to university? What did they do for a living, if you know?
   d. Do your parents own their own homes? Rent?
   e. What did you do for A-level? Why did you choose these A-levels?
   f. (If not already known) What school did you go to?
   g. Where did other people from your school go to university? How many went on to university? Types of universities?
   h. Do you know what they're going to do after graduating?
   i. Did you work during A-levels? Where?
   j. Are you interested in the business world?
   k. Are you interested in foreign affairs?
   l. Are you interested in politics?
   m. What political tradition would you most closely align yourself with?
      i. Do you think the involvement of the business world in politics is too much, not enough, or about right? Don't know?
      ii. Do you think the involvement of the business world in education is about right, too much, not enough? Don't know?
   n. Do you read newspapers regularly? Which one?
   o. What type of music are you interested in?
   p. What do you think success in life depends mostly on? i.e. hard work, social background, intelligence, education, don't know?

Appendix 5: Interviewee profiles

Appendix 5.1: Middle class graduates with private sector destination

Pseudonym	School type	University	Degree subject	Father's occupation	Mother's occupation	Labour market destination
Alan	Private	Elite	Soft science	Lawyer	Housewife	Corporate Law (Magic circle)
Charlie	Grammar	Elite	Hard science	Partner in Accountancy	Medical Secretary	Banking, Equity analyst
James	Grammar	Elite	Vocational	Actor	Admin. Family business	Management Consultant
Louise	Private	Elite	Hard science	Journalist	PA	Strategy Consultant
Lara	Grammar	Elite	Soft science	Partner in Law firm	Physiotherapist	Strategy Consultant
Mike	State	Elite	Vocational	Economist	Housewife	Corporate Law (Magic circle)
Mona	State	Elite	Soft science	Solicitor	GP	Corporate Law (Magic circle)
Ryan	State	Elite	Soft science	Accountant	Accountant	Accountancy trainee
Thomas	Private	Elite	Hard science	QC	Housewife	Management Consultant
Ally	State	Elite	Soft science	Self-employed business	Accountant	Consultant/ researcher
Andrew	Grammar	Elite	Soft science	Senior Manager (HR)	Primary school teacher	Corporate Law (Magic circle)
Emma	Private	Elite	Soft science	Finance Director	Speech therapist	Strategy Consultant
James	Private	Elite	Soft science	Senior business Manager	Primary school head teacher	Strategy Consultant
Camilla	Private	Elite	Soft science	Stockbroker	Housewife	City PA
Liam	Grammar	Elite	Soft science	Senior investment banker	Housewife	Investment bank analyst
Nicholas	Private	Elite	Soft science	Marketing Director	TV Producer	Strategy Consultant
Rob	Grammar	Elite	Soft science	Large business owner	Insurance broker	Corporate Law (Magic circle)
Simon	Private	Elite	Soft science	Director of a bank	Secondary school teacher	Marketing graduate (corporate)
Timothy	Private	Elite	Hard science	Senior Corporate manager	Housewife	Software developer
William	Private	Russell Group	Hard science	Engineering manager	Teaching assistant	Bond trader
Simon	Private	Russell Group	Vocational	Accountant	HE lecturer accountant	Auctioneer
James	State	Russell Group	Soft science	Engineer	Lab assistant	Graduate trainee
Adam	Private	Russell Group	Vocational	Large business owner	Large business owner	Corporate Law (Magic circle)
Katie	State	Russell Group	Hard science	Quantity Surveyor	Director of Private	Graduate trainee

					Education College	(nuclear)
Louise	Private	Russell Group	Vocational	Large business owner	Accountant	Marketing graduate role
Pete	State	Russell Group	Hard science	Managing Director engineering	Secondary school teacher	Graduate trainee engineering
Charlie	State	Russell Group	Soft science	Business owner	Secretary	Legal intern
Louise	State	Russell Group	Soft science	Conservationist	Aromatherapist	Sustainability engineer
Stuart	State	Russell Group	Vocational	Property developer	Housewife	Corporate Law (LPC)
Shaun	Private	Russell Group	Vocational	HE Lecturer	Bank clerk	Commercial Law (region)
Tess	Private	Russell Group	Vocational	NCO army	Nursing home manager	Accountant
Mike	Grammar	Post-1992	Vocational	Small business owner	Bank manager	Pensions Administrator
Ollie	State	Post-1992	Vocational	Business owner	Small business owner	Design Engineer
Katrina	State	Post-1992	Vocational	Medium business owner	Office supervisor	HR graduate position
Yvonne	State	Post-1992	Vocational	Medium business owner	Housewife	Customer Service scheme in banking
David	Grammar	Post-1992	Hard science	Greenkeeper	Accountant	Graduate scheme
Francesca	Grammar	Post-1992	Vocational	Quantity Surveyor	Childrens home manager	Administrator
Helen	Grammar	Post-1992	Hard science	Dentist	Hairdresser	Non-grad engineer
Mary	State	Post-1992	Soft science	Corporate manager	Teacher	Customer service banking

Appendix 5.2: Middle class graduates with public sector destination

Pseudonym	School type	University	Degree subject	Father's occupation	Mother's occupation	Labour market destination
David	State	Elite	Vocational	Journalist	Charity manager	Charity researcher
Rachel	Private	Elite	Soft science	Inventor	TV Producer	Civil Service Fast Stream
Helen	Private	Elite	Soft science	Engineer	Manager NHS	Graduate Music college
Becky	State	Elite	Soft science	Publishing manager	Housewife	PhD
Alan	Private	Elite	Soft science	Senior civil servant	Housewife	Int. Development Masters
Emma	Grammar	Elite	Soft science	Private tutor	School teacher / tutor	English school teacher
Harriet	State	Elite	Soft science	Secondary school teacher	Housewife	IELTS teacher
Kelly	Private	Elite	Soft science	Deputy Headteacher	Teacher	TV runner
Kristy	Grammar	Elite	Hard science	Surgeon	GP	Fast track medicine
Ryan	Private	Elite	Soft science	Senior civil servant	Teacher	Teach First
Susan	State	Elite	Soft science	Snr Hospital management	HE Lecturer	PhD / Civil Service Fast Stream
Hattie	State	Russell Group	Soft science	Small business owner	HE Lecturer	PhD – social science
Sarah	State	Russell Group	Soft science	Accountant	Accountant	Secondary school teaching - PGCE
Ashley	State	Russell Group	Soft science	Small business owner	Small business owner	Speech therapist course
Kath	State	Russell Group	Hard science	Managing Director (Insurance)	Primary school teacher	PhD – Astrophysics
Katie	State	Russell Group	Soft science	Manager - Automobiles	Office manager	Work experience SEN kids
Rachel	State	Russell Group	Hard science	CEO Engineering	Pharmacist	Archaeological digs
Emma	State	Russell Group	Soft science	Deputy headteacher	Nurse	Researcher at think-tank
Sarah	State	Russell Group	Soft science	Civil Servant	School activity leader	Civil Servant
James	State	Russell Group	Hard science	Civil Servant	Lab technician	PGCE
Victoria	State	Post-1992	Soft science	Manager bank	Hospital administrator	Secondary school – PGCE

Sophie	State	Post-1992	Soft science	Civil engineer	Housewife	Proofreader / Masters
Dan	State	Post-1992	Soft science	Council manager	HOD Secondary school teacher	Temporary job – child development
Kelly	State	Post-1992	Soft science	Army chaplain	Nurse	Teacher – PGCE
Mike	State	Post-1992	Vocational	Teacher	Teacher	Teacher - PGCE

Appendix 5.3: Elite trajectory working class graduates

Pseudonym	School type	University	Degree subject	Father's occupation	Mother's occupation	Labour market destination
Edward	Grammar	Elite	Soft science	Chef	Childcare assistant	Teach First
Fred	State	Elite	Hard science	Painter	Lettings agency	PhD Research
Felicity	Grammar	Elite	Hard science	Antique restorer	Book-keeper	TV Production
Helen	State	Elite	Hard science	-	HR Admin NHS	Medicine fast track scheme
Susan	State	Elite	Soft science	Technician	County council	Teaching
David	State	Elite	Soft science	Entertainer	Old people carer	Commercial Law
Nathan	Private	Elite	Soft science	NCO RAF	College admin	Legal pathway – year out
Dean	State	Russell Group	Vocational	Joiner	Hair-dresser	Paralegal
Sarah	State	Russell Group	Soft science	Community worker	Cook	Sustainable development
Michelle	Grammar	Russell Group	Vocational	Estate supervisor	Teaching assistant	Paralegal
Jayne	State	Russell Group	Soft science	PC technician	Care home assistant	Sales assistant
Lulu	State	Russell Group	Hard science	Retired miner	Literacy assistant	PhD
Mark	State	Russell Group	Vocational	Taxi driver	Cleaner	Commercial Law LPC
Kelly	State	Russell Group	Vocational	Factory worker	Receptionist	Paralegal
Jamie	State	Russell Group	Vocational	Roofer	Administrator	LPC – Paralegal
Rebecca	State	Russell Group	Soft science	Fire officer	Housewife	Marketing assistant
Katie	State	Russell Group	Hard science	Support worker	Secretary	Purchasing assistant

Appendix 5.4: Modal trajectory working class graduates

Pseudonym	School type	University	Degree subject	Father's occupation	Mother's occupation	Labour market destination
Christopher	State	Russell Group	Soft Science	Plasterer	Nurse	PGCE – Secondary Teacher
Katie	State	Russell Group	Soft Science	Postman	Teaching Assistant	Recruitment consultant
Helen	State	Russell Group	Vocational	Self employed	Self employed	Training coordinator
Charlie	State	Russell Group	Hard Science	Unemployed	Unemployed	Re-sitting exams / shop work
Christine	State	Russell Group	Hard Science	NCO fire service	Shop worker	Temping
Susan	Private	Russell Group	Soft Science	Construction site supervisor	Nurse	Sales assistant
Ellen	State	Russell Group	Soft Science	Mechanic	Receptionist	Unemployed
Louise	State	Russell Group	Soft Science	-	Cleaner	Monitoring assistant
Sam	State	Russell Group	Hard Science	Skilled manual technician	Taxi driver	Law conversion course / Paralegal
Becks	State	Post-1992	Vocational	Car salesman	Nurse	PGCE
Dean	State	Post-1992	Soft Science	Shop assistant supervisor	Child-minder	Farm labourer
Allie	State	Post-1992	Soft Science	Baker / unemployed	Housewife	Unemployed
Kristy	State	Post-1992	Soft Science	Skilled manual miller	Admin assistant	Beauty writer
Natalie	State	Post-1992	Vocational	Skilled machine operative	Sales assistant	Marketing assistant
Lucy	State	Post-1992	Vocational	-	-	Intern / paralegal
Marcus	State	Post-1992	Vocational	Nurse	Care assistant	Unemployed
Mark	State	Post-1992	Vocational	IT engineer	Call centre worker	Unknown
Stuart	State	Post-1992	Vocational	TV technician	Secretary	Insolvency case administrator
Taruna	State	Post-1992	Vocational	Taxi driver	Housewife	Mortgage administrator
Ian	State	Post-1992	Vocational	Fitter	Shop worker	Business support officer
Anna	State	Post-1992	Vocational	Self employed	Bar worker	Unemployed
Gemma	State	Post-1992	Vocational	Mechanic	Housewife	Receptionist

Appendix 5.5 Graduate / non-graduate destinations by social class and university

		Graduate destination	Non-Graduate destination
Middle Class	Elite University	97%	3%
	Russell Group University	81%	19%
	Post-1992 University	54%	46%
Working Class	Elite University	100%	0%
	Russell Group University	26%	74%
	Post-1992 University	15%	85%

Note: Graduate destination defined as graduate-level employment (i.e. requiring a degree) or postgraduate study. Research did not include those planning to take a gap-year.

Appendix 5.6 Occupational destinations by social class and university

		Higher professional/ managerial	Lower professional/ managerial	Intermediate occupations	Routine occupations	Unemployed	Further Study
Middle Class	Elite University	80%	17%	0%	0%	0%	3%
	Russell Group University	67%	5%	19%	0%	0%	10%
	Post-1992 University	23%	46%	31%	0%	0%	0%
Working Class	Elite University	71%	0%	0%	0%	0%	29%
	Russell Group University	11%	42%	11%	26%	5%	5%
	Post-1992 University	8%	25%	25%	17%	25%	0%

Note: Occupations defined against NS-SEC SOC2010. Where higher professional / managerial include most traditional graduate destinations (Graduate trainee accountants, lawyers, bankers, other financial services, consulting, but also civil service, teaching etc.) Lower professional / managerial includes certain para-professional occupations such as paralegal which are not 'traditional' graduate destinations but largely occupied by legal graduates.

Appendix 5.7 Occupational destinations of working class graduates by trajectory

		N	Higher professional/ managerial	Lower professional/ managerial	Intermediate occupations	Routine occupations	Unemployed	Further Study
Elite Trajectory	Elite University	7	71%	0%	0%	0%	0%	29%
	Russell Group University	10	10%	70%	10%	0%	0%	10%
Modal Trajectory	Russell Group University	9	11%	11%	22%	44%	11%	0%
	Post-1992 University	13	8%	25%	25%	17%	25%	0%

Note: Destinations taken 6 months after graduation, derived from follow-up survey.

Appendix 5.8 Sector background and destination of Middle Class Graduates

Parental occupation sector	N	Private Sector	Public Sector
Private Sector	34	85%	15%
Public-Sector	14	0%	100%
Mixed Sector	16	63%	38%

Note: Parental occupation sector defined by equal weighting of father and mother. Mixed refers to cases where parents work in opposing sectors

Appendix 5.9 Sector background and destination of Working Class Graduates

Parental occupation sector	N	Private Sector	Public Sector
Private Sector	24	95%	5%
Public-Sector	5	75%	25%
Mixed	10	50%	50%

Appendix 6: Follow-up survey

1. Please insert your details:
    - Full name
    - Current City/Town
    - Email Address

2. What degree grade did you achieve?

☐ 1st ☐ 2.1 ☐ 2.2 ☐ 3rd ☐ Pass ☐ Fail

3. Which of the following best describes your current situation?

☐ Employed ☐ Paid internship ☐ Unpaid internship ☐ Unemployed

☐ Studying for a Higher Degree ☐ Studying for a Professional Qualification

☐ Studying (Other) ☐ Travelling ☐ Other

4. If you are employed which of the following best describes the type of employment that you are in?

☐ Graduate fast-track scheme ☐ Management graduate role

☐ Professional graduate role ☐ Other graduate role

☐ Non-graduate management/professional ☐ Skilled manual role

☐ Unskilled manual role ☐ Not sure ☐ Other

5. Which of the following categories captures your current annual earnings?

☐ Prefer not to disclose ☐ 0-£9,999 ☐ £10,000 - £14,999

☐ £15,000 - £19,999 ☐ £20,000 - £24,999 ☐ £25,000 - £29,999

☐ £30,000 - £39,999 ☐ £40,000+

6. If you are employed, could you please describe, as fully as possible, the role and responsibilities that you currently have?

7. If you are employed, who is your employer, how big is the organisation and what type of work does it typically perform?

8. If you are studying please describe what you are studying for and where you are studying

9. If you currently have any, what are your plans for the future?

10. What are your closest five friends from university currently doing? (Please give detail e.g. trainee graduate accountant)

11. What are your closest five friends from home, who went to university, currently doing? (If you are not in touch please say so)

12. Looking back, do you think the university could do anything different to help its students be more employable?

13. Looking back, is there anything that you would change about how you approached university or finding a job if you could?

14. As part of this study I would like to analyse CVs in relation to graduate outcomes, would you be willing to submit a CV (at a later point) to help with this research (devoid of personal details)?

15. If it was required would you be willing to be contacted for a short (15-minute) follow-up telephone interview?

☐ Yes ☐ No

16. Is there anything else that you would like to add that you think might be relevant to this research?

Many thanks for your time.

Appendix 7: Example of a Graduate Interviewee Transcript

Becky
Elite University, History and Politics
Civil Service Fast Stream (career aim)
Middle class – mother retired TV producer, father retired RAF pilot/inventor
Both parents university educated (1940s/50s)

[D- Interviewer] Why History and Politics?
[Interviewee] I guess I've always been into history…and I've always been fascinated…chose them because I like them, not through any career choice…I just liked both of them
I've always been interested in news, I've read a newspaper since I was about ten
[D] Really?
[I] So, ya know, I've always followed politics really closely
[D] What type of newspaper?
[I] Well err at the beginning I read what my parents read…what we had in the house, which was the Mail or the Times, so I started off reading the Mail because it had lots of pictures and, as I got older I read the Times, and I still read the Times
[D] So you're very interested in politics?
[I] Yep.
[D] You did A-level History with?
[I] I did erm. Religious studies as a full a level, chemistry as a full a level, biology as an as
I was considering doing biochemistry when I started my a-levels but I realised that I was better at history and more into the history…
[D] Yeah, I see, yeah. Erm…What school did you go to?
[I] Erm.
[D] Was it private? State?
[I] St [inaudible] High School up in a private school in Newcastle
[D] So, when you applied to Elite University, was that a predetermined idea or did you get your AS results and think right I'll go to Elite University?
[I] Ermm…it was after my GCSEs really, I got good GCSEs, you know I was going to get on with my AS's fine and you know it suggested that I would be a good Elite University candidate I thought twice, I went down and had a look, fell in love with the buildings and thought this is really pretty!
[D] Where else did you apply to?
[I] Glasgow, Edinburgh, Durham, Liverpool and York..
[D] Very northern.
[I] Well I am northern, yes [laughs]
[D] But very northern, I'm from Yorkshire and we're the Midlands to your aren't we
[I] Yer Yer [laughs] where in Yorkshire?
[D] South Yorkshire
[I] Lower Midlands
[D] [Laugh] near Rotherham
[I] Oh
[D] north South Yorkshire, I was in Sunderland and somebody called it the Midlands once
[I] It is midlands,
[I] My dad's from Yorkshire he's a Ripon lad that's Yorkshire
[D] Pardon?
[I] My dad's from Ripon, that's Yorkshire
[D] Come on, that's closer to Scotland that and Newcastle!
[D] Why X?
[I] I didn't apply to X
[D] You didn't?
[I] No.
[I] It was, why Y?

[D] Why Y?
[I] I wanted a huge college, I didn't want a tiny college
[D] Did you come down for an open day?
[I] Yeah yeah, I came down for an open day, it will have been the summer of my AS's
[D] Yep
[I] I looked around a load of colleges with a friend and then, like, chose Y, applied there
[D] You got an offer of three A's?
[I] Yep.
[D] Got the three A's?
[I] Yep.
[D] Came here.
[I] Yep.
[D] Okay, right, so what have you done whilst you've been here?
[I] I've rowed, I coxed,
[D] You rowed?
[I] Yeah, for a year. I rowed all my first year. Coxed a bit of my second year.
[D] First team?
[I] No, no. Second… I edited the student newspaper the Elite University paper…
[D] Did you!?
[I] Yeah…I was the secretary of the Elite University media society, I erm, what else have I done?
[D] So. You've rowed in the first year? Yep. You coxed in your second year? Yep. Third year?
[I] Third year, first term I was editor, and during my second year I was features editor and then deputy editor of the paper but also a reporter articles contributor, I was secretary of the Elite University news society, [I] I've done other things as well, what have I done?
[D] That's a lot.
[I] Yep. Oh and one other thing, in the holidays, in my first year in my holidays I did erm work experience at my local paper in Newcastle and I went to Bulgaria to help orphans, I sailed some tall ships from here to Tenerife
[D] Yeah, yeah.
[I] and last summer, and then last Easter, the Easter of my second year I worked for the London paper the Freesheet…for two weeks, and then in the summer I worked at Newsnight for five weeks, ok, and I worked at the News of the World for a month.
[D] For free?
[I] No, I got. I started off at the BBC working for free and then they started to pay me because they wanted me to stay on because they liked me and then at the News of the World I was on a thing called the Murdoch Scholarship which is something Elite University offers.
[D] Ok, yeah.
[I] They give me two hundred pound living allowance for living across London, which is meant to help you out, a week, for three weeks.
[D] That's the Scholarship?
[I] Yeah.
[I] So that covers like…tube travel, just…and not accommodation.
[D] Yeah.
[I] Then they paid me to stay on, a full week which they paid me but then I had to come back to uni.
[D] That's a hell of a lot. So that's down in London, were you down there just now for interviews with them?
[I] Yeah, with the News of the World actually.
[D] So with the News of the World? How's that going?
[I] I got the job.
[D] You got the job?
[I] But I'm not taking it.
[D] What?
[I] I'm taking, I have another job.
[D] Go on…
[I] I have a job at the Civil Service, Fast track.

[D] Yeah, yeah, yeah.
[I] So I'm doing that…instead. I just spent all weekend deciding.
[D] They're like two brilliant jobs.
[I] I know. I felt quite chuffed actually.
[D] Yeah, I can imagine.
[D] So why the Civil service?
[I] Erm…it's weird, its weird actually. Cos ever since I was about eleven I've read the paper and I've always thought I want to be a journalist, I want to be a journalist, this is what I want to do, I want to be a journalist, you know you can tell, I've worked at the student paper, I've done all that work experience…but doing it in actual national news rooms you realise how hard it is and the pressure…you don't really get a life, it's low paid and you don't get a social life
[D] No, no.
[I] But the Civil Service, you still get to be highly political, you still get to use your brain, you're still engaging
[D] You get to be political?
[I] No, no, we get to be politically involved.
[D] Ok.
[I] Engaged in what's going on with the world.
[D] You actually have a real impact? Whereas in the NOTW you're giving your opinions.
[I] Exactly. I applied for jobs in the Times and the Guardian, I didn't get. Which would have been nice. But I didn't get that. And then I got a job in the NOTW and I thought, I'd be tied in for two years, its not that long, it seems an easy length of time, and all of my cuts after that time will be full of big brother contestants and I just thought I may want to move on from tabloids, how would I do that?
[D] It's a hard job to get into surely, the sun and the NOTW?
[I] Well, it's the biggest selling paper in the country. It's a good job to have.
[D] It's much harder to write for the NOTW or the Sun than the Times?
[I] Yeah, but the Times didn't give me a job so…I don't know…I tend to keep myself busy.
[D] Did the internship in the NOTW, did that come into play when you went for the job?
[I] Yeah, obviously.
[D] Did you apply for a certain area in that?
[I] I applied for the graduate scheme, they take one person a year.
[D] One person a year. And you turned it down, wow.
[I] It was a big decision, as you can imagine, I've spent plenty of time thinking about it the last few days. I only turned it down on Tuesday.
[D] And what did they say?
[I] They were ok, I felt really bad, but the guy who interviewed me, I had interviews with the editor as well and stuff like that, but the guy who mainly interviewed me, that's why I was late last week, I had to be back at two but they asked me to stay on to meet the deputy editor, the editor…
[D] So when you went along, the original Murdoch scholarship, they offer one of them?
[I] No they offer four, five I think. They're different papers within the Murdoch state, the Times, the Sunday Times.
[D] So presumably its really competitive?
[I] Well its only, it is competitive, but its less competitive than other things in the real world, because its only open to Elite University students
[D] Yeah, yeah.
[I] So you submit your cuttings that you've done, and like a little statementy thing saying why you want to be a Murdoch scholar
[D] Okay.
[I] And there's a panel which includes people from his Empire and erm like Elite University Professory people.
[D] Ok.
[I] And its them who choose.
[D] Ok, I see. So you've written for the Student Newspaper? You were the editor. Does that take up a lot of time.
[I] Yeah, a lot.

[D] You live and breath it?
[I] Absolutely. I did it in Michaelmas, I think the least number of hours I did in that term was a thirty five hour week, on top of my degree.
[D] Full time job on top of full time job? So you were quite tired?
[I] Yeah.
[D] So you've done History and Politics, which in itself is a tough one to do, because you have two essays a week, something like that?
[I] One and a half.
Twelve a term.
[I] Yep.
[D] You should have done Geography, it would have been easier.
[I] My best friend's a geographer, I'm very diplomatic.
[D] College?
[I] College's full of geographers.
[D] Did you apply for the Civil Service last year?
[I] You apply in September, October something like that.
[D] What preparation did you do for that?
[I] No, nothing. It was kind of a back-up. I was like if I don't get a journo job which is perfectly ya know, understandable given the difficulty of it, I need a back-up. I was like what would I second most like to do in the world? And so I thought the Civil Service, I'll be engaged, use my mind. So I did the tests, passed. Walked up to the centre, did some more tests passed. Walked up to the test day, had an interview, passed.
[D] In the interview, what sort of things did they ask you?
[I] It was weird I didn't like it. It was competency based.
[D] What did you have?
[I] Well, I used the Student Newspaper a lot, and I used the tall ships thing I did, that's useful. But in the feedback, its interesting, they said that I was very good on all the tests which is why they gave me the job but in the interview I didn't demonstrate team work well enough but I don't really understand why. Given that I have worked in teams quite successfully.
[D] The tall ships would be a good example?
[I] Yeah. I just don't think I talk in the right way. Because the feedback was that she was able to give lots of examples of the way in which she was able to [demonstrate competence] but she didn't explain thoroughly how she, erm, how she works in a team. I just don't think I talked in the right way,
[D] Ok. But you got the job still?
[I] Yeah. Because all my tests were good.
[D] Where ultimately will this take you?
[I] Im not sure, it's a bit of an open… I just need to see how it is. Because I worked at the NOTW I knew what to expect. I would have been working with the same people. I knew how stress and difficult it was going to be. I wasn't sure I wanted to do that. I applied to the BBC and they didn't give me a job either. That's what I would have liked to do.
[D] Even though they gave you paid-work with them?
[I] Even though I got paid-work.
[D] What would you have liked to do?
[I] Producer. I applied for the production graduate scheme and was disappointed I didn't get it. I may re-apply for that next year.
[D] You have applied for some of the most competitive things you can apply to.
[I] Yep.
[D] And you've succeeded in two of them?
[I] Yeah.
[D] There must be something why?
[I] [laughs] Not in the one I really wanted. Which would have been the BBC. But you can't really expect to get that.
[D] How many get recruited at the BBC?
[I] Four or five but its really competitive, there are thousands and thousands of applicants.
[D] And not just Elite University students?

[I] No, no.
[D] It probably works against you in some ways?
[I] Yes because of all this ethnic diversity, they say they don't take it into account, but as a white British Elite University student.
[D] Are you from Newcastle?
[I] Yeah.
[D] You went to a private school?
[I] On a scholarship.
[D] Did your parents go to university?
[I] Yeah, its not necessarily because he was middle class, my dad's quite old, he joined during the war, there was a scheme then where they wanted university trained pilots, that's why he went to university….my mum went to like a polytechnic in Salford.
[D] What does she do now?
[I] She was a television producer. She's retired now.
[D] Granada?
[I] She worked for ITV and the BBC.
[D] In Salford?
[I] No, up in Newcastle.
[D] Your dad?
[I] He is an inventor.
[[Machine measures CO exhausts, works with BCG, machine that analyses heart rate display]]
16 minutes
[D] Did your parents influence on what you did?
[I] They've always been very supportive, my dad is very politically, I think that where's my interest comes from, [watches news all the time]
[D] Are you right wing, left wing?
[I] Liberal on the social scale
[D] I voted Lib Dem last election.
[I] I'm a liberal socially but centre-right in economic policies.
My dad, around the dinner table will talk politics all of the time.
[D] What are the other History & Politics students doing?
[I] There's only one at Mansfield, Alex, he is travelling around Africa…Matt from Queens is travelling around, another person, Luke, is going into Management Consultancy with McKinsey, I think.
[D] How did you find the interviews with the Civil Service?
[I] I didn't really get a very good read off them…when the full assessment day came I didn't actually think I'd got the job, actually, I found the tasks challenging, I found the tests difficult…but I didn't get a very good read off of them…
[D] Were a lot Oxbridge?
[I] There were quite a few Oxbridge yeah but not everyone…I'd say it was 50% Oxbridge.
[D] Do you know anyone else going into the Civil Service?
[I] Yeah, I know two people, one from Mansfield, doing PPE, and another one in the University.
[D] Did you get involved in the union here?
[I] Oh yeah, I was the Press Officer, I forgot to tell you, I was the Press Officer for the Union. I like to keep busy.
[D] Is the requirement for the Civil Service a 2.1?
[I] Yeah.
[D] Did you even consider taking a Gap Year?
[I] Before Uni I thought of doing one…I like to go travelling but I get restless…I'm going travelling over the summer, three months is a long time, I don't need a year.
[D] Where are you going?
[I] California, Croatia, Geneva…

[D] Why Geneva?
[I] My friend is staying there.

[D] How did you get on the BBC?
[I] It was on the BBC website, I applied for work experience, had an interview with Newsnight people.
[D] Did you work with Jeremy Paxman?
[I] Yeah, yeah. I met him. I had to brief him that was scary. He made fun of me. I used a semi-colon when it should have been a comma.
[I] It was my ideal job, I really enjoyed it.

Environment, Education, Health – choices for Civil Service Fast Stream

[D] How do you succeed in the CS Fast Stream interviews?
[I] When I went…I wasn't worried about it…I just relaxed
[D] Why did they mention lack of team-working?
[I] I don't think I'm very good at talking…I don't think I know how to use the buzz words.

[D] What do you read? You read the mail.
[I] No, no I read the Mail when I was thirteen, I read the Times now.

[D] What music do you listen to?
[I] Indy-stuff, fairly mainstream really…Kings of Leon, Paulo Nutini?

Experience is empirical data.

[I] Looking for jobs was very haphazard for me, I was like I'll apply for the Civil Service Fast Stream and every journo job in the world.

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