Expectation and Everyday Relationships: Young Women Going to University

A thesis submitted to The University of Manchester for the degree of PhD
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KIRSTY FINN
School of Social Sciences
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Abstract

The University of Manchester
Kirsty Finn
PhD
‘Expectation and Everyday Relationships: Young Women Going to University’
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The thesis explores the experiences of 24 young women from a town in North West England (‘Millthorne’) as they make their way through their first year of university study. The project is based on a qualitative, longitudinal methodology comprising of three in-depth interviews conducted with each respondent before, during and after the first year of study. The aim of the research was to examine the ‘process of relating’ (Mason, 2004) for the 24 respondents, in order to think through the ways in which individual actions and identities emerge out of experiences of relationships with kin and non-kin. The project thus contributes to a growing body of literature which attends to the emotional and moral dimensions of social life, and which seeks to challenge ideas around individualism.

The public story (Jamieson, 1998) around going to university is one which stresses notions of selfhood, adventure and individualism and so, in the early interviews, respondents expressed a sense of expectation that their identities and relationships would alter significantly once university began. They expected that, by going to university, they would be removed from the clutches of family and that longstanding friend relationships based at home would be replaced by better, more enduring relationships formed within the context of university. The interviews carried out later in the project, however, revealed a divergence between respondents’ expectations of kin and non-kin relationships and their real-life, everyday experiences. Significantly, family and longstanding friendships continued to play a central role, leaking into the spaces of university through virtual and imagined as well as tangible means. This meant that respondents did not experience the move to university in the ways they had anticipated and it was not the wrench that many had hoped or feared.

What this study demonstrates is the complexity of personal relationships and the ways in which feelings of attachment and relatedness play out in different ways and at different times. Personal relationships are active and dynamic and it is the longitudinal methodology employed in this research which reveals this. Clearly people speak about relationships in particular ways at different junctures in the life course, appealing to discourses of individualism at some points and the security of relationships at others. It is imperative therefore, to capture the richness and complexity of the emotional and the personal, if one is to fully understand the social.
Declaration

that no portion of the work referred to in the thesis has been submitted in support of an application for another degree or qualification of this or any other university or other institute of learning

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Acknowledgments

I should like to acknowledge the support of a number of colleagues, friends and family who helped me complete this thesis. First and foremost, I should like to thank the 24 young women interviewees who gave their time and their experiences to this research. They committed to the project for almost 15 months and welcomed me into their homes even when the sun was shining outside and when, I’m sure, they had lots of other things to do.

I also offer huge thanks to Carol Smart and Fiona Devine who supervised this research. They showed me kindness and patience throughout and encouraged me to believe in myself and get the best out of the study when things became particularly tough. I should also like to thank other members of the Department of Sociology at the University of Manchester, particularly Wendy Bottero, Lucy Gibson, Brian Heaphy, Jennifer Mason Helene Snee and Dale Southerton who have offered kindness, support and encouragement over the last few years. Special thanks go to Katherine Davies, who has become a treasured friend as well as a colleague. In addition, I must also thank my colleagues at the University of Teesside who have given me the time and space to complete the write up of this thesis.

Thanks should also go to my friends and family for their unwavering support and patience over the years. My two best friends, Farnaz Azari and Alicia Beckett, have read and edited drafts of the thesis, as well as providing much needed emotional support over email, text, Facebook and phone. We have not lived within the same city for many years now, but our friendship remains as strong as ever. My four siblings are also ‘just like friends’ and have been incredible throughout this process. Craig, Darren, Nina and Victoria, and their partners, Katie, Emily, Roy and Sebastian, have provided good company and good wine, and I have felt so grateful to have such a close network around me.

My greatest debt goes to my (four) parents who have simply been fantastic. It is hard to convey in a short sentence the many ways in which I have felt supported but I have, and completing this thesis would have been impossible without them. I should like to thank my extended family too. Everybody, it seems, has taken an interest in my work and their messages of support have meant a great deal, particularly in the final stages. This is especially true of my grandparents. Sadly, my granddad passed away twelve months before I was able to complete this thesis. He always had so many questions about the project and was genuinely excited by the things we discussed. I know he would have been very proud to see it completed and so I dedicate this to him.
Chapter 1
Introduction

Over the last fifteen years increasing numbers of young people have taken up undergraduate degree courses in the UK. This increase has been particularly marked for young women who today, attend university in greater numbers than their male counterparts. Transformations within the UK higher education sector have meant that many of these young women come from ‘working-class’ families, or those which have had no previous engagement with the HE system. In addition there has been an increase in the number of young women students who come from minority ethnic backgrounds. This shift toward university study and, related to this, an increased engagement in geographical mobility, means that more and more young women are required to make choices about how and in what ways to organise their relationships with kin and non-kin going forward into the future. While such decisions apply also to young women from middle-class families, it is thought that issues around geographical mobility and university study are much newer concerns for young working-class and/or minority ethnic students. The aim of this research was, therefore, to explore how and in what ways young women from a typically working-class town in North West England (‘Millthorne’) negotiated relationships with family and friends before, during and after their first year of study.

Historically, sociologists have been captivated by the relationship between education and the working-class. Although this fascination has, for the most part, centred on specifically educational experiences and outcomes, there have been one or two studies of note which have explored the relationship between education and family and personal relationships (see for example, Brooks, 2002, 2003, 2003a, 2003b, 2005, 2007). Indeed, Jackson and
Marsden’s (1962) study of grammar school children in Huddersfield continues to offer a decisive and fascinating insight into the ways in which education impacts upon ‘traditional’ personal relationships, values and aspirations. Their research captures ‘working-class children turning into middle class citizens’ and the vivid descriptions contained within it offer ‘a tangled picture… the voices weave together their own pattern of delight, snobbery, frustration and love’ (1962: 15). Jackson and Marsden’s particular focus on the emotionality and complexity of human experience makes this work feel as fresh today as it did almost forty years ago. More recently, research carried out by Power et al. (2003) highlights the importance of family expectations in educational experiences and also challenges ‘untested assertions’ (p. 3) regarding the apparent success of middle-class transitions. Indeed, class distinctions and class-based assumptions are often overstated in research of this kind, and the nuances and complexities of individual experiences are glossed over. Equally, the broader emotional and relational dimensions of young people’s experiences are also given short shrift within sociological research. The aim of this thesis is, therefore, to provide a corrective to these imbalances, and to depict lives and experiences which are rich, dynamic and active rather than simply rational and one-dimensional.

The Study

This research is based on a qualitative longitudinal study carried out with 24 young women from a town in North West England that I have called Millthorne. This town is typical of other northern mill towns insofar as it has, in recent years, suffered from deindustrialisation and the associated problems of unemployment, low average wage levels, poor educational attainment and high levels of deprivation in some areas. Millthorne thus embodies a certain working-classness and thus represents a useful starting point for thinking about the ways in which the shift toward higher education might pose a challenge to ‘traditional’ relational practices amongst young women and their intimate networks. Although Millthorne may be conceived as working-class, respondents reflected a diverse range of social class backgrounds. Indeed, while most young women had little or no familiarity with the university system a small number of others had one or even two
parents who had studied to degree level and beyond. Respondents were recruited on the basis that they lived in Millthorne and studied at state funded institutions within the town. What they reveal, however, is the complexity and heterogeneity of social class and the ways in which class backgrounds intersect with ethnicity, religion and regional attachments to inform individual identities and actions.

In truth, I had not planned for such diversity within the sample. Originally this project set out to explore specifically working-class experiences of going to university. However, I soon found the conceptualisations of class that I was working with were perhaps too rigid and old-fashioned, not reflecting what was really ‘out there’. Moreover, in my review of the literature I found that working-class experiences have been well-documented and that studies of this kind tend to focus solely on the vulnerability or risky nature of going to university. It was hard to accept that all working-class experiences are inherently tricky ones, and I knew (from personal experience) that there is much to gain and be happy about during the move to university. As Devine maintains, while it is imperative to understand the ‘hidden injuries of class’ it is also imperative to understand ‘the dignity of ordinary people’s lives, their pleasures in life as well as their pains, their hopes and dreams as well as their setbacks and losses’ (2010: 155). Therefore, when this project began it was my aim to explore the affective dimensions of respondents’ experiences and the diverse ways in which they understood their own lives in relation to others around them.

Jackson and Marsden’s study has been of particular relevance to this research not only for its ability to imbue sociological writing with real-life emotion and meaning but because the study mapped out ‘a stretch of life, an initiatory experience’ through which they lived themselves (1962: 19). Indeed, of the 90 working-class children within the sample, Brain Jackson and Dennis Marsden were two. The authors reflect on the ways in which they benefited through the grammar school system, and also, of the methodological challenges (specifically the task of ‘objectivity’) of conducting such a personal study. As they maintain however, ‘The very choice of any research project in sociology inevitably presumes an act of judgement in which personal values and personal history play their
own – perhaps hidden – role’ (p.17). This is certainly true of this research. The motivations for this study - in addition to the sociological questions around class, family, relationships and social change – were also rather personal. It is almost ten years to the day that I left my own home in Millthorne to begin a degree in sociology at the University of Newcastle-upon-Tyne. I was the first in my family to go to university and indeed to live away from home. Like Jackson and Marsden, I too am aware of the ways in which I have benefited from the opening up of education, and I count myself lucky as a result. This shift has however, brought with it questions and concerns about where to situate myself (geographically and socially), and the ways in which I relate to my family and friends have been the subject of constant re-negotiation and re-definition ever since.

In truth, decisions about university have implications for the whole family, and also for young people’s wider networks of intimacy (e.g. friends, boyfriends and girlfriends). I have seen this first hand and understand the wrench felt not only by those leaving for pastures new, but also by those who remain at home. Within sociological research into young people’s experiences of university, family and friends are mostly only considered before the event, in thinking about how and in what ways young people are resourced for this transition and how they make their choices. What this research reveals however, particularly through the use of a longitudinal methodology, is the constant reverberations of decisions about university and the ways in which these reorder and realign family and friend relationships over time. Such reverberations take different forms and styles depending on how the move to university is structured and the kinds of family relationships within which people are embedded. Nevertheless, in all cases, it is clear that family and friend relationships are constant projects of investment and emotion long after decisions about where to study have been made, and the first term has begun.

The overarching aim of this research was therefore, to present the 24 young women as dynamic individuals who may sometimes feel constrained in their choices and actions but who also have strong commitments and attachments to others which they value (see Sayer, 2010). Holdsworth and Morgan (2005) note the ways in which young people are
traditionally conceived as emerging out of families into the world of education or work, rather than as active, contributing members of these vibrant networks. This research highlights the commitments that the young women described in relation to their own family relationships and the ways in which they expressed a desire to be ‘close’ to family either in physical or geographical ways but also in sensory and ideological ways too. Contrary to theories of individualisation, family relationships were centrally important for these young women and their narratives reveal the morality and emotionality which underpins close kin ties. In terms of friendship, young people – particularly women – are understood as engaging in relationships which are based on the kinds of intimacy and disclosure which are characteristic of Giddens’ ‘pure relationship’. While there is evidence of this in this research, this particular notion of friendship remains to be an expectation or an ideal rather than a real-life, everyday experience of friendship. Instead respondents’ revealed the complex negotiations involved in making new friends and managing old ones. Moreover, it was clear that the practices of openness and intimacy often had to take a back seat for the long-term good of friend relationships at particular moments in time.

**Theoretical Underpinnings**

This research contributes to the growing literature which challenges understandings of social life that focus on the individual nature of experiences and identities (for example, Giddens, 1991; Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 2002). The aim of this research is to provide new ways of seeing personal experiences, by focusing on the ‘process of relating’ (Mason 2004) rather than simply on the individual. By exploring the different ways in which the young women reflected on their experiences of kin and non-kin relationships before and during university study, it is possible to understand how and why they made particular choices about where to study and how often to return home, and how this impacted upon their sense of self. In thinking about the self as situated within webs of relationships and resources, this study naturally leant itself to Bourdieu’s concept of habitus and the related concepts of social and cultural capital. These concepts have provided useful ways through which to understand the kinds of decisions respondents made about where to study and
also about how to structure the relationships with home. I am aware of the limitations of Bourdieu’s theoretical work (see Chapter 3); however these, concepts form part of a broader conceptual toolkit that I have used throughout this research.

Within this toolkit, Mason’s (2004) work on relationality has been especially significant. In thinking about the different dimensions of feelings of relatedness, and how this shapes individual narratives and decisions, it is possible to understand individual action as arising out of thoughtful and intentional networks. People do not experience relationality in the same ways and the concept does not necessarily imply loving or supportive networks, but includes relationships of constraint and conflict too. It is in this regard that the concept of ‘ambivalence’ has also been useful for understanding respondents’ experiences. Heath et al. (2007; 2008) work with the concept of ambivalence in order to consider the ways in which moments of tension and conflict impact upon the choices people make with regard to education. Building on the work of Lüscher (1998, 2000, 2005) and Connidis and McMullin (2002), Heath et al. offer ways of conceptualising individual decisions which bring wider networks of intimacy into view. The concept of ambivalence captures the ‘simultaneous existence of polarised emotions, thoughts, volitions, social relations and structures that are considered relevant for the constitution of individual or collective identities’ (Lüscher 2005: 100, cited in Heath et al. 2008: 222) and, in this way, provides ways of accounting for the complexity and emotionality which underpins social action. Emotion is a strong theme in this research, and notions of embeddedness are also particularly helpful for understanding the role of history, morality and affect in people’s individual experiences. According to Smart (2007), people are embedded within chains of relationships across generations and also, within relationships which may no longer be ‘current’. These feelings of embeddedness are understood as having a significant bearing on the ways in which people think and act so that life is always lived in relation to others.
The Respondents

I have taken the decision to introduce respondents here in the introduction of the thesis, because I felt it important to share some of the detail of their lives before moving through the theoretical and empirical work which has informed this research. As a way of introducing the 24 young women I shall describe the sixth forms and colleges through which they were recruited. All of the colleges and sixth forms were state funded however as I shall demonstrate, they each had a different tone and style with some appealing to the academically-focused student, and others attracting young people who wished to follow vocational routes. The six institutions that I visited were located around the town and surrounding area, meaning that while a number were centrally located an easy to access, others were more remote and involved complicated journeys. Although I am providing this information in the introduction, details about respondents’ educational backgrounds can also be found in Appendix A for reference.

Valley Sixth Form

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Catherine</th>
<th>University of Plymouth</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Harriett</td>
<td>University of Bristol</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Katie</td>
<td>Lancaster University</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mira</td>
<td>Manchester Metropolitan University</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Serena</td>
<td>University of Leeds</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sophie</td>
<td>University of Warwick</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stacey</td>
<td>University of St. Andrew’s</td>
</tr>
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</table>

Valley Sixth Form is part of a renowned local selective school located outside Millthorne, about 8 miles away from the centre. The sixth form is the largest of all those contacted for this research, with over 600 pupils attending at one time. Although students at Valley Grammar do not pay fees, they are required to pass an entrance examination in order to
gain entry to the school, and enrolment in the sixth form is dependent upon achieving high GCSE results and passing an interview. Most students go on to study at university after A Levels and the sixth form has good links with Oxford and Cambridge University. Respondents who attended Valley did so on account of its historically good reputation and its links with prestigious universities. Young women like Katie and Harriett attended Valley Grammar prior to moving into the adjoining sixth form. Both of these young women had parents who had studied at university and expressed a strong commitment to academic study in their interviews. Other respondents such as Sophie and Stacey, for example, joined the sixth form after completing their GCSE exams. Both of these young women had taken the entrance exam for the grammar school but were unsuccessful and had worked hard to secure entry at A Level. Catherine, Mira and Serena also attended different high schools in Millthorne and said they had joined Valley in order to ensure good A Level grades and places at university. Mira and Serena were South Asian and of Muslim faith, and had previously attended schools which catered especially for Millthorne’s minority ethnic community. With this in mind, both young women stated that the atmosphere and ethos at Valley encouraged mutual respect and support, and this was something which was important to them.

**Hillside Sixth Form**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>University</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ashley</td>
<td>University of Birmingham</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Charlie</td>
<td>Manchester Metropolitan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Esther</td>
<td>University of Huddersfield</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jenny</td>
<td>Manchester Metropolitan University</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sahia</td>
<td>London School of Pharmacology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wendy</td>
<td>Lancaster University</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Hillside Sixth Form is perhaps closest to Valley in terms of its student composition and the emphasis placed on academic success. However, in terms of geography it is located at
the opposite end of the district, about 6 miles outside Millthorne centre. Hillside is also a selective school and sixth form and students are again required to pass an entrance examination before being accepted. The sixth form appeals to students with high GCSE grades although the entry policy is not quite as strict as that of Valley. Hillside generally encourages the university route but there is less emphasis on the elite universities. Hillside has around 250, mostly white students who live in the more rural areas of the district. Respondents who attended Hillside Sixth Form generally attended Hillside High prior to moving through to the adjoining sixth form. Indeed there was a popular trend to ‘stay on’ primarily because of the location of the school and the rural catchment area but also because of its good record for academic success. Only Esther and Charlie joined Hillside in the sixth form, and both young women attended the same all-girls high school in Millthorne prior to this. These young women lived close to Hillside and had friends who attended Hillside High and therefore had a ready-made friendship group there. Mostly these young women showed a preference for local universities; however, Sahia, who was South Asian and Muslim, chose to study in London.

**Local Sixth Form**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Aayra</th>
<th>University of Central Lancashire (Preston)</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Anna</td>
<td>University of Newcastle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caitlin</td>
<td>University of Nottingham</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Husna</td>
<td>University of Manchester</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Local Sixth Form adjoins Local Comprehensive and is situated in the heart of Millthorne. Both the school and sixth form are popular among Millthorne residents because of the accessibility of the site and its track record for good GCSE and A Level results. The school and the sixth form are diverse in terms of students’ ethnic and social class backgrounds and South Asian students are well-represented. There is usually fierce competition for places at Local Comprehensive and there are around 300 students in the sixth form. Respondents who were recruited through Local Sixth Form were all
continuing students. Aayra and Husna, who were South Asian and of Muslim faith, said that they felt happy and comfortable at Local and did not want to adversely affect their studies by moving. Both young women lived just minutes away from the site and so their decision to stay on reflected other, practical concerns too. Both Anna and Caitlin expressed a strong desire to remain within their friendship networks at Local, knowing that on leaving for university – to Newcastle and Nottingham respectively – they would be separated from their established friendships at home.

**Holy Sixth Form**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Hayley</th>
<th>University of Salford</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Megan</td>
<td>University of Central Lancashire (Preston)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tanya</td>
<td>Edge Hill University</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Holy Sixth Form is attached to a local all-boys high school which attracts post-GCSE students from a range of church schools in the area especially the local all-girls catholic high school. This institution is the smallest with around 150-180 students enrolled at one time and A Level results vary. The sixth form has good links with small universities in the North which specialize in teaching, for example, Trinity and All Saints College in Leeds. The site is located close to Millthorne town centre and recruits mostly white, Catholic students. All three respondents who were recruited through Holy Sixth Form were white, Catholic students who had previously attended the local all-girls’ school. As the table, above, illustrates, there was a strong preference amongst students at Holy Sixth Form, for local, post-1992 institutions.
In addition to the sixth forms discussed above, I also recruited students through the two main colleges in the Millthorne area, Town College and Greenside College. Town College serves post-16 and mature students in a range of subjects and vocational courses. It is situated in the heart of Millthorne town centre and attracts a high number of South Asian students. Fizza, who was South Asian and of Muslim faith studied a mixture of A Levels and vocational business courses at Town College before going on to study a degree in Marketing in Leeds. She cited the diversity of the college and also its central location as key reasons for choosing to study at Town College.

Greenside College is located just outside Millthorne and is popular with school leavers who want a change from traditional school-style education but who wish to retain a strong academic focus. It is a relaxed college with a diverse composition of students and while it caters for traditional subjects it is especially popular with art and design students who often study a foundation degree at Greenside before moving onto university. Emily is typical of Greenside students. She was studying a degree in music management and promotion in Buckinghamshire and reflected on the importance of attending an arts-based college prior to this. Rachel was rather different; she chose Greenside because it specialized in courses in early childhood studies which was valuable for her application to study primary teaching (early years) at Liverpool Hope University College.
Plan of the Thesis

In the following chapter, *Researching Higher Education: A Review of the Literature*, I consider the ways in which issues around social class have been explored in other empirical studies focusing on young people’s experiences of higher education. In so doing I highlight the ways in which research in this field of study is marked by two loosely defined approaches: *Inequality Studies* and *Relationality Studies*. The former tends to focus rather narrowly on the experiences of ‘non-traditional’ students (i.e. students from working-class and/or minority ethnic backgrounds) and often highlights the negative, challenging and ‘risky’ experiences of working class young people as they enter into higher education. While these issues are important, what is missing from this research is an account of the broader aspects of young people’s lives. With this in mind, the second part of Chapter 2 examines research which takes a more relational approach. This approach explores young people’s experiences of friendship (Brooks, 2005), home-life and family (Patinotis and Holdsworth 2005; Holdsworth and Morgan 2005) and sexual and intimate relationship (Henderson et al. 2007) so that a fuller and more active picture of young people’s lives may emerge.

In Chapter 3, I examine some key theoretical literature which has informed this research; work which seeks to develop notions of relatedness and a version of the self as situated and active. In *Thinking through relationality: theoretical underpinnings of this research*, I challenge ideas around individualism and individualisation, making the case for ways of thinking about the self as embedded and relational. It is in this chapter that I discuss in detail the work of Mason (2004), Smart (2007) and Heath et al. (2007; 2008) outlining the key concepts which are used later in the empirical chapters. Within this chapter therefore, I also include a discussion of Bourdieu’s theoretical concepts and some of the key criticisms of his work.

Chapter 4, *The Significance of Habitus and Home*, provides a rich, detailed description of the research setting, Millthorne. In this chapter I outline some of the defining features of the area in which all 24 respondents lived with their families, thus providing a context in
which to situate the empirical chapters which follow. This chapter is partly a description of the research setting but, also, it offers a discussion of key literatures around home, place and, crucially for this study, geographical mobility. Chapter 5, *Researching Everyday Relationships: Reflections on a Longitudinal Study*, provides a reflective account of the research methodology. As already stated, this project is based on a qualitative longitudinal methodology and so in this chapter I explore some of the decisions that I made with regard to the timing and organisation of fieldwork interviews. In addition, I discuss some of the rewards and challenges of conducting qualitative longitudinal research and how this impacted upon the project as a whole. Finally, I introduce the analytical framework used in sorting data, which is important going forward into the empirical chapters which follow.

In Chapters 6-9, I examine data produced during this research. Chapters 6 and 7 focus on respondents’ experiences of family relationships and Chapters 8 and 9 attend to issues around friendship. Within these two couplets, the first chapters (6 and 8) explore notions of expectation. These chapters focus exclusively on data generated during the first stage of fieldwork interviews and consider how and in what ways respondents approached the move to university, how they thought relationships with family and friends might change and how their decisions about university reflected their desire to limit or embrace notions of transformation. The second chapters within the two couplets (7 and 9) examine respondents’ narratives at stages 2 and 3 of the fieldwork interviews. The discussion in these chapters centres on the lived reality of those earlier expectations; on the everyday nature of family and friendship once university had begun. These four chapters reveal divergences with regards to the ways in which respondents imagined their relationships changing and, also, in terms of the ways that they managed their family and friend relationships later in the year. There was however, common to all 24 narratives, a strong sense of a ‘public story’ (Jamieson, 1999) around going to university, in which notions of selfhood, independence and adventure were strong. While this story was rather easy for some respondents to engage with, for many others, this process was more challenging and necessarily impacted upon the kinds of narratives and experiences they were able to create.
In the Conclusion, I consider the key findings of the research and, drawing on a small amount of stage 3 interview data, make some comments on respondents’ experiences of self-identity and also, their experiences of being part of a family. So often, young people’s experiences are understood in isolation to, or merely a product of, their family background. They are understood as emerging out of families rather than playing an active and valuable role within them. What this research reveals however, is the way in which family relationships matter to the young women respondents and how they saw their decisions and actions as shaping the broader experience of family life at home. It is imperative to think about young people’s experiences in this way – as positive and affirmative expressions of love and commitment, rather than simply as evidence of the constraints of their family background or their inherent individualism. As the final chapter demonstrates, the young women in this study understood their lives as linked across generations and embedded in webs of relationships which provided ways of seeing the self in different ways and different times.
In this chapter I shall examine a range of studies which consider young people’s experiences of higher education. As I shall demonstrate, research which looks at the experience of ‘going to university’ can be divided into two different approaches. The first tends to focus on the experiences of young people from working-class and/or minority ethnic backgrounds and, in so doing, highlights some of the challenges facing this particular group of students. The second strand of research takes a more relational approach. What I mean by this is that while these studies take issues around social class and ethnicity into account, they also recognize the broader experiences, relationships and commitments which shape, and are shaped by, the move to university. These two approaches, which I have termed ‘Inequality Studies’ and ‘Relationality Studies’ respectively, will be discussed in this chapter in order to provide a context for this research. By way of introduction however, I shall briefly sketch out the origins of research around class and education and how this has informed contemporary studies within the field.

From Grammar Schools to Higher Education: Researching Social Mobility

Concerns about inequality and the ways in which it is reproduced in the field of education have been major themes in British sociology for decades. Perhaps the most significant example of this is the work of Brian Jackson and Dennis Marsden. In *Education and the Working Class* (1962) Jackson and Marsden cast a reflective light on their own lives through interviews with 88 children from working-class backgrounds in Huddersfield, who had transformed their social status through education. The research focused on key debates at that time around selective education and the ways in which young people felt their lives had been shaped by attending local grammar schools. Specifically, Jackson and Marsden reveal the ways in which grammar schools enabled less privileged children to
not only consider, but also in many cases attend, university and subsequently advance into professional careers. Nevertheless as the authors note below, there were often considerable trade-offs for working-class children and it was with these issues that they were most concerned.

‘In the search for equality through education there is a peculiar blockage. Much has been gained… But was it altogether worth it? Did the child gain or lose in winning through to middle-class life, and growing away from working-class origins...This book was our attempt to find out where there was loss and where there was gain.’

(Jackson and Marsden 1962: 16)

Today the debate around inequality and education continues to drive a considerable amount of sociological research in the UK. Some forty years after Jackson and Marsden’s influential research however, a key focus is on university study rather than grammar schools, and it is the expansion of the HE sector which is now regarded as the force behind social change and greater equality. Evidence of this may be seen in the steady increase in the percentage of young UK university entrants who were from a minority ethnic background during the period from 1996-97 to 2002-03 (11% up to 15%) (HEFCE May 2010). In addition, figures show that the proportion of young people living in the most disadvantaged areas who enter higher education has increased by around 30% over the past five years, and by 50% over the past 15 years (HEFCE January 2010). There have also been shifts in terms of the gender composition of UK undergraduate students with female students currently outnumbering their male counterparts. In fact, while the number of female students more than doubled between 1990-91 and 2000-01, the number of male students increased at a much lower rate (around 50%, Department for Education and Skills).

These figures highlight the major shifts which have taken place in the HE sector over the last twenty years. Moreover, they reveal the impact of government Widening Participation initiatives which have directly targeted young and mature women and also, students from working-class and/or minority ethnic backgrounds. The social trend toward university study has provoked scholars from within the social sciences to make visible the experiences of working class and minority students who are attending universities in
greater numbers. It is clear then, that Jackson and Marsden’s research and ideas continue to resonate and the task of understanding how and in what ways social mobility is achieved and experienced remains at the heart of sociological inquiry. For this reason, much of the current research into HE documents the experiences of ‘non traditional’ students (i.e. students from working class backgrounds, minority ethnic students, mature students, and students with disabilities). Studies of this kind tend to highlight the barriers to entry, the incidence of non-completion, and the impact of social and financial constraints on young people’s decisions about university. There is therefore a strong focus on inequality within these studies and the ways in which this is felt and reproduced within the system. The first part of this chapter explores some of the key studies within this body of research.

While ideas around inequality were central to Jackson and Marsden’s (1962) study, there was also something distinctive about the ways in which they wrote about the experiences of working-class children attending grammar schools. The lucidity of the authors’ writing was noted at the time and is a main reason why this work still has relevance today. For example, while they documented the social, material and financial inequalities which separated the working-class children from their middle-class peers at grammar school, they also explored the emotional, moral and relational dimensions of their experiences. As the excerpt below demonstrates, Jackson and Marsden invoked subjects were active and embedded in places and relationships which mattered greatly to them. They also revealed the complexities of social mobility and the implications for self-identity.

‘[R]elationships at home were also changing… The social life of school and the particular fields of study were now out of the parents’ reach. Together with this had gone changes in tone, manner, accent, friendships, which often troubled home relationships… fathers and mothers began to seem very dull and limited indeed. ‘I thought my parents were terrible and very badly educated. They were always doing the wrong things’. With some this was no more than a passing hubris, but there were others perceptive and candid enough to admit that these things could bite down to the very roots…The imbalance could be established in many ways, but the orthodox child belonged to two worlds – school and home – and sometimes developed two identities to match.’

(Jackson and Marsden 1962: 153 original emphasis)
It is this aspect of Jackson and Marsden’s work which has perhaps taken a little longer to gather pace, however, it has been no less significant. For example, in recent years there has been a noticeable shift within sociology toward accounts of social life which emphasise the emotional and dynamic nature of individual action. A number of scholars have called for the need for sociological theory and analyses to move away from ‘bland’ accounts of social life (see for example, Sayer, 2005 and Smart, 2007), highlighting the need to capture the richness and complexity of everyday life. Although class inequalities undoubtedly shape young people’s educational experiences, concerns around class may often, as Savage et al. (2001) suggest, be far less salient to people than sociologists might like to think. It is important therefore, not to foreground one issue (in this case class) at the expense of other important concerns, hopes and expectations that young people are forced to negotiate during the move into higher education.

Research which focuses on young people’s relationships and their feelings of relatedness provides a useful way of thinking through the emotional and dynamic aspects of social life without glossing over the complexities and constraints imposed by one’s social class, gender or ethnic background. Because a relational approach does not proceed with the aim of highlighting problems or vulnerabilities, research of this kind redresses the balance of studies which explore young people’s experiences of attending university and/or leaving home. However, such an approach does not necessarily engender rosy or uncomplicated images of the student experiences, on the contrary. Indeed, by exploring the diverse range of commitments, relationships and feelings of attachment that young people discuss at this juncture, studies of this kind reveal both the pleasures and the pains experienced by working-class and middle-class young people alike. I have termed this body of research ‘Relationality Studies’ and it is within this field of research that I situate this thesis. This strand of research will be explored in the second part of the chapter.
‘Inequality Studies’

1) Working-class and ‘non traditional students’

This strand of research is rooted in issues around access and ‘choice’ for working-class and ‘non-traditional’ students (see for example, Archer and Hutchings 2000 on motivations of working class non-participants, and Archer et al. 2003 and Pugsley, 2004). These studies often focus on the barriers which many young and mature students face when applying for university and, related to this, they seek to explain the kinds of decisions that students from less-privileged backgrounds make with regard to university study. For this reason, research of this kind has a tendency to focus on the negative and more challenging aspects of minority and working class students’ experiences. An example of this way of approaching inequality within the field of HE is a study by Leathwood and O’Connell (2003) entitled, ‘It’s a struggle’: the construction of the ‘new student’ in higher education. The title of this article is suggestive of its strong focus on the hardship and struggle that many students face in going to university. Through their longitudinal study of 310 students at a post-1992 inner-city university, Leathwood and O’Connell (2003) explore the ways in which widening participation initiatives, which are seen as an important part of the (then New Labour) Government’s economic and social justice agenda, have constructed a ‘new’ kind of university student with an associated and often problematical new student identity. In particular, the authors highlight the additional difficulties that many new students face at university, which reflect educational and other inequalities related to class, ethnicity, gender and age.

Central to Leathwood and O’Connell’s argument is what they regard as a significant shift for university entrants from ‘students’ to ‘learners’ under New Labour. They maintain that ‘learners’ are constructed as active consumers of educational services, taking responsibility for their own learning as independent, autonomous and self-directed individuals. The ideal of the learner is based on masculinist conceptions of the individual, with the learner thus constructed as male, white, middle-class and able-bodied: ‘an autonomous individual unencumbered by domestic responsibilities, poverty or self-doubt’ (Leathwood and O’Connell, 2003: 599). In short, through widening participation
initiatives, which encourage working-class, minority ethnic and students who have entered with qualifications other than the standard A levels, the Government supposedly provides opportunities for equality and self advancement. It is assumed therefore, that it is simply up to the individual to take up these opportunities, aspire to greater things and develop their own potential.

With the onus of educational success being firmly located onto the individual under the new, expanding, system of higher education, there appear to be new inequalities as well as opportunities for the new non-traditional student. Leathwood and O’Connell make the case that in the move from an elite to a mass HE system it is the non-traditional students who have come to constitute ‘the masses’ and who are consequently marked as Other when compared with existing students who are perceived to be there ‘more as of right, representing the norm against which others are judged and may be found wanting’ (Webb 1997: 68). ‘Mass’, they argue, thus means lower standards and the ‘dumbing down’ of university in general terms. Crucially, it is the ‘new’ students who are regarded as responsible for this shift. In this way then, working-class and minority ethnic students, as well as those with non-conventional entry qualifications, are pathologised in the same way as the working classes always have been (Walkerdine 1990, Skeggs 1997), as being deficient in ability, in not having a ‘proper’ educational background, or in lacking the appropriate aspirations and attitudes (Leathwood and O’Connell, 2003: 599).

Leathwood and O’Connell’s (2003) study is based on interviews with students at a post-1992 university. They took the decision to focus on a new institution because there is a greater tendency for working-class students and those from minority ethnic groups to attend post-1992 universities which tend to have more open access and encourage socially diverse applicants, and for middle class students to attend pre-1992 universities which tend towards more elitism (Power et al. 2003; Sutton Trust 2000). It is thought that working-class and minority students are heavily concentrated in these universities for a number of reasons including: students’ concerns over the financial and social costs of moving away from home, the availability of popular, vocational and newer subjects at post-1992 universities, the resistance of pre-1992 universities to students with non-
standard entry qualifications, and also the close engagement of these universities with widening participation policies. In addition, the authors note the ways in which students recognize newer institutions as having a more diverse student body than the older, more prestigious universities, and that this affords them greater chances of meeting people with whom they share a similar outlook and background (Leathwood and O’Connell 2003, 601). Notwithstanding the apparent preference of non-traditional students for post-1992 universities, Leathwood and O’Connell (2003: 603) still portray a ‘strong sense of students struggling to succeed against the odds’ within these institutions. In particular the authors note high incidences of student withdrawal and extension beyond the standard 3 year degree structure, and, also, high numbers of students shifting from full to part-time status and back again depending on their financial and social obligations. What this study highlights then, is the vulnerability of working-class and minority students, whose experiences are apparently defined by their class position and their lack of familiarity with the HE system.

A second study from the strand of traditional/inequality research comes from Reay et al. (2001). There are a number of similarities which can be drawn between this and that of Leathwood and O’Connell. However, Reay and colleagues examine the process of ‘choosing’ a university rather than the day-to-day experience of undergraduate life. Reay et al.’s (2001) research focuses on a ‘specific segment of HE applicants who as recently as ten years ago would have been very unlikely to be applying to university’ (p. 855). In the article, Choices of Degree or Degrees of Choice? Class, ‘race’ and the Higher Education Choice Process (2001), the authors explore the ways in which inequalities are reproduced within the HE system and the meanings that students attach to particular kinds of institutions. Ultimately, writing in a similar tone to Leathwood and O’Connell (2003), Reay et al. seek to challenge ‘contemporary political discourses which position widening access and the advent of a mass system of higher education as unproblematically positive advances’ (2001: 855). Drawing on data generated through qualitative interviews carried out with 53 students from a diverse range of sixth forms and colleges in or near to London, they demonstrate the ways in which, even when entry requirements are taken
into account, inequalities of class and ‘race’ operate at other levels for non-traditional students making decisions about university.

In particular, the authors discuss several ‘exclusionary processes’ which interviewees experienced when making decision about university. Firstly, working-class and minority students noted the ways in which their choice of institution was constrained by geographical concerns and the need to remain local. According to Reay et al. the transcripts of working-class students were ‘saturated with a localism that was absent from the narratives of their more economically privileged peers’ (2001: 861). Such geographical constraints were closely linked with financial concerns as students’ worries about travel and accommodation costs limited the range of universities they could choose from, to those located within a small geographical area usually close to their family home. Their findings thus support the work of Callender and Jackson (2008: 427), who maintain that, for low-income students, the costs of higher education are often seen as a debt rather than an investment. Moreover, they argue that inequalities in patterns of HE participation are perpetuated through material constraints, especially a fear of debt.

Reay et al.’s (2001) research therefore sits with a number of other studies which explore the financial constraints experienced by working-class young people who may be thinking about university (Callender, 2006; Forsyth and Furlong 2000). Exploring this point, Reay et al. note the ways in which financial constraints often lead non-traditional students to take up part-time work during their A Level studies. It is thought that these additional hours may have a negative impact on the grades students are able achieve in exams and course work and subsequently, their chances of gaining entry to an elite university. In addition to this discussion however, Reay et al. (2001) explore the ways in which decisions about university are also constrained by emotional and psychological issues. They discuss the ways in which non-traditional students, particularly those from minority ethnic backgrounds, engage in practices of self-exclusion from some of the more prestigious universities, for example by imagining themselves into other, more comfortable spaces such as the post-1992 universities. Equally however, Reay et al. found cases in which working-class and minority students dis-identified with the spaces which
have supposedly opened up for ‘people like them’ in HE. Newer courses at newer universities, they argue, were seen as degraded and thus avoided by some non-traditional students who were then drawn to the risky and unfamiliar middle-class terrain of elite universities (2001: 867). Reay and colleagues are able, therefore, to theorize social reproduction as well as change and the reasons why some working-class young people are able to move against the tide of family norms and trajectories.

Taken together, the studies carried out by Leathwood and O’Connell (2003) and Reay et al. (2001) highlight reasons for both optimism and pessimism with regard to the expansion of the HE system. While there are clearly gains for young and mature people who, in another time, would not have had the chance to study at university, recent changes to the HE sector have fostered a new hierarchy of institutions in which prestigious research universities have emerged as a top layer of elite institutions (Reay et al. 2001). Thus, while more working-class and minority students are entering university, for the most part they are entering different universities to their middle-class counterparts (Reay et al. 2001: 858). As Leathwood and O’Connell put it, rather than moving from an elite to a mass system, we now have an elite and a mass system (2003, p. 612). Although in later work Reay et al. (2009) discuss the positive impact of university study for working-class young people, it is clear that studies which seek to highlight inequalities within the system necessarily give greater space to the negative and problematical aspects of university experiences. Moreover, in researching the experiences of ‘non-traditional’ students, middle-class experiences are often neglected or over-simplified.

It is important to note that my categories of Inequality Studies and Relationality Studies are by no means absolute. Indeed, there are studies which focus on minority experiences that have begun to attend to issues around family and personal relationships. An example of this comes from Sarah Evans (2009) whose study of young working-class women students also deals with the process of decision making about HE. In a similar way to the studies discussed above, the emphasis in Evans’ paper is on working-class and minority experiences of choice making. All of Evans’ respondents, who were recruited from sixth forms in London, were the first in their family to study at university. While Evans
discusses the financial and geographical concerns of the young women in her study, she extends her discussion to include the workings of family relationships and loyalties, and the ways in which these structure entry into HE. For Evans, while there has been a discernible pattern in which levels of education and educational aspiration have been raised, the social impact of this shift is limited by the cultural factors which structure the context of educational participation (2009: 343).

Evans’ research thus reiterates some of the arguments outlined above. In particular she challenges understandings of HE which present university study as a ‘private project’ and an individual endeavour. She notes the way in which the young women interviewed expressed a preference to remain local and present their lives and decisions about the future as fundamentally connected to their family ties at home. In so doing, Evans provides a corrective to the image of the university student as disembedded and individualized, able to ‘choose’ how, where and what to study at university. By exploring the role and influence of family, Evans' work supports the arguments put forward by Reay et al. (2001) regarding self-exclusion and self-limitation, which are understood as inhibiting social mobility and reproducing inequality for working-class and minority students. Even though Evans brings family into the gaze of education research, the study nevertheless positions the respondents as vulnerable and at risk. This particular approach necessarily means that the more positive and emotional aspects of this process are not fully considered.

In truth, Evans’ (2009) work is one of only a few studies which explore the importance of family relationships in decision making about HE (see also Brooks, 2003, 2003b) and, crucially, the ways in which aspiration and ambition are structured differently for some students than others. The growing interest in students’ wider social world, in particular their networks of social support, has begun to gather pace however. This surge in interest has arisen largely out of the broader project to understand student retention and the reasons behind non-completion. According to Christie et al. (2004: 618) non-completion has gone from being a private issue to one of public worry for British higher education. And, as the financial health of the universities depends on student numbers, universities
have put in place mechanisms to support students and commissioned research to find out how and why some students leave university early. Research has suggested that early student withdrawal from university is due to a lack of preparedness for university life (see Davies and Elias, 2003; and Lowe and Cook, 2003), for example when students choose the ‘wrong’ course or institution based on inadequate pre-entry information. Within this line of reasoning, students have been ‘blamed’ for being poorly prepared and/or lacking the motivation and academic ability to see their studies through (Wright, 1996). In addition, widening participation initiatives have also been critiqued for raising the aspirations of non-traditional students without tackling university culture (Thomas and Cooper, 2000, Thompson 2000). Increasingly however, researchers have been looking toward students’ experiences of family and friend relationships (at home and university) to find out how and in what ways the process of ‘fitting in’ impacts upon the incidence of non-completion (Christie et al. 2004; Wilcox et al. 2005).

Research which examines the reasons behind non-completion sheds important light on the kinds of things that matter to students, particularly those from minority and/or working-class backgrounds because it is these students for whom early withdrawal is a key concern. Non-completion rates at post-1992 universities are some of the highest and as mentioned above, non-traditional students are heavily concentrated in these institutions. However, as Christie et al. maintain, to assume that non-completion is simply a product of bringing poorly prepared non-traditional students with financial problems into higher education over-simplifies what is a very complex issue (2004: 621). Christie and colleagues investigate the reasons behind student withdrawal at two Scottish universities - one with a high rate of non-completion and one with a much lower rate. Rather than looking simply at students who leave university early however, the authors compare experiences of completion and non-completion to find out at which point a particular set of pressures – financial, social or institutional – remain bearable for one student but not for another (2004: 621). Christie et al. thus approach student experiences with a certain degree of openness and, in so doing; they avoid presenting one particular group of students as more inherently vulnerable or risky than another. They argue that, feelings of isolation, loneliness and financial problems are not unique to students who withdraw
early nor are they particular to students from lower socio-economic or minority ethnic backgrounds (Christie et al. 2004: 631). This research is of a slightly different tone to the other studies discussed so far. There is an attempt to explore the similarities of young people’s experiences rather than the supposed class-based distinctions which are often over stated. This research thus provides a counterbalance to the many studies which explore issues around university withdrawal and the more problematic aspects of undergraduate life.

As outlined earlier in this discussion, the term ‘non-traditional’ may be applied to mature students, those who have entered through alternative routes, those with qualifications other than the standard A Levels, those with a long-term disability, students from working-class backgrounds and students from minority ethnic groups. What is striking is that the latter group – minority ethnic students – are included in the non-traditional category irrespective of their qualifications or age (Webb 1997). This would suggest that there is something rather distinct about the experiences of ethnic minority HE students, regardless of their socio-economic background. Despite this, Hussain and Bagguley (2007: 33) maintain that scholars such as Reay et al. (2005) tend to treat ethnic inequalities in higher education in the same way that they do social class. As outlined in the previous chapter, a number of research participants were of South Asian heritage and Muslim faith. It is important therefore to look in more detail at the ways in which South Asian experiences have been researched and theorized within sociology. The following discussion examines this literature in detail.

2) **South Asian experiences in higher education**

Hussain and Bagguley (2007, and also Bagguley and Hussain 2007) examine the experiences of South Asian women in higher education. They argue that it is not only important to recognize the diversity of ethnic minority groups’ experiences of HE, but also the diversity of South Asian women’s experiences of choosing and attending universities in the UK. In their study based on interviews with 100 South Asian women students and graduates, Hussain and Bagguley compare women of Indian, Pakistani and Bangladeshi origin, in order to consider their experiences at sixth form, during university
and after graduation. The authors set out to challenge and unpack some of the myths about young South Asian women, especially those who are Muslim, regarding their continuing education and progression into the labour market.

In ‘Moving on up: South Asian women and higher education’ (2007), Hussain and Bagguley provide a detailed account of the three different South Asian ethnic groups, drawing attention to the differences between the women of Bangladeshi, Indian and Pakistani origin in terms of their income, education, social class and labour market situation. They establish the diverse circumstances of these different ethnic groups which are so often grouped together and treated as the same. In order to flesh out the differences which separate the young women, Hussain and Bagguley (2007) examine contemporary identities of young South Asian women at different stages of their educational transition. In addition to their discussion of identities, Britishness, and religion the authors also explore the process of decision making for young South Asian women and the struggles that many face with regard to seeing their degree studies through. In a similar fashion to the studies discussed earlier in this chapter, Hussain and Bagguley (2007) consider the extent to which young South Asian women’s choices about university are constrained by financial, geographical and emotional/familial concerns. Interestingly however, they challenge some of the central arguments put forward by Reay et al. (2001, 2005) which state that community ties and perspectives often carry more weight than reputations of universities and league tables for minority ethnic students (Hussain and Bagguley 2007: 78). In contrast to this, Hussain and Bagguley found that many of the young women they interviewed were aware of the differences which separated the universities of Leeds and Birmingham (the two research sites) and that ‘huge significance was placed on the prestige of a university’ (2007: 79). Moreover, they found ‘little evidence’ that ethnic minority students tend to choose those institutions that are perceived to have a significant proportion of ethnic minority undergraduates (Hussain and Bagguley, 2007: 81), something which is also at odds with Reay et al’s (2005) findings.

Hussain and Bagguley thus provide a challenge to some of the recent theorising around ethnic minority groups and the ways in which they make decisions about higher
education. Moreover, the study also attends to the importance of family, community and local ties for young South Asian women. Supporting Dale et al. (2002), Hussain and Bagguley (2007) demonstrate the ways in which the family acts as an important institution (financially, socially and economically) within South Asian communities. Notwithstanding this, there is still a focus on the ways in which family relationships and feelings of attachment work in negative or constrictive ways. For example, the authors state that, ‘whether or not many young South Asian women get to university is shaped by how far they are able to negotiate with their parents two important issues: marriage and leaving home’ (Hussain and Bagguley 2007:87), and the study reveals that while the majority of parents placed a major importance on education, others who allowed their daughters to study regarded education ultimately as a time filling experience until an eligible husband was found (2007: 89). Hussain and Bagguley highlight the often-limited levels of control that some young South Asian women were able to exercise over their futures, rather than the feelings of love and support that they felt within their family networks.

For most of the interviewees however, the central question was not whether to study at university but whether to leave home whilst studying. Hussain and Bagguley maintain that in more general literature on university choice, this question is treated ultimately as a class-based issue (2007: 96). As outlined earlier in this discussion, within this literature it is assumed that those from working-class backgrounds have either limited economic resources, limited knowledge about institutions or choose the local university in order to meet people like themselves (see Reay et al. 2001; 2005). Notwithstanding this, Hussain and Bagguley (2007) found that ethnic and religious identity is especially important in this regard (p.107). While they acknowledge that financial limitations related to class background play a part for some South Asian women, parental perceptions of risk to the family’s honour (izzat) played a much more significant role, most notably for Bangladeshi and Pakistani women. In their careful drawing of the young South Asian women respondents, Hussain and Bagguley present a picture of these young women not as oppressed or without agency, but as working with and carefully negotiating the constraints arising from their familial and community preferences (2007: 107).
Hussain and Bagguley’s research thus provides an important counterbalance to studies of HE choice, which treat minority ethnic groups as having similar experiences to working-class and other ‘non-traditional’ students. In terms of their discussion of South Asian women’s experiences once at university however, this is much more limited primarily because the authors adopt an approach which focuses almost explicitly on the experiences of racism and Islamophobia in HE. From this perspective, Hussain and Bagguley demonstrate the ways in which young South Asian women experience an environment in which they are a visible minority. In addition, they highlight the difficulties that many young women face as they make the transition from a predominantly South Asian high school or sixth form, to a setting in which South Asian people are relatively few in number. While this discussion is clearly important, in neglecting to consider the positive impact of going to university (i.e. making new friends, the enriching nature of the university experience) Hussain and Bagguley perpetuate the trend within studies of minority students which presents their experiences as less enjoyable or affirmative than those of other (majority) young people.

The research discussed here under the banner of Inequality Studies has been important for this study. This strand highlights the impact of social-class background, the particularities of ethnicity, and the ways in which attachments to place shape young people’s decisions about where to study at university. I have been mindful of the issues highlighted by research from within this field, because many of the respondents who volunteered for this research were the first in their families to go to university and, also, many chose local and post-1992 universities. An important point to note about respondents, however, is that many do not fit neatly into the categories of ‘working-class’ or ‘middle-class’ and, consequently, they do not fit the profile of the ‘non traditional’ student. Their experiences are, nevertheless, as complex and significant in understanding the implications of the social trend towards university study. It is imperative then that research which explores significant shifts, such as the expansion of higher education, appreciates the diversity of experience and also, the similarities, which cut across social class and ethnicity. In addition, Inequality Studies, it seems, affords very limited space for a discussion of the
broader (and in many cases positive) impacts of going to university. The positive impacts of university study do not end with opportunities for social mobility and higher earning potential, but, crucially, extend to the realm of personal relationships. By exploring how and in what ways going to university shapes the experiences of family, friend and intimate relationships one is able to create a more active and complete image of young people’s experiences of higher education. The following section explores studies which have sought to correct the balance within youth and/or education research and present young people as embedded within relationships to family, friends and home.

Relationality Studies

As I have demonstrated, research which focuses on inequality in higher education often presents young people’s experiences of university as separate from their personal relationships and emotional connections. Although family and community backgrounds are understood as shaping decisions about HE, this is often imagined as a uni-directional process and it is rare for research to consider the ways in which going to university reflects back onto personal relationships with family and friends. In the discussion which follows then, I shall examine a particular strand of research which takes a relational approach to young people’s experiences of higher education, leaving home and growing up. This literature is of a rather different flavour to the studies discussed above primarily because it does not foreground social class, ethnicity or gender, but instead seeks to situate young people and the choices they make within their webs of relationships and attachments. At the heart of these studies is an emphasis on relational practices and an approach to young people’s experiences which allows for more subtle and nuanced accounts of their lives to emerge.

1) Friendship

There are very few studies of young people’s experiences of friend relationships during the move to university. This perhaps reflects the longstanding neglect of friend relationships within sociology, although, in recent years this imbalance has been addressed and studies of friendship have begun to emerge with greater frequency (see for
example, Pahl and Spencer, 2004). Research which has explored the relationship between friendship and education has tended to be rather gendered and has, in the main, focused on much younger students (for example, Hey 1997). Rachel Brooks’ (2005) study, ‘Friendship and Educational Choice: Peer Influence and Planning for the future’ is therefore, a rare account of the ways in which relationships with friends are managed during the move to university.

Brooks’ findings are based on data gathered through a qualitative longitudinal project carried out with sixth form students in the south of England. Fifteen young people and their friends were interviewed, primarily about the ways in which they had made decisions about university. However, they were also asked to share information about their lives outside college and their relationships with friends. Interviewees were selected to reflect different levels of attainment and different subject areas rather than on the basis of their social class or ethnic background. As a result, Brooks describes the sample as having ‘higher than average’ levels of academic attainment and as being ‘broadly lower middle-class’ (2005: 14). In this way Brooks’ research sample differs significantly from many other studies within the field, particularly those discussed above. Commenting on the composition of her research sample, Brooks maintains that young people who fall between the economically underprivileged working-classes and the upper and professional middle classes are hugely under-theorised in both the sociology of youth (Miles, 2000) and in education research (Power, 2001). Brooks’ work therefore fills an important gap in the literature and provides an account of ‘ordinary’ youth experiences.

Although social class is not the focus of Brooks’ study, the research does raise important questions which challenge assumptions about ‘class-strategies’ with regard to the process of HE decision-making (for example, Ball, 2003; Gerwitz et al., 1995; Lauder and Hughes 1999; Reay, 1998). In the main, Brooks found that young people from very similar social locations came to understand the structure of the HE market in very different ways (2005: 119). The study emphasizes the problems associated with assuming the homogeneity of the working and middle classes. These findings support the work of Savage et al. (2001) who make the case for a more sophisticated approach to what are
apparently complex and fragmented social class groupings. Similarly, Devine (2004; 2010) also calls for conceptualizations of social class which are less tightly bounded and which attend both to intra-class distinctions and inter-class similarities.

The main contribution of Brooks’ research, and particularly for this study, are her comments on friendship. The way in which respondents’ friend relationships are presented – as challenging, unequal and constantly shifting - sets this work apart from other reflections on young people’s friend relationships which often essentialise and oversimplify them (Roberts and Allen, 1996, and O’Connor 1992). Brooks achieves this by exploring the reciprocal effect of preparing for university on the nature, quality and practice of friend relationships, rather than simply the influence of friends and peers on the decision-making process. The study illuminates the complexities and contradictions that respondents experienced when discussing their thoughts and plans for the future with friends. Brooks maintains that when young people are making choices about HE they often feel awkward and uncomfortable talking about this with friends because of the emerging differences and hierarchies that such a process brings with it (2005: 72). The interviewees were aware of the positioning, and associated judgments, which were taking place with regard to their own and their friends’ choice of institution, course and location of university. Drawing on Savage’s (2000) work, Brooks makes the case that such ‘horizontal comparisons’ (i.e. judgments against those in the same position rather than ‘above’ or ‘below’) are an important means for students to define themselves (2005: 98). Disclosing and sharing information about university is therefore seen as a challenge to the equality of friend relationships and is avoided by a number of strategies. Brooks found that ‘good’ friendships were not always ‘open’ and ‘honest’ relationships. This therefore challenges theories which place considerable emphasis on the importance of intimacy, disclosure and the sharing of life plans within close friendships such as those put forward by Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (1995), Giddens (1992) and Pahl (1998) (see Brooks 2005: 99).

Brooks’ research thus unsettles some of the theory which attends to personal life and relationships. First, the 15 interviewees and their friends described stable friendships over
the two year research period despite the emerging sense of inequality, something which goes against Allan’s (1998) claims that ‘where such balance is missing, sustaining the relationship as friendship becomes problematic’ (1998: 76-77). Second, and perhaps most significantly for my own research, through a discussion of the ways in which young people manage and maintain friend relationships – often through concealing information or misleading friends – Brooks picks apart the very idea that there is something ‘special’ or ‘unique’ about young people’s friendships as others have stated (see Berndt, 1999; Duck, 1983; Hendry et al. 1993; Hunter, 1985; Reed-Danahay, 1999). Brooks supports Wallace and Kovatcheva (1998) and Lesko (2001) who argue against an essentialist understanding of ‘youth’ (2005: 154). Instead Brooks creates an image of negotiation rather than individualization, and of the constraints placed on friendships by social divisions and by competing responsibilities to ourselves and to others.

Brooks’ research is the most significant exploration of young people’s friend relationships during the move to university. While the research does not present friendships as easy or enjoyable all of the time it does, however, provide evidence of the creativity with which young people ‘do’ friendship during periods of change and transition. Importantly, Brooks avoids the trap of essentialising young people’s friendships, and, unlike other research into students’ friend relationships (for example, Callender and Day Slater, forthcoming, cited in Callender and Jackson, 2008: 410) preserving long-standing relationships with school or college friends is not seen as evidence of a failure to ‘branch out’.

2) Family and Home
In thinking about relationality and young people’s personal attachments one automatically thinks about their relationships with family and home and how this impacts upon their experiences of higher education. In this section I shall examine two key pieces of research which consider young people’s relational practices in leaving or remaining at home during university study. The first study is from Patiniotis and Holdsworth (2005), who explore the ways in which home and family shape decisions about where to study and where to live while at university. They maintain that deciding whether or not to remain
living at home while attending university is a question which incorporates more complex factors relating to students’ family resources, community ties and aspirations and expectations rather than simply a matter of economic viability (2005: 82). In their mixed-methods investigation of how and why students make the choice to stay at home whilst they study at university, the authors comment on the ways in which leaving home to attend university is particular to the British context. The current restructuring of student finances has meant, however, that increasing numbers of undergraduate students are choosing to remain living at home (Patiniotis and Holdsworth 2005: 82).

There are elements of Patiniotis and Holdsworth’s (2005) research which resonate with the Inequality Studies strand. For example, the authors examine the risks involved for less-privileged students entering higher education and, also, they reinforce the argument that for many disadvantaged and/or working-class students the decision to live at home represents a strategy to save money (Patiniotis and Holdsworth 2005: 88). What sets this research apart from more traditional research, however, is the way in which they emphasize the agency of their respondents who wanted to remain at home with family during their studies. In this way, living it home is not simply understood as a constraint, or as a negative consequence of young people’s social position and financial resources. Indeed, it has been a common assumption that students who live at home would in fact prefer to live away from home and remain local merely as a way of easing the economic burden of living away. According to Heath and Cleaver (2003) the decision to live at “home is seen to impose social constraints on students who are unable to participate fully in student life, and to break away from existing social networks”. The end result, they argue, “is a common representation of home-based students as unequivocally disadvantaged in monetary, social and cultural terms” (Heath and Cleaver 2003: 79). Patiniotis and Holdsworth’s (2005) are aware of the challenges which face home-based students; however, they avoid presenting this group of students as victims of their social location. Instead they reveal the complex ways in which young people make decisions about university, taking into account their commitments to family, their personal ambitions, and their emotional attachments to place. Patiniotis and Holdsworth therefore add weight to the argument put forward by Irwin (1995), who maintains that continuing
dependence may be seen by some young people as an opportunity rather than a threat; thus staying at home may be a *choice* rather than simply a given.

Extending this idea, Patiniotis and Holdsworth (2005) argue that the decision to stay at home during study is closely linked to students’ feelings of ontological security (Giddens 1991). According to Giddens, in the midst of wide-scale social change individuals seek ontological security, which is defined as having confidence in one’s self identity, and as the security derived from shared and routine background practices (1991). Patiniotis and Holdsworth reveal that a number of respondents, although particularly those from working-class communities, continued to live locally so that they could retain a sense of belonging and identity that would perhaps have been threatened by the idea of moving away (2005: 89). The familiarity and security of home can provide support and stability for young people to whom the world of HE feels alien, however it may not be enough to insure against the new risk of becoming ‘other’ within their traditional local communities (Patiniotis and Holdsworth 2005: 92-93). Patiniotis and Holdsworth highlight the ways in which working-class students, by virtue of entering into HE, are breaking away from tradition in ways that middle-class students are not expected to do (2005: 93). Within this argument there are clearly echoes of Jackson and Marsden’s (1962) study cited at the beginning of this chapter.

The second study which has informed this research comes from Holdsworth and Morgan (2005). In, *Transitions in Context: Leaving Home, Independence and Adulthood* the authors explore issues around home and family relationships as well as the meaning and experience of leaving for home for young people. They draw on data generated through a comparative investigation of young people’s experiences of leaving home in three distinct European contexts – Norway, Spain and the UK – which represent different home-leaving models. They maintain that leaving the parental home represents a major life-course transition for young people, and that it is the way in which this process has been separated out from other transitions (i.e. marriage, employment, education) which makes it so varied, unpredictable and therefore worthy of academic study (Holdsworth and Morgan 2005). Within their discussion the authors examine important themes such as
independence, adulthood and home, focusing on similarities and differences across the three research sites. It is the discussion of time and generation, and young people’s personal relationships, which has been most significant for this research.

In their discussion of timing and generation, Holdsworth and Morgan (2005) reveal the ways in which respondents in Norway, Spain and the UK came to the decision to leave home. Whilst age was important to some degree, for the most part the ‘right’ time to leave home was regarded as an individual choice dependent on individual circumstances and feelings (2005: 55). Although respondents drew heavily on discourses of individualization, Holdsworth and Morgan (2005) demonstrate the ways in which the points at which respondents decided to leave home were hugely contingent on their relationships with others. References to other life-course transitions came up in all three locations, and home leaving was linked to love, co-habitation and in some cases (Spain) marriage, as well as difficult relationships with parents (Holdsworth and Morgan 2005: 55). The authors reveal the ways in which decisions about home-leaving are informed by relationships with significant others. More than this however, Holdsworth and Morgan demonstrate the ways in which young people are embedded within the cultural practices, norms and expectations of their localities. Home-leaving is thus understood as a relational, rather than individualized, practice.

It is through such a focus on relational practices that Holdsworth and Morgan (2005) are able to understand the important role that others play in decisions about home leaving. They maintain that others, especially siblings and friends, acted as role-models for some of their participants as they made their decision to leave home (Holdsworth and Morgan 2005: 55). In addition, these significant others sometimes merged into a kind of ‘generalized other’, a sense that everyone in a particular convoy or cohort was doing the same thing. Through their conceptualization of the ‘generalized other’ Holdsworth and Morgan create a multi-dimensional picture of young people with various and varied points of reference as they negotiate their pathways out of home. This sense of ‘other’ is similar to Mead’s concept of the generalized other. Holdsworth and Morgan maintain that,
‘The concept of the generalized other is pertinent when considering transitions, as
young people are often looking for different anchorage points to guide them
through the transition process. It has however to be used loosely as it pertains to
what others might be doing, rather than a sense of a recognized community norm,
it is a useful way of recognizing the boundaries of possible behaviour, rather than
a sense of normalized practices.’

(2005: 144)

Holdsworth and Morgan highlight the ways in which friends, family members, and other
young people in the wider community and society impact upon young people’s lives in a
more indirect way. In so doing, the authors demonstrate the impact of emotional and
moral values on the decision-making processes as well as structural and financial
concerns.

*Transitions in Context* (2005) is a useful study then, especially in the ways in which it
attends to issues around family relationships. I agree with Holdsworth and Morgan who
claim to ‘avoid the problems inherent to many approaches to socialization whereby
family is taken as a rather static entity, particularly when conceptualizing young people’s
relationships within families’ (2005: 127). Instead, the authors present family
relationships as active rather than reducing them ‘to a system of resources out of which
young people emerge’ (2005: 128). By exploring the dynamic nature of family
relationships Holdsworth and Morgan allow for an understanding of how and in what
ways going to university and/or leaving home affects the lives of other family members
and not just the student in question. It is imperative to consider how parents respond to
change, or the possibility of change, and how this filters into everyday, reciprocal
relationships.

3) Sociality and Intimacy

The final study which takes a relational approach to understanding young people’s
experiences is the *Inventing Adulthoods* study by Henderson et al. (2007). This qualitative
study, carried out over ten years with around 100 young people in 5 contrasting areas of
the UK, is extremely broad in its scope and touches on issues such as work, education,
vioence, mobility and well-being. With such a wide range of issues covered, the book
naturally offers only a limited discussion of the key themes, however these are developed
in a range of articles which explore issues around identity, ambivalence and social capital (e.g. Thomson, 2002; Thomson and Holland 2002, 2003; Thomson et al. 2002).

With the use of rich data, *Inventing Adulthoods* offers an exciting discussion of the ways in which young people manage their relationships and identities during a period of change and transformation, making particular reference to new forms of sociality and intimacy. At present the role of communications technologies and the impact of the internet and social networking sites on young people’s personal lives are still under-researched within sociology (see Wajcman, 2008 for an overview). Henderson et al. (2007) thus demonstrate the ways in which new forms of sociality are emerging and to what extent these are shaping young people’s intimate relationships (2007: 161). The authors reveal the ways in which mobile phone technology has given parents access to arenas of young people’s lives that would formerly have been unavailable to them (p. 162) and this therefore allows for new ways of thinking about issues of distance and proximity, private and public, privacy and intimacy, and, also, the innovative and creative ways in which young people connect with family and friends.

Significantly, Henderson et al. (2007) make the case for the continued importance of relationships with family and friends for young people. Their study offers a counterbalance to theories of individualization and the declining significance of family life in the current era (for example, Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 1995). Henderson et al. (2007) also comment in detail on young people’s romantic and intimate relationships; a discussion which has been largely absent from youth research. Interestingly, Henderson and colleagues reveal that most of the young people they interviewed envisaged a partnered future for themselves (2007: 149). This finding challenges theorists such as Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (1995) and Bauman (2000) who argue that the bonds of family and intimate relationships are weakening in contemporary society. Perhaps most significant for my own research are the comments made about education and intimacy, specifically the way in which becoming an educated and successful woman often stands in tension with being a committed and ‘local’ girlfriend (2007: 141). It is through this discussion that Henderson et al. (2007) demonstrate the complex relationship between
personal relationships and individual choices. This research has providing an important point of reference for my own research, especially in its consideration of relationships and identities in the context of different geographical locations. Such an emphasis on the embedded nature of social life is something I have taken forward into my own research.

Concluding Comments

This chapter has outlined the key empirical studies which have informed this research. As I have demonstrated, these studies can be situated, albeit rather loosely, within two different strands of research: Inequality Studies and Relationality Studies. These strands have different aims and, although researching similar issues, they proceed from very different positions. Research carried out within Inequality Studies seeks to highlight the challenging and often negative experiences of young people from working-class and minority ethnic backgrounds as they make decisions about university. In contrast to this, Relationality Studies seek to situate young people within their broader webs of relationships and highlight the ways in which emotional attachments and values come into play during the move to university. I do not wish to diminish or dismiss the ways in which inequalities are reproduced and experienced within HE, however I wish to build upon the growing body of research discussed in the second section of this chapter. The ways in which social class is understood within social research often overstates class distinctions and masks the many similarities which occur at the level of everyday relationships. Moreover, there are problems in assuming that where ‘constraints’ are experienced, these are almost always experienced in negative and inhibiting in the way that some studies suggest. Feelings of embeddedness and connectedness to home, kin and friends do, in fact, work in complex ways. In the next chapter I shall explore some of the key theoretical work which has allowed me to think through issues around relatiornality and feelings of attachment.
Chapter 3
Thinking through relationality: theoretical underpinnings to this research

The aim of this chapter is to discuss some of the key theories and concepts which have influenced this study, and which offer ways of thinking through relationality. These theories do not form one, single unified approach; they have developed at different times, in different ways and in response to quite different concerns. What they share in common, however, is an emphasis on situated and contextual understandings of the self and social action. These different theories understand people’s relationships, resources and histories as significant in shaping not only what they do but also, who they are. Relational theories thus pose a challenge to concepts of individualisation, individualism and the self, which have come to dominate some of the most influential sociological commentaries on social change. While I shall say a little about the recent preoccupation with individualisation in social theory, my intention is to explore the ways in which such an approach is being questioned and destabilised. This chapter begins then, by looking at three key concepts: relationality, embeddedness and ambivalence. Drawing on the work of Jennifer Mason (2004), Carol Smart (2007) and Sue Heath and colleagues (2008), I shall demonstrate the ways in which a strand of contemporary sociological theory has begun to think about how and in what ways personal relationships influence the kinds of decisions people make and the values they possess. These theories provide new ways of thinking about relationships, which take into account some of the major shifts in modern family structures and, also, the ‘darker’, more problematic aspects of feelings of relatedness.

As I shall demonstrate, the concepts of relationality, embeddedness and ambivalence are put to use in rather different ways, yet, they share a focus on the historical and active nature of relationships and also, the relationship between the individual and the collective. One can, therefore, make links between these contemporary theorisations of family relationships and personal life, and the theoretical work of Pierre Bourdieu. Indeed, Bourdieu’s theory of social reproduction – particularly his concept of *habitus* – has been widely drawn upon by scholars undertaking research in the field of higher education, as
well as within sociology generally. Bourdieu’s conceptual framework is appealing to sociologists who wish to move away from notions of individualism because, as Diane Reay contends, ‘habitus is a dynamic concept, a rich interlacing of past and present, individual and collective’ (2010: 75). Individual action is understood as a reflection of a person’s resources, their relationships and also their (class) culture. As I shall demonstrate, there are some parallels between Bourdieu’s theorisations and those put forward by Mason (2004), Smart (2007) and Heath et al (2008). While I have not been slavish to any one way of thinking, I have found habitus (and the related concepts of field, and social and cultural capital) useful for thinking about this research. Thus, the second part of this chapter discusses Bourdieu’s key theoretical concepts, as well as some of the important critiques and debates which accompany them.

Challenging Theories of Individualization

The discussion which follows examines some key, contemporary ways of thinking about agency and identity which recognise, and in some cases proceed from, the process of relating and people’s experiences of relatedness. While the three key concepts that I discuss work in rather different ways, taken together they pose a challenge to the appropriateness of concepts of individualisation, individualism and the self in explaining the complexities of social change (Mason 2004: 163). I shall not rehearse theories of individualization here, in full, because this has been done elsewhere (see Smart, 2007 and Burkitt, 2008) and, also, because I wish to give more space to work which challenges this approach. There now exists a body of empirical research which offers alternative understandings of identities, values and actions, illustrating the ways in which lives are embedded and interwoven across time and space (see for example, Finch and Mason, 2000; Ribbens McCarthy, Edwards and Gillies, 2003; Sevenhuijsen, 1998; Smart and Neale, 1999; Skeggs, 1997). I cannot discuss each of these studies in turn so, instead, I shall examine three key pieces of empirical and theoretical work which have impacted upon this research. Before I come to these, however, and way of introduction, I shall say a few words about contemporary western preoccupation with individualisation.
‘The ideals of freedom, liberty and individual autonomy are values that can prevent us from submitting to authorities that crave too much power…But like all good ideas and ideals, individualism can also have its dangers’.

(Burkitt, 2008: 2)

The quotation above is taken from Ian Burkitt’s *Social Selves: Theories of Self and Society* (2008), in which he plots a history of both individualist and relationist approaches to identity in the social and philosophical sciences. As demonstrated in the excerpt, Burkitt’s aim is to challenge ideas around individualism, particularly ‘possessive individualism’, which have come to dominate contemporary Western thinking about the self. The notion of possessive individualism is based on the idea that each individual is the possessor of his or her own skills and capacities, owing nothing to society for the development of these (see Macpherson, 1962). For Burkitt, the problem with this theory is that it creates a division between the individual and society, and in so doing, distorts the fact that each one of us develops our capacities in society: ‘we are all born into social relations that we didn’t make, and much of who and what we are is formed in that context’ (Burkitt, 2008: 3).

Burkitt’s discussion covers a broad range of theories from the work of Rene Descartes in 1637 to the more recent theorisations of Anthony Giddens. Central to Giddens’s (1991; 1992) arguments around identity and intimacy is the notion that choices of biographical narrative and lifestyle are made independently of others, with reference only to the plans and choices of an individual. Burkitt contends that, in western societies that put a high value on the individual –its freedom, autonomy, creativity, and the expression of its own individuality – there is often a temptation to overlook the role that others play in the process of self-identification (2008: 1). Giddens’s thesis is therefore, regarded as far too generalized and far too individualized (Burkitt 2008: 171). To support his critique of Giddens (and other proponents of individualism), Burkitt references the work of George Herbert Mead and Mikhail M. Bakhtin as a way of demonstrating the ways in which identity is always primarily based in relational life with others. From this perspective, the way we see ourselves can never be disconnected from the way others see us – even if we respond by trying to become the opposite of what we are imagined to be. For Burkitt then, identities are never composed only with reference to personal projects of the self, because
such projects and images of what one hopes to be are ‘always formulated in dialogic interaction with others’ (2008: 171).

It is well documented that theories of individualisation emerged, and gathered pace, in response to the supposed decline of ‘the family’. Writing about the individualization thesis, Ulrich Beck refers to family as a ‘zombie category’ (2002: 204), while Elisabeth Beck-Gernsheim contends that, ‘the traditional social relationships, bonds and belief systems that used to define people’s lives…have been losing more and more of their meaning’ (2002: ix). Similarly, Giddens (1992) understands the current proliferation of different types of family structures, gay and lesbian families, and families of choice that are composed of individuals who are not biologically related, as evidence that tradition is being swept away in the current era, and that people now have greater choice in terms of the lifestyles they can adopt. There have of course been many challenges to the individualisation thesis over the last decade (Jamieson, 1998, 1999; Ribbens McCarthy et al. 2003; Smart and Shipman, 2004; Brannen and Nilsen, 2005; Gross, 2005; Crow, 2002; Lewis, 2001). Scholars, writing within the field of family and personal life, have highlighted the lack of congruence between the depiction of family life in the work of individualization theorists and the kinds of lives being represented in empirical studies of family relationships, kinship and friendship networks (Smart, 2007: 17). It is out of this engagement with the individualization thesis that the concept of relationality (or relationism) has emerged, opening up new ways of thinking about the ways in which people experience their everyday lives (Smart, 2007).

**Key Concepts: (1) Relationality**

The emergence of relationality as a tool for understanding and explaining personal relationships can be seen then, as a response to the growing need to broaden the analytical gaze of traditional ‘family sociology’ and also that of studies of kinship in anthropology. Developments in reproductive technologies and, in addition, the increasingly complex nature of family forms mean that traditional ways of ‘seeing’ family relationships have become outdated and unhelpful. Instead of focusing on the demise of relationships as in
the case of theorists of individualization, a number of scholars have called for better understandings of the role and significance of ‘non-blood’ relationships, such as step-parents and step-siblings, adoptive family members as well as those relationships with people who may not be family or kin in a strict sense but who nevertheless occupy the same place in emotional, cultural, social and personal senses (Smart 2007: 46). Relationality is an important concept then, because it allows for a greater flexibility in approach than terms such as ‘family’ and ‘kin’ which carry with them significant, and often negative ‘baggage’.

By thinking through people’s relationalities and their sense of relatedness it becomes possible to appreciate the many and varied relationships that they are embedded within and which they must negotiate, draw upon and provide support to on a daily basis. This way of thinking means that one is able to avoid making (often incorrect) assumptions about the value and centrality of some relationships (i.e. immediate family) and the peripheral, flexible nature of others (i.e. friends, neighbours or workmates). It is clear therefore that the concept of relationality makes visible a broader range of personal relationships which have previously been obscured from the view of traditional ‘family sociology’, and which contemporary theories of social change neglect to consider. On a second level however, relationality allows for an understanding of individuals as constituted through their close kin ties. Relationships are understood as playing a central role in the ongoing development of personhood and individuality (Smart, 2007) and this provides a way of thinking about how and in what ways relationships feed into the process of decision-making and also, into the construction of ‘unique’ identities. There are similarities here with Burkitt’s (2008) notion of social individuality – a self formed through social relations, and also the work of Janet Finch (1989) and later Finch and Mason (1993, 2000), who encouraged a more sophisticated conceptualisation of kin and kinship. While Finch and Mason’s work focused on negotiated relationships, it is in more recent work that Mason (2004) has developed the concept of relationality.

In the article, ‘Personal narratives, relational selves: residential histories in the living and telling’ (2004), Mason reflects on a study of people’s residential histories, and
demonstrates the ways in which personal narratives of individual agency reflect relational, rather than individualistic, practices. The study asked people to talk about where they had lived over their lives, how this had come about, what moves they had made and why, what living in a place meant to them and whether and how relationships with others had figured in these processes (2004: 164). This research involved people with varied residential histories and highlights the complex nature of decision-making. Mason presents decisions about whether and where to move as, interwoven layers of consideration and practice that were contingent upon each other, commenting that:

‘People would fairly easily recall where they had lived throughout their lives, in sequence – although sometimes they struggled with exact dates – and could tell us what else had been going on in their lives at those times in terms of household composition, marriage, separation and divorce, births, approximate ages of self and key others, activities and education of children, family illnesses and deaths, the nature and quality of their relationships with family, kin, friends and neighbours, work, employment, and so on. They could situate these within a wider context including the economy (especially house prices, rent levels and the cost of living), politics on a local, national and sometimes international scale (especially as a backdrop to transnational migration), social history and ways of living, environmental factors and the climate… they were usually unable or unwilling to offer one reason [why they had moved or stayed] and instead they told often complex and lengthy stories of the interrelationships between sets of considerations, constraints, opportunities, co-incidences and serendipity.’

(Mason, 2004: 166)

It is evident from the quotation that people, like those in Mason’s study, are embedded within webs of relationships, their own and other people’s, and their practices are entrenched within the broader social, cultural and material conditions of their environment. According to Mason, in order to understand this process it is imperative to keep in focus the process of relating as much as, if not more than, the individual or the self (2004: 177). The ‘process of relating’ is not however, consistent for all people all of the time. Within her discussion therefore, Mason illustrates the different shapes and forms that the relational dimensions of people’s narratives can take. Mason identifies four key relational styles: 1) narratives of relational inclusion and co-presence; 2) narratives of relational participation; 3) narratives of relational constraint and conflict; and 4) narratives of relational individualism. As I shall demonstrate, the different relational
styles reflect both warm and supportive connections as well as relationships which give rise to feelings of constraint, conflict, claustrophobia and isolation.

Discussing the first style - *narratives of relational inclusion and co-presence* – Mason states that this was quite common, particularly among people who had only ever made local moves and who had kin living nearby. This style appeared in the accounts of both men and women, and was evidenced in the ways in which they told their residential (hi)stories with reference to considerations about being geographically proximate to kin. Within these narratives there was a taken-for grantedness about the importance of considering kin when moving home, with many respondents never contemplating anything other than geographical proximity to kin (2004: 168). For the few respondents who had moved away from kin at some stage, the co-presence of kin was described as a more virtual experience. Mason gives examples of kin providing advice, assistance or encouragement or practical support in the form of loans for house deposits; support in negotiating with mortgage lenders, estate agents, rental agents and landlords; in the task of actually looking for a home; in repairs, maintenance and renovation, and so on (2004: 168).

According to Mason, respondents who demonstrated the second style - *narratives of relational participation* - were those who discussed residential decisions as the product of explicit discussions and negotiations. The process of choosing and moving was thus conceived as a participative process and narratives were couched in the idea that creating a home ought to be a joint project. Mason notes the incidence of ‘we speak’ amongst these respondents, and an emphasis on the moral value of shared decision-making. A participative process, or participative narratives, does not necessarily mean that everyone had equal rights however, or that outcomes were always fair. In some cases or at some times, Mason notes that the process was reported to have been less participative than in others. Sometimes it was made clear that one partner had a more pressing desire to move than another at a particular time, for example for their own career advancement (more often men than women); a wish for a shorter journey to work (men and women equally); a desire to live near relatives (men and women, although more common amongst women);
a concern for children’s social networks (mostly women); so that children could go to a particular school (men and women equally). However, the message that moving or staying ought to be, and be presentable as, a shared project that is fair for and agreed by both partners, was very clearly heard from the ‘participatory’ narratives, whether or not a fair outcome had been perceived to have been achieved in every case (2004: 169).

The third style of relational narrative that Mason describes - narratives of relational constraint and conflict - involves people talking about their relationships as hampering them in some way, in questions about where they lived. Mason comments that as well as being supportive, relationships could be destructive and negotiations were often fraught with conflict, overt or otherwise. The very relationality of people’s residential practices could be a major source of resentment, and not just for those co-residing with kin. It was often in the aftermath of separation and divorce that the relationality of questions about where to live was described as problematic or constraining, as people struggled to establish new patterns of relating with ‘old’, ‘new’ and ‘ex’ sets of kin, and to work out practices of responsibility for and relationships with children (2004: 172). Often then, respondents who demonstrated this relational style were in states of turmoil and transition. According to Mason, it is during such times that narratives of constraint seemed particularly powerful, because people felt forcibly confronted with the relationality of their residential options (and lack of options), and could easily articulate their ambivalence, frustration and sense of lack of control.

The final relational style that Mason discusses is relational individualism which involved people speaking about how they had exercised individual control or agency about where to live, but in the interests of others. It is noted that within these accounts there was a sense of individualistic decision-making about relational matters, although respondents recognized that such a narrative was not entirely culturally and morally acceptable. This style of narrative was highly characteristic of a minority of the white men’s accounts, and was evident in none of the women’s. Mason maintains that these narrative styles were the least relational and thus share a strong tendency to individualism in the telling, but they simultaneously describe practices which are relational. Nevertheless, what this suggests is
that reflexive individualism, if it exists at all, is a privileged experience of a minority of white men (2004: 175).

Mason’s research and, crucially, the way in which it allows her to demonstrate the different forms and variations of relationality, provides a further challenge to theories of individualization. It is clear that people not only act in relation to significant others – taking into account their wants and needs – but also, that they recognize the morality and value in doing so. In addition, Mason’s research provides ways of thinking about those relationships which may have a negative impact upon the ways in which people understand their choices and identities. It is important to appreciate the supportive, loving and generally positive impact of family, friend and other relationships (indeed, there is an implicit assumption that personal relationships are felt in this way). Notwithstanding this however, sociological theory must accommodate the ‘darker’ side of relationality and feelings of relatedness. It is in this regard that Mason’s work is particularly useful.

Key Concepts: (2) Embeddedness

Smart (2007) maintains that, in a similar way to relationality, embeddedness is particularly important in its capacity as the counterweight to theories of individualism and individualisation, and the general emphasis on the apparently fragile bonds of couple and family relationships in contemporary society. In her discussion she draws on research carried out by Bengtson et al. (2002) who deploy the concept of ‘linked lives’ and argue that individual life trajectories are meaningful in the context of other lives which run in parallel, cross and interfere with that of the subject. Smart references this work as a way of highlighting the importance of chains of relationships across generations and also, to reveal the significance of relationships which may no longer be ‘current’, for example, those with people whom we may no longer speak to, or those with people who have died. Smart illustrates the way in which lives that are lived in the present are often done so with reference to relationships which may well be considered to be part of the past (2007: 45).
The concept of embeddedness thus allows for an understanding of the lasting influence of relationships which, even when presumed to be ‘over’ are still very much present. These relationships often continue to occupy spaces in our memories and imaginaries for long periods after they are deemed to have ended and, thus, continue to permeate our lives, decisions, values and identities. According to Smart (2007: 45), we now appreciate that family relationships do not necessarily end with death and that people have symbolic means, and even practices, which sustain elements of love and closeness, or even hate and bitterness. Embeddedness, like relationality, is therefore regarded as neither a good nor a bad quality in family or other relationships. This sense of connection can offer ontological security yet, at the same time, may also be experienced as psychologically or emotionally suffocating. It is with this that Smart (2007) makes the case for the ‘sticky’ relationships; those which are hard to simply shake off and which continue to shape our thoughts and practices even though we would prefer that they did not.

Embeddedness and relationality share certain similarities; they both evoke a sense of connectedness and, in addition, they provide ways of thinking through the antipathies of relationships and people’s sense of relatedness. They also work in rather different ways though too. Whereas relationality calls to mind the active, present, and everyday experience of personal relationships, embeddedness implies a sense of history and also, the intangible qualities of connectedness that one often feels. Both of these concepts are clearly very helpful then, in thinking about how young women structure and experience the move to university, and the dynamic relationship between personal relationships and individual action. Sometimes there are clear links between relational practices or feelings of embeddedness and the choices people make. At other times, however, people experience tensions and conflicts which shape social action in different and unexpected ways. It is with this point that I come to the third of the key concepts: Ambivalence.

**Key Concepts: (3) Ambivalence**

In their study of educational decision-making, Heath et al. (2007; 2008) work with the concept of ambivalence in order to consider the ways in which moments of tension and
conflict impact upon the choices people make. The authors reinforce Mason’s (2004) claims regarding the constricting and sometimes distressing effects of connections to family, highlighting the ways in which decisions that may remove people from the clutches of family are nevertheless taken in relation to experiences of relatedness to kin. They characterise their study as ‘a network-based approach’ to the decision-making process. This means that the starting point of their research was to reject the notion that decision-making is an essentially individualised process. Instead, the authors work with an understanding of decision-making as ‘an embedded social practice within and across generations as well as across the life course’ (2007: 3). This way of thinking is at the heart of their methodology so, rather than simply interviewing individuals did who had no plans to continue their formal education past Level 3\(^1\), Heath and colleagues also interviewed members from the individual’s networks, mainly family members, partners and friends. These nominated members were asked about their own educational backgrounds and also to reflect on what they thought may have influenced the decision-making process of the key individual.

In their analysis and discussion Heath et al. (2008) employ Lüscher’s (1998, 2000, 2005) and Connidis and McMullin’s (2002) different conceptualisations of ‘ambivalence’ as a framework for understanding the complexities and tensions of the decision-making process. Lüscher (2005: 100, cited in Heath et al. 2008: 222) uses the term ‘intergenerational ambivalence’ to capture the ‘simultaneous existence of polarised emotions, thoughts, volitions, social relations and structures that are considered relevant for the constitution of individual or collective identities’. It is thought that ambivalence can result in irreconcilable polarisations which will continue for as long as an individual remains within a certain field of action, and which individuals may or may not be able to cope with in competent and productive ways (Lüscher, 2005: 101). Therefore, ambivalence, depending upon how it is coped with and managed within a network, can spur individuals to action in some instances yet, in others, can produce wholly different outcomes. In order to explain these variations, Lüscher has developed a heuristic model in

\(^1\) The level of qualification which is usually the baseline for gaining entry to UK HE
which different forms of ambivalence are characterised and, in which, the possible outcomes of ambivalence (i.e. continuity or change) are considered.

According to Heath et al. (2008: 222), Lüscher’s model considers the interplay between the degree to which different family members share similar outlooks and values, and the degree to which they seek to preserve traditional family forms or express a desire to embrace change. Lüscher proposes four basic models for experiencing and dealing with ambivalence which are dependent upon the relationship between these two dimensions: 

- **Solidarity** (convergence of outlook/desire to reproduce tradition),
- **Emancipation** (convergence in outlook/desire to embrace change),
- **Captivation** (divergence in outlook/reluctance to reproduce tradition) and
- **Atomisation** (divergence in outlook/desire to embrace change). 

Through this model Lüscher is able to demonstrate instances in which networks remain bounded and static (i.e. Solidarity and Captivation) and others where networks are unstable and more open to change (Emancipation and Atomisation). 

Ambivalence provides a tool for thinking through the ways in which webs of relationships – which may be supportive as well as challenging or conflicting – play a central role in the decision-making process.

Lüscher’s model relates specifically to family relationships. However, Connidis and McMullin (2002) argue that ambivalence is a feature of all social relationships. They build upon Lüscher’s work to argue that differential access to resources within networks influences the degree to which ambivalence can be satisfactorily resolved by an individual. Some individuals, for example, are able to mobilise a range of resources in order to distance themselves (including geographically) from their closest ties (e.g. Lüscher’s Atomisation) whereas others, through constraint, remain dependent upon them despite their differences (e.g. Lüscher’s Captivation) (Heath et al. 2008: 223). Heath et al. are able to demonstrate, through their discussion of the case of ‘Lorraine Smith’, the ways in which ambivalence can be used as a framework for considering how and in what ways influences and resources represented within a given network may allow for intergenerational continuity and/or change (p. 224-227). More than this however, their rich data reveal the way in which ‘poor relationships’ with parents or siblings, for
example, and painful and/or negative experiences such as bereavement or divorce, also have the power to structure actions and identities as well as narratives. Thus, in a similar way to Mason’s study of residential biographies, Heath et al. (2008) illustrate how and in what ways people like Lorraine, and the members of her network, assemble stories about education around relationships with partners, children and parents. As Heath et al. (2008) note: ‘…many of the key decisions made by Lorraine in relation to education have been linked to the quality of her personal relationships, and have had consequences for the ongoing nature of those relationships’.

The ways in which Heath et al. (2008) deploy the concept of ambivalence demonstrates further the significance of personal relationships for people’s sense of identity and also with the choices they are able to make. In addition, they reveal the ways in which ambivalence works to bring intergenerational relationships into view. As a conceptual tool, it provides ways of thinking about the shared values of the collective (family, community), the personal dispositions and desires of the individual, and the ways in which these two may be in conversation at different times and with differing effects. In revealing the impact of negative relational experiences on decision making, Heath et al. (2008) add to the growing body of literature which seeks to understand the emotionality of personal life and its sometimes ‘darker’ side. The emphasis on emotion is apparent for each of the three key concepts discussed here, but what ambivalence is able to offer in addition to this, is a way of thinking about continuity and change across generations. Understanding the different ways in which reproduction and transformation occur within families is essential for this research and ambivalence is one way of thinking about this. It is, however, the work of Pierre Bourdieu which has been most influential in this regard. The following section looks in detail at his key theoretical concepts.

*Pierre Bourdieu: Habitus and Field*

“You do not have to be a devotee of Pierre Bourdieu to acknowledge the awesome influence of his work on the social sciences across the globe over the last half century.”

(Devine, 2010: 151)
As Devine points out in the quotation above, Pierre Bourdieu has played a significant role in determining the shape of the social sciences in recent years. Within education research, Bourdieu’s concepts have become increasingly popular amongst scholars seeking to understand the experiences of working-class young people entering higher education. Although originally conceived as a way of theorising the reproduction of middle-class advantage, Bourdieu’s framework is often used to consider inequalities, and the difficulties faced by working-class young people and their parents (see for example, Reay 2009). As outlined in Chapter 2, the reproduction of inequality in HE is not the focus of this study. Nevertheless, Bourdieu’s concept of habitus provides a useful framework for thinking about contemporary identities, and permits an understanding of social action which emphasises the situated and relational nature of individual agency. Thus, although it is part of a much bigger theory, habitus is similar to relationality, embeddedness and ambivalence because it is a multi-layered concept, “a rich interlacing of past and present, individual and the collective” (Reay, 2010: 75). The discussion which follows looks in detail at habitus, and the related concept of field, revealing the ways in which both provide ways of understandings of action and identity as relational experiences.

Bourdieu describes the habitus as “a system of durable, transposable dispositions which function as the generative basis of structured, objectively unified practices” (1979: viii). Put simply, the habitus is the culture (of an epoch, class or any group) as it is internalised by the individual in the form of durable dispositions that are the basis of his/her behaviour (Bidet, 1979: 203). Bourdieu offers a model of disciplined bodies in which the habitus is the product of strategies objectively co-ordinated by mechanisms which are, crucially, unknown to the individual (Skeggs, 2004: 83, emphasis added). The idea that ways of seeing and acting within the world are inculcated within the individual without their knowledge is central to Bourdieu’s conceptualisation of the habitus. The various characteristics of the habitus are enacted unthinkingly, and that is partly what defines them as habitual (Adams 2006: 514).
The development of an unconscious habitus is thought to begin during the early childhood years. Bourdieu actually writes that habitus ‘refers to something historical, it is linked to individual history’ (Bourdieu, 1993: 86, cited in Reay, 2010: 76). The objective conditions of the child’s material world shape both their family socialisation patterns and their schooling, which in turn impart to them particular principles which govern the way they respond to their environment. It is in this way then, that Bourdieu offers a conceptualisation of identity and individual action as situated and relational, taking into account the social, cultural and familial context in to which a person is born and in which they grow and come to understand the world. As Adams maintains, therefore, ‘though thoroughly individualized, the habitus in fact reflects a shared cultural context’ as ‘[t]he cultural commonalities of a class become inscribed upon the body’ (2006: 514).

It is important to note the ways in which the habitus is conceived as an essentially embodied phenomenon. As Adams maintains above, a person’s history and, in particular their class, become inscribed upon the body so that the habitus signifies not just how they think about the world but, also, how they act within it. This includes, for example, ways of walking, a tilt of the head, facial expressions, ways of sitting and using implements, and also the tone and style of our speech (Bourdieu, 1977: 85). So deeply entrenched are these dispositions that, ‘[the body] does not represent what it performs, it does not memorize the past, it enacts the past, bringing it back to life. According to Bourdieu, what is ‘learned by the body is not something one has, like knowledge that can be brandished, but something that one is’ (Bourdieu 1990: 73). From this perspective, a child is disposed to see and experience the world in the same way as elder generations of family and community, and this then leads them towards following certain courses of action and to regard certain types of behaviour as ‘normal’ (Heath et al. 2008: 221).

Indeed, Bourdieu is often considered to be more interested in stability rather than change and it is this line of his argument which has received some of the heaviest criticism. Bourdieu is often regarded as excessively deterministic in his writing (see for example Alexander 1994; Halle, 1993; Lamont, 1992), and is understood as creating a world in which behaviour has its causes, but actors are not allowed their reasons (Jenkins, 1992:}
Giroux (1982) goes as far as to suggest that Bourdieu’s concept of habitus and his theory of reproduction generally, display no faith in the ability of subordinate classes and groups to re-invent and re-construct the conditions under which they live. Bourdieu is therefore, often understood as emphasizing mindless conformity and continuity rather than transformation and change.

Such criticisms fail to recognize, however, the force of Bourdieu’s insistence that the habitus is not to be conceived as a principle of determinism but as a generative structure. It is with this point that I wish to introduce the concept of Field, which is central to an understanding of how the habitus works. According to Bourdieu, the field is ‘a relational configuration endowed with a specific gravity which it imposes on all the objects and agents which enter it’ (Bourdieu, cited in Widick, 2003: 684). Fields engender certain responses, hailing the individual to respond both to themselves and their surroundings in specific ways to the point of habituation (Adams, 2006). Thus, within certain objective limits (i.e. within the field), the habitus engenders a potentially infinite number of patterns of behaviour, thought and expression that are both ‘relatively unpredictable’ but also ‘limited in their diversity’ (McNay 1999: 100). Thus, while the habitus is envisaged such that individuals are disposed to experience the world in the same way as the older generations of their family and community, reproduction from one generation to the next is never perfect. Empirical research highlights the way in which and moments of tension (between habitus and field) give rise to transformations within the habitus (see for example, Reay et al. 2007, 2009). Therefore, the habitus is understood as permeable and responsive to what is going on around it. Current circumstances are not just there to be acted upon, but they are internalised and become yet another layer to add to those from earlier socializations (Reay, 2010: 76).

By thinking about the habitus in this way – as layers of internalized experiences – one is able to consider its dynamic quality and the ways in which it allows for, rather than denies, human agency. Thus, individuals may still be understood as creative subjects, that do not simply reproduce their meaning systems but who also produce them and use them. Notwithstanding this, Bourdieu’s understanding of agency - as a process which is
bounded, compromised and attenuated (via the habitus) by social structure and unconsciousness - necessarily stretches the meaning of ‘agency’ to its limits and those who engage with his concepts are aware of this. Bourdieu’s portrayal of people as one-dimensional rational actors has been duly noted (Devine 2010). Andrew Sayer (2005, 2010), for example, has called for a greater appreciation of the morality of human beings and their actions. He maintains that an understanding of human actions needs to be modified to embrace reflexivity and the ethical dispositions that are an important component of these reflections and also, that sociological theory must move away from a notion of all actions as self-interested (Devine 2010: 153).

Scholars working with Bourdieu’s concepts of habitus and field have sought to apply, develop and extend his theories, highlighting the potential uses and benefits of this approach. McNay, for example, argues that the generative and embodied nature of the habitus helps to explain the persistence of reasonably entrenched gender identities (1999). As a constantly reiterated cultural norm, gender is deeply inscribed on our bodies; however in many theories of identity transformation (e.g. Giddens, 1991; Featherstone 1992) there is a tendency to construe identity as a process of symbolic identification without considering its mediation in embodied practice. In contrast to this, Bourdieu’s concept of habitus – which represents the incorporation of the social into the corporeal – provides a tool for thinking through how and in what ways gender identities may or may not be renegotiated and transformed. According to McNay (1999: 103):

The pre-reflexive mode of habitus provides a more differentiated or layered account of the entrenched dimensions of embodied experiences that might escape processes of self-monitoring. Thus detraditionalizing forces may have thrown certain aspects of gender relations – the gender division of labour, marriage – up for renegotiation...however, men and women have deep-seated, often unconscious investments in conventional images of masculinity and femininity which cannot easily be reshaped and throw into doubt ideas of the transformation of intimacy.

It is in this way that the concept of habitus is particularly useful for thinking through how and in what ways movements between fields (i.e. traditional towns like Millthorne and the field of higher education) impact upon decisions made and the ways in which
identities are constructed and mobilized. From this perspective one is able to find a space to explain elements of variability and potential creativity immanent to even the most routine reproduction of gender identity (McNay, 1999: 101).

In addition to theorizing stability and change within contemporary gender identities, habitus and field provide ways of thinking about social class so that the notion of fixed class identities or categories may be avoided. By considering the ways in which classed dispositions are embodied within the habitus, and also, how such dispositions may (or may not) be mobilized within different fields of action, one is able to appreciate class as a relational experience, with class differences playing out and taking on meaning in specific contexts or fields. Thus, while a person may feel comfortable and competent within one field of action, movement into a different field may be experienced as problematic as the dispositions contained within their habitus do not fit as neatly with the new environment.

As Devine and Savage (2005: 15) maintain:

‘As people move between fields they become aware of the different kinds of stakes that exist in diverse fields, and hence can become reflexive about the kinds of practices they can pursue, their respective ethics, strategies and tactics… However the ability to move between fields is itself variable and dependent on particular kinds of habitus that support mobile personality characteristics, personal flexibility and so on. It is those with stakes in many fields, namely male members of dominant social classes, who thereby find it easier to develop various kinds of reflexivity.’

It is important then to always consider the concept of field when thinking about the workings of the habitus, something which many scholars fail to do (Reay 2010). Habitus is defined in relation to field and though established dispositions become transposable between fields, the possibility of a lack of fit is always possible. This lack of fit is the space where reflexivity can emerge, according to Bourdieu, particularly in times of crisis (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992: 131). A crisis might be radical changes in the field or a sudden movement between fields. However, in such a context the establishment and maintenance of habitus is problematised. McNay (1999) contends that contemporary society is routinely marked by the crisis emanating from the movement between fields, and Sweetman (2003) talks about the prevalence and normalisation of crises resulting in ‘a more or less permanent disruption’ (2003: 541). The similarities between Bourdieu’s
notion of habitus and field and the concept of ambivalence are apparent. When there is a lack of fit between habitus and field this may well give rise to feelings of polarised emotions, thoughts, volitions, social relations and structures, which in turn may spur a person into action. The kind of action taken depends of course, as Connodis and McMullin (2002) note, upon the range of resources available to a person. Indeed, the kind of dispositions that a person possesses within their habitus is dependent upon the level and value of the economic, social, cultural, material capital available to them. In the final section of this chapter, I shall examine Bourdieu’s concepts of social and cultural capital.

**Social and Cultural Capital**

Many scholars, particularly those writing on issues around class and inequality, have been drawn to his typology of different forms of capital (material, social, cultural and symbolic) the value of which is judged within different fields and which is mutable. According to Bourdieu, social capital is ‘the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to…membership in a group – which provides each of its members with the backing of the collectively owned capital’ (Bourdieu, 1986: 249 cited in Thomson et al. 2003: 36). Put simply then, social capital refers to an individual’s networks and relationships (family and community). In recent years the concept has become the subject of considerable debate and contestation. Notwithstanding this, commonalities can be found between Bourdieu’s conceptualisation of social capital and those of more recent proponents such as Coleman (1988) and Fukuyama (1999) (both of whom stress the importance of the family as a source of social capital) and also Putnam’s (1995) definition of the term as ‘benefit trust, norms and networks’ (p. 167). There seems therefore, to be consensus around basic elements that relate to the norms and values that people hold that both result in, and are the result of, collective ties and relationships (Thomson et al. 2003: 37). As Edwards (2002, cited in Thomson et al. 2003, no page number given) notes: ‘where people share a sense of identity, hold similar values, trust each other and reciprocally do things for each other then this is felt to have an impact on the social, political and economic nature of the society in which we live’.
Social capital is, therefore, generally considered to be a good thing; integral to the workings of society. Notwithstanding this, Bourdieu (in his focus on the reproduction of middle-class advantage) explored the idea that, those in positions of dominance may often exploit networks of relationships or groups in the reproduction of advantage. In a study of middle-class families and education in the UK and America, Devine (2004) notes the ways in which social resources may be mobilised in more subtle and less calculating ways. She notes that within her study, middle-class children’s school friends were often bright students, from families which emphasised the importance of a good work ethic, and thus together, these groups of children propelled each other towards higher education in a competitive way while also providing a source of social support (p. 121). In addition, Devine comments on the important role of informal contacts in securing laboratory work that facilitated entry into medical school and the more general impact of these networks for providing advice and recommendations for high-level jobs.

In seeing middle-class social networks as valuable in reproducing social positions and social mobility, working-class networks are often understood as somehow lacking and/or hindering the processes of social mobility. Some forms of social capital, principally those which link families to wider collectives (bridging capital), are understood as more conducive for social mobility. Other forms however, particularly those which hold societies and families together but which keep them separate from wider collectives (bonding capital), are understood as offering the ‘wrong kind’ of support. It is often suggested that, although networks of family friends and neighbours may provide reciprocal relationships of trust and care for working-class young people, these may go against the processes of social mobility by keeping individuals entrenched in particular locales or groups (see for example Willis’ Learning to Labour, 1972). It is clear then that as a concept, social capital is useful in thinking about the role of a person’s social networks with regards to the ambitions or aspirations they may have and also, how the advice and information they receive informs the kinds of decisions which are made. By understanding the social context and the social resources available to a person, one is able to think about identity and agency as embedded within particular normalised cultures and practices.
Cultural capital is different to social capital insofar as it denotes the particular kinds of cultural knowledge, education and competencies that a person may or may not possess. For Bourdieu, cultural capital refers to a specific form of knowledge which, as Johnson puts it,

‘equips the social agent with empathy towards, appreciation for or competence in deciphering cultural relations and cultural artefacts… The possession of cultural capital is accumulated through a long process of acquisition or inculcation which includes the pedagogical action of the family or groups members (family education), educated members of the social formation (diffuse education) and social institutions (institutionalized education).’

(Johnson, 1993:7 cited in Lawler 1999: 6)

It is important to note however that not all cultural capital can be traded on equal terms (Skeggs 1997). It is only when cultural capital is legitimated that it can be converted into symbolic capital and, according to Bourdieu, it is only the cultural capital of the middle classes which is recognized and known as legitimate in this way. The result then is that class distinctions are drawn between the cultural competencies attached to different social class positions. From this perspective, the family, community and locality that a person has grown up within, is understood as having the power to shape the ways in which they understand the world, how they act within it and the extent to which those actions are valued and legitimated. Like social capital, it can also often take the ‘wrong’ form. Commentators have illustrated the ways in which the absence of certain kinds of (symbolically dominant) cultural capital can impact upon and often limit ambition and achievement, particularly in women (Skeggs, 1997; Reay et al. 2001). However it has also been argued that we need to pay attention to the different value systems which exist outside of the dominant symbolic, if we are to understand and give meaning to the different kinds of ethical value systems that working-class and/or ethnic minority groups operate within (Skeggs, 2005: 88). According to Skeggs (2005: 88-89) ‘Bourdieu’s theory of habitus, whilst explaining perfectly the middle-class and aspects of working-class inability to inhabit entitled dispositions, cannot account for that which is beyond abstraction, beyond the metaphoric model of exchange, investment and accumulation’. Because of this we need to develop the notion of cultural capital so that we are able to
understand how people who cannot or do not want to make economic capital out of their relations to others, live and move through the world.

Concluding Comments

In this chapter I have outlined some of the theories which seek to challenge ways of thinking about social action and identities which emphasise notions of individualism and individualization. Concepts like relationality, embeddedness, ambivalence and habitus provide a corrective to social theory which envisions a situation ‘where agency is set free from structure’ (Lash 1994: 119) and in which little attempt is made to differentiate between experiences of people in diverse, structurally positioned settings (Giddens, 1992). In addition, the concepts discussed in this chapter provide ways of thinking about the moral and emotional dimensions of social life, the feelings of attachment that people have to people and places and how this informs practices and decisions made. It is only by attending to the affective qualities of social life that one may avoid presenting individual action as rational and predicable. As Smart maintains, we cannot grasp how people behave in relation to one another or what things mean to people unless we are attentive to emotions (2007: 58).

These concepts thus incorporate history, biography, feelings of relatedness and also, the kinds of resources (social and cultural as well as economic) that people may draw upon when making decisions or in order to mobilize particular aspects of their identities. In this discussion I separated social capital from cultural capital, yet these two resources are often entwined with each other. As Devine maintains, social capital is crucial to the making of cultural capital (2008). In the empirical chapters therefore, I will often deal with these concepts together and it is clear that there is a certain degree of overlap. The social and cultural resources available to respondents and which constitute their personal habitus are also closely tied with Millthorne, the place where respondents had grown up and come to understand the world. Thus in the following chapter I shall explore the setting for this study and demonstrate the ways in which place and home shape individual
habitus. Within this discussion I shall also review some of the key literature around home and mobilities.
Chapter 4
The Significance of Habitus and Home

The aim of this chapter is to provide a context in which to situate the interview data which is discussed in the empirical chapters. It is important to create a sense of the history and geography of the town as well as the social, economic and cultural dimensions of this place which is woven into respondents’ experiences and which has a bearing on their personal habitus. Millthorne is the place where respondents attended school and sixth form; it is the place they associate with family and where friendships were first made and lived; it is their frame of reference, or part of it, at the very least. The traditions and norms which exist in Millthorne give rise to certain aspirations and possibilities and it is within Millthorne that respondents’ personal identities had begun to take shape. Some respondents felt ‘at home’ in Millthorne. Others, however, identified a disjuncture between their emerging sense of self – their habitus – and the place where they had grown up. In both cases, the young women were nevertheless acting in relation to their feelings of connectedness to Millthorne and this is what makes home so significant.

Home is a concept which is open to challenge and contestation and I am mindful that in devoting an entire chapter to Millthorne I am imbuing it with a certain significance. It is significant, of course; however, as I demonstrate in my discussion of sociological and geographical literature around home, places inhere in the self in complex and contradictory ways. There is now a growing body of literature which attends to the matter, meaning and experience of home and place and the ways in which this impacts upon the experience of personal identification. Even when one leaves a place, particularly home, it is often carried with us (whether we like it or not) in memories, accent and speech and in values and outlook. Home is therefore a multi-layered concept. It can be taken to mean house or the physical structure in which one lives; neighbourhood, community, or even nation; it often refers to a feeling, a sensory experience; and it also often denotes the practices and relationships we share with kin. As Mallett maintains,
“[h]ome is a place but it is also a space inhabited by family, people, things and belongings – a familiar, if not comfortable space where particular activities and relationships are lived.”

(Mallett, S 2004: 63)

This chapter is therefore, part description (of Millthorne, the setting for this research) and part discussion of key literatures around home, place and gender. As I have already stated, leaving home has emerged as a major theme in youth research and this perhaps reflects the more general shift within the social sciences to appreciate the practices of mobility and the ways in which they shape personal identities and relationships. As a way of concluding this chapter then, I shall discuss some of the key debates which have emerged out of the ‘mobility turn’ within sociology (Urry, 2000). Rapport and Dawson (1998) state that in an era of increased movement and mobility understanding ‘home’ as fixed to a particular space or place becomes problematic, as it limits its use in both analytical and conceptual terms. This is perhaps, the case for some people (who have greater freedom of opportunity) much more than it is for others (who may encounter more constraints). Nevertheless, because the process of home-leaving and ideas around proximity and distance are so central for some respondents it is important to include a discussion of these literatures here in this chapter.

_Hometown_
Millthorne is a town in northwest England with a population of around 85,000\(^2\) people. Although it was once a thriving industrial area – one of the world’s largest producers of cotton at one time – today, it is a place beset by social and economic problems. Nestled in the Pennine hillside, Millthorne is a town of contrasts. It is at once a gateway to lush green countryside, and an exemplar of urban deprivation and de-industrialisation. Millthorne has a strong industrial history based primarily on periods of rapid expansion during the industrial revolution. In the beginning, the town’s successful coal mining, engineering and textile industries attracted workers from Ireland and Europe as well as from other parts of the UK. By the late 1960s, Millthorne became home to a growing community of immigrants from Pakistan and the wider Indian subcontinent. These migrants, in the first instance men from Pakistan, Bangladesh and parts of southern Afghanistan, came to Millthorne to help the local economy overcome labour shortages taking unskilled jobs in the mills and factories. Once they had settled and secured work in Millthorne these men were joined by their wives and families, and today there is a strong South Asian community (8.2\(^3\)) in the town which goes back for several generations. Although Millthorne’s population is falling\(^4\), the town’s ethnic minority community continues to grow\(^5\).

Millthorne's history, economy and character are etched into its landscape. The high chimneys, viaducts and rows of tightly packed terraced houses create a skyline indicative of the town’s industrial past. Equally however, the rundown and neglected buildings in and around the town centre, together with the numerous abandoned retail spaces, signify the current lack of investment and the local effects of a global recession. The local employment sector has changed dramatically over the last two decades and as a result Millthorne’s employment rate compares unfavourably with the

\(^{2}\) Source: Mid-year population estimates, ONS, 2006
\(^{3}\) Asian or British Asian – source: ONS, 2005
\(^{4}\) Population has fallen from 90,300 in 1999 to 85,700 in 2009
\(^{5}\) from 7.1\% in 2001 to 8.2\% in 2005, Source: ONS, 2005
rest of the country\(^6\). Redundancies have played a significant role in the town’s increasing unemployment figures. After the mining and cotton industries began to fall away towards the end of the last century, Millthorne was dominated by large engineering companies and, for this reason, managed to attract workers to the area. In recent years however, a considerable amount of manufacturing work has been outsourced to companies in Eastern Europe and Asia and, as a result, the town has lost a third of all its manufacturing jobs. Today, public administration, education and health now accounts for most (around 26\%) of the jobs in Millthorne. Notwithstanding these shifts, Millthorne still demonstrates an over-reliance on the manufacturing industry\(^7\). This suggests that, the local habitus within Millthorne is not one which leans towards higher education and professional occupations. The average weekly wage in Millthorne is £303.50, this is significantly lower than the national average, of £376\(^8\). The effect of deindustrialisation and the general lack of ‘higher value’ jobs can be measured in the town’s falling population, and it is assumed that young people who have achieved degrees and professional qualifications are contributing to this ‘exodus’ as they see little reason to return home after their studies.

Interestingly, the percentage of women in professional occupations in Millthorne is also significantly lower than the national average\(^9\). This again reveals the local habitus within Millthorne, which is based on specific gender norms and patterns of employment that are not usually aligned with university study. The route to university, though becoming much more widespread nationally, is not the general experience for young people in Millthorne\(^10\). In fact, the town’s educational attainment is significantly below average at all levels with GCSE results positioning the town only a few places above the bottom ranked in England\(^11\). In addition to this, two of the five secondary schools in the town have been placed on the ‘special measures’ list. This supports the point above, with regard to the local habitus within Millthorne. In the following Chapter, I show that most respondents were the first, or part of the first generation, in their family to study at

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\(^6\) Employment Rate – Millthorne, 70.7%, England, 78.3%. Source: Annual Population Survey, 2006

\(^7\) Manufacturing accounts for 24\% of employment sector. Source: Annual Population Survey, Jan 2006-Dec 2006

\(^8\) Source: Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings, 2007

\(^9\) 6.9\% compared to 10.02\%. Source: ONS

\(^10\) Highest qualification achieved – Level 4/5: 12\% (Millthorne) 19.2\% (England), Source: ONS

\(^11\) Pupils with 5 A*-C GCSE – 45.5\% (Millthorne) 58.4\% (England)
university. Respondents should be understood as moving against the orientations of their family and the local community.

The lack of opportunity in Millthorne, not only with regard to employment but also for the performance of certain lifestyles and identities, is significant to this research. The centre of Millthorne appears tired and outdated when compared to the proximate and cosmopolitan cities of Manchester and Leeds. These nearby cities, with which many respondents were already familiar, provide a sharp contrast to the visual, cultural and social milieu of Millthorne. The propinquity of these cities only reinforces the town’s external image as a place that is unfashionable and in need of regeneration. The way in which Millthorne is perceived from the outside, by others looking in, is important because as respondents began to meet new people at university and trade information about themselves, Millthorne often became a defining aspect of their identity, albeit perhaps in the short term. This supports Savage et al. (2005) who maintain that residents of a particular place are hugely aware of how their home is seen by outsiders with a recognition that ‘one is placed by others on the basis of where one comes from’ (p. 126). It is important to note then that, in recent years, Millthorne has received significant media attention for its supposed racial tensions and the growing presence of the BNP. This undoubtedly creates a certain image of Millthorne and also, of the people who live there.

‘Coming from Millthorne’ is of course, by no means a universal experience and understandings of home are dependent upon different locations (social/geographical) which respondents occupied. Millthorne is a town of contrasts with different areas within it inciting different feelings for each of the respondents. For example, although unemployment figures are higher than average in Millthorne, there is considerable diversity within the town with some areas having an unemployment rate as high as 9.2%  

\[12\] The BNP now have two elected seats on the town’s council.
and others as low as 0.7\%\textsuperscript{13}. Similarly, whereas some parts of town feel quite rural and quaint in parts, other wards within Millthorne are among the most deprived nationally. The 2007 Index of Deprivation revealed a number of areas in the district with very high levels of deprivation. These figures are based on the Index of Multiple Deprivation, which combines information from seven Deprivation Domains: Crime, Income Deprivation, Employment Deprivation, Education, Skills & Training Deprivation, Health Deprivation and Disability, Barriers to Housing & Services and Living Environment Deprivation\textsuperscript{14}. The areas in the top 10\% of the most deprived nationally are those which are home to the town’s South Asian community.

It is largely understood that different people, groups, and communities often experience the same places in quite different and opposing ways. As Bondi and Rose (2003: 234) note much work remains to be done to understand how constructions of race, ethnicity, and class interweave with gender to shape everyday experiences of inclusion in, and exclusion from, urban spaces. Millthorne is, as I have stated above, segregated to some extent with white and South Asian communities occupying different areas of the town. The external contrast of the urban and the rural is reflected by inner contrasts between those who live in relatively affluent areas of Millthorne and those who live within the most deprived wards of the town. Notwithstanding this, there is an overall sense of the town, particularly its recent decline, which is felt by all, albeit unevenly. The ways in which place inheres within the self is by no means straightforward, and to talk of a sense of connection or relationality to home or place is not necessarily to speak of warmth, happiness or yearning. As the coming chapters demonstrate, respondents carried Millthorne with them in complex and contradictory and this supports much of the recent theorizing in geography with regard to locality and place (McDowell 1999). As Savage et al. (2005) maintain, ‘belonging’ often means familiarity in a place linked to routine and upbringing, as in Bourdieu’s conception of habitus. Feeling that one ‘belongs’ in some way to place however, whether that be through history or ritual, is not quite the same as

\textsuperscript{13} ILO Unemployment Taylor Associates, 2007
\textsuperscript{14} Indices of Deprivation, 2007
feeling ‘at home’ there (Savage et al. 2005: 48). The following section attends to issues around house and home in more detail.

*House and Home*

Having introduced the local area and history of Millthorne, this section focuses on the different kinds of houses and neighbourhoods which constitute Millthorne and in which respondents lived with their family. Respondents’ houses were the context for at least one of their interviews and it was through visiting their homes that I was able to observe their private social worlds, their interactions with parents and siblings and, also, the form and style of the place where they lived. According to Bourdieu (2005: 19), the house is a material good which, like our clothes, is exposed to the general gaze and in this way ‘expresses or betrays’ the social being of its owners, the extent of their ‘means’ and indicates their tastes. As discussed in Chapter 3, Bourdieu conceives habitus as a multi-layered concept, with more general notions of habitus at the level of society and more complex, differentiated notions at the level of the individual (Reay, 2010: 75). Thus, it is important to understand respondents’ familial habitus and the role and significance of the home within that. Like the previous section, this discussion will weave together detail about respondents’ houses with academic literature relating to home, house and gender.

I do not wish to overcomplicate this description of the neighbourhoods in Millthorne and for reasons of anonymity and confidentiality I am not able to name individual wards. Roughly speaking therefore, Millthorne can be best understood as divided into two districts: Inner and Outer Millthorne. Inner Millthorne represents the old town. The houses there date back to the 1800s when Millthorne was in a period of industrial growth; they are positioned close to the river and canal and, also, the centre of town with its shops and bars. Houses in Outer Millthorne are located at a distance from the centre of town. These houses are much newer and were built to accommodate the growing population during the middle-to-late part of the last century. The houses that I visited fell into two main types – terraced houses or semi-detached properties within enclosed estates. Most
people in Millthorne own their homes (with a mortgage)\textsuperscript{15}. The average house price is one of the lowest in the country (£101,516)\textsuperscript{16} and the average price of a terraced house is just £40,000\textsuperscript{17}. This figure reflects over-supply and a high concentration of terraced houses which significantly reduces the average value. The percentage of houses which are deemed ‘unfit’ in Millthorne is 8%, a figure which is considerably higher than the national average (4.2\%)\textsuperscript{18}.

Respondents who lived in Inner Millthorne lived within the rows of densely packed terraced houses which have two living rooms and a kitchen on the lower level, and two or three bedrooms and a small bathroom upstairs. It was common for respondents to share a bedroom with their sibling(s), or to at least have shared in the past. This was particularly the case for the young South Asian women. Respondents’ homes were generally well-maintained, although other houses on the same street often revealed signs of dilapidation and neglect. The terraced streets coalesce around churches, public houses and small playing fields, which are also in varying states of disrepair. Nevertheless, in some areas, particularly those inhabited by South Asian families, there is a strong sense of community-living: halal butchers’ shops; authentic Asian dress-makers; and large (and always busy) grocery stores. There is a general sense of busyness in Inner Millthorne, whatever the time of day.

In Inner Millthorne, I noted the ways in which family photographs, especially official portraits, featured in many of the respondents’ homes. As a substantive topic, domestic display inhabits a growing literature on the construction of the home through consumption, and the management of display has been conceptualised both as performance and as a marking practice contributing to negotiations of identity (Hurdley 2006: 718). The ways in which homes are organised are thought to make visible the ideas, ambitions, values (both personal and cultural), preferred tastes and styles of the people who live there. Thus it is popular now for conceptualisations of the home to be explored.

\textsuperscript{15} 42.1\% compared to national average, 38.8\%. Source: ONS
\textsuperscript{16} Land Registry: October – December 2007
\textsuperscript{17} Land Registry: October – December 2007
\textsuperscript{18} Land Registry: October – December 2007
through the material culture that exists within it (Miller 1987; Pertidou 2001) and the relationship between home and identity and/or the concept of the self has been examined elsewhere (see Després, 1991, Clarke 2001, Pink 2004). The strong visual representations of family within respondents’ houses was reinforced by the close proximity of wider kin who lived either on the same street or close by within the extended network of terraced houses. The ways in which respondents’ homes were organized around close-knit kinship ties calls to mind the work of Marylyn Strathern (1981) and Jeanette Edwards (2000), both of whom found that the invocation of kinship was a central way that people, in their studies of Elmdon and Bacup respectively, established a sense of belonging. The notion of being ‘born and bred’ in Millthorne and of occupying quite specific locations within the town was strong amongst respondents who lived in Inner Millthorne. Respondents’ familial habitus were based around proximity, and informal practices around care and kinship.

An association between home and family has been noted by many researchers (Jones, 1995, 2000; Finch and Hayes, 1994; Bowlby et al., 1997), some suggesting that the link between home and family is so strong that the terms are almost interchangeable (Crow, 1989; Oakley, 1974; Bernardes, 1987). All respondents lived at home with their immediate family with some having two homes in cases where parents had separated. I accept however that the experiences of the 24 respondents should not be generalized and that the physical closeness of family and home does not necessarily equate to an emotional closeness of the two. In the same way, it is important to treat with caution the view that ‘home is a place that offers security, familiarity and nurture’ (Tuan, 2004: 164). This way of thinking about home and family has been challenged for reinforcing an idealized, romanticized even nostalgic notion of home at odds with the reality of peoples’ lived experience of home (Jones, 2000; Wardaugh, 1999; Sibley 1995).

Respondents who lived in Outer Millthorne, on estates of mostly new-build semi-detached properties, were no less family-oriented even though their kin relationships were often spread out across the town, or even the country. They too demonstrated the significance of family through the display of photographs. However, there were few
other similarities between the terraced houses of Inner Millthorne and the quiet cul-de-sacs in the outlying areas of town. Respondents who lived in Outer Millthorne displayed different kinds of tastes and indications of wealth than the young women discussed above. Their homes had conservatories and large gardens, and they tended to exude a polished feel, hinting at recent renovations or re-decorations. These homes also had more living space and all respondents had bedrooms of their own, as well as, in some cases, ‘dens’ and living spaces that were separate from those of their parents. Their houses had newly fitted kitchens and some had been extended to suit the changing needs, and income levels, of the family evolving within its walls. As I shall outline in the next chapter, only a few respondents’ parents worked in professional occupations yet these houses were apparently more ‘aspirational’ than those of the young women who lived in Inner Millthorne. Respondents of Outer Millthorne lived away from the ‘poorer’ parts of town in estates with well-tended gardens and multi-car households. Of course, this inner/outer Millthorne class distinction should not be read as absolute and there are notable exceptions. Even so, respondents’ class and ethnic backgrounds as well as their locations within the town must be considered in any reading of their experiences of home and their decision about university.

Details about respondents’ houses are important because they reveal layer upon layer of information about where (and what) the young women have come from. Just as the broader locality of Millthorne provides an important frame of references for respondents so too do their family homes and the practices which constitute them. They provide indications about what each respondent understood to be ‘normal’ and appropriate and equally, what might be deemed ‘abnormal’ or extravagant. It has been said that by conflating or relating home with house a greater emphasis is given to the symbolic nature of physical structures than on the way people themselves understand and experience their home (Petridou 2001: 87) and that, in so doing, this approach reductively represents home as one-dimensional (Douglas, 1991; Rapport and Dawson, 1998; Porteous, 1976). I would argue however, that domestic display and the symbolic nature of home are inextricably linked to the ways in which people understand and experience their homes. For this reason it is important to appreciate home as multi-layered and multi-dimensional.
There was a time when such a focus on possessions, emotional attachment to such possessions and the subjective experience of home generally, was given little attention. When feminist sociologists initially became interested in the interior life of home, their aim was to dismiss the commonsense, rosy view of home and point to the downside of privacy where violence, for example, could occur without any protection being afforded to the victims or shame accorded to the perpetrators (Smart 2007: 160). Feminist sociologists wanted to expose the gendered division of labour within the home and demonstrate the ways in which the home was experienced by women mostly as the site of domestic labour, childcare, abuse and feelings of loneliness (e.g. Finch and Groves, eds, 1983; Pahl, 1989; Oakley, 1974; Bernard, 1976). For this reason, as Smart maintains:

‘…a term such as home came to be seen as part of an ideological package which included ‘the nuclear family’, women’s oppression and compulsory heterosexuality. This meant there was little positive to be said about homes and people’s feelings about their homes – except in as much as they were necessary to provide shelter and the wherewithal to live a decent life. Possessions were seen in material terms and ownership of such possessions – particularly those of value – became seen as more important than feelings about them. This was entirely understandable because the belief that dependent wives shared their husbands’ earnings and possessions was clearly revealed as fiction in the 1960s and 1970s, when divorce rates were rising but women were finding that they were being left without a claim to the matrimonial home, or to any of the property therein.’  
(Smart 2007: 161)

The gendered nature of home is still significant today. In the previous section I explained that, in Millthorne, only very few women are employed in professional occupations and this is reflected in the sample. When I visited respondents’ homes – in both Inner and Outer Millthorne – there was a strong female presence. Respondents’ mothers would often be busy with cooking and housework and were keen to make sure I was made to feel welcome and given tea and refreshments. Thinking about the gender norms and practices within respondents’ homes is important for thinking about how they understood their own position and how this informed the choices they made about university and also with regard to the ways in which they managed subsequent interactions with home once university began. Most recently, it is the sensory and emotional experiences of home
which have emerged as key themes. Sarah Pink’s (2004) work for example, explores what she terms ‘home creativity’ - housework or domestic chores and home decoration – and in so doing, highlights both the sensory and the physical experience of home. Jennifer Mason has also called for a conceptualisation of home which is more attentive to the emotional, experiential, and metaphysical aspects of this material and social space (1989). In this respect, ‘home’ may be understood as a verb as well as a noun; a state of being which is not necessarily bounded by a physical location. The focus here then, is practice; the diverse ways in which people ‘do’ and feel home (Gurney, 1997; Jackson, 1995; Ingold, 1995).

A review of the literature demonstrates the growing recognition of ‘home’ as a concept which is without a fixed meaning. Instead, according to Smart (2007) home is understood as having variable meanings which reflect things like the quality of relationships which are associated with home or a time of a particular activity, such as homemaking or childhood. Many respondents associated their family home (neighbourhood, house, place) with childhood and in thinking about home they felt nostalgic and happy, warmth and safety. Home provided a sense of ontological security and reinforced the personal habitus. Equally however, many others also felt that, as they had grown older, the physical, social and emotional spaces of home had begun to sit less comfortably with their sense of self; their personal habitus. The meaning and experience of home had begun to shift as they developed different needs and different ways of identifying. It is important to appreciate that, like any word we use to cover a particular field of experience, ‘home’ is always open to contradiction and may evoke security in one context and seem confining in another (Jackson 1995 122–3). Thus, the significance of home can wax and wane and rarely reflects some kind of biologically given yearning (Smart 2007: 163).

In this section I have demonstrated the close link between one’s place of residence – for the respondents, their family home – and personal habitus. Houses not only convey messages which are indicative of taste, style, wealth and values, but they are also the site of relationships and the places where people construct a frame of reference for seeing and being in the world. During childhood, homes transmit information about gender roles and
care, and provide people with windows through which they may see the private social and emotional worlds of others. Home is crucial then in understanding respondents’ experiences of going to university and the different decisions that they made regarding where to live and how to organise their homecomings.

Leaving Home

Within the UK geographical mobility is often assumed to be a critical part of the transition that young people make to higher education. Suitably qualified individuals have the opportunity to apply to any university within the UK and indeed amongst the middle classes, having a child move away from home to study is part of the ‘natural order’ (Allatt, 1993, cited in Christie, 2007: 2458). The value placed on this mobility is intimately bound up with the project of modernity where the process of leaving home allows students to construct new and individual identities for themselves, free from the ties of their families or connections to their home spaces (Giddens, 1991). According to Christie (2007: 2445), mobility is valued within neoliberalism, with Mitchell (2003) arguing that the (higher) education system is geared up to produce individuated, mobile, and multicultural subjects. Within the discourses both of modernity and of neoliberalism, then, geographical mobility marks a significant stage in the transition that young people make to adulthood and independence, bringing with it the opportunity to access a new city and new lifestyle. Living at home contrasts with normative – and middle-class – assumptions about the best way of being a student, where leaving home to attend university is the norm. In this discourse, geographical mobility is normalised and acts a significant marker of a young person’s transition to adulthood and independence (Molgat, 2002) and becomes embedded in the public story of going to university.

The growth and influence of the ‘mobility turn’ within the social sciences has transformed the ways in which travel, communication and relationships are theorized in sociology and geography. Transcending the dichotomy between transport research and social research, this new field of inquiry claims to ‘put the social into travel’ in order to connect different forms of transport with the complex patterns of contemporary social
experience which is so often conducted at a distance (Urry 2003: 157-8). This field of research has grown in response to the increasing scale of contemporary travel and movement and the 24 respondents are a small but significant part of this phenomenon. It is important to see the respondents as connected to these transformations because they are what Larsen et al (2006: 2) refer to as, ‘ordinary people on the move and communicating to connect absent others’. For this reason, theory and research around contemporary mobilities must attend to the ways in which this is experienced by all kinds of people and not just ‘professional elites’ or ‘underprivileged migrants’. The mobility practices of young students are seriously under-researched with only one notable exception (Christie 2007). For the most part, students are understood as either ‘staying’ or ‘going’, and rarely is it considered that they may oscillate between home and university on a continuous basis.

Increases in personal travel, together with the growing shift toward university study, means that increasing numbers of young people are facing decisions about mobility. In addition, because family responsibilities do not seem to have declined over time, relationships with family at-a-distance remain significant (Finch and Mason 1993). Kaplan maintains that travel for many people today is ‘unavoidable, indisputable, and always necessary for family, love and friendship’ (Kaplan, 1996: ix). Mobility must be understood therefore, as a set of relational practices involving families, kinships and other communal contacts rather than isolated decisions pursued by individual agents. This way of thinking directly challenges the idea of the free-floating individual, moving through the world uninhibited. Such an approach to mobility ensures that the combination of obligations, desires and needs that people negotiate as they move around are appreciated and carefully considered. These transformations have the power to re-order the ways in which people engage in personal relationships with family and friends. The pull of mobility, and the way in which such practices have become normalised for young women like the respondents in this study, necessarily has implications for conceptualisations of ‘home’ and the relationships which exist there. Despite this, until very recently theories around mobility tended to focus on tourism and travel, emphasising fixed dualisms such as leisure/work, home/away, guest/host and the extraordinary as opposed to the ordinary
(Cohen 1972; MacCannell 1976; Smith 1978; Urry 1990). If the concept of home is to be understood as part of the ways in which people experience and make their relationships, then our understandings of mobility ought to tie into this in quite similar ways. In short, mobility must be conceptualised as involving connections with, rather than simply an escape from, social relations and the multiple obligations of everyday social life (Urry 2000).

The literature on geographical mobility highlights the way in which personal relationships, like those which are significant to the respondents in this study, are today structured around movement, distance and proximity. It has been argued that to be close to someone socially does not necessarily require physical proximity and that, in a world of ‘disembedded mechanisms’, immediate co-presence is no longer considered to be the necessary basis for social relations (Allen 2000: 58). It is true that there now exists a proliferation of communication technologies which allow people to interact, chat and share stories without actually ‘being there’. Despite this, research has shown that physical travel continues to increase as these communication devices have become more widespread (Urry 2003: 158). The reason for the continued significance of ‘co-present interaction’ is according to Boden and Molotch (1994) because co-present meetings produce thick, embodied socialities where people are accessible, available, and subject to each other. Even though there are now many platforms from which to engage with family, friends and work colleagues, these are thought to supplement rather than replace physical meetings (Urry 2002, 2003). Viewed in this way, mobility and developments in communications technologies are thought to enhance rather than undermine closeness and social capital. It has been suggested that the growing trend towards independent travel, lone working, and the dispersal of networks has mostly negative effects for gendered categories such as the family and community (Putnam 2001). In response to these claims however, recent research has demonstrated how transport, travel and digital communications are integral to social inclusion. Therefore, mobility is seen as the glue holding social networks together and allowing individuals to be full and active members of society (Larsen et al. 2007, 2006; Urry 2002).
Concluding Comments

This chapter has provided detailed descriptions of respondents’ hometown – Millthorne. Millthorne is the setting for this research thus, from a methodological perspective, this information is important in providing a context for understanding the empirical chapters which follow. In offering this rich description and, also the images in this chapter, I am providing ways of visualising the place within which respondents’ were embedded as they began their undergraduate studies. The kinds of houses, neighbourhoods and families respondents lived amongst had a bearing on their personal habitus, their ways of seeing the world, their identities, choices and relational practices. In taking a relational approach to this research, it is imperative to think through the different ways in which home may be experienced. In my discussion of key literature around home, I have demonstrated that as both a concept and an experience, home is multi-layered and complex, and feelings of connectedness or embeddedness at home can give rise to a range of different emotions from contentment and longing to uneasiness and disaffection.

This chapter has also revealed the ways in which mobility is often fundamental to the ways in which a person experiences home so that there cannot be a home without a journey just as there cannot be a self without an ‘other’ (Petridou 2001: 88). It is thought that the journey away from home provokes reflection and re-evaluation of spaces which may be taken for granted. This literature is significant therefore in understanding respondents’ experiences as they move in and out of the spaces of home and university. As the following chapter illustrates, respondents’ choice of HE institution meant that their journeys to and from home ranged from frequent, everyday oscillations to more sporadic interactions with home. The following chapter provides details about the research sample but in the main, offers a reflective account of the longitudinal research process.
Chapter 5  
Researching Everyday Relationships: Reflections on a Longitudinal Study

This chapter documents the research process, from designing the study and formulating research questions, to establishing links with local sixth forms, conducting interviews and devising a framework with which to analyse data. Because I discussed the research setting in detail in the previous chapter, I shall not revisit these issues here. Similarly, because respondents were introduced in Chapter 1, details about the research sample and the universities they attended are also given a rather light touch here. The main aim of this chapter is to explore some of the main issues which arose during the project. Qualitative longitudinal studies are complex and raise a range of ethical and analytical questions which challenge established ways of thinking about ‘good’ sociological research. Moreover, it is through this particular research methodology that I have been able to understand change as a process and as a constant negotiation of established and shifting practices. It is important therefore to reflect on the research process in detail, and think about how and in what ways methodologies such as this can add to sociological understandings of relationships, relational practices and personal identity.

Research Design

This project was originally designed to explore the ways in which the identity and sense of selfhood of young ‘working-class’ women changes, and is potentially transformed, as they move out of their local space and familial class milieu into the typically middle-class spaces of university. I decided to explore the experiences of young women because their participation in undergraduate study had been growing. In 2005, just as this project was about to begin, HEFCE reported that ‘young women in England are 18 per cent more likely to enter higher education than young men’19. Indeed, Chapter 2 reveals that today, women students outnumber their male counterparts. This shift is thought to reflect broader social changes and has led some to suggest that, through the process of detraditionalisation, gender is losing its determining influence. Despite this, as Du Bois-

19 http://www.hefce.ac.uk/pubs/hefce/2005/05_03/
Reymond maintains, in practice the pulls of tradition still operate and are most acutely felt by young women. She comments on the ‘doubleness’ of the female biography which ‘even in its modern shape carries with it the burden of traditional female destination and definition’ (Du Bois-Reymond, 1998: 75, cited in Thomson, 2009: 40). With this in mind I wanted to explore the ways in which young working-class women made decisions about university study and how such decisions were lived out in practice. ‘Going away’ to university, it seems, stands in stark contradiction to traditional, respectable (heterosexual), working-class notions of femininity which are normally rooted in localism (Archer et al. 2003; Ryan, 2003) and which are inherent in Millthorne (see Chapter 4).

Ideas around detraditionalisation and individualisation are central to theories of late modernity (discussed in Chapter 3). The changing relationships between the public and private is seen as significant in this regard as women have moved in increasing numbers into the public sphere for work, ‘transposing the feminine habitus’ (McNay, 1999). Theorists such as Anthony Giddens (1992), for example, claim that this movement has been paralleled by a democratisation of the private, part and parcel of a transformation of intimacy (Thomson 2009: 41). A move away from the local is assumed to de-stabilize traditional notions and roles associated with gender. As a way of countering the optimism inherent within Giddens’s work - in which he sees women as the vanguards of the transformation of intimacy and in which he also observes that gender divisions no longer have authority – Jamieson (1998) points out that ‘change is undoubtedly occurring but how to characterise the significance of the change remains deeply contested’ (p. 2). Echoing this, Archer et al. also note the ways in which young women’s future identities and aspirations are nevertheless structured by classed and gendered occupational ‘choices’ (Archer et al. 2003: 186). At the heart of this research design then, was the aim of understanding how and in what young women from an ostensibly working-class town negotiated the competing obligations and expectations within their local and university environments.

During the early stages of this project, I expected that the complex collection of experiences arising from the move into higher education would be double edged: at one
level, university would provide sites for change and challenges to personal identities, yet, at the same time, environments traditionally defined as ‘home’ may also begin to pose questions with regards to respondents sense of selfhood and feelings of belonging. I was mindful that, once university began, respondents would find themselves living in two very different social settings. This informed a major aim of this project, which was to provide a more nuanced understanding of how different young women manage the interrelationship of gender and class in different settings. It was this concern which directly informed the first of my three research questions:

How do the young women construct their class/gender identities in contexts of cultural change?

The geographical focus has been central to this study, and I chose Millthorne because of the ways in which it represents a certain sort of working-classness (see Chapter 4). Class is a contested term and ascribing an individual with a social class status is problematic. Millthorne is however, a town which embodies a certain kind of localism; there is something of a ‘born and bred’ culture in the town and this links in with ideas around working-class notions of family and friendship (as based around community and place) compared with middle-class family and friend relationships which are thought to be less localized. This way of thinking about geography and home informed the second research question:

How do the changes involved in negotiating gender/class in a new social context affect relationships with significant others? (For example, friends, siblings, parents and/or partners in Millthorne)

As stated in Chapter 3, research into young people’s experiences of higher education rarely considers the way in which this experience reflects back, shaping relationships with family and friends at home. These relationships are, instead, most often regarded as static – as informing decision-making practices yet having no bearing on the ways in which university is experienced. I hoped therefore to explore the dynamic nature of the move to university and consider how going to university shapes relationships and not simply the other way around.
This aim of understanding the active and dynamic nature of relationships is rooted in my desire to capture the process of going to university. This process has various stages and involves reflection, deliberation and decision-making at different stages (not just before the event). At the outset then, the aim was to capture the complexity of individual lives, the relative impact of events within them and, ultimately, understand how these young women were living out their classed identities - both in and outside of the context of their study at university. Based on this, the third and final research question which guided the study was:

*How do young women’s expectations, aspirations and horizons change over time?*

In thinking about expectations and aspirations I was referring not only to career-based ambitions but also, the ways in which respondents anticipated their personal relationships shifting and evolving over time. Each of the three research questions were designed to examine shifting temporalities and shifting localities and it was because of this that I decided to carry out a series of qualitative interviews rather than a single interview with respondents.

Heath et al. (2009) maintain that, given the major preoccupation with various aspects of transition in young people’s lives many researchers have long seen the value of introducing some element of ‘follow up’ into their studies (p. 88). The *Inventing Adulthoods* project (Henderson et al. 2007) discussed in Chapter 2 is an example of this although this project became longitudinal only by default, as successive waves of funding were granted to the research team, allowing for contact with some young people up to six times after initial contact in 1998. Nevertheless, as McLeod notes, a longitudinal approach, however it is arrived at,

‘[…] can illuminate, confirm or unsettle initial and tentative interpretations, alert us to recurring motifs and tropes in participants’ narratives as well as to shifts and changes, suggest continuities or disruptions in emotional investments, in desires and in dispositions, and provide a strong sense of how particular identities are taking shape and developing. This allows identity to be analyzed as a process and not simply a repository of one-off opinions or quotations.’

(McLeod, 2000: 49)
Heath et al. (2009: 97) add weight to this argument stating that repeat interviews allow for an engagement with change as it unfold over time, and also allow research participants to reflect back on what they might have said in a previous interview. Thomson (2009: 35-36) also notes the ways in which the methodology of repeat interviewing both privileges and decentres the individual. She states that,

‘[t]hrough the accumulation of accounts it becomes possible to understand the self as situated, enmeshed and saturated in circumstance and obligation. Ironically, it is precisely through the focus on operations of agency that it becomes possible to discern the factors contributing to individuals’ ability to improve and innovate in the construction of gendered identities, and the extent to which these innovations have resonance with or are recognised by others’

Given the benefits of longitudinal research, this project was designed so that respondents were interviewed once before they began university (Summer 2006), again during their first break from study (Christmas 2006), and then finally, at the end of their first year (Summer 2007). I planned the three interview stages in this way in order to reflect what I thought would be key transitional moments for the 24 young women; the transition from sixth form student to university student; the transition from university back to home during the Christmas break; and the transition from ‘fresher’ to something more established at the end of the first year. As I shall discuss later in this chapter, the interviews followed a semi-structured format in the early stages of the research and, by the final stage of fieldwork, were relatively open and flexible. Therefore, even though I planned the interviews around what I assumed to be important moments for respondents, I hoped that by employing a narrative-style approach to interviewing, I would also be able to uncover what have variously been referred to as ‘turning points’ (Hodkinson and Sparkes, 1997) and ‘critical moments’ (Thomson et al. 2002) in respondents lives. Thomson et al. have defined ‘critical moments’ as ‘an event described in an interview that either the researcher or the interviewee see as having important consequences for their lives and identities’ (2002: 339). By allowing respondents to talk more freely about the events leading up to their decisions about university, and also their experiences away from home, I hoped to be more open to hearing about other ‘landmark events’ or ‘epiphanies’ (Denzin, 1989) which may have been more hidden than more traditional transitional markers.
Within the original research proposal, I included research diaries. I planned to ask respondents to keep ongoing, reflective diaries so that I would be able to capture the process of change, and also, so that the young women would be active in the creation of data. “Whilst tried and tested methods such as interviews and surveys remain widely used, there is also a much greater willingness amongst researchers (particularly those working with young people) to draw on a more diverse repertoire of methods of data collection. This broadened repertoire includes the use of internet based methods, diaries and creative methods, including visual approaches” (Heath et al. 2009: 3). For this reason, I also hoped to incorporate some element of the visual into my methodology. Due in part to the many ethical considerations associated with this approach, I decided that I would ask respondents to take photographs of ‘things’ (rather than people) which reflected their lives and/or which were of significance to them. The aim was to use these photographs as tools for photo elicitation during interviews so that respondents would be able to control some of the direction of our conversations.

Visual methods are generally argued to offer a number of advantages over other methods when researching the lives of young people. Morrow (2001) for example, has suggested that the use of participant-produced photographs can offer an effective alternative to participant observation, enabling young people to choose what they want to depict. Punch (2002) has also suggested that engaging young people in visual activities can be less intimidating than asking them to take part in one-to-one interviews, especially if the interviewer is much older and/or unfamiliar to them. Visual methods can help young people to gain greater control over the research process (Heath et al. 2009).

Finally, at the heart of the research design was the aim to select individuals on the basis of purposive sampling (Mason 2002). This means that I hoped to recruit young women who would be moving away from home into HE (rather than attending locally) because I wanted to capture the significance of leaving behind a familiar, spatial milieu. As this chapter shall demonstrate however, I later took the decision to amend the sampling technique and criteria. I shall explain the reasons for this in full in the discussion which follows. Nevertheless, the main reason for this was because the distinction between ‘staying’ and ‘going’ to university was not quite as absolute as I had imagined. The
alterations that I made to the sampling criteria meant that I was able to interview more South Asian women. As revealed in Chapter 4, Millthorne has a significant South Asian community and I wanted my sample to reflect this in some way. As research suggests however, there is a tendency for Pakistani and Bangladeshi youth (particularly women) to study locally often commuting to college or university (see for example, Dale et al. 2002). By broadening my scope I was able to interview young South Asian women who remained living at home.

At the outset of this project, it was my aim to look specifically at the experiences of young women who would be leaving home in order to live and study away at university. It was not therefore, my intention to explore the experiences of those who planned to live at home and commute to their studies. I made this decision because I felt that the experience of going to university is vastly different for those who are uprooted from friends and family, in order to live in a new environment often far away from home. I assumed that for young women who travel in to university each day, while there would be significant changes to their learning environments and to the routine of their daily lives, their supposed comfort zones – ‘home’, ‘family’ – would stay the same, thus minimising the experience of change or disruption. As I shall discuss below however, early into my study I began to change this particular focus of my research.

Many of the young women who had volunteered to take part in this study were not planning to move away from home once September came, but it was only during the interviews that I learned of their plans to attend local universities and remain living at home or, similarly, that they would live away at university through the working week, and come home every weekend for boyfriends, part-time jobs, or to see family. Perhaps not wholly surprisingly, all of the young women who planned to remain living at home identified themselves as British Asian or British Muslim. These young women cited family and community relationships as central to their decisions, rather than say the prestige of the university, something which challenges the findings of Hussain and Bagguley (2007). Respondents who intended to return to Millthorne each weekend however were mixed and it soon transpired that this arrangement was popular amongst young people in the town.
Although I had concerns that the young women I was interviewing did not decide to carry on with the interview, tailoring the questions to suit respondents' individual university plans. I felt that, because these young women had been kind enough to volunteer to take part, it was only right to conduct the interview even if there was very little material that would be of use. As each interview unfolded however, I soon became aware that the categories I had used to define my sample (‘commuters’ versus ‘leavers’) was much too rigid and not really a representation of the kinds of practices these young women were engaging in. There were a number of respondents who did not speak in terms of ‘staying’ or ‘going’ and instead it was clear that they wanted to carve out a middle space in between the two. As I realised that this process was not as neat or simple as I had assumed, I began to wonder if I was trying to tell a story that was not really there and also, if I was dismissing a different and no less significant story in the process. I had not anticipated such a range of diverse ways of managing the move to university and, in addition, I was reluctant to lose the voices of the South Asian respondents who added yet another layer to my understandings of this complex process of transition. For this reason, I decided to adapt my project, alter my interview schedules and explore the variation of experiences that the volunteers were offering me.

As the focus of the project began to change I thought hard about the methodology and, in particular, the validity of the personal diaries I had asked (some) respondents to keep. Through their interviews I realised the many and often competing obligations and responsibilities they each had to manage once university began and I wondered whether asking them to keep a diary of their experiences would become too for them, and if this might dissuade them from continuing with the project in the long-term. Equally, I also considered how the process of constant reflection would increase the likelihood of ‘researcher effect’ upon participants’ narratives. With some thought then, I realised that in keeping diaries the process of reflection would, inevitably, become a continuous one beginning with their first interviews until the project’s end (and no doubt for some time afterwards). I imagined the young women documenting every conversation, action, and feeling, reflecting on every moment, looking for meaning and interpretation at every turn. I especially wanted to avoid this. A central concern of the project was to capture the ways in which young women ‘do’ university and I feared the fieldwork would get in the way of
this. For this reason I decided to remove the diaries from the research methodology. This meant that there were significant breaks between each stage of the fieldwork, allowing the young women to get on with the day-to-day business of being students without the project dominating their experience.

Establishing Connections: Recruiting Participants

When I began recruiting research volunteers I had already established contacts with sixth forms and colleges in the Millthorne area as part of work carried out for a pilot study carried out the previous year. This, and the fact that I grew up in Millthorne, meant that re-establishing connections with Heads and other gatekeepers was much easier for me. Despite no longer living in the area, my status as a ‘local girl’ seemed to open doors for me; my regional accent and in-depth knowledge of the local area presented me as both accessible and trustworthy. All the sixth forms and colleges that I contacted are publicly funded institutions and are located in different areas of the town. The reasoning behind this was so that I would capture the diversity of young women’s experiences, including those from typically working-class areas of Millthorne and those from more aspirational areas of the town. In addition, my intention was to recruit respondents studying a diverse range of degree courses thus, while some of the institutions that I contacted were traditionally ‘academic’ in their focus, others offered a mixture of traditional and vocational courses.

I began making contact with local sixth forms and colleges in Millthorne in February 2006 and, because of the ease of this, I had by the following April arranged appointments with six institutions in the town in which I gave presentations to potential respondents in the final year of A Level study. Four of the six institutions were sixth form centres – ‘Valley’, ‘Hillside’, ‘Local’ and ‘Holy’ – and the remaining two were colleges – ‘Town College’ and ‘Greenside College’

When I visited each of the sixth forms I thought a great deal about how to present myself and the project to potential participants. According to Heath et al. (2009: 39) the significance of sameness and difference within the research process is an important issue to be considered when conducting research with young...

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20 See Chapter 1 for details
people. As a young woman from the local area there were some obvious similarities in terms of my own identity and those of the young women I was appealing to. Nevertheless I was, and still am, almost ten years older than the respondents and although I may have possessed some ‘insider status’ I was also coming to them very much as an ‘outsider’ – someone who no longer lives in Millthorne and someone who has already experienced the move to university. There is a lively debate about the importance of sameness within the research setting and while Fay (1996) and Stanley and Wise (1993) would stress the importance of women interviewing women, Padfield and Proctor (1996), in reference to their own study of young women’s transitions to adulthood, concluded that a shared gender identity appeared to be irrelevant in many cases (Heath et al. 2009: 40). Hollands (2003) and Nairn et al. (2005) challenge the very idea that it is possible to match researchers and research participants, and maintain that by prioritising certain characteristics over others one engages in rather simplistic and essentialist ways of thinking about researching ‘across difference’.

A researcher’s personal characteristics are of course not irrelevant to the conduct of research. Pascoe (2007) discusses the impact of gender within the research process and reflects on her experiences of trying to adopt a ‘least-gendered identity’ when interviewing young men, in order to minimise the sense of difference between herself and the respondents. Thinking about my own experiences of meeting potential respondents for the first time, I realise the many ways in which I tried to emphasise the sense of sameness between us, my intention being that the young women would feel comfortable and would be able to imagine themselves talking to me in an interview setting. My height (short), build (petite) and age at the time (early twenties) allowed me to present myself as ‘young’ and therefore minimise the sense of difference between myself and the potential respondents. Proweller (1998) argues that being of the same gender and only in her twenties helped to facilitate close relationships in her ethnography of an elite girls’ school, while Moore (2003) notes how her youthful looks helped her to get into nightclubs (the site of her research) and gain acceptance by those she was observing (Heath et al. 2009: 49). In the same way, I remember choosing my clothes carefully on the days I made presentations to sixth form students. I wanted to appear youthful and
accessible, however I was also careful to look professional so that the lines between researcher and researched would not be blurred too much.

As a white woman there were obvious differences between myself and the young South Asian women who attended the introductory presentations, and who subsequently volunteered to take part in the research. Taft (2007), reflecting on her own status as a white researcher interviewing young black and Latina women, maintains that a researcher does not need to share the same characteristics as those they are researching in order to gain valuable insights into their social worlds. She asserts that ‘research is a racialised process whether it is conducted by racial insiders or racial outsiders… being White and talking to White girls and asking them things that include racial politics requires as much consideration as being White and talking to Black and Latina girls’ (2007: 213, cited in Heath et al. 2009: 41). This is a point which resonates with my own experiences and one which I shall discuss more fully later in this chapter. Nevertheless, I was aware that my status as a white researcher may, in some instances, prove to be problematic. As a way of countering this however, and any assumptions about my social class, I (subconsciously?) drew on my regional accent, drawing on this important cultural resource as a way of indicating my proximity to the young women’s social worlds.

In terms of presenting the research project, I decided to keep my presentations short, my intention being not to deter the young women by overwhelming them with lots of complex information. That said, I understood that in order to be ethical and respectful of the young women, whose narratives have formed the basis of my thesis, I had to make sure they received some detailed information about my background as a researcher, and the project that they would be contributing to. Informed consent is widely regarded as a key strand of ethical research practice across the social sciences (Heath et al. 2009: 23). In addition, the British Sociological Association state that there is ‘a responsibility on the sociologist to explain as fully as possible, and in terms meaningful to participants, what the research is about, who is undertaking and funding it, why it is being undertaken and how it is to be disseminated (2002: 3). I knew then that that there were certain standards and expectations that I must meet as a professional researcher however I found this to be quite a tricky a process to put into practice, for two key reasons.
First, I was aware that, by outlining a definite research agenda, or even the key themes of my research, I might lead potential respondents into certain ways of thinking and thus taint their narratives from the outset. Secondly, I was not, at that early stage, completely sure of what participation may entail for respondents, nor how the research would be disseminated. My research methodology was designed to be flexible and open and this therefore meant that I could not guarantee the topics of discussion or how respondents might feel at stages 2 or 3 of the fieldwork. According to Heath et al. (2009: 24) “it is questionable whether a researcher is ever able to genuinely secure fully informed consent given the difficulties of explaining (exactly) the nature of the research process and its likely outcomes to any research participant”. Notwithstanding these difficulties, it is hugely important to ensure that young people are as fully informed as possible about the nature of the specific research project that they are taking part in. In the end I adopted an approach to informed consent which stresses the agency and competency of research participants. From this perspective, the young women were able to express their agency within the research process, arising from their competency at decision making. This includes ‘their competency to engage with [the] project’s specific methods [and] also, their competency to make informed decisions about whether or not to take part in the first place’ (Heath et al. 2009: 24).

In order that potential respondents were able to make informed decisions about whether or not to take part I created an information sheet (Appendix B) which provided information about my research background, the duration of the research project, the nature and level of involvement required of participants as well as some information on codes of confidentiality and the uses to which the research might be put. Provision of an information sheet ensures that respondents are able to remember details about the project after they have agreed to participate and after the research has ended. I felt that this information sheet offered enough detail to potential respondents and that by agreeing to take part in the project they had given their consent. I did not therefore ask respondents to sign consent forms. At one level, the need to obtain a signature makes the consent process a very formal one which I thought might be off-putting to some of the young women. In addition to this however, because of the longitudinal nature of the project I decided to adopt an approach of ‘process consent’. The notion of process consent acknowledges that
research participants have the right to express their agency by withdrawing at any time and also, that consent should be negotiated on an ongoing basis. Thus, a signature would have held very little value as I stressed to respondents that they may withdraw from the project at any time of their choosing, or opt out of certain elements of the project with which they were not fully comfortable. It would not have been appropriate or particularly comfortable for either party, obtaining a signature for each stage of the fieldwork.

The Research Sample

After presenting to the sixth forms and colleges in Millthorne I collected around 70 names and email addresses. Because of problems with illegible email addresses and a poor response rate this soon reduced to 36 potential respondents. From those 36 replies I began organising interviews throughout the summer of 2006. Communication with the volunteers was primarily through email or text at this early stage. It soon became clear that this was how the young women preferred to keep in touch; when I telephoned respondents my calls often went unanswered; however respondents would quickly respond to my voicemail messages with a friendly text, answering my questions and confirming arrangements. The emails and texts that I received from the young women were very chatty and often included emoticons and/or were signed off with a kiss (x). At first I struggled with the tone and style of respondents’ messages and grappled with maintaining the interviewer/interviewee professional divide. At the same time however, I wanted to minimise the sense of difference between myself and the respondents. I decided then that it was important that I adopted a similar, chatty tone in my responses in order to ensure that respondents did not liken their participation to work or school-based activities. I was mindful that they had only recently finished a summer of exams and I did not want the project to feel burdensome.

During the first stage of fieldwork there were inevitably cancellations, and although some interviews were re-schedules there were a number of young women who withdrew from the project. For many respondents, particularly those studying far away from home, the summer was the last chance to spend time with family and friends and this impacted upon their willingness to commit to the project. Thus, by the end of the summer there were 30
young women who took part in the first stage of interviews and only 24 remained involved in the project from stage 1 to stage 3.

As the table on the following page shows, 12 respondents lived in ‘Inner’ Millthorne and the remaining 12 live in ‘Outer’ Millthorne. The distinction between Inner and Outer Millthorne is a little ambiguous, however, as I explain in Chapter 4, neighbourhoods in Inner Millthorne tend to be part of the old town. Being closer to the centre of town these houses are characteristically smaller terraced properties and some areas are quite deprived. By contrast, neighbourhoods in Outer Millthorne are mostly new-build estates and, because they are located further away from the centre of town, they often evoke a more rural or village-like feel. Most respondents (17) identified themselves as White British. The remaining 7 respondents identified themselves as either ‘British Muslim’ or ‘British Asian’ and this reflects the ethnic composition in Millthorne outlined in Chapter 4. The rows which are shaded denote respondents who had one or more parent educated to degree level. There were only 7 of these respondents in total. Some respondents had older siblings who had been to university, however, I want to capture the fact that university study was, nevertheless, a new phenomenon these young women and their families. The table also includes details about respondents’ HE institutions however more details can be found in Appendix C.
The first stage of interviews began in June 2006 and ran until the beginning of September 2006. The 36 volunteers were given a time and date for the interview, working around their holidays and summer plans, and I explained that the interviews could last for up to one hour. I gave respondents the opportunity to choose the research setting and all but two chose to be interviewed at home. Heath et al. (2009: 93) note that “physical space is rarely neutral and that it has the potential to confer advantage to one or other party to the interview to the disadvantage of the other”. I felt that conducting the interviews in respondents’ homes, in a space where they would feel comfortable and relaxed, would allow them to feel much more in control of the situation. For the most part, interviews in
respondents’ homes worked well and many respondents opted for periods during which their parents were out at work and when the house was empty. Others however, perhaps as a way of minimising any risk, preferred to be interviewed to while other family members were at home. On these occasions it was not uncommon for parents or siblings to move in and out of the research space (usually the kitchen or conservatory). While younger siblings were often curious about a stranger being in the house, parents (usually respondents’ mothers) often wanted to take part and have their own voices heard.

Heath et al. (2009: 93) maintain that when interviews are conducted in young people’s homes, and when there is a likelihood of parents or siblings moving in and out of the research space, there is often an impact on the willingness of respondents to discuss certain topics. Generally speaking, respondents seemed comfortable talking about their experiences in their own homes and, where present, parents and siblings observed the privacy of our meetings. The two young women who were interviewed in a different setting did express concerns around the ‘safety’ and anonymity of being interviewed at home. For one respondent (Tanya) there were concerns about the lack of space at home. She stated that her house was quite small and that there were few private or indeed separate spaces in which to conduct the interview, and so we met instead in a local café. This research setting brought new problems however, the background noise for example, which made it difficult to decipher the tape recording. The second respondent (Megan) was in a clandestine relationship with a much older man, and therefore requested that the interview take place at her partner’s house instead of her family home. Megan hoped that she would be able to speak more freely about the role the relationship had played in her decisions about university. While this research setting eliminated any worries Megan had about her parents discovering her relationship, it was clear that her partner’s home was not a neutral environment either. In the short time that I spent with Megan I became aware of the power relations between her and her partner and I was not able to conduct the interview with her in private.
In terms of the interview schedule and the experience of interviewing the 24 respondents, I had different levels of success. While the schedule (Appendix D) worked well with some young women there were naturally occasions where it worked less well. The interview schedule for the stage 1 interviews was the most structured of all the guides and this was useful for myself as the interviewer and also for the interviewees. As the researcher I was grateful of the more structured format because I had not at that time, developed much of a rapport with respondents. There was a certain amount of information gathering in those first interviews; which universities had respondents applied to; how many open days had they attended and with whom; had parents or siblings attended university. This helped respondents to relax into the interview and get used to being quizzed however it also created a kind of question-answer dialogue and this was, in some cases, hard to break out of later in the interview when my questions became more open-ended. Some respondents were at ease with the interview setting from the outset perhaps because interviews have become a familiar social encounter, whether in the form of celebrity interviews on television chat shows or through job interviews and therapeutic interviews (Heath et al. 2009: 79). In addition, it was clear that some of the young women possessed the necessary cultural capital to articulate their experiences and feelings in a way that others could not. These respondents, who were often shy or simply not used to narrating their lives in this way, needed much more guidance and direction and the interview schedule served as an excellent resource.

Stage 2 Interviews

The stage two interviews were conducted during respondents’ first Christmas break from university (December 2006 through to February 2007). Because of the timing of these interviews many respondents were busy with family commitments and/or seeing friends so I interviewed only 21 respondents21 during that second wave of fieldwork. Again, these interviews took place mostly in respondents’ family homes in Millthorne, although I did travel to Newcastle and Manchester in order to meet with two respondents who did not have the time at Christmas and who wanted to remain in the project for all three stages. Sadly, Megan, the young woman with the older partner did not return my calls or

21 See Appendix G for details
messages and thus withdrew from the project. I did, and still do, wonder how things worked out for her.

The stage 2 interviews were generally much longer than those carried out at stage 1, with some lasting as long as two hours. Respondents had lots that they wanted to share with me and, because the interview guide at stage 2 was far less structured than previously (see Appendix E), the young women had much more scope to discuss the many experiences they had had in the months that had passed. As Appendix E illustrates, I had a number of themes around which to guide our conversations. The aim of the second wave of interviews was to understand how, since starting university, respondents had experienced their relationships with family, friends and partners at home in Millthorne. I wanted to find out how respondents had structured their ‘homecomings’ (daily? weekly? holidays only?), and the extent to which this had impacted upon the nature and quality of their relationships at home and at university. At stage 1 I asked respondents to share their expectations – their hopes and anxieties about university life - during the stage 2 interviews therefore, I asked them to talk about the ways in which these expectations had (or had not) been met. This broad theme encouraged respondents to consider their experiences of study, friendship, family and also of different spaces and places. Naturally, respondents often spent a large portion of the stage 2 interviews discussing university and the people they had met there but because, at the time of the interview, the young women were in Millthorne there was a certain amount of shifting between the experiences of home and away and the relationship between the two.

For the young women who continued to live at home during study, the balance of the second interview was rather different insofar as they spent less time discussing the new people they had met and the new friendships they had made. Initially I was concerned about this gap in the data and how I would attend to this later in my analysis but, as I shall discuss in Chapter 9, this lack is indicative of the kinds of things which were important to these young women. They did not expect or hope their experiences of university to be defined by new friend relationships and this in itself says a great deal about how they approached the move to university and the value system within which they were operating.
Within the stage 2 interview guide were prompts which asked respondents to engage in a similar kind of forecasting that they had at stage 1. I wanted respondents to think again about their expectations for their second year of study, and beyond, as a way of closing the interview. In practice however this line of questioning did not feel quite right, so after trying this with one or two interviews I decided to remove this last theme from the guide. It seemed too soon somehow to ask the young women to imagine moving on from this still very novel stage in their transition. I decided then to hold back these kinds of questions until the final interview. The stage 2 interviews focused much more on ‘university living’ for example, the day-to-day experiences of cooking, sleeping, learning, travelling and communicating with friends and family. To a certain extent, the second stage of interviews focused on the ‘little things’ whereas, as I shall discuss in the next section, the interviews carried out at stage 3 were more evaluative and reflexive.

In the main, returning to respondents’ homes and interviewing them for a second time was an enjoyable experience. I knew my way around the research setting (which room to go to, which chair to sit in) and the young women knew more of what to expect from the encounter. While there was often a sense of familiarity about those second interviews there was also quite often a very different young woman sat before me. I mean this not only with regard to respondents’ new hair colours and styles (of which there were many), but also in terms of their temperament within the interview setting. Respondents had been rather tense during the stage 1 interviews – nervous about their impending A Level results and nervous of me and my research perhaps – but at stage 2 they seemed to be much more at ease both with me and their own situations. This meant that the second stage of interviews went smoothly and respondents were happier to take control of the conversations. There were only two interviews which did not follow this easy pattern and after which I felt uneasy and concerned about the effect of the interview on the participant.

The first of these difficult interviews was with a respondent (Ashley) who had not had such an easy time at university and for whom making friends had been a troubling experience. She had not connected with the people in her student flat and she commented that she felt anonymous on her course, a popular (and therefore rather large) Business
Management degree. During her second interview it was apparent that the feelings of loneliness, isolation and worry had taken their toll; she was much thinner than previously and seemed sad and withdrawn in comparison to the young woman I had interviewed only a few months before. It was quite distressing to see, what appeared to me to be, a young girl so upset and clearly unhappy. It was not so much that this respondent poured her heart out to me or that she articulated her sadness, although I suspected that if I asked enough questions she would. I realised that my experience of previous interviews had lead me to presume the experience of establishing friendships at university, so I had to quickly adapt the style of my questions. I did not want to add to her feelings of isolation by making her feel ‘different’. This experience highlighted a problem within my methodology, that of encouraging respondents to tell stories about their lives. Reissman (1987) has observed that what appears to be ‘narrative failure’ may in fact be a failure on the part of the interviewer to recognise the particular subject position and narrative style of the interviewee (cited in Thomson 2009: 16). More recently, Bridget Byrne has commented that asking people to produce stories of their lives…might enable some, but also silence other accounts that are not so easily produced in this genre (2003: 47, cited in Thomson, 2009: 16-17).

More than this however, a part of me wanted to console this respondent and allow her to disclose all of the horribleness she had experienced during the last few months away from home. I suppose I wanted to help in some way. I found it difficult to know what to do, what position to take. Should I address the proverbial elephant in the room or continue with my questions as though I hadn’t noticed the wells of tears in the young woman’s eyes? Listening back to the interview tapes I am not sure that I did either of those things. I tried to navigate the interview and working with the notion of an ‘ethic of care’ I kept to questions which I hoped would not cause distress yet which would also allow her to communicate her experiences to me. Heath et al. (2009: 48) maintain that older researchers must be careful not to view their role as a surrogate parent or therapist and insist that interviews are not quasi-counselling sessions. Adding weight to this, Thomson and Holland (2003: 239) state that the therapeutic potential of the research interview must be treated with caution and that researchers should recognise the costs of self-exposure for the participant’s privacy and integrity.
The second interview which I experienced as rather problematic was with a respondent (Tanya) who was happy and settled at university. This young woman was studying at a post 1992 university not too far away from Millthorne and where two of her friends were also undergraduate students. While this meant that her experiences at university were extremely positive, her experience of her stage 2 interview may not have been. During her first interview this respondents stated that she hoped to move away from Millthorne and attend an ‘established’ university in a big city. When interviewed for a second time then, and when asked to talk about the reasons why she had changed her plans, this respondent was forced to face our previous conversation in which she had been ‘pro-distance’ and ‘anti-new universities’. In reflecting on her earlier narrative and the way in which she had presented herself at that time, this respondent became very defensive, and it seemed to me that the whole process of reflecting back was quite painful for her as she tried to make sense of her decisions and actions. Heath et al. (2009) maintain that, ‘for some young people a longitudinal approach might be experienced rather negatively, effectively reflecting back to them a sense of internalised failure… It may be then that some young people who are prepared to commit to a long term study might have a very different outlook on their lives than those who decline to take part or those who are lost along the way’ (p. 97-98). This respondents did not return for a third interview.

It was during the stage 2 interviews that respondents engaged in the visual element of the research methodology. I had asked respondents to have three objects with them at the interview, which were of significance to them or which best reflected their identities. The aim was to ask respondents to arrange the objects and capture them in a series of photographs using a digital camera. The images created at stage 2 would be used for photo elicitation in the final interviews. In practice, this element of my methodology brought mixed results. When respondents remembered to bring objects with them the task was fun and generated interesting conversations about the process of finding and selecting objects. On several occasions however, respondents simply forgot about my request and this meant that they could not produce any images and this created a difficult atmosphere as respondents felt that they had not adequately prepared. One respondent told me quite plainly, that she thought the whole idea was silly and so had decided not to take part. The limited success of this element of the methodology meant that there were also limits to
the ways in which I was able to take this forward into stage three. I had assumed that visual methods would engage the young women and that this would enable a more collaborative approach to data generation. Indeed, the literature suggests that creative methods are especially suited to research with young people. What I found however, was that many respondents looked upon this as ‘homework’ rather than as something fun.

**Stage 3 Interviews**

I began the third stage of interviews in June 2007. At this time respondents had completed their final exams and submitted the last of their assessments and most had returned to Millthorne for the duration of the summer. There were one or two exceptions – respondents who were working away or travelling abroad – but because I had established good relationships with the young women over the course of the fieldwork, I had little trouble securing interviews at this final stage. I interviewed 22 respondents during the summer of 2007. A number of young women who had been unable to take part in the second wave of fieldwork returned to the study and one respondent decided not to continue with her involvement (see Appendix G for more details). By this final round of interviews I had established a very good rapport with respondents and they were again, quite comfortable speaking on the telephone and having me as a guest in their homes. By that time the interview process had become rather routine, but not in a negative way. I sensed that the kinds of ‘warm up’ questions I had relied so heavily in at earlier stages of the project were no longer required, and most young women were eager to get into the themes of our discussion.

The stage 3 interview schedule (see Appendix F) was flexible, perhaps even more so than at stage 2. Each respondent had shared her own story and I had different avenues to pursue with different young women. Of course, these avenues coalesced around my key themes – family, friendship, mobility, home, identity – but I understood that, in their final interviews, respondents wished to bring their own stories full circle, tying up the stray ends in order to reach some kind of full stop. The stage 3 interviews were, therefore, much more narrative-based than those conducted at stage 1 and 2. This, as I shall discuss, worked well, although I was cautious about such an approach given some of the problems
I had encountered at stage two. I was careful not to expect that all respondents would be happy to narrate their experiences in this way and that the process of reflecting back might be a tricky one for some young women. Losing a respondent at the final stage was disheartening, and I desperately wanted to prevent respondents leaving the project with negative feelings about their involvement. Going in to those interviews I felt almost as though I was juggling research themes, contingency plans, and escape routes, as well as 23 very different and often complex stories. As Thomson maintains, qualitative longitudinal interviews generate ‘movies’ rather than ‘snapshots’ (2009: 14 citing Neale and Flowerdew, 2003), and I often found it difficult to coordinate the many scenes, plots and actors that respondents described.

I am not sure if respondents had simply become accustomed to our conversations or whether it was through the process of living away from home and/or meeting new people, but by the final wave of interviews they had become competent and confident at articulating their experiences. Even respondents who had been quieter, or not quite at home with notion of disclosure, began to discuss their experiences in evaluative terms. They were happy to deconstruct relationships and events, and offered their own interpretations. Having completed the first year of study respondents seemed to be naturally reflexive, wishing to take stock of the events of the last twelve months and consider what might lie ahead. This particular transitional moment lent itself, then, to conversations about the future and to respondents newly forming expectations. For this reason, in the final stage of interviews respondents moved away from the detail-rich narratives which characterised stage 2, in order to consider bigger shifts in their relationships and identities. Although respondents were encouraged to direct the conversation, from my meta-analysis of stage 2 data I also asked them to reflect on notions of mobility, distance and travel as well as the continuing themes of my research.

The process of reflecting back either on previous interviews or the images that were created at stage two, brought different experienced for different respondents. Perhaps because a greater amount of time had passed between the stage 2 and 3 interviews, for most respondents this process mostly roused fits of giggles or caused them to cover their
faces with their hands (‘God, did I really say that?’). It was not easy for respondents to cast their minds back to conversations about which, some months later, they felt differently. Nevertheless, they tended to wince or cringe in playful, good-humoured ways rather than anything more serious. Of course, there were one or two respondents for whom this was more difficult but they used the third interview to weave their past ambivalences and changes in their perspectives to create meaningful stories and to shore up their current position. For example, one young woman who was continuing to live at home with her family during her studies had, at stages 1 and 2, implied that she may move out of home at some stage and live with friends in Manchester. By her third interview however she confessed that this was not her intention at all and that she had felt compelled to talk in this way about university and independence. This example not only reveals the importance of repeat interviews for capturing the ‘whole story’ but also for revealing the process of change, and the process of decision-making which may reverberate beyond the point at which a decision seems final.

I want to discuss one final example before I begin this discussion to a close and move on to considering data analysis. Reflecting back on the interviews and indeed on the whole year of study enabled respondents to think about the many ways in which they had changed. For one young woman, the experience of moving away from Millthorne had brought with it lessons about selfhood and also about racism and her own use of racist language. During her stage 1 interview, this respondent had used, rather casually, language which made me feel uncomfortable. Larossa et al. (1981) state that in the comfortable atmosphere of the home and when there is trust, participants might disclose information that they may not have otherwise have chosen to reveal. This respondent certainly felt comfortable enough to speak in language that I found problematic and it was quite challenging to listen to a young person speak this way. After the stage 1 interview I spent a lot of time reflecting on how I had handled the situation – in truth I did very little - and whether or not the decisions I made on the spot were the best ones.
This respondent did not take part in stage 2 of the fieldwork but as I prepared to meet with her for a final time I thought hard about how I would negotiate any difficult language. In a study of racism, Christine Griffin (1991 cited in Skeggs 2001) argues that when participants in research are reproducing damaging and racist ideas then the ‘researcher should talk back’, arguing that not to do so would reproduce, legitimate and collude in the racist ideas being articulated (see Skeggs 2001: 434). While I understood Griffin’s argument, going into the final interview I decided not to ‘talk back’ to this particular respondent. It was not my intention to gloss over the matter and I did try where possible to talk around these issues in a more nuanced way, encouraging her to reflect upon her ideas and explain them to me. Although there were moments when I felt uncomfortable, I was conscious of my ethic of care towards this young woman and of my broader responsibilities as a researcher.

Since our first meeting this respondent had been on a personal journey, she had begun a project of self-assessment and, at stage 3, recognized that some of her language, and her ways of thinking, had been racially insensitive. As she reflected on the transformation she had undergone it was clear that it had been both rewarding and painful for her. She had looked at herself, at the values she had taken for granted for so long, and she had started to move away from these and make changes. This respondent recalled this time with blushed cheeks and also deeper feelings of shame. Although she commented on how disappointed she was with herself (‘so naïve’ ‘so stupid’) she was nevertheless willing to discuss these emotions with me in the research setting. I took this as evidence of the relationship of trust that had developed between us. This only reinforced my view that to chastise respondents or to admonish them in any way would break that trust and to act irresponsibly. As a researcher it was my job to gather real data and present these young women in the terms that they used, however uncomfortable this might be for me personally.

Data Analysis

It seems rather odd to discuss ‘data analysis’ as though it was somehow separate from the research process described above. In fact, the process of analysis began with the very first
interview and has been an ongoing, ever-present experience since that time. According to Thomson (2009) a characteristic of qualitative longitudinal research is the impossibility of separating the research process and the data record: ‘[t]his means refusing the conventions of sociological genres that gloss over the messy business of real-life research, the collisions between data collection and analysis, the provisionality of interpretation and the presumption and closures involved in writing’ (p. 2). As I shall reveal in this discussion, my experience of conducting this research forced me to confront the kinds of issues that Thomson outlines, and this was especially the case with regards to the temporariness of interpretations which were troubled with each new stage of data generation.

After completing the stage 1 interviews I transcribed each one and then began to code the transcripts thematically. The aim of this early analysis was to identify key themes which emerged across the data set and to get a sense of how and in what ways these themes played out differently and in accordance with respondents’ ethnicity, social class background and/or the kinds of FE institutions they had attended. Some of these themes were rather obvious and expected – family, friendship, home – others however, such as discussions around proximity and distance, were much more central than I had anticipated. This process of analysis, as early as it may have been, enabled me to organize the data set (and the respondents) before going into stage 2 of the fieldwork and, in addition, it informed the design of stage 2 and stage 3 interview schedules. It would have been impossible for me, as the sole researcher on this project, not to have begun to sort respondents and their narratives at this early stage. There were however, certain problems with this approach – with trying to pin respondents down or put them into boxes – which only really materialized as I carried out the later interviews.

Rachel Thomson has written in great detail about the importance, and also the difficulties, of conducting qualitative, longitudinal research and in the following quotation she perfectly articulates some of the problems that I faced during this research.

A longitudinal data set disrupts the smooth narrativity in which ‘the past is always remade in the light of the present’ (Lawler, 2002: 251). Finding ways of managing such data draws attention to the hidden codes of a sociological discourse within
which research subjects are isolated from the temporal flow. It is by eliminating the future from the picture that it becomes possible to focus on the relationship between the data and the social…Time does not stand still, research subjects keep living and changing, and longitudinal methods demand that we keep looking. The arrival of new data reconfigures the archive, revealing the provisional character of analytic accounts while testing the validity of earlier interpretations.

(2009: 133)

The quotation illustrates the value of qualitative, longitudinal research for understanding social and personal change yet it also reveals the way in which this kind of data can become unwieldy and exempt from some of the more traditional ‘rules’ of sociological research and analyses. To some extent, there is always another stage, another interview in projects such as this and because of this any ‘findings’ feel rather partial. I had real difficulties coming to terms with this process and as I came to understand the interview data (and the research participants) as complex and particular, I found it difficult to find the overall story which emerged out of the 24 stories upon which this thesis is based.

Analysing and organising the data set has then been my biggest challenge. Coding data after each stage of fieldwork enabled me to understand the young women’s narratives and also to move forward to the next stage of data collection, but it also meant that I wore rather deep analytical grooves into the project’s pathway, and it became difficult to avoid drifting into these as I made my way through the research. As Thomson maintains, ‘the moment at which analysis is undertaken is a moment of analytic closure’ (2009: 133). I certainly found this to be true. On reflection, I recognise that it was only through the writing of this thesis that I was able to truly engage in analysis – to step back from the individual narratives and understand them as a whole.

As I explain in the coming chapters I decided to treat family and friend relationships separately in my analysis, despite the trend within sociology which characterises these relationships as similar and overlapping. In addition, I worked with typologies to move through the three stages of data, characterising the ways in which respondents anticipated change in family and friend relationships prior to university and how they experienced these relationships later in the project. The tables below outline the main typologies and concepts used in the coming data chapters for both friends and family.
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Having introduced the concepts that will guide the following empirical chapters I shall not dwell too much more on the process of research or analysis. It is important to stress however, the difficulties involved in managing such a wealth of qualitative data while also trying to give individual respondents a voice. As Power et al (2003) note with reference to their own longitudinal study, ‘[W]hile the individual experiences cited in later chapters raise questions about the ‘bigger picture’, there is a parallel danger of over-individualizing biographies to the extent or dimensions of exceptionality’ (p. 4). I certainly experienced this tension and because there has been so little written about how to manage qualitative longitudinal data the process was, at times, incredibly overwhelming. Thus, although it is helpful to think about qualitative longitudinal interviews as generating ‘movies’ rather than ‘snapshots’ (2009: 14 citing Neale and Flowerdew, 2003), this analogy oversimplifies the process of analysis because movies are essentially fictions whereas my own aim was to capture realities.
Chapter 6  
Leaving home?

In this, the first empirical chapter, I shall examine data produced during the first stage of fieldwork interviews. The discussion which follows begins my analysis of respondents’ experiences of family relationships and ideas around ‘home’. The early interviews were saturated with images indicative of a tug of war between the familiarity of home on the one hand and the exoticness of being ‘away’ on the other. These images were hugely powerful and dominated the first stage of interviews as respondents reflected on their decisions about where to study at university. In addition, because the interviews took place in the space between A Level examinations ending and results being released, respondents could not be certain about the future and were, therefore, still grappling with the decisions they had made. As a result, the relationship of tension between ‘staying’ and ‘going’ was heightened at this time. As outlined in Chapter 5, because these images were so powerful, I decided to use notions of pulling away and staying close as my core analytical concepts in this chapter. While respondents’ narratives were structured around pulling away or staying close, what emerged from the stage one interviews was a middle space where respondents could negotiate the competing demands of familiarity and exoticness. Many young women thus demonstrated the ways in which, by treading carefully, they could achieve some kind of balance and make a decision about university which they were happy with. Moreover, the ways in which these ideas of pulling away, staying close and treading carefully played out across class and ethnicity varied considerably, and I shall discuss these differences in detail.

In Chapter 4 I discussed sociological literature around home and mobilities. This literature discusses physical and geographical movement but what is most important for my purposes is the interplay between such movements and emotional attachments and meanings. It has been argued that travel and movement ought to be recognised as a fundamental right (Urry 2000; 2002), because an engagement in mobility for work or leisure enables people to access opportunities and participate fully in society. The impact
of this way of thinking around mobility was evident across the 24 narratives which were organised around the public story (Jamieson, 1998) of ‘going to university’ implicit in which are assumptions about movement, detachment and new experiences. For example, set in the context of the ‘beginning of a new chapter in life’ the notion of going away was nested in the narrative of adventure and excitement. From this perspective, movement – especially for those who had experienced little of it – seemed entirely attractive and the thought of meeting new people itself was presented as desirable. In contrast to this, the idea of staying close to home during study was understood as less appealing, and to some extent, less meaningful, because of the way in which it is linked to ideas of traditionalism. Explaining the desire to stay close to home is not devoid of narrative power however. This stated aim can fit with ideas of love (of family), of security (especially for those whose families have experienced a lot of mobility), and of contentment and happiness.

This chapter is organized around these three key experiences. Pulling away indicates a wrench away from what is known, but also a sense of excitement and impending freedom. So the term indicates some ambivalence and thus it perfectly encapsulates the attraction of imagined possibilities of life at university, whilst at the same time suggesting the physical and emotional process of untangling oneself from the everyday routines of home. By the same token, Staying Close is a concept which allows for a more nuanced understanding of ‘immobility’ which embraces the intangible issues of emotional attachment, feeling near to people who matter and preserving cherished ties. So staying close is not to be understood as mere passivity but as a choice to remain connected in a particular way. Somewhere in the middle of these ideal types is the notion of Treading Carefully. This concept symbolizes the cautious, and in some cases rather reticent way in which respondents thought about going to university. These young women displayed the greatest feelings of ambivalence and, also, the complex relationship between local attachments and expressions of independence.

Both staying and going could therefore be understood as very positive choices as respondents made use of the different forms of social and cultural capital that were available to them. The stage one interviews reveal that, in the case of the young women
respondents, relationships with family were thought to provide foundational economic and material support, such as the provision of housing, meals and transport, as well as feelings of love and comfort which enabled them to feel cushioned as they made their way through the world. This support should be understood as ‘elastic’. This means that it is not necessarily tied to the local but can take effect in other places (e.g. buying a flat for a daughter at university, regular phone calls and so on). So, whether respondents chose to pull away from or stay close to home, or whether their decisions evoked a sense of them treading carefully, balancing their feelings of ambivalence with their expectations of transformation, they nevertheless revealed the different kinds and workings of social and cultural resources at home. This chapter explores the different workings of social and cultural capital in detail.

The data produced during the fieldwork are suggestive of these two concepts and of ways of thinking about family relationships in general. However, despite the fact these concepts are often theorized as distinct I am interpreting them as much more fluid and overlapping. For example in ‘going away’ to an institution of higher education there is a promise of acquiring additional cultural and social capital. In addition to the cultural value of the education itself, moving away and engaging with more diverse groups of people can create new social networks which may provide better opportunities for work and upward mobility, as well as relationships for the future. This focus can underestimate the gains of cultural and social capital of staying at home during study. These might be the opportunity to use the skills and knowledges that work best in a local setting. For example, many respondents discussed the importance of continuing to work part-time at home and for the young women of South Asian heritage there was significant cultural value associated with staying close to home and in the local Muslim community. This kind of debate links in with ideas about ‘bonding’ and ‘bridging’ capitals those, for example, which foster a more inward-looking approach versus those which encourage people to cast a wider net. It is often argued that inward-looking bonds allow people merely to ‘get by’ whereas outward-looking connections allow people to ‘get ahead’. However, this way of thinking which is largely economic in its perspective,
underestimates the importance of local ties and the kinds of things which are significant for different groups and their personal experiences.

The ideas central to this chapter are underpinned by notions of social class and ethnicity. These social distinctions were a very significant part of how the interviewees discussed the whole idea of going away and staying close. Social class is deeply implicated in how the young women positioned themselves in the narrative of moving to university. As I shall show below expectations, as well as a sense of excitement about moving, cannot be fully understood without acknowledging the social background and resources of the young women themselves. Equally issues of ethnicity were central in decisions about staying and going, but also ethnicity set a framework of opportunity and also an alternative narrative to account for choices made. Pulling away, staying close and treading carefully, can be understood as different but also very positive choices. However, it is important to recognize that the influence of the public story of going to university, particularly in its evocation of ideas around mobility, influenced the ways in which respondents’ were able to construct their narratives during the first stage of fieldwork.

Pulling Away

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<td>Plymouth</td>
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<td>Emily</td>
<td>Buckinghamshire</td>
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<td>Harriett</td>
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In this first section, my discussion focuses on 7 respondents who were confident and optimistic about leaving family in order to study away at university. The sense of
excitement and the self-assurance that these respondents displayed was recognizable not only in their narratives, but in their preference for universities located at a distance from Millthorne. University was regarded as a way to pull away from family at home in order to create space for new experiences and emerging identities. This way of thinking about going to university reflects more traditional (and middle-class) norms and expectations, in which mobility is valued and regarded as a significant element of the broader experience of higher education (Christie, 2007). In truth, the seven young women who spoke of pulling away from home typically came from families which understood and had engaged with higher education in the past. These families could, perhaps, be described as more middle-class than others from within the sample. In order to provide some context for respondents’ narratives, I shall first describe their family situations and relationships.

Respondents who spoke of pulling away from home shared many characteristics with regard to their family relationships. Typically their families were small\(^{22}\), and there was no incidence of parental divorce or separation\(^{23}\). Respondents described having close-knit immediate families, however, because of the patterns of migration in their family histories their extended families were scattered around the UK and/or overseas. For example, Harriett’s mother was born in North Yorkshire but moved to Millthorne after meeting and marrying her father; Sophie’s parents are from the South of England but they had moved around considerably with her father’s work in the armed forces; Sahia’s parents were born in Pakistan but moved to London as teenagers and then finally to Millthorne after they married. Sahia had family in Manchester, London and the USA. These 7 young women were familiar with notions of mobility and, also, with the experience of conducting family relationships across distances. These respondents valued the opportunities which greater personal mobility afforded and it was clear that they were excited by the prospect of pulling away from home. Notwithstanding the apparent exoticness of movements away from home and family, mobility was also regarded as normal, and as ‘just something one does’. This is because mobility was built into their family habitus. Over time they had developed relational practices which enabled them to

\(^{22}\) Predominantly 1 sibling except Sahia – 3.

\(^{23}\) Harriett’s parents plan to divorce, announced before she left for Bristol.
relate meaningfully with one another across distances. For this reason, respondents could imagine how and in what ways distance and mobility would impact upon their relationships and how they might respond to this.

Much of the movement and travel carried out by respondents’ parents came as a result of their educational trajectories and/or their commitments to professional occupations. These young women tended to have a sense of familiarity with the university system either through parents\textsuperscript{24} or older siblings\textsuperscript{25}. Stacey’s parents, for example, moved to Millthorne when her father was appointed as Headmaster at a prestigious secondary school, and Caitlin’s father spent time in London as an undergraduate student. It has been argued elsewhere (Ball 2003, Brooks 2003) that it is parents’ social networks and their own educational experiences which enables them to develop an understanding of the higher education market. This knowledge is then passed onto their children who become well placed and confident to make decisions about the move to university. It is perhaps unsurprising then that the notion of pulling away held more appeal for respondents whose parents had also studied at university. From this perspective, one can see how lives are linked across generations.

Typically therefore respondents who spoke of pulling away came from middle-class families with an understanding of the higher education system and in which geographical mobility was accepted as a normal part of everyday life. These young women were often embedded in practices which centred on education and university study. Indeed, the idea that they would one day study at university was not new, but there was usually a longstanding narrative within their family regarding this transition. Stacey for example stated that ‘there was never any doubt’ about the kind of university she hoped to attend and that her family understood her decision would be based upon the reputation of the university rather than of its proximity to home: ‘My family wouldn’t want me to [attend a local university] no, they really understand what it is about university that is so important – going away, living away, trying new things.’ (Interview 1). Stacey’s comments call to

\textsuperscript{24} Caitlin, Harriett, Sophie, and Stacey
\textsuperscript{25} Sahia and Emily
mind Mason’s (2004) concept of relational individualism, in which seemingly individualised narratives and choices are actually made for the good of others. It would not have suited Stacey or her family for her to have remained close to home and her parents understood this.

For these respondents then, university occupied a space within their family habitus. It is for Sophie that this was most apparent. In the excerpt below she reflects on her application to Oxford University, revealing the ways in which this was, in itself, indicative of her family’s biography and aspirations. In the quotation, Sophie describes her own and her parents’ reactions on the day they learned that her application had been unsuccessful.

**Sophie:** When I received the letter from Oxford it was awful. I mean awful; just awful. Mum had promised me that she would contact me if a letter came so that day I got a message on my mobile [phone] and mum came over [to sixth form] to bring it to me at lunch. I opened it and burst into tears basically. […] Mum fussed around me but when dad came in and asked what was wrong he shouted at me to pull myself together. He was so angry with me. He said that Oxford was competitive, all the things that I already knew, and he tried to get me back on my feet again. He was like, “just get over it”.

Within Sophie’s narrative there is a real sense of relational participation (Mason, 2004). Applying to Oxford was a joint project for Sophie and her family and they each played a role within this experience. It is important to provide a context for Sophie’s reflections on her mother and father’s differing responses. When her father was much younger he also applied to Oxford and like Sophie he too was unsuccessful. At one level, her father’s experience of the higher education system allowed him to offer her advice and support, and generally provide Sophie with a particular kind of resilience. On another level however, the fact that Sophie and her father were both what she calls, ‘Oxford Rejects’ is illustrative of the way in which higher education and aspiration are woven into their family biography and even when there is some disappointment, it is possible for this experience to be transformed into something positive and meaningful, binding the family together in new ways. In addition, because of Sophie’s family’s knowledge of universities and the differences which separate institutions such as Oxford and Cambridge, they are able to make sense of and draw strength from what might otherwise have been a rather
negative experience. This is in an instance then, of the way in which cultural capital can be passed down through the generations in a middle-class context – even though the defining experience is one of rejection.

Sophie’s story is typical of respondents in this group who talked about applying to university as something of a collective family experience. Their parents and siblings shared in this experience by accompanying them to open days and helping them to write and research their applications. In addition to this however, respondents also discussed the ways in which their ideas about pulling away from home permeated everyday family relationships. Their relationships with parents and siblings, and their familiarity with mobility and the higher education sector clearly influenced the ways in which they were able to express sentiments of longing and yearning for adventure and change. There was no (visible) anxiety at things not working out at university, and because parents or older brothers and sisters had also studied away from home there was no risk of offense in articulating the need to pull away and make a break. Taken together, these separate issues meant that these respondents could be hopeful and optimistic about moving away from family in Millthorne. They expressed almost no feelings of ambivalence and establishing their own identity in the world seemed to be the priority at that time.

Another factor for consideration was that these young women did not see a future for themselves in Millthorne or the North West. Pulling away to study at university actually represented the first in a series of other imagined moves away from family and home. Sophie for example, having moved around the UK with her family, stated that she would “hate the thought of being stuck in one area forever” and “would love to live in London and start my acting career there because that won’t happen in the North” (Interview 1). Similarly, Sahia expressed clear and strong views about the importance of place for establishing her identity as a young South Asian Muslim woman. In the excerpt below Sahia, who was studying in London, reflects on the importance of location.

**Sahia:** Bradford is my second choice because of how good it [the university] is for pharmacy but it’s totally boring as a place, I don’t really want to be there. It’s very orthodox you know for Asian women. But I guess on the plus side I’d be really close to my brother who is in Leeds. I didn’t really like [Bradford] though if
I’m honest, even though the accommodation is a lot nicer than the one I’ve picked in London. But the pull for me, with London I mean, is the reputation of the university, and the fact that I can move to the capital as a young Asian woman too. That’s a big deal for me.

Sahia considers the benefits of studying in Bradford (a reputable course, more space and comfort) against those of living in London (freedom of self, exciting, greater diversity) and in so doing she reveals the complex process of decision-making. Her narrative provides support for the work of Hussain and Bagguley (2007) who maintain that young South Asian women regard the reputation and quality of university courses as, if not more, important as locality or being amongst similar others. It was imperative for Sahia to put distance between herself and what she understood as more orthodox Muslim women, typical of Millthorne and the North. Although in London Sahia would be further away from her family, and despite the fact that her accommodation there would be small and boxy, she was balancing a range of different needs and desires, one of which was her emerging sense of self. Sahia was the only South Asian respondent to move a significant distance away from home and the fact that both of her parents also lived in London when they were younger ought to be understood as significant in this regard. It was through her interactions with London as a child that Sahia felt a sense of familiarity and belonging there. This place was part of her family history, part of the broader story of how she came to be in Millthorne. One can see evidence here of linked lives, and the ways in which a sense of connectedness is created across generations even when there are movements away from family and home.

Respondents who spoke of pulling away were, therefore, expressing the strongest statement of selfhood and individualism. From the examples I have discussed, however, it is also apparent that in making choices which would take them away from family at home, these young women were nevertheless acting in relation to the kinds of orientations which were part of their family habitus. They were embedded in practices which centred around geographical mobility for work and education and could speak of relationships with kin which were not based on localism or daily, face-to-face interactions. It is also
important to appreciate that it was perhaps easier or accepted for these young women to articulate a need to pull away from home, because of the ways in which mobility was constituted within their family habitus. Moreover, there was a strong sense of participatory decision-making for these respondents. Sophie and Harriett reveal examples of this below.

**Sophie:** I would actually rather be quite far away, I’m quite confident that I’ll cope and I want to test myself you know. I think [mum] would maybe have liked me to have gone to Manchester […]. This is my chance to get away from my family, I think because we are so close I need to be further away to be me completely. It’s not that they stop me from being myself or anything, but I rely on them for a lot of things that I would like to do myself. (emphasis added)

**Harriett:** I’m quite excited about being a bit further away anyway. I’ve never really spent that much time away from my parents before and Mum keeps on saying how it will be good for me […] Dad is a man of very few words and I know he’ll worry but he’s the same as mum really; he knows Bristol will be the best thing for me all round.

In this section I have examined the ways in which a small group of respondents articulated their expectations about going to university. These young women spoke with confidence about moving away from Millthorne and their families and expressed very little uncertainty with regard to how and in what ways their family relationships may alter in the coming months. There was in fact, a sense of taken for grantedness within their narratives. It was, perhaps, much easier for these young women to speak in this way because of the practices and narratives within which they were embedded. Most respondents had parents or siblings who had studied at university and they were therefore able to draw on these experiences as a way of articulating their own expectations. In addition, they typically had some experience of geographical mobility and this meant that they were able to visualize how they would conduct family relationships at a distance. Significantly, the narratives expressed by these respondents were generally shared by their parents so there was no risk of offending family members in expressing a desire to move away from home. These respondents displayed a mix of relational individualism and, also, relational participation, so that seemingly individualized choices were in fact shared and understood as for the greater good of the family. Although these young women seem to articulate individualistic concerns, it is clear from this discussion that
their ideas, expectations and choices are tied to their experiences of family relationships and their family histories. This therefore demonstrates a particular kind of relationism in which proximity and the local are not key features.

*Treading Carefully*

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This section examines the experiences of respondents whose narratives evoked a sense of them treading carefully toward university. Treading carefully is indicative of the cautiousness and ambivalence which underpinned their decisions about where to study at university. Rather than bold, confident narratives of choice, selfhood and identity, these young women reflected on carefully thought out negotiations, balancing their ties with family and home in Millthorne with the desire to represent popular narratives around going to university. It is imperative to consider the broader cultural context in which these young women were embedded. Mobility and individualism are key themes within the public story of going to university and so they attended to this in their interviews. Even
though respondents expressed similar kinds of expectations to the young women discussed in the previous section, they did so with a degree of anxiety and seemed far less self-assured in their decisions. These young women moved softly, and at times with reluctance, toward the goal of university study. They were captured by the prospect of an adventurous life away from home, yet the stability and comfort of staying close to family still held strong appeal. Predominantly therefore, as the table above reveals, these respondents showed a preference for universities located in and around the North West of England. By choosing universities in this area they hoped to experience life away from home while staying close enough to home so that they could continue to engage in relational family practices which, as I shall discuss below, were based around proximity and localism.

Respondents in this group were much more diverse in terms of their social class, family and ethnic backgrounds than the young women discussed previously. Typically these respondents had much larger and more ‘complex’ family structures. For example, it was common for them to have at least two or three siblings and, in cases in which parents had separated or divorced respondents also spoke about ‘step’ or ‘half’ siblings and also, additional parents. Despite having larger families which were often spread over multiple family homes, respondents in this group spoke about the close-knit and comfortable nature of their relationships with family. Tanya, for example, explained how her two older half siblings – children from her mother’s previous relationship – lived on the adjacent street and that this meant they were ‘always popping in unannounced’ usually to call upon Tanya for baby-sitting duties. These young women referenced the easiness and informality of their family relationships and the ways in which they depended on one another for care and support. These sorts of relationships were not limited to immediate family members, but extended to aunts and uncles, cousins and grandparents, and, sometimes, neighbours who were not officially kin. Esther, who was studying physiotherapy in Huddersfield, describes this laid back style as she reflects on her relationship with her grandparents.

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Esther: My grandparents are very close to us you see. We go on holiday every year with them, last year we went to Italy, and when I was a bit younger we used to go walking in Spain. When I work for my mum at the chippy I always call into see them afterwards for a brew and a natter.’

In the quotation Esther reveals the physical closeness – the geographical proximity –and, also, the emotional closeness which underpins her relationships with her grandparents. Esther’s language indicates the everyday familiarity of their relationships and, in addition, her narrative reveals the ways in which the practices she and her grandparents engaged in (‘a brew and a natter’) were interwoven into everyday experiences and routines. Esther’s narrative is evocative of the notion of linked lives across generations, and the feelings of love and commitment that such a sense of connectedness produce. The examples above demonstrate the ways in which family relationships provide important sources of social capital – Tanya in her role as child minder, and Esther’s mother providing part-time work and thus financial support. These kinds of family practices were constituted within respondents’ family habitus, they had long histories and thus informed decisions and emotions regarding proximity and relationships. It is important therefore to understand these young women as embedded in particular kinds of relationships and relational practices which were based on co-presence and the informality of everyday routines.

In thinking through the embedded nature of these family practices, it is imperative to explore respondents’ family histories and residential patterns. The young women who were treading carefully tended to come from families which had long established connections not only with Millthorne but within particular areas of the town. Their parents had lived and worked in Millthorne all their lives and, mostly, their grandparents had had similar experiences. Only a few respondents

27 stated that their parents had experienced significant geographical mobility. In those cases, this was migration from the Indian subcontinent and despite the scale of this movement respondents stated that other members of their family were now firmly rooted in local communities in Millthorne and that their relational practices were locally based. For example, Kat and Serena, both of whom were studying in Leeds, stated that their parents were born in Pakistan and came to

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Millthorne as young adults. Nevertheless, both young women described the geographical and emotional closeness of their extended families that often lived within the same street. The excerpt below is taken from Kat’s first interview.

**Kat:** My parents came [to Millthorne] when they married I think, I am not sure. My dad used to live with my uncle here and then he and my mum got married in Pakistan. I know that’s where they got married because I have seen photos, but I think then they came here, back here to live I mean, together. My dad’s parents were in Pakistan until they passed away, but my mum’s parents live here, just around the corner actually. They have a shop, and [mother’s] sister lives around here too with my uncle and cousins.

Kat and the other young women in this group spoke of family relationships which reflect more ‘traditional’ practices and ideals of family life. They understood family relationships as based upon (physical) closeness and informality and regarded these attachments as a source of important (and flexible) social and emotional support. Respondents’ parents, grandparents, uncles and aunts had remained (or become) embedded within Millthorne through their family commitments and also through paid work. For the most part, these young women were surrounded by examples of people who had left school at 16 and worked in Millthorne since that time. Only three respondents had parents that had studied at university. In these cases, their parents had had studied locally, on a part-time basis and usually as mature students rather than ‘going away’ to university as young adults. This kind of (or lack of) engagement with higher education, coupled with the more traditional, locally based family relationships that respondents spoke of, created a framework for thinking about university. For these young women university was understood as part of their existing patterns and routines at home rather than as representing a break from these. Notions of ‘making a break’ were not part of the family habitus for these young women, when compared to those who expressed a desire to pull away.

Crucially, the way in which respondents’ parents had (or had not) engaged with higher education impacted upon the kinds of advice and support they were able to offer their daughters. For the most part respondents in this group said that their parents had been

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28 Jenny, Tanya and Katie
involved in the process of choosing and applying for university however, many also stated that their parents were as anxious as they were about making the ‘right’ choice. These respondents also demonstrated the kinds of relational participation discussed earlier, however these respondents received different kinds of support from their parents than the young women who chose to pull away. Typically the parents of these young women were also treading carefully as they too were unclear about how the move to university would shape their lives and relationships. Thus, rather than stressing the importance of adventure and space for ‘self-discovery’, respondents’ parents emphasized notions of safety and well being. An example of this comes from Jenny who was studying at York University.

Jenny: My dad secretly hopes I end up at Manchester. We went to the degree show at Manchester Met and I could tell by the way he was talking, because he [studied] there, he wants me to go there too and live at home. He worries about me such a lot. We went to this reggae gig the other week, the whole family, and I was dancing around on my own and my mum said he was just watching me, and if a guy came near me he would tense up and stare at me.

Jenny’s narrative reveals the importance of cultural reproduction within families. She notes the ways in which her father wanted her to follow his own pattern, possibly because this is something which he understood and could offer advice about. Respondents described family relationships which were similar to respondents who were pulling away. The difference being of course, that in this instance family practices were local rather than geographically dispersed. Within the literature, it has been argued that parental assumptions about the purpose and nature of higher education can have an important bearing on the ways in which young people approach the move to university (Brooks 2003). Typically, respondents in this group said that their parents were delighted and proud of their educational success and that they regarded university study as a fundamentally *educational* experience. This means that respondents’ parents accorded less significance to the broader (individualized) experience of university and instead, respondents hoped to find ways of incorporating this new experience into their existing family practices.
In Chapter 2 I discussed the ways in which issues around cost and in particular, fear of debt, impact on young people’s decisions about university. Given the influence of this way of thinking about young people’s decisions with regard to higher education, it is surprising that only one respondent, Megan, who was studying in Preston, spoke explicitly about financial issues in relation to decision making. Moreover, and in keeping with the previous point, it was her father’s concerns about the cost of living away which shaped her decision to remain in the local area. Megan’s father had lived in Millthorne all his life and was concerned about the costs involved in living a significant distance away from home. Although Megan had planned to go to York, she and her father found a compromise in Preston, where she would be able to return home every week in order to continue working in Millthorne part-time. Megan explains this below.

Megan: I’m not sure how I feel [about going to Preston]. I was like, York, York, all along and I suppose I never thought about money and stuff, I just looked for the best course and it [York] isn’t too far away is it? But then Dad said all this stuff about costs and well it went from there really so I just applied to Preston.

Megan’s experiences are perhaps the most explicit example of relational constraint (Mason, 2004). Megan’s father was not actively involved in her application to university; she researched and visited institutions by herself or with friends. It is clear however that, in the small part he played, her father had a great deal of influence over her decision to study at Preston. According to Brooks (2003), one should not assume that there is always a positive correlation between level of parental involvement and parental influence. This research certainly supports this argument. Although Megan had strong feelings about York and had researched the course thoroughly, she also respected her father’s ‘real world’ concerns about money and cost of living. In her interview, Megan described the careful way in which she and her father had thought through this problem, and although she felt restricted in her choice, there was also a sense of mutuality and of trust in knowing what was ‘right’ in this instance. Interestingly however, Megan’s case was rather rare and most respondents did not speak with regret about staying within close reach of Millthorne, nor did they reflect on feeling constrained in a negative way. Mostly these respondents described the ways in which they had carefully balanced the competing commitments of
family with ideas around selfhood and autonomy. They were, it seems, experiencing a dual pull toward home on the one hand, and toward independence on the other.

Katie’s experiences were even more complex because her parents separated when she was 8 years old and, since then, she divided her time equally between their two homes. During this time her family had grown significantly. Re-marriages meant extra siblings and prior to fieldwork beginning her step-sister had also had a child. Because she had experienced so much change in her life Katie was reluctant to create more obstacles to her family relationships and therefore decided to study in Lancaster and return home at the weekends. In the quotation below Katie describes the ways in which she and her family had established important relational practices which worked for their specific situation. They were able to balance the time they spent together and emphasize notions of proximity and physical closeness. Going to university represented a challenge to those practices and because of her already divided commitments at home, it was important for Katie to find a university which would allow her to continue to contribute to both her families.

**Katie:** I hate change. I honestly hate it. I hate it when things come to an end like holidays and stuff or school. I like to have an arrangement that I’m happy with you know, I like to know what I’m doing. It’s hard to think about how [going to university] will affect things at home but I really don’t want things to change a lot at all, because [living with both her mum and dad] has worked for us now for a really long time. So yeah, I am a bit worried.

For some young people then, the experience of transformation was simply not something that they sought. Remaining close to home during study allowed respondents to feel happy and contented during their studies. The decisions that respondents made were not simply based on cost or constraint, or of feeling alienated because of their social class or ethnic background. Instead, it is important to appreciate the ways in which these decisions represented moral values about the closeness of family ties and also, expressions of love and commitment to people and a place which mattered to them. Respondents who spoke of treading carefully can, therefore, be understood as expressing notions of *solidarity as a way of managing* intergenerational ambivalence. In these cases family members reveal a convergence of outlook alongside a desire to reproduce traditional social forms (Lüscher
2005: 106). Esther provides an example of this below. It is clear that, although she was faced with a range of options with regards to how and in what ways to structure the move to university, it was the desire to reproduce the traditional family relationships and practices which drove her decision.

**Esther:** I will miss mum so much. I know that. I have had to pick a university close to home because I need to be able to come home a lot. I think I’ll come back fairly regularly, every week maybe [...] I’ll be [in Huddersfield] by myself so that’s scary but it means I’ll be able to see my mum and my family as much as I can you know; I don’t want that side of my life to change.

Many of Esther’s friends were studying in Leeds and Manchester thus, by choosing Huddersfield Esther was expressing her autonomy and making an individual choice. She reveals the way in which respondents who were treading carefully balanced their commitments and attachments to home and family with the desire to be part of the public story of going to university. In addition, respondents like Esther did not regard travel as a normal or necessary caveat for achieving personal or professional ambitions. These young women did not see themselves moving away from Millthorne in the future and, generally, they were pursuing vocational degrees such as teaching or nursing. In order to remain embedded within certain practices in Millthorne it was imperative for respondents to find a university which would allow them to experience ‘home’ and ‘away’ simultaneously.

This section has demonstrated that, for most respondents, there was a degree of ambivalence and uncertainty with regard to pulling away and leaving family during study. These young women reveal the ways in which, by treading carefully, they tried to find a balance between their desires to remain embedded at home, and continue to engage in family practices which made them feel happy and secure, with the need to articulate the kinds of autonomous individualism which is thought to characterize the move to university. These young women were therefore aware of the public story around leaving home and establishing a new self at university. This discourse, however, sat rather less comfortably with their family habitus which were based on a commitment to the local area, proximity to kin and regular, co-present interactions with family members. Because these young women were embedded in these kinds of family practices, it was much more difficult for them to articulate the desire to move away from home, and also, to imagine
how this might work in practice. What one can see then, from the examples discussed here, is the way that respondents worked within this, finding opportunities to carve out a middle space (i.e. Esther at Huddersfield) while at the same time staying close to home.

A final point with regard to this, the largest group of respondents, is the way in which they recognized their own role within their families. They were aware of how their decisions about university would impact upon the broader experiences and relationships within their networks of intimacy at home. This reveals the morality and emotionality at the heart of their decisions. They saw themselves as key players within their families and understood that by removing themselves things would change for everyone. This is not a sign of constraint. On the contrary, it is an example of young women working within thoughtful and intentional networks of care and love. This discussion therefore reinforces the need to see young people’s experiences in a positive light and also, to recognize young people as active family members rather than mere recipients of care and support.

**Staying Close**

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In the final section of this chapter I shall discuss the experiences of respondents who chose to stay close to home during their degree studies. The four respondents who chose to remain living at home with family talked in very different ways about the move to university. The public story or popular narrative of ‘making a break’ was not as significant for these young women as it was for the others. This way of thinking was significant insofar as respondents felt compelled to construct their narratives around it, however these young women were not caught in the same dilemma as those treading
carefully, and expressed a similar confidence to the young women who were pulling away in their decisions to stay close.

All four respondents in this final group were of South Asian heritage and Muslim faith. They did not hope or expect to transform their everyday lives and relationships and they therefore negotiated decisions about university so as to preserve and protect the routines and relationships that they were embedded within at home. They did this by choosing local universities, similar to those preferred by respondents discussed above, which they attended on a daily basis. These young women imagined university as separate from their personal lives at home and hoped to manage the experience accordingly, minimizing any feelings of disruption.

These respondents lived in Millthorne’s poorer neighbourhoods, and in areas in which there is a significant South Asian community. They had large families, two or three siblings in each case, and, in addition, a network of extended kin in close proximity. There was no incidence of parental divorce or separation amongst these respondents and the image which emerged was of family relationships which were tightly bound and based on strong notions of reciprocity and care. In her first interview Mira spent time outlining the reasons why she had chosen to remain living at home, and in the quotation below it is evident that her close family relationships were at the root of this.

Mira: I have my meals cooked and my clothes washed [at home]. I’d really miss all that and I’m not sure I can do these things for myself properly. Also, I like to speak to my parents, you know properly, tell them about my day and stuff, and it just isn’t the same on the telephone. I’m a very homely girl […] everyone knows each other [in her neighbourhood] and it feels safe and stuff around here. My grandparents just live up the street. We don’t all live together but we eat meals together everyday – lunch and dinner.

Mira’s family, like the other young women in this group, came to the UK from Pakistan over twenty years ago. Since they arrived in Millthorne they have established strong local ties by living close to one another – even on the same street – and by predominantly living and working within their neighbourhood. It is clear therefore that, despite their residential histories, the families of respondents like Mira have taken steps to feel rooted within their local area and create a place which feels ‘safe and stuff’ for their children.
Although Mira did not speak explicitly of risk or a fear of feeling isolated at university it is likely that this was a concern for her as a young Muslim woman. Research reveals the way in which issues around ethnicity shape decisions about university, and perhaps my identity as a white researcher shaped the data produced during the interviews with South Asian respondents. Nevertheless, respondents who were staying close seemed happy with the decisions they had made and their choices reflected strong moral and loving commitments to family rather than a fear of the unknown. It is important to appreciate this positive dimension of social life, particularly for those in marginalized groups who are so often understood as disadvantaged and in situations which are problematical.

Indeed, it is important to understand that different groups of young people have different expectations of the move to university. In a similar regard to respondents who were treading carefully, those who were staying close spoke explicitly about the importance of feelings of familiarity and stability, and family relationships were central to this. For this reason these respondents longed for continuity rather than change. This means that the very idea of the ‘university experience’ was not regarded in the same way as it was for young women who were pulling away. While this broader understanding of university as an opportunity for personal and social transformation dominated the narratives of other respondents, this aspect of going to university held little appeal to these respondents. This avoidance of ‘change’ must not be read as a lack of imagination or ambition however. The four young women who chose to stay close did so because they wanted to achieve specific (normally vocational) career goals, but these goals were understood as entirely achievable within the context of their daily lives at home. In contrast to those respondents who wished to pull away from home, these young women did not see aspiration and geographical mobility as interdependent.

In fact for these young women, family was understood as the key to achieving goals and realising ambitions. As Fizza (Leeds) commented, ‘I just know I’ll want to see my family everyday. I can’t live without my family’. For Mira it was only against the backdrop of family support and care that she believed she would be happy and successful at university, and her parents supported this view. Her parents were typical of respondents
in this group who, perhaps in a similar way to the parents of the young women who were treading carefully, worried about issues of safety and well being over and above the status of the university their daughters were hoping to attend. Neither of Mira’s parents had studied at university and this again was usual for these young women, they therefore promoted education but within the context of family life. She explains this below.

Mira: My parents worry about all kinds of things; like that I won’t look after myself properly; that I won’t eat properly; and that I’ll mix with the wrong people. To be honest, I worry about these things too, especially about fitting in you know

Mira demonstrates the way in which fears and worries are passed on from one generation to the next. Feeling comfortable and ‘fitting in’ will undoubtedly have been of significant concern for families like Mira’s who represent minority ethnic and religious backgrounds. For the four young women in this group localism was an issue of ethnicity and religion as well as social class and the importance of choosing a university where they felt safe and/or would be happy raised the issue of risk in relation to university choice. This supports the work of Reay et al. (2001; 2005) however one must not surmise from this that local choices were ‘bad’ choices. As I shall demonstrate in the next chapter, it is important to recognize the particular value system within which these young women were operating, and not impose one singular understanding of ‘successful’ university experiences.

All four respondents who stayed living at home attended a local comprehensive school with an especially high percentage of South Asian and Muslim students. Furthermore, because of the nature of the area where they lived, they had had very little contact with white people of their own age. For this reason, ‘bridging’ social capital, (i.e. outward-looking networks) was regarded as risky and uncomfortable because these young women had until that point engaged in local and relatively homogenous relationships. Thomson and Holland (2002) comment on the ways in which young people identify and use different kinds of resources. They argue that it is through the experience of competence in particular fields, and the recognition of this competence by others, that young people make investments of time, energy and identity that have significance for their trajectories. For example, it is likely that the four young women in this group chose to stay at home
because they felt competent within their family relationships and less so in their relationships with the wider community. Thus they were more energized to put time and energy into family than into having a typical ‘university experience’. This comes through in Aayra’s reflections of her first experiences of ‘mixed’ classrooms at college.

**Aayra:** I find it hard to meet people and trust them so I kind of stick with those I’ve known for years, I’m not so bothered about making new friends…At first at college I would hardly speak in class you know. Before at school I was quite outspoken but I was just taking the whole thing in and trying to work out what the white students were thinking of me. It sounds crazy now, and I do have some white friends, but it’s still quite strange for me.

Aary’s comments reveal the way in which, for some of the young South Asian women, moving out of their comfort zones in Millthorne was difficult and unsettling. Engaging in settings in which they were a minority or in which they felt unfamiliar was not enjoyable or comfortable for them. The decision to remain living at home was an easier decision, and a choice which would ensure their happiness. Although students do experience some additional difficulties and barriers through living at home during study, there was also a lot to be gained for these young women. This leads me to question the notion that young South Asian women, like those interviewed for this study, should be expected to engage in practices with which may make them feel uncomfortable and out of place. For Aayra, she simply wanted to be happy and get on with the business of going to university.

**Concluding Comments**

In this chapter I have demonstrated the diverse ways in which respondents approached the move to university and the kinds of expectations they had with regard to family life. It is clear that all respondents expected that, by going to university, their relationships with family would alter. Their narratives were organized around the public story which presents the move to university as an individualized project underpinned by notions of adventure and detachment. While this narrative sat comfortably with a small number of respondents (and their parents) for the most part the idea of transformation was met with different levels of anxiety. Because of this, most respondents made decisions about where to study at university which would allow them to balance the commitments and the pull
of family life with the experiences of being a university student. Many respondents wanted a taste of the adventure of living away but they also wanted to remain connected to home. Because of this their narratives evoked a sense of them treading carefully, negotiating the competing demands of various attachments and desires. The four South Asian women who decided to continue living at home during study acknowledged the public story, yet it was clear that they were working with a very different understanding of what university would mean for them and their families. Their decisions to remain at home thus represent an avoidance of change and a strategy to ensure continuity during that time.

Of the 24 respondents, 18 were reluctant to let go of ties with home and family, even in the short term. While mobility, higher education and long-distance relationships were built into some respondents’ family habitus, mostly the young women’s family relationships were characterized by proximity to kin. Respondents described ways of relating to family which were based on a casual informality and, also, on being near to one another. Respondents decisions to remain close to home therefore should not be read as constraint of background or resources but as expressions of love and commitment and a desire to reproduce traditional family forms and practices. The young women understood themselves as having important roles to play at home and by leaving they knew that the whole dynamic of family life would alter.
Chapter 7
Homecomings

This chapter focuses on the second stage of interviews which were carried out during respondents’ first formal break from university. This discussion completes my analysis of respondents’ family relationships by exploring how and in what ways they experienced their homecomings. Although most respondents had spent the first term moving between home and university – some on a daily basis – there was also a small group of young women for whom Christmas was the first real chance to spend time at home with family. The regularity of respondents’ visits home is, therefore, a central concern of this chapter. Specifically, the following discussion explores the relationship between the frequency of respondents’ (co-present) interactions with home and their shifting experiences of family relationships. The aim of this chapter is to understand how and in what ways the ongoing negotiations of family relationships are influenced by distance, proximity and changes to shared routines and practices.

The previous chapter discussed the ways in which respondents reflected on ideas around staying close or pulling away from home. These ideas underpinned their decisions about where to study at university and, also, revealed their different relational practices and expectations. In this chapter I shall explore how relationships at home, which were mostly taken for granted before they left for university, had to be renegotiated after a period away. How, for example, would the young women who hoped to find a different ‘me’ [self] at university, bring the new self back into their old familiar home? Equally, the following discussion considers the extent to which shifts on a smaller scale (i.e. for those staying close) have the power to reorder family relationships and experiences of identity. My focus in this chapter is on family and kin relationships. Respondents’ friend relationships will be discussed in Chapters 8 and 9.

The ways in which respondents structured their homecomings was dependent upon where they were studying at university. The experiences which I discuss in this chapter relate
directly to the kinds of approaches discussed in the previous chapter. For example, respondents who pulled away and who had to endure long and expensive journeys home were reluctant to do so regularly. On the other hand however, respondents who continued to live with their families maintained much more consistent levels of interaction within the home. As a consequence, this chapter pays greater attention to the narratives of respondents who lived away from home as they talked in much more detail about the significance of returning home. There is also a difference between the experience of the very first homecoming for those who moved a long way away, and the realisation of a more gradual shift in relationships which might occur over a year at university. Thus for those who moved as far away as Plymouth, for example, the first visit home at Christmas was quite momentous. But for others, who went to university nearer to home and who came back more often (or did not actually leave), the nature of their relationships changed more gradually and sometimes little change was apparent at all.

In Chapter 3 I explored some key theoretical concepts which have enabled me to understand and explain respondents’ different experiences of personal relationships. Notions of relationality, embeddedness and ambivalence were still strong in the later fieldwork interviews. In addition, there was also a strong sense of negotiation, primarily because respondents were actively managing their experiences both at university and at home. Following the work of Finch and Mason (1993) my understanding of ‘negotiation’ is when the course of action that a person takes emerges out of his or her interaction with other people (p. 60). From this perspective, the decisions that people make about family are not thought to arise out of rules of obligation or their structural position within their family. Instead, they emerge out of long standing relationships between parties which have a past, a present and a future. Ideas around negotiation thus reinforce the relational approach outlined in Chapter 3. As the following discussion demonstrates, respondents can be understood as working out their own course of action and doing so with reference to their feelings of relatedness to other people in their families. Of course, this sometimes led to feelings of uncertainty and ambivalence although there were many other occasions in which respondents were able to establish new relational practices which better suited
their new situations. In both cases, what is apparent is the way in which shifting feelings of connectedness inform choices and identities.

In the previous chapter I discussed respondents’ expectations about family relationships, and how they thought these might alter given their individual decisions about where to study. The timing of those interviews meant that anticipation and expectation were strong themes. In the later fieldwork interviews however, respondents spoke less about expectation and more about the everydayness of their family relationships. It was interesting to see how and in what ways their expectations of family relationships translated into real-life experiences, and it is in this way that the longitudinal element of the project’s methodology is key. While some respondents had been anxious about shifts within their family relationships (i.e. those who were treading carefully), others (who were pulling away for example) expressed very little concern. As I shall demonstrate however there were occasions when parents or siblings exceeded and, also, failed to meet respondents’ expectations. In some instances relationships prospered and in others problems arose and tensions were felt. Interestingly, this was the case for both middle-class and working-class respondents, regardless of their familiarity with higher education, thus revealing the similarities of experiences which cut across class divides.

It is possible to think through the mismatch between expectations and everyday experiences of family relationships by drawing on the work of John Gillis. According to Gillis,

‘We not only live with families but depend on them to do the symbolic work that was once assigned to religious and communal institutions: representing ourselves to ourselves as we would like to think we are. To put it another way we all have two families, one that we live with and another we live by. We would like the two to be the same but they are not…the families we live with…are much less reliable than the imagined families we live by. The latter are never allowed to let us down. Constituted through myth, ritual and image, they must be forever nurturing and protective and we will go to any lengths to ensure that they are so even if it means mystifying the realities of family life’. (1997: xv)

Gillis’ work reveals the complex ways in which family relationships occupy the imaginary as well as the terrain of real life experience. Our imaginings of family often
allow for certain ways of being and thinking, and this was especially true for the young women respondents in their decisions about university. What I shall demonstrate in this chapter however, is how those imaginings interacted with respondents’ experiences of returning home during their first year of study. For some young women life moved on as expected but for others there were surprises. At the heart of all the interviews however was an overwhelming sense of emotionality, and it is this that I wish to attend to in this chapter. The following discussion is organised again around the three key experiences and approaches which emerged from the interview data. These experiences map (loosely) onto those discussed in the previous chapter. These approaches are: first homecomings, dipping in and out and being at home.

First Homecomings

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<td>Catherine</td>
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<td>Harriett</td>
<td>Bristol</td>
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<td>Sahia</td>
<td>London</td>
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<td>Sophie</td>
<td>Warwick</td>
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<td>Stacey</td>
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The notion of homecoming – specifically the timing and regularity of visits home - is used here as a device to explore of the way in which family relationships are negotiated over time. My discussion begins by looking at respondents who experienced their very first homecoming during the Christmas vacation. These young women represent the clearest statement of renegotiation because of the way in which long periods spent away from family and home make change and renegotiation more explicit. This group of respondents was made up of all but one of the young women whose original plan was to pull away from home and family in Millthorne.

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29 Of course, phone calls, emails and texts will have been exchanged during this time.
A prime example of ‘first homecoming’ would be Stacey who was studying English and History at St. Andrew’s. Stacey came from a middle-class background, and both her parents had studied at university and experienced a considerable level of geographical mobility as a result of their professional occupations. Stacey’s family and social class background had instilled her with the kind of social and cultural capital that makes pulling away both appealing and possible. Stacey never intended to return home regularly, indeed her rationale for moving to a prestigious university 300 miles away was to put distance between her ‘old’ life at home and the ‘new’ life she imagined for herself at university. In the three months since university began Stacey returned to Millthorne on just two occasions – once during university reading week (November) and once for the Christmas vacation. Stacey’s first homecoming was significant because it was during this first visit that she experienced the physical (and emotional) environment of home differently. In the quotation below she describes how, in her absence, her mother had cleared out her bedroom, putting all her books, clothes and other belongings into storage.

**Stacey:** it was definitely a shock for me to see my room like that the first time that I came home. I thought maybe we would do it together, maybe at Christmas or next summer or something.

Stacey’s experience of the first homecoming is an example of the way in which geographical distance and/or long periods of separation often forces family members to renegotiate their relationships with one another. It is because of physical separation that these renegotiations do not usually take place at the level of everyday interaction. Therefore, as Stacey’s narrative illustrates, changes to the practices of family relationships and shared routines can feel uncomfortable (and even disappointing). From the excerpt above it is clear that Stacey imagined her home and family as fairly static and unchanging, and she was shocked to find that life there had moved on in her absence. This reveals the ways in which the decisions and actions of young people leaving home reflect back onto the family (Holdsworth and Morgan, 2005) so that this experience reconfigures broader family relationships and dynamics at home.

There is a certain degree of taken-for-grantedness where family relationships are concerned and because of this these ties are often regarded as less dynamic or demanding
than relationships with friends and other non-kin. Stacey’s narrative is illustrative of this understanding of family relationships and also of parents who, it is assumed, will always be there. Stacey’s parents are ‘still there’ for her in many different ways however it is clear that a renegotiation of that relationship had begun given that she and her mother were out of step with one another. Stacey regarded her mother’s decision to clear out her bedroom as too sudden and unilateral. Moreover, the surprise of coming home to a stark and unfamiliar bedroom unsettled her imagined and experiential sense of home. This research therefore supports conceptualisations of home which call for a greater appreciation of sensory and intangible experiences (see for example Pink, 2004). The physical and material transformations that Stacey observed during her first homecoming were not simply difficult for her to deal with because her bedroom no longer felt familiar but, significantly, because these transformations were symbolic of other more implicit changes to the emotional environment of home.

Respondents commented that, by spending long periods of time away from the family home, they had begun to feel out of step with the practices and routines that they were once embedded in. Coming home to a ‘familiar’ space which actually felt strange and awkward for the first time unsettled their experiences of home and caused tensions in their family relationships. For Stacey these tensions did not manifest themselves in arguments or a particularly tense atmosphere, in fact, at a day-to-day level Stacey and her mother got on well and little seemed to have altered between them. What the ‘room clearing’ episode had done, however, was create a feeling of emotional distance between mother and daughter who suddenly seemed unable to read or understand one another’s needs. This kind of emotional distance is indicative of possible drifting apart over a longer period as family members slowly begin to see themselves as separate from and as having different needs to each other.

It is possible to see a change in tone emerging in Stacey’s relationship with her mother which might be not uncommon for many young people returning home for the first time. It is likely that Stacey was hurt by her mother’s actions and upset that the clear out happened without any consultation. However, it might be mistaken to assume that these
shifting relationships are all generated on one side and to see Stacey as simply passive in this situation. So, to flesh out the context of their experiences it is important to add that Stacey described coming for the first time as a ‘rude interruption’ for her, meaning that she did not really want to leave university to come home in any case. In addition, for her first visit home Stacey brought with her two university friends who had nowhere to go for the holidays. Both of these things would suggest she had already achieved a degree of emotional detachment on her own terms and that Stacey was herself, changing the qualities of their home environment by transporting elements of her university life back with her. It would be interesting to imagine how that might have been experienced form her mother’s point of view.

The reason I have dwelt on this small interaction is to highlight the subtleties of small exchanges of this sort. Suddenly, through small shifts of this nature there is a realisation that home is changing and that relationships within it may never be the same again now that lives are moving in different directions. Even simply running to different timetables or having a preference for different kinds of food can create a sense of emotional distance between family members who live much of their everyday lives in different geographical (and sensory) locations. Sophie, who was studying in Warwick, illustrates this in the quotation below.

**Sophie:** It [going to university] hasn’t affected things with dad at all; in a way I think we’re almost closer. My dad went to university and is in the [armed forces] and I kind of get him more now […] Things have become a little bit more tense with mum though. I got on with her so well - I still do get on with her so well - but I think I’ve grown up so much since I’ve been at Warwick. When I was at college I’d come home and we’d have a cup of tea and I’d tell her what was going on and what was on my mind but now I’m kind of like, I don’t need to tell her that stuff anymore. I know she’s still there if I need to talk to her but I kind of like doing all these things by myself now. [Interview 2]

Sophie’s narrative indicates the ways in which the practices that once underpinned her relationship with her mother no longer felt necessary or comfortable for her. She had new networks of support and new confidantes at university with whom to shares the details of her life. Although she recognized that this shift had possibly ‘hurt’ her mother whom she assumed felt ‘redundant’ in their relationship, she was unable to simply slip back into old
habits at home. This reveals the ways in which people are willing to accept negative or perhaps problematical emotions or phases within family relationships. People accept that there will be periods of transition and in which relationships become challenging and feel less natural. Respondents like Sophie demonstrate the complexity of personal relationships and feelings of embeddedness which are not always rewarding, positive or loving.

What is interesting about Sophie’s comments is the way in which she compares her relationships with both her mother and father. She understands her relationship with her father as unchanging, and perhaps even as improving, since she moved to Warwick. By ‘going away’ to university she was able to share in some of the experiences that had been so influential for her father when he was a young student living away from home. In contrast to the emotional distance Sophie felt between her and her mother, she experiences a greater sense of connection with her father. This highlights the way in which gender, and crucially a mother’s role as ‘care giver’ at home, is implicated in these relationship shifts. Thus, whilst Sophie no longer relied on her mother for various forms of social capital (e.g. meals, washing, advice even) she began to attribute significant value to her father’s knowledge and experiences (cultural capital) of living and studying away from home.

This brings me to my next example which is Caitlin who was studying in Nottingham. Caitlin’s experiences were slightly different but nonetheless involved changing relationships with her parents and particularly her father. Caitlin was studying History at Nottingham and her first homecoming was at Christmas. Like the other respondents in this group Caitlin subscribed to the view of university as an individual experience and one which initiated the movement away from home. She was therefore very happy to put mileage between herself and Millthorne and indeed her family. One thing she had not anticipated however was that her relationships with family at home would change and would filter into her experiences at university. During her second interview Caitlin described her father’s response to her leaving home paying particular attention to a number of text messages which he had sent to her soon after she arrived in Nottingham.
These messages were of an emotional nature and often contained poignant song lyrics from the Paul Simon song, ‘*Father and Daughter*’.

During her interview it was clear that Caitlin found these messages a little unsettling, because they had not been part of their previous relationship when she was living at home. So although she had moved away – made a break – she found that her relationship with her father had followed her to Nottingham. This meant when she came home for the first time she was already anticipating a different kind of relationship with her father. She stated that, on first seeing her father during her first homecoming, she felt some embarrassment and that things felt ‘a bit weird’ between them. They became involved in a joint project around the building of their new family home and this focus on the future and the excitement of the new house allowed Caitlin and her father to establish different kinds of bonds to the ones that she had felt before she left for university. What was happening for Caitlin was a renegotiation of her relationship with her father at the same time as her parents were moving home and also at the same time as her older brother was returning to live at home to complete his final year at university. There were therefore multiple shifts, renegotiations and re-alliances occurring at the same time which created a context of ‘new beginnings’ in which new relationship practices were able to develop.

Shifts in broader family relationships were also evident in Harriett’s narrative. Harriett was studying in Bristol and before leaving for university her parents announced their plans to separate. This news came as a shock to Harriett but she was grateful that, by being away in Bristol, she would be able to distance herself from the processes of the separation (e.g. packing up the family home and moving to a new house). When Harriett made her first homecoming (at Christmas) she returned to a new rented home, where both of her parents were living until they found permanent separate accommodation. Harriett reflected on their new living situation and acknowledged that it was far from ideal. In the quotation below, however, she illustrates the way in which being physically distant from her parents during the sale of the family home had allowed her to come to terms with the changes occurring within her family relationships.

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30 The family home had sold quickly
Harriett: Yeah [being home] is better than I expected. It was totally strange coming back to a different house and all that, and as you can see it’s far from a home because there’s boxes and stuff everywhere. But, I was dreading it at first and it’s actually fine […] I think [being away at university] has made it easier in a way. I’ve been able to just get on with things and not be caught up in all of this, not that things are particularly nasty or anything like that. It’s just like, I’ve come home to this and this is how things are now. (Emphasis added)

Harriett’s narrative is illustrative of the ways in which physical distance can allow relationships with family to shift and be renegotiated without the need for conversation or debate. ‘This’ is how things were when Harriett arrived home and as she explains, in some ways this was easier to accept and deal with because she had been removed from the transitional stage. Of course, I am not suggesting that in being away Harriett was able to avoid the emotionality of this particular experience. Instead, in this case geographical distance allowed for a particular kind of renegotiation of relationships.

In this first section I have demonstrated the ways in which respondents, all of whom spoke confidently about pulling away from home to attend university, experienced shifts in their relationships with family during their homecomings. These respondents made fewer homecomings and, in this way, reveal the ways in which distance can impact upon the process of renegotiation within family relationships. In Chapter 6 I revealed that these six young women had imagined themselves making smooth transitions out of home. They were able to do this because of their familiarity with higher education and experiences of geographical mobility. The examples discussed in this section however, indicate that this was not always the case and that, even for middle-class respondents and their parents, renegotiating family relationships at this juncture, was often fraught with tension, ambivalence and uncertainty.

Specifically, these respondents had not anticipated the ways in which their movement away from home would reflect back on the nature and quality of their family relationships in Millthorne. So often young people are seen as emerging out of families and little attention is given to the ways in which they continue to constitute a dynamic part of those active relationships (Holdsworth and Morgan, 2005). My discussion reveals however, that the process of going away to university transforms the physical experience of home and
family (i.e. Stacey), the emotional dynamics of kin relationships (i.e. Caitlin) and also the social arrangements which family relationships are embedded in (i.e. Sophie and her mother). Chapter 6 presented these six young women as confident individuals with quite specific expectations about how university would impact upon their lives. They had not it seems, accounted for the ways in which it would shape the lives of others. Within the public story around going to university there is a strong emphasis on the individual and on autonomous decision making, however the reality of everyday relationships reveals that this is far from an individualistic process (see Jamieson, 1999). Instead, it is one which involves the whole family. Moreover, even those families and young people who are seemingly well-equipped to approach this transition (i.e. those with middle-class origins/educated parents), are rarely able fully to anticipate the emotionality of shifting relationships with kin. Removing oneself from established relational practices as Sophie tried to with her mother and, equally, establishing new forms of relating as in the example of Caitlin and her father, are complicated, ‘sticky’ processes (Smart, 2007). This reveals the ways in which people become embedded in certain kinds of relationships and relational practices, the renegotiation of which is rarely straightforward regardless of social class or ethnic background.

Dipping in and out

The experience of a single or first homecoming was only really a reality for the six respondents discussed above. For most respondents, their family home in Millthorne remained a regular feature of their experiences during their first year of study. These 14 respondents, listed in the table below, described instead, the process of dipping in and out of home and university life in a more patterned way. Like the young women discussed above, these respondents also experienced homecomings but these were much more frequent and therefore of a slightly different order. The effect of this oscillation between home and university was that most respondents were trying to manage both experiences and commitments simultaneously. Moreover, their continual movement between home
and university meant that their attempts to remain embedded in either location were often compromised.

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<td>Ashley</td>
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<td>Charlie</td>
<td>Manchester</td>
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<td>Emily</td>
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<td>Serena</td>
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The young women in this group commented on the ways in which they were required to renegotiate their relationships with others – both at home and university – each time they arrived in either location. This process of constant repositioning caused many respondents to feel anxious and unsettled, as they often had to switch (physical) locations just as they had begun to feel comfortable in a place. It is thought that a lack of constancy of a person’s surrounding social and material environments can destabilize their feelings of ontological security (Giddens 1991). Because the sense of order and continuity of respondents’ everyday lives was repeatedly disrupted by intermittent journeys to and from home, it became difficult for them to feel anchored and confident in their sense of self. As John Urry maintains ‘anxiety is the obverse side of ontological security. Anxiety is what is felt when ontological security is shaken’ (1994: 40). Writing with regard to
similar issues, Smart et al. (2001) comment on the ‘emotional seesaw’ experienced by children living half time with divorced parents, and Kenyon’s (1999) study of undergraduate students highlights the contrast between stability and permanence for young people at this time. Kenyon maintains that, the experience of short-termism with regards to students’ homes at university necessarily affected the level of emotional investment that they were prepared to make there. This research certainly supports these ideas around dual commitments and the emotionality involved in maintaining two homes.

Within respondents’ narratives, notions of comfort and security, or lack thereof, were strong amongst these young women. I want to explore the issues of ‘comfort’ and ontological security by looking first at the example of Emily. Emily was studying in Buckinghamshire and in this was pulling away from home (see Chapter 6). In her first interview, she expressed the desire to make a clean break from her family at home. Emily is rather different to the other young women who were dipping in and out because, originally, they had been treading carefully. Notwithstanding this difference, once university began Emily found herself returning home every other week, so her pattern of mobility was not at all dissimilar to the other young women in her group.

Despite not intending to return home regularly Emily often found herself with lots of spare time at university, mostly at the weekend when other students who lived locally returned home. Her visits to Millthorne tended therefore to be last minute journeys depending on what was happening in Buckinghamshire that particular weekend. For this reason, Emily’s journeys home were unplanned and based on emotional decisions to be in a familiar place and amongst people she felt close too. The quotation below captures some of this indecisiveness, anxiety, and longing of Emily’s first term away from home.

**Emily:** I’m settling there [at university] more though now so even if there’s not a lot going on there I try to stay a bit more [...] you get itchy feet don’t you? When there’s not a lot happening I think about what’s going on up there [at home] and I just want to be there [...] when I get home though there never seems to be anything to do and I wish I hadn’t bothered paying for the train.

Emily’s experiences of returning home were constantly tinged with disappointment. In contrast to the experiences of respondents discussed earlier in this chapter, home had
remained unchanged from her perspective. She was therefore regularly overwhelmed by a sense of not knowing where to be or knowing where she would be most comfortable. Her ontological security was shaken by the lack of consistency of her surrounding social and material environment. In addition, the more Emily switched between Buckinghamshire and Millthorne the harder it was for her to commit to a particular location and thus feel comfortable within that space.

Another important point here is the way in which when Emily arrived in Millthorne life there appeared to have remained mundane, and did not fit with her expectations of what going home would feel like. While she was away at university the idea of home occupied a space within her imagination that real-life experiences could not match. Emily’s narrative is suggestive of the work of John Gillis who maintains that ‘we all have two families, one that we live with and another we live by’. The point Gillis is making is that families and family relationships have increasingly occupied our imagination so that we create images of families to live by (rather than with) so that we are never let down or disappointed by the real thing. Perhaps this was the case for Emily. She longed to be amongst her caring family when life went quiet at university but, on returning to Millthorne, she found that her parents were busy or had commitments, that her sister was busy with her own life, and that, crucially, life at home was still the fairly ordinary place she had wanted to pull away from just months before.

This sense of disappointment must not be read as unhappiness. In fact, Emily’s relationship with her parents appeared to remain strong as her first year of university progressed. She spoke in positive terms about the easiness of their relationship and how this had been improved by her living away some of the time. In addition, Emily was re-evaluating her relationship with her older sister partly because she felt she had a greater understanding of her sister’s choice to stay at home while at university. Previously she had considered her sister’s decision to commute into Preston everyday as rather parochial, but she was slowly coming around to this way of thinking about combining university with relationships at home. By leaving home to go to university Emily had become more consciously aware of the intimacy she shared with her sister. She no longer took her for
granted and had a greater appreciation for the emotionality of the attachments within her family. So, in spite of some of the difficulties outlined above, as time went on Emily was able to manage her relationships with her nearest kin perfectly well and this may well have been feeding into her paradoxical desire to return home regularly.

Respondents in this group also commented on the physical impact of constantly returning home to family in Millthorne. As Anna, who was studying in Newcastle, stated ‘I went home, ooh, it must have been five or six times last term and to tell you the truth I don’t know if I can do it [go home] that much [next term]. It makes you dizzy’ (Interview 2). Other respondents like Jenny for example said that they felt tired and that the constant journeying induced feelings of harriedness and stress. For many respondents however, the physical and the emotional effects of constantly dipping in and out of home were mutually dependent. Often the wrench of leaving home for university each week was emotionally draining, especially for Ashley who was not particularly enjoying her experiences in Birmingham. Each time Ashley had to leave Millthorne to return to Birmingham she said that she felt sad and exhausted at leaving her mother and sister at home. The interplay between the physical and the emotional was also evident in Esther’s narrative. Even though Esther tried to stay at university every other weekend so that she would bond with her flatmates she found that, by Friday afternoon, the pull toward home was too strong to resist. This feeling was not straightforward however, because of the associated guilt she felt at not conforming to her idea of the authentic and autonomous student. The quotation below is taken from Esther’s second interview, and clearly illustrates the feelings of ambivalence which respondents like Esther experienced with regard to their homecomings.

**Esther:** Even when I plan to stay at university all weekend I have this feeling in my stomach by Friday lunchtime and before I know it I’m in the car driving home!

**Kirsty:** What’s the feeling?

**Esther:** I don’t know; guilt, excitement, boredom? I’m not sure exactly but it niggles at me and I’m not settled until I’m back at home.

By her final interview, this pattern of mobility had become even more challenging for Esther because her relationships at university had become stronger and therefore more
demanding. Esther stated that she felt as though her life had been ‘split in two’ since starting university and that this had made her feel ‘worn out’ almost every week. Esther was typical of respondents who were dipping in and out. Relationships with family at home had a sense of easiness whereas relationships at university were, at that time, still very new. Added to this, by returning to Millthorne every week respondents disrupted the flow of getting to know new people and thus found themselves in a self-perpetuating cycle. Respondents revealed the strong sense of ambivalence at this time, discussing the competing ideals of family and home life on the one hand and the image of a typical student life on the other. It is important at this point, to flag up the power and influence of the public story around the move to university, in which the ‘proper’ student lives away from home, is embroiled in adventure and has no desire for ties at home. Respondents like Esther were still very aware of this narrative and were careful not to stand out as ‘stay at home’ students. For this reason, regular visits home induced feelings of anxiety and disappointment at missing out on the fun of university. However, the thought of not returning to see family was also difficult to bear.

The two examples reveal the difficulties involved in managing relationships in two separate locations. Feelings of relatedness and attachments to place clearly informed decision-making with regard to respondents’ homecomings and shaped their feelings of belonging. Imagine then the complexities involved in this process of dipping in and out when parents were separated and when respondents had two family homes to return to. For young women with divorced parents and two families there was often the added pressure to divide time equally between mother and father. This means that visits home had to be well managed in order to minimise further feelings of anxiety, disappointment and guilt at spending more time with one than the other. In Smart et al.’s (2001) study, they found that children living in shared parenting arrangements thought that going to university would resolve the tensions of living in two homes when in fact the problems became intensified during vacations. This research supports those findings.

Katie’s experience is an example of these kinds of tensions. Katie was studying in Lancaster and said that, ‘it’s harder now that I’m at uni to know where to come home to’.
Part of Katie’s experience was that when she arrived home at her father’s she found their relationship was deteriorating. Staying solely with her mother during homecomings was both practical and less emotionally taxing, this was because her father’s household was busy and full of step-children and grandchildren and Katie felt there was no room for her there. Equally however, her father was sensitive to the way in which Katie had made the gradually shift towards her mother’s home and blamed her for not spending enough time with his new family.

Part of Katie’s decision to maintain her regular pattern of homecomings was to work on her relationship with her father. After sensing his unhappiness she returned to Millthorne with greater regularity, sometimes mid-week, so that she could spread her time evenly between her two parents at home. For this reason, Katie could not escape the situation with her father completely because of her decision to continue dipping in and out of both sets of homes and university. With every visit, she therefore felt an increasing sense of guilt: guilty for not attending lectures that she skipped to make the journey home, guilty for missing out on the fun at university, and guilty for not being there for her father as she had been prior to going to university. The excerpt below is taken from Katie’s third interview. In the quotation she reflects on how her changing relationship with her father impacted upon the experience of her first year at university.

**Katie:** The first term was the worst, no hold on it was more after Christmas because I really felt it after then, after the holidays, because he arranged this trip to the theatre – and it’s something we’d always do together – well he went with my step-sister and he didn’t ask me to go so that was horrible. But then I dunno, I think I got mad at him, I was angry, because out of everyone it was him, he’d been like ‘go to university, don’t get stuck here’ and then he was all like that with me and I was just so mad.’

Katie’s comments are indicative of the ways in which family relationships are negotiated over time and how small shifts can re-order relationships and make them seem difficult to handle. There are certain parallels here with the experiences of respondents who made much fewer homecomings too. Like Sophie or Stacey, Katie felt out of step with her family relationships and these then required reflection and consideration in ways that had not before. In addition, what emerges from Katie’s narrative is the way in which her movement away from home reflected back onto her family at home, so that relationships
between other family members (i.e. her father and step-sister) had also altered as a response to Katie going to university. The emotionality of her relationship with her father is also apparent. Her father was hurt and felt pushed to one side when Katie left for university and so, regardless of the fact that he had encouraged her to move away from home, he felt emotionally distant from her and he made this known. Equally Katie experienced a similar hurt, but she also felt guilty at her alliances (with university and her mother) and rejected and removed from established family practices. Katie’s conflicting emotions coupled with her desire to reproduce traditional family relations at home, meant that she was caught in a cycle which seemed to perpetuate the situation. In addition, this example reinforces the point that Gillis makes about families we live by. To Katie, her father had always been her biggest supporter, he had always valued education and in her imagination it was her father who was going to handle the transition the best. In reality however this was not the case.

It is clear therefore that for the young women who were dipping in and out, the experience of homecoming was also, at times, complex and challenging. Katie’s case is perhaps the most problematical and the one which emphasises the more negative impact of university on the young women’s relationships. For the most part however, the trials and tribulations associated with intermittent journeys home and ‘living in two camps’ were understood as part and parcel of this experience. Respondents understood that these more difficult experiences were unavoidable and often, they were outweighed by the feelings of love, support and pleasures they took in being able to attend a university which allowed them to remain embedded in their networks of intimacy at home. Rachel for example, who was studying in Liverpool reflected on how going to university had affected her relationship with her parents in positive ways. In her second interview she remarked, ‘it’s like we have changed gear without having to have a conversation about it...things have just changed between us, they [her parents] respect me and I respect them’. Rachel discussed the new sense of freedom that she felt at home since starting university, such as not having to be home by a given hour and not having to stick rigidly to family meal times. By the same token however, Rachel said she felt more respectful of
her home as her parents’ house, and so rarely stayed out late or brought her student lifestyle back home with her.

In this section I have revealed the ways in which respondents who made regular homecomings, and were therefore dipping in and out of both university and home life, experienced shifts in their family relationships. Clearly, these young women also faced challenges, and the renegotiation of relationships was often as difficult for them as it was for respondents who made only one or two homecomings. In their attempts to simultaneously maintain two lives and two sets of relationships in two separate geographical locations respondents felt dizzy and disoriented and because of this, creating a sense of ontological security and feelings of belonging were rendered much more difficult. On the other hand however, the regularity of their interactions meant that relationships with siblings and parents often shifted in more gradual ways, so there was less of the strangeness that the first group of respondents reflected upon. For the most part, the (emotional and physical) spaces of home remained constant and this was something which underpinned their continued longing for home. In keeping with this, it is important to note that respondents continued to dip in and out of home, despite the associated challenges, precisely because of the way being at home made them feel. Home generated feelings of excitement (as well as ordinariness) and it is imperative that the emotionality of home is not diminished or regarded as less significant than other experiences. This is a point which I explore more fully below.

**Being at home**

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In this final section my discussion focuses on the small number of young women who chose to remain living at home while they studied at university. These four young women were predominantly of South Asian heritage\textsuperscript{31} and Muslim faith, and at stage one they spoke of strong relationships with their immediate families, extended kin and the local community. Family relationships were a central concern for these young women. This meant that they wanted to wake up with family and come home to family everyday. It was the everydayness of family rituals and practices which provided a sense of security and belonging for these young women. In the quotation below Fizza describes the way in which life at home had carried on, much in the same way as before university began.

**Fizza:** Things are pretty much the same at home; I still eat meals with my grandparents and my family everyday and I still help mum with cooking every evening. We have to eat later now on a Tuesday because my train gets in a bit late.

As Fizza points out, her experience of home and family remained fairly constant during her first term at Manchester Metropolitan University. Even where small changes had to be made – the timing of their evening meal on a Tuesday for example – these were done so that shared family practices would be kept intact. The respondents in this category wanted to preserve their family relationships and tried where possible to limit the effect of university on their experiences of home and kinship. This means that university study was undertaken for the benefits it would bring for work and employment rather than for new experiences. For this reason respondents treated it in the same way as school or college. Respondents were happy to travel into university on a daily basis, compartmentalising the experience and keeping it separate from family life.

Being at home was important for respondents because they yearned for stability and continuity much in the same way as those who were dipping in and out of home. This is interesting because it is indicative of the kinds of social and cultural capital which they regarded as important. Daily face-to-face interactions, shared meal times and a feeling of closeness to family are important resources for these young women. Of course, they were aware of the public story which surrounds the transition to university and some had friends, also of South Asian heritage and Islamic faith, who were living away from home.

\textsuperscript{31} One respondent was of mixed ethnicity
while they studied. The quotations below illustrate that, on reflection, the respondents felt that the risks of leaving home for university far outweighed any benefits.

**Aayra:** My friend was living [at university] with four girls, and the things she had to deal with. They were having drinking competitions and there were condoms on the floor and they were having parties all the time so she had to come home. At college we knew of girls who got up to things like that but we weren’t really exposed to it in that way. She had no escape from it.

**Mira:** When term was closing last year I spent a few nights there because I had work to hand in and get finished and it was easier than travelling in […] it was nice but I didn’t think ‘wow, I could get used to this’. They have to make their own food and sort all their own washing out and stuff and I would rather not have to do all that and be able to see my family.

It is clear from both excerpts that living away from home held far less appeal to these young women. Obviously they had considered what living away would mean for them and were aware of the value placed on student living and the supposed links with autonomy and independence. As Mira states however, her short experience of student living did not make her feel envious of her friends but instead, she felt more secure in her own decision to stay at home.

In the excerpts above both respondents make reference to the preparation and sharing of food as central to the experience of family and home. In taking part in cooking and family meal times, Aayra and Mira were not merely undertaking domestic tasks but they were also receiving knowledge from their mothers about particular cooking techniques and, crucially, about how to provide care for other family members (Morgan 1996). This particular kind of cultural knowledge (or capital) was much more important for these young women, who wanted to stay at home in order to remain connected to their communities and for whom other, more significant transitions loomed on the horizon. To explain this point, it is important to understand that respondents from South Asian families imagined their future trajectories out of the home in different ways to the other young white women. It was not always easy for these young women to share with me (a white, middle-class woman) their reasons for wanting to stay close to home. Nevertheless, by her third interview Mira was able to put into words the reasons why she had chosen to continue living with her family during her studies.
Mira: Moving out feels grown up and I don’t want to feel like that really. I don’t like thinking beyond my degree to be honest. My mum got married at around 22 and that is the most common age I think. I suppose I have never moved out for university because I know I’ll have to go for good one day so I’m making the most of my time with my family now.

In the excerpt above, it is clear that Mira was anticipating leaving home in order to become a wife and later a mother. Her awareness of the pattern of her mother’s biography was heightened by the recent news of her older sister’s engagement and this evokes the notion of linked lives and feelings of embeddedness. Because of the way in which Mira and her family imagined their family changing in the future the emphasis was very much upon making the most of the time they had together, rather than on moving away for study. Finch and Mason (1998) stress the importance of time in family relationships, arguing that responsibilities toward parents or children are ‘not negotiated in a vacuum’ when a need arises, but emerge as part of long standing relationships between parties which have a past as well as a present and anticipate a future (p.26-28). The past and future, they maintain, are at least as important as the present in understanding how people negotiate family relationships. This is especially true in Mira’s case and also, with regard to the other South Asian women.

This discussion is necessarily much shorter than the previous two sections because homecomings were not so much a part of respondents’ experiences of university. It was perhaps the daily experience home leaving which was of greater significance because these young women remained at home on a permanent basis. Notwithstanding this, what emerges from these narratives is a sense of family and relatedness which is based upon proximity and being together. None of these young women expressed regret at their decisions to remain at home and were happy that the decisions they had made allowed them to remain embedded at home and to engage in the daily family practices which informed their sense of self and feelings of belonging. While it may be argued that Mira’s journeys to Manchester were long and complicated and impacted upon her ability to mix with new friends at university this was, as I demonstrate in the coming chapters, not centrally important for her. It is imperative not to work with (or impose) singular understandings of what constitutes a happy or successfully student. These young women
found happiness in knowing they could return home each day and enjoyed the smaller transformations that going to university brought with it. As Skeggs notes, sociologists must understand and give meaning to the different kinds of ethical value systems that working-class and/or ethnic minority groups operate within (Skeggs, 2004: 88).

Concluding Comments

What I have revealed in this chapter is, first and foremost, that family relationships mattered a great deal to these young women, regardless of the choices they made about where to study at university. Contrary to popular theories of family and personal life (for example, Giddens, 1991; Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 2002), this research reveals that even when choices are made which removed the young women from their networks of intimacy, the quality and organization of family relationships continued to be significant. At times, family relationships were significant because of the way they had become challenging and hard to manage. Periods away from home meant that everyday practices had come to an end or, if still in place, no longer seemed as relevant or as meaningful as they once had. Equally however, regular (physical) contact with home also brought concerns around belonging and security. After all, respondents were establishing commitments in places and with new others at university and this fed back into their relationships with and at home. For the young women who remained living at home, family relationships provided sanctuary, support and important resources for identity. These young women found happiness at home and although their experiences at university clearly differed from the other young women interviewed, their happiness must be valued and appreciated on its own terms.

Significantly this chapter, like the last, highlights the similarities which cut across class and ethnicity. There is no single or best way to structure the move to university and challenges and obstacles are felt in different ways at different times, and for different reasons. Renegotiating family relationships during times of transition is difficult, because of the emotionality of these ties and the ways in which practices become embedded and therefore difficult to transform or shake off. In addition, this chapter emphasizes further
the ways in which young people see themselves as integral and dynamic components of their families. They understand the important role they play in parents’ happiness and more mundane family practices. Young people are often understood as the product of families rather than active within them so this discussion encourages an approach to young people’s lives which is more appreciative of this. The final point I wish to make about this chapter regards the way in which decisions about university continue to reverberate and take on new significance long after UCAS forms have been submitted, offers have been made and accepted and term has begun. Research into higher education decisions must attend to the ways in which such decisions are lived in practice if we are to depict a fuller picture of young people’s experiences of going to university.
Chapter 8
Friendship and the Imaginary

So far, I have explored the ways in which respondents discussed their experiences of family and home life. In particular, I considered how and in what ways feelings of relatedness to kin influenced respondents’ expectations about going to university and, also, the regularity and experience of their homecomings. My discussion revealed the ways in which respondents’ feelings of embeddedness permeated their narratives, shaping their decisions about whether to stay close or pull away from Millthorne. Although most respondents were embedded in family practices which emphasized proximity and physical closeness, a small group of respondents described family habitus which were based on notions of mobility and autonomy. In both cases, respondents demonstrated their individual feelings of connectedness and the ways in which they were embedded in webs of relationships at home. Those webs of relationships included friends as well as family, and in this chapter the discussion focuses on respondents’ expectations of friend relationships before they began their university studies. Chapter 9 examines how and in what ways friend relationships were experienced once university was an everyday reality.

As outlined in Chapter 5, during the analysis of respondents’ interview data I took the decision to treat their narratives of family and friend relationships separately. Making such a distinction between family and friend relationships may appear to go against the current trend within sociology which increasingly recognizes the way in which people, who are not related by blood or marriage, relate meaningfully and significantly with one another (Smart 2007). These arguments are supported by a body of empirical research which indicates a shift toward conceptualizations of family and friend relationships as increasingly similar and overlapping. Pahl and Spencer’s (2004) work on ‘suffusion’ is an example of this research as is Weeks et al. (2001) and Weston’s (1991) conceptualizations of ‘families of choice’. Despite this however, data produced during all three stages on the fieldwork interviews indicated significant differences between respondents’ narratives of family and friend relationships, and thus the need to analyze
them separately and in different ways. It is important to note that respondents were still very much dependent (both financially and emotionally) on their families at home and this created a sense of permanence which was inherent to family relationships. Such feelings of stability were not typical of respondents’ understandings of friend relationships and this necessarily meant that the prospect of being separated from friends was experienced in quite different ways to that of leaving family. In addition, unique to respondents’ friend relationships was the juxtaposition between ‘old’ friends and the new relationships they imagined for themselves at university. This was not the case for the young women’s family relationships at that time.

Creating distance between oneself and one’s family at this particular juncture is generally considered to be part of the natural order of growing up and becoming independent (Holdsworth and Morgan 2005). Understanding how distance might alter the day-to-day experience of close friendships is far less clearly defined however. Respondents were acting at a time characterized by significant personal change for themselves and, also, many of their friends too. Consequently, respondents were uncertain about how to manage change within their friend relationships and this gave rise to feelings of ambivalence. Respondents were thus engaged in multiple negotiations, of their own and their friends’ expectations about how relationships should or should not progress. There was then, for many young women, a tentativeness around friend relationships (both future and existing) which highlights the complexity and emotionality of these attachments, the investments made or required, and the potential for loss and disappointment as well as fun and excitement.

Within the literature on friendship, Graham Allan maintains that while some friendships are long-term, a few lasting a lifetime, most are not. He argues that as people’s position in the social structure changes so gradually do their friendships. This process, he maintains, is entirely normal and not a sign of a failed or flawed friendship (1996: 97). It is thought then that each friendship is different from the next because relationships are seen as having their own distinct histories and implicit frame of reference. People carry with them ideas about what each relationship is like as well as the expectations, obligations,
responsibilities and demands which are legitimate and relevant to them. What I shall demonstrate in this chapter however, is that although there is a certain truth in Allen’s claims about the shifting nature of friend relationships and the boundaries which define them, the implicit rules of friendship are rarely straightforward. Moreover, in thinking about changes in people’s friendship over the life course as routine and normal, diminishes the profoundly emotional experience of making, losing and maintaining these relationships. As the following discussion illustrates, even though people may think about friendships as flexible, disposable even, when compared to family, the everyday reality is often much more complex. As Jamieson maintains,

‘Friendship as the ‘continuous creation of personal will and choice…ungoverned by the structural definitions that bear on family and kinship…grounded in the unique and irreplaceable qualities of partners, defined and valued independently of their place in the public systems of kinship, power, utility and esteem, and of any publicly defined status’ (Silver, 1996) is a philosophical ideal which has become a pervasive public story rather than an everyday lived reality.’

(Jamieson, 1998: 105)

The aim of this chapter then, is to explore the kinds of expectations respondents expressed with regard to their friend relationships. During the first stage of interviews respondents’ narratives shifted between the expectations they had of established friendships at home, specifically how these might be affected by the move to university, and the expectations they had of meeting new people and establishing new networks of intimacy at university. I shall begin this discussion by exploring respondents’ narratives of ‘old’ friendships which, for the most part, were considered to have run their course. Following this, the discussion focuses on the ways in which respondents imagined new friend relationships at university. By contrast, these relationships were understood as possessing a rather magical and enduring quality. These contrasting narratives of old and new friendships were articulated in different ways and with differing degrees of comfort. What was significant about respondents’ narratives of friendship however, was the way in which they were shaped by the interrelationship of social class, ethnicity, attachments to the local and the public story around the move to university. This interrelationship gave rise to feelings of optimism and trepidation with regard to friend relationships. In a
similar regard to respondents’ narratives of family relationships, there were key experiences and these experiences provide the structure for this chapter.

*Out with the old?*

This section explores the ways in which respondents imagined their longstanding relationships changing and evolving once university began. With the exception of just a handful of respondents, there was a general sense that the beginning of university ought to signal the end of relationships with friends at home. Respondents spoke pessimistically about the future of their relationships with school and college friends, and it was largely accepted that the move to university would (and should) remove them from these friendship networks. This way of thinking was based partly upon the assumption that university provides a setting in which new, richer and ‘better’ friendships are able to develop. In addition to this however, many respondents also understood university as a time to branch out and move away from longstanding friendships as a way of symbolising their emerging sense of autonomy and identity.

There are many examples of the ways in which respondents tried to frame their own experiences within broader narratives of selfhood and autonomy. For one group who I refer to as ‘the Hopefuls’ this was relatively straightforward since they had chosen universities at a distance from their friends in Millthorne. For a second group ‘the Worriers’, while their narratives seemed to emphasise their emerging sense of autonomy, there were also many contradictions and uncertainties as they felt they had to justify their decisions to go to university with friends or remain close to home. Even for respondents who seemed to accept the public story around university and the apparent need to let go of longstanding friendships, there was still an underlying sense of reluctance and ambivalence towards change. For the third group ‘the Stoics’ the issue of separating from friends at home was less of a concern. These respondents did not expect their longstanding friendships to alter or fizzle out on going to university. They had of course, taken measures (i.e. living at home, choosing similar universities) to ensure that these relationships remained intact during the move to university.
I shall begin by looking firstly at the Hopefuls. The table above reveals the seven young women who welcomed the chance to move away from their longstanding friendships at home and understood the move to university as a period of ‘time-out’ from friendships at home. By limiting their engagement with friends from school and college, these respondents were demonstrating their independence and also, their emerging sense of identity. An example of this comes from Emily, who was studying in Buckinghamshire. Throughout her first interview Emily explained that she was ‘proud’ of herself for choosing a university which would take her away from her friends at home. It was important for Emily to move away from her older friends not only because she thought this would allow her to be more open to new relationships, but also because of the way in which it set her apart from her peers in Millthorne, marking her different and more adventurous. She explains this in the quotation below.

Emily: All my mates who went to university last year, because I took a year out after school so I’m like a year behind, well they’ve all been like, ‘I can’t wait to get out of Millthorne’ and none of them have. They’re all at Manchester or Leeds, or doing degrees at Millthorne college and they’ve never left […] but I know I’ll be the only one to actually get out […] For them I think uni or getting a degree or whatever well its more just something to do. For me it’s a lifestyle change.

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32 These young women are the same as those who talked about ‘pulling away’
Emily’s narrative demonstrates the importance of the generalised other in building an image of the self. Here, this other refers to young people with whom Emily went to college and in Millthorne generally. She highlights the way in which, in Millthorne, the tendency is to remain local thus, through imagining herself moving away from her longstanding friend relationships (geographically and ideologically), Emily is demonstrating an identity which stands in opposition to traditional Millthorne identities and practices. Thus, although Emily is expressing notions of individualism, she nevertheless reveals herself as always acting in relation to real and imagined others.

Catherine, who was studying Geography in Plymouth, expressed similar feelings with regard to longstanding friendships. At Plymouth, Catherine would be several hundred miles away from Millthorne and her school and college friends who were studying in and around the north. In her interview, Catherine compared the decisions she had made about university with those of other people in her year group at sixth form. As she reflected on the experiences of her fellow students, she spoke in fairly negative terms about one particular group of male students who had decided to go to the same university and, also, were planning to live in the same halls of residence. It was inconceivable to Catherine that these young men had looked at only one university and that, after one visit to Leeds, they had ‘decided to go there straight off; they never even looked anywhere else…it just seems so sad that you wouldn’t take the opportunity to branch out’ (Catherine, Interview 1). In sharing this story with me, Catherine, like Emily, was presenting her own choices and identity in relation to others’. Therefore, although the Hopefuls appear to be the most individualised of all respondents, particularly with regard to their expectations about friendship, they nevertheless understood their actions and sense of self in relation to significant and generalized others.

Both Emily and Catherine highlight the ways in which mobility is valued in the current time. In Chapter 4, I discussed the ways in which it has become increasingly accepted that a person’s trajectory will involve some kind of travel and mobility (see Urry 2000). According to Smart, these kinds of social transformations have a bearing on personal feelings so that, ‘the social context may not determine what a person feels about
relationships but it would seem that there is a complex interplay between social mores and at least some of the feelings we may experience’ (Smart 2007: 50). As distance and geographical mobility continue to be defining features of contemporary social life, expectations and feelings about relationships with family and friends also begin to adjust. Catherine’s narrative, above, is evidence of this. It is clear that, from her perspective, if people have greater opportunity for mobility they should take it, regardless of attachments to friends and home. Another example of this comes from Sahia, who was studying in London. In the excerpt below she illustrates the way in which popular ideas about mobility and long-term career goals shaped her expectations about friend relationships.

**Kirsty:** How do you see things working out with your friends from home once you’re away at uni?

**Sahia:** We say we’re all going to visit each other but I know that in reality sometimes you just don’t manage things. It’s kind of sad in a way but I think now, we really do all need to move on a bit from what we have here [in Millthorne]. I know I will never live here, you know, I mean like as an adult. I couldn’t do it. It’s not for me, a place like this. So I think that you need to get out, see new things, new people early on [in your life] so that you get used to the changes.

Sahia’s narrative demonstrates the way in which she and the Hopefuls understood changes to their friend relationships as a normal and natural feature of the life-course. Friendships were understood as being tied to specific periods of time. Because of Sahia’s dream of living in London, and her inability to imagine herself returning home to Millthorne, it was difficult for her to imagine a future for her longstanding friendships which she understood as embedded within a place and practices which she no longer felt a sense of attachment to. Caitlin, who was studying in Nottingham, also expressed a desire to move on from her established friendships, however, putting the ‘staleness’ and ‘claustrophobia’ that had begun to undermine these relationships down to spending seven years with the same group of friends. She explains this in the quotation below:

**Caitlin:** we’ve been friends all the way through school and sixth form. We are close but not that close now, we all have boyfriends and stuff and I have got closer to some other people through my [A Level] lessons and stuff. I think you just get to a point where you can do no more together you know, you’ve done it all.
The excerpt illustrates the way in which, even though she and her friends stayed together after their GCSE exams, the friendship group had begun to adjust in line with changes to their individual commitments and aspirations. Other relationships (with boyfriends, for example) became more central and this had implications for the amount of time Caitlin and her friends were able to devote to their friendships. Moreover, as she explains, other friendships had emerged with friends at sixth form, friends who perhaps shared similar goals and ideas about the future. There were only one or two of Caitlin’s close friends who wanted to continue into higher education and, as she imagined herself in Nottingham she became aware of the gulf emerging between her and the friends she had known since she started high school. The experiences of the Hopefuls thus support Allan’s comments about the shifting nature of friendships over the life course. However, it was only this small group of young women who articulated such a nonchalant approach with regard to the demise of longstanding relationships.

In this discussion I have revealed the ways in which the Hopefuls understood the move to university, specifically as the first in a series of other moves away from their homes in Millthorne. Whilst Sahia imagined herself remaining in London after her degree others like Caitlin and Stacey had ambitions of working and travelling abroad. It is for this reason that these young women were able to imagine their friendships at home coming to an end. They regarded these relationships as having a limited lifespan, or perhaps being significant for some moments and not for others. There was also a sense that maintaining older friendships would hold back or hamper their success and ambitions, and also their future relationships. It seems as though the Hopefuls were less emotional and more pragmatic about their longstanding friendships because, as I shall reveal later in this chapter, they had greater confidence in meeting new friends at university. In addition, it is important to remember that these respondents imagined their lives moving away from Millthorne in the longer term. These young women had geographical mobility built into their personal and family habitus and this necessarily impacted upon their expectations of friendship.
A final point to note with regard to the Hopefuls is that they were perhaps using geographical distance as a means to negotiate (or avoid) the complex and tricky process of managing friendships at a distance. By simply being too far away to return home for a weekend or a birthday celebration the Hopefuls were removing themselves from some of the more challenging aspects of friendship practices. Although their narratives of longstanding friendships seem cold and unfeeling at times, they were perhaps hoping that geographical distance would also provide emotional distance. As I shall demonstrate in Chapter 9 however, this was not always the case.

The Worriers

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In a rather similar way to their approach to family relationships, the Worriers\(^{33}\) expressed ambivalence and uncertainty about the future of their longstanding friend relationships. Again, these young women displayed more emotionality and less confidence than the Hopefuls. As they contemplated being separated from their close friends in Millthorne,

\(^{33}\) These were the same respondents as were found in the ‘Treading Carefully’ category
the Worriers expressed feelings of sadness and while many expected these relationships
to change once university began, they were simultaneously finding ways to minimise the
impact of change. The result of this combination of expectation and pre-emptive action
was a set of conflicting narratives. For example, while these respondents often expressed
similar sentiments to the Hopefuls with regard to the importance of autonomy and
independence their decisions to remain locally based and/or with friends meant that such
a narrative of independence was more difficult to articulate.

Anna, who was studying in Newcastle, is an example of this. Anna was part of a group of
six girlfriends who had been close throughout school. After taking their GCSEs this group
of six began to fragment as three of them decided not to continue their studies and instead
found full time work. The remaining three – Anna and her two best friends, Marie and
Natalie – continued into the adjoining sixth form at their high school. Like many of the
young women, Anna and her friends felt it was important to have their own individual
university experiences. For this reason they each picked a different city in the north of
England in which to study at university. Even though these three friends had accepted that
university would alter their relationships with one another (and made decisions to ensure
this) they were nevertheless ambivalent. In the quotation below Anna reveals the mixture
of emotions that she and her friends experienced during the summer before they started
university.

Anna: We go through stages and one night we’ll be saying how sad we are to
leave each other then we say how excited we are to be going off, and the next
minute we’re scared we’ve made the wrong decision and we should have all gone
to the same place together […] we’ve made a promise that we’ll come home at
least once a month and spend time together, and no two of us will spend more
time together than the others, like we’ll visit each other the same amount.

The promises that Anna talks about indicate the strong levels of commitment that
continued to characterise their friendship even as university was approaching. Their
commitments to the past and the present however, were clearly mixed up and confused by
a sense of excitement about starting a future without each other. It is clear from Anna’s
interview that she and her friends had considered the ways in which they would maintain
their friendships with one another despite making decisions which reflected a new start
and a chance to branch out. This means that although Anna and her friends had expectations that their relationships might fade or become secondary once university began, they were, at the same time, trying to preserve these relationships as much as possible. This example reveals a relationship of tension between public stories of personal relationships and the reality of everyday experiences.

For most respondents therefore, imagining established friendships losing their significance and fizzling out was uncomfortable and challenging. By the same token, respondents also found it difficult to express the need to hold on to school friends during the move to university. Katie was studying at Lancaster along with three of her close friends from college. In her interview Katie spoke almost apologetically about the fact that she and two of her closest friends would be attending the same university. She spent considerable time justifying this decision and explained it as a ‘complete coincidence’ since they had researched and applied for university independently and apparently in secret. The emphasis on experiencing university alone and by oneself meant that respondents found it uncomfortable, and even a little embarrassing, to admit needing and relying on longstanding friends at that time.

The Worriers expressed a general sense of confusion with regards to how they thought they ought to feel about their longstanding friendships. This was because most of the young women were unsure about how university would alter their personal relationships. Their parents had not studied at university and there was a strong commitment to the local area amongst these respondents. There was therefore, no blueprint indicating how or in what ways distance and separation might impact upon their friend relationships at home. Thus, while the Worriers had expectations of change they were not confident about what this change would be or how it would feel. For a small number of respondents these questions were not entirely new. Rachel, for example, had already moved away from her school friends when she started college. She chose to attend a different college than her friends because it specialised in childhood studies, which she felt would benefit her in her application to study Primary Teaching in Liverpool. Rachel had already begun to experience transformations in her friend relationships even though she was still living in
Millthorne and close to her friends. Rachel’s best friend Claire had become serious with her boyfriend and as a result there was less time available for their friendship. In the quotation below Rachel reflects on way their friendship had changed and why these changes made the prospect of moving away to university easier to deal with.

**Rachel:** “My best friend and I don’t see each other that much now anyway even though she lives just up the road. We work together and it’s like, that’s our time together now. I will miss her when I go to university but I have kind of missed her all year in a way. I am used to us not being so close so I guess her getting a boyfriend and all that, well it’s been a blessing in disguise because I’ve had to get used to her not being around so much. (Emphasis added)

Rachel’s sadness regarding her friendship with Claire is palpable. It cannot have been easy for her to ‘miss her all year’ but this has nevertheless prepared her for the next stage in their relationship. What Rachel is describing is the gradual untangling of lives that were once tightly interwoven. Relationships do not simply end but are instead renegotiated over time and under new terms. For many young women like Rachel, this process of renegotiation was challenging and hard to envisage. Thus, while there was an acceptance that university would change the nature and quality of longstanding friendships, the emotionality of this transition mean that this felt neither normal nor routine.

*The Stoics*

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In the final discussion of respondents’ old friendships I shall explore the experiences of the Stoics – the young women who continued to live at home. These young women did not see a divide between ‘old’ and ‘new’ friends precisely because they did not think in this way about their friend relationships. As I shall reveal in the next section, the prospect of new friendships was hardly mentioned at all in their first interviews. In addition ‘old’
friendships were not characterised in this way because these relationships were viewed in the present tense, as active, ongoing and enduring. Husna was studying in Manchester. Like many of her friends she chose to stay at home with her family and commute to university every day. Manchester was a popular choice amongst her friends though others were studying in Preston and Leeds. In the following quotation, Husna reveals that she and her friends did not regard the move to university as a challenge to their friendships with one another.

**Husna:** We all knew it was a toss up between Leeds and Manchester really and there are plenty of universities and courses to chose from there alone. Rather than following each other we made the decision to each choose our university based on the course we felt more comfortable with. We’re all always going to be really close anyway so it was never a big deal you know.

Respondents like Husna, who was of South Asian heritage, regarded friend relationships as lifelong endeavours. Often these young women lived on the same street or in the same local neighbourhood as their best friends and could not imagine their friendships in any other form. For these young women there was an excitement about starting university because this was the start of a new chapter in their friendships with one another rather than the end of their relationships. Husna reveals the ways in which decisions about university were participatory, they included one another in their conversations and made joint decisions for the good of their friendships and themselves. The young women were looking forward to spending time together shopping in Manchester city centre after lectures, sharing the commute with each other each morning and taking their relationships into new places and spaces. Longstanding friendships provided these young women with the resources and support to enable them to move outside of the spaces where they were comfortable in Millthorne and engage in higher education.

**In With the New?**

This section examines the ways in which respondents imagined new friend relationships at university and is structured again around the Hopefuls, The Worriers and the Stoics.
The Hopefuls

These 7 respondents welcomed the idea of meeting new people at university, and experienced the process of imagining new friend relationships as exciting. These young women could, with relative ease, envisage the kinds of people they hoped to meet at university and visualise the practices and activities that they would engage in together. Significantly, these young women were confident in their ability to build meaningful relationships quickly and understood different friendships as occupying particular ‘moments’ in time.

An example of this way of thinking about new friend relationships comes from Caitlin, who was studying History in Nottingham. Nottingham was Caitlin’s second choice, her first being King’s College in London. In her applications, Caitlin chose universities with historically good reputations, high levels of entry and those located in big, cosmopolitan cities. She was disappointed not to be accepted on a course at King’s College but was still excited about going to university in Nottingham because she was the only person in her group of friends who planned to study there. Caitlin is typical of the Hopefuls, insofar as she imagined a period of total immersion in university life and a chance to separate herself from old routines in Millthorne. Arriving at university alone and without anybody else to consider was important to all of the Hopefuls, particularly Caitlin. She imagined that this would make her more open and available to the many new friend relationships she imagined herself making in Nottingham. It is clear that for Caitlin, university was the time for new friend relationships rather than established ones.

Stacey also imagined university as a time for creating new relationships. She was studying English and History at St. Andrew’s University and could easily visualise herself there, surrounded by like-minded people. The way in which she imagined a new life and new friends at university was largely dependent however, on having a sense of anonymity in St. Andrew’s. In the quotation below she explains the importance of going to university alone and how the presence of old friends might hamper her experiences of making new friends.
Stacey: I wouldn’t have changed my mind about going to St. Andrew’s if say, a friend really wanted to come too, but I have to admit I’d be a little disappointed […] It would just change things for me I think. I have a pretty strong picture of what things will be like there [at St. Andrew’s] and if say, er, if say this girl from my history class is there and wants to be all pally with me then, well, it messes up my plans a bit. Uni is about the future isn’t it? It’s about starting afresh and making new friends.

Stacey’s narrative is typical of the Hopefuls, who were able to create ‘strong pictures’ of the friendships they hoped to make at university. Significantly however, Stacey reveals the way in which imagining new friend relationships became more difficult, and less enjoyable, when she considered the prospect of being amongst familiar people at university. As she states, the mixture of familiarity and anonymity ‘messes up’ the process of imagining new friendships. All of the Hopefuls chose universities which would take them considerably far away from home and, in so doing, they were creating new and unspoiled settings in which to establish new friendships. What this reveals is that respondents understood their identities as embedded within their relationships in Millthorne. They saw themselves in relation to others (close friends, peers, workmates) and so in order to establish and mobilise new or emerging aspects of their identities, they needed to disconnect from longstanding relationships. So, although the decision to move away from established friendships in Millthorne and go to university alone may appear to reflect rather individualistic practices and concerns, respondents were actually looking to create new attachments through which to assemble a new sense of self.

Issues around anonymity and ‘starting over’ at university were strong within the narratives of the Hopefuls, and clearly had an impact on the ways in which respondents were able to visualise new friend relationships. In addition however, respondents enjoyed the process of imagining new friends, ultimately, because this was an area in which they were successful. Their past experiences of changing schools or starting college had instilled within them high levels of self-confidence, especially with regards to making friends and ‘fitting in’. As Emily, who was studying in Buckinghamshire, noted, ‘I know I could meet someone on my first day [of university] and within hours I’ll feel like I’ve known them years’. Typically, these respondents had lots of separate groups of friends
rather than one particular and permanent set of friends. These friends were often from
different towns or cities, and respondents like Sophie, for example, who had experienced
significant geographical mobility had trails of relationships around the UK. The Hopefuls,
because of their family and social class backgrounds, had a certain degree of flexibility
built into their personal habitus. Moreover, because most of these young women had
some knowledge of what going to university\(^{34}\) would entail, they possessed the necessary
social and cultural capital to think and speak in particular ways about how this transition
might impact upon their friendships.

Interestingly, when the Hopefuls engaged in the process of imagining their new friend
relationships at university they placed a strong emphasis on the future, and expressed the
notion that these friendships would have longevity. This is particularly significant
because, as I have already demonstrated, they understood school and home-based
friendships as having a more limited life span. It seems that the Hopefuls were able to
imagine new friend relationships as more enduring and defining than their established
friendships at home because they saw these new friendships as based around shared
interests and outlooks rather than the happenstance of growing up within the same area
and attending the same school. The Hopefuls seemed confident that friend relationships
formed at university would be ‘better’ and, crucially, more fitting than the ones they were
leaving behind. Perhaps therefore these young women were in pursuit of the ideal, the
‘pure relationship’ in which a person negotiates self-identity ‘through linked processes of
self-exploration and the development of intimacy with the other’ (Giddens, 1991: 97).

To some extent therefore, the new friend relationships that the Hopefuls were imagining
for themselves were symbolic representations of their emerging sense of identity.
Evidence of this can be found in Sophie’s interview. Sophie was studying in Warwick;
however, her first choice was Oxford but her application was unsuccessful. During her
first interview it was clear that much of her disappointment at missing out on a place at
Oxford came from the fact that she had already begun to imagine the kinds of friendships
she would make there. She talked about the sense of excitement she felt during the open

\(^{34}\) Four of the 7 young women had parents who had studied at university
day and how, on seeing groups of students on campus, she had caught a glimpse of herself as an ‘Oxford girl’. There are parallels between Sophie’s narrative and comments made by Sahia, who was studying at London School of Pharmacology. In the excerpt below she reflects on her long held dream of living in London and in expressing this, she engages in the process of imagining new friendships.

**Sahia:** I’ve wanted to be in London since I was 13 or 14. We [my family] go down to London about four times a year to visit my aunt and her family. The time I knew I’d actually [live in London] was, erm, about the time of my GCSEs, about the time I got really sick of Millthorne and the North. I’d been there for the weekend and I just thought, ‘this is where I am going to live’. I didn’t always know, I didn’t know that university would take me there but somehow, whether it would just be to work or whatever, I knew I’d do it. I think it takes a particular person you know, you know [London] isn’t for everyone, so I think, well, I think when I’m there I’ll meet my mates for life. I know I’ll meet people just like me who love the buzz of city life…and who want more you know, that bit more from life.

It is evident then, that in imagining new friendships, Sahia and the other Hopefuls were engaging in important identity work. By thinking about the kinds of people they would meet and form relationships with at university respondents created a sense of distance between the things that they felt no longer reflected their identities, and the kinds of things they wanted to be associated with in the future. New friend relationships were therefore symbolic of transformation and they provided ways for respondents to ‘try on’ new identities. All of the Hopefuls expressed the desire to pull away at stage one, and this, coupled with strong sense of selfhood within their narratives, might be understood as an example of individualisation or individualistic concerns. Despite the apparent focus on the self I am, however, reminded of Mason’s (2004) relational individualism in which people talk about individual agency but such decisions or actions actually reflect relational concerns (i.e. meeting new people, forming new friendships). There is also a sense here of Mead’s (1967 [1934]) generalized other, specifically the ways in which people view themselves from the perspectives of different groups and communities. The Hopefuls, in imagining Oxford students or Londoners as friends, were in fact thinking about how and in what ways they themselves may be viewed by others once they began university.
This section has explored the ways in which the Hopefuls were able to imagine making new friend relationships at university, a process which was aided by their feelings of detachment from old friendships, as well as a familiarity with university and mobility. Although I am treating respondents’ narratives of family and friendships as separately in this thesis it is still imperative to consider the ways in which these relationships interact and inform practices and expectations. Many of the Hopefuls for example had parents who had studied at university and Stacey for example, said that her parents had met at university. These young women were able to draw upon experiences within their family habitus which allowed them to articulate particular ideas about friendship. These young women were also aware of the popular narrative around university and understood the apparent value on expressing their autonomy and independence and this necessarily shaped the ways in which they imagined new friendships.

_The Worriers_

This section examines the ways in which most respondents experienced the process of imagining new friend relationships at university. For these 13 young women, thinking about new friend relationships was a complex, challenging and, at times, quite a troubling process. They did not share the same confidence of the Hopefuls, instead, they were unsure about the kinds of people they would meet at university and whether or not new friendships would (or could) be as significant as longstanding friendships at home. At the same time however, all respondents were aware of the public story (Jamieson, 1998) around going to university, and the important role that new friend relationships are thought to play in this. The Worriers, therefore, expressed feelings of ambivalence as they tried to imagine new friend relationships, and this ambivalence informed the decisions they made as well as shaping their narratives. This can be identified in the Worriers’ preference for local institutions and/or cities in which they would be close to friends, boyfriends and family at home.

Hayley was typical of the Worriers. Originally, she had intended to go to Edinburgh University because she understood that this was a reputable institution but also, she felt
this would reflect her emerging autonomy and independence. At the same time, however, Hayley worried about how she (and her friendships) would cope with long periods of separation. For this reason, Hayley decided to accept a place studying Architecture in Liverpool. Liverpool was much closer to Millthorne (and Manchester where many of her friends and her boyfriend would be) and her older brother was also studying there. By choosing Liverpool Hayley had negotiated a middle space in which she was able to display her autonomy (by not following friends to Manchester) while also feeling supported and retaining a sense of familiarity. Although this choice seemed to address some of the concerns that Hayley had at that time she was still very nervous about how and in what ways her life would change by going to university, and this meant that imagining new friend relationships was not a process that she enjoyed.

**Hayley:** It would be really nice if someone was [in Liverpool] with me but you can’t let things like that determine where you go can you? I just, I don’t know, I, it’s weird thinking about having other mates and, like spending time with new people. I just can’t see that happening you know. It’s strange. What are we gonna talk about? What if they’re all really weird? (Emphasis added)

Imagining new friendships away from home was difficult for Hayley because, up to that point, her experiences of friend relationships had been based on shared histories and everyday interactions with the same group of girlfriends that she had known since she was very young. In addition, because she had moved with this same group of friends from school to sixth form, she had relatively few experiences of meeting new people and making new friends upon which to reflect. Also within popular discourses around the move to university there is no space to articulate a need for old ties. In fact, as Hayley states, ‘you can’t let things like that determine where you go’. In this comment it is apparent that discourses around selfhood and autonomy permeated respondents’ understandings and narratives. However, there were contradictions too because Hayley’s understanding of and engagement with university was also limited so she had little to draw upon in the way of evidence or experience. Neither of her parents studied at university. Her older brother was studying in Liverpool, however, since leaving home he had ‘changed dramatically’ and Hayley described him as becoming ‘very weird’ during this time. For Hayley then, the prospect of change was quite unsettling because she was not searching for the kind of personal transformation that the Hopefuls were hoping for.
Her sense of self was located within her experiences and relationships at home and she wanted to make decisions about university which reflected these relational concerns and practices.

Many of the Worriers expressed similar concerns to Hayley. Typically, these young women described themselves as being part of the same group of friends throughout school and sixth form, and having quite dense, locally based webs of relationships. Ashley, for example, who was studying at Birmingham University, was also anxious about meeting new people. In the quotation below she explains how, when she moved into the adjoining sixth form at her high school, she struggled to connect with new incoming students. This experience thus meant that it was difficult for her to imagine herself establishing meaningful connections with other students at university.

Ashley: There are a few of us who joined [Hillside] at the sixth form stage, you know, they er, they went to different high schools. But it isn’t so easy to talk to them, not the way I can be with my older friends. It’s different between us, it isn’t as easy or as natural. That kind of makes me a little bit nervous about how I’ll make new friends at uni. I can’t imagine how it’s gonna be for me you know.

During her first interview, Ashley stated that even her longstanding friendships had not been instantaneous and that they were the product of ongoing work and negotiation. It is clear from the excerpt above that it took time for her to develop relationships in which she felt at ease. Her experiences of making and maintaining friendships had become internalised within her personal habitus, so that she was cautious, nervous and quiet around new people, taking time to open up. This reveals the complexity of friend relationships which are so often depicted as easy and uncomplicated. As Ashley’s narrative reveals, however, the emotional and intangible dimensions of these relationships often have a profound impact on the way one feels and acts. In addition, what is interesting about Ashley’s case is that, unlike the other Worriers, she chose a university located considerably far away from Millthorne. Ashley was the only respondent to study in Birmingham or even to have applied there. Ashley was rather different to Hayley and the others because, despite her anxieties, she chose to pull away from home on a more permanent basis. Notwithstanding this significant difference, Ashley was still quite similar to Hayley insofar as her narrative was interwoven with conflicting comments. On
the one hand she spoke of the ‘need to branch out’ and ‘meet friends for life’. At the same time, however, it was clear that she was anxious and sad at the thought of leaving Millthorne and her friends behind.

Hayley and Ashley expressed similar sentiments with regards to moving away from home and also the difficulties in imagining new friend relationships at university. Both young women reveal the ways in which feelings of ambivalence shape the decision making process, yet the end result is rather different. In choosing Liverpool over Edinburgh, Hayley negotiated a space which was close to home and friends but in which she would also need to be independent. Ashley, on the other hand, had the same kinds of polarised emotions and yet chose to make a break and pull away from family and friends at home in order to meet new friends. For both young women there was a real awareness of the public story of going to university, which is based on traditional, middle-class patterns of home-leaving. It is evident that there was a certain sense of embarrassment about making local choices or in articulating a desire to be close to longstanding friends. What this reveals is the ways in which morality, emotion and the generalized other come in to play for young women making decision about university. It is not enough to think about social class background as producing conditioned responses, but instead to think through the complex ways in which emotion, morality and ambivalence are managed and how this informs individual action.

In keeping with ideas around emotion, it is important to appreciate how and in what ways the presence of longstanding friendships at home gave rise to feelings of awkwardness and guilt when the Worriers engaged in the process of imagining new friendships. During her first interview Anna who was studying at Newcastle said, ‘I say I don’t want new friends, but I do. It’s kind of hard to say that you’re ready to move on when you have such good friends around you’. For Anna there was clearly a difficulty in thinking about new friend relationships because she understood this process of imagining as a sign of disloyalty to her existing friend relationships in Millthorne. Similarly, in the quotation
below, Jenny who was studying in York explains how the process of imagining new friendships challenged her emotional attachments to old friendships.

Jenny: yeah, um, I do yeah, I have [thought about new friendships at university]. Usually at night when I’m trying to get off to sleep. My mind kind of wanders and I can go a bit, a bit too deep into thinking about it. Then I get these horrible, horrible headaches, like stressy ones, so I try not to go there […] [when I do think about new friendships] I’m like, ‘no! no!’ because it’s just not right is it? I feel well bad about it when I see my mates. It just doesn’t feel right, not yet. [laughs]

Jenny’s quotation reinforces the point that friend relationships are hugely complex, and the thought of new friendships replacing old ones challenges the very essence of those relationships (i.e. trust, honesty, commitment). The Worriers generally said that it felt too soon or too strange imagining themselves with new friends and this reflects the morality which is built into many people’s experiences of friendship. In addition, the Worriers tended to speak of having quite fixed, long-established friendship networks rather than dispersed groups of friends. The move to university thus represented the first real challenge to the order and experience of these relationships. Of course, friendships are subject to constant renegotiation and I am not suggesting that, until the point of going to university, respondents’ experiences of friend relationships were idyllic or plain-sailing. On the contrary, Rachel for example, who was studying Primary Teaching in Liverpool, discussed the ways in which she and her best friend Claire had been involved in the renegotiation of their friendship for some time. Rachel’s experiences were rather different to the other Worriers because she had already made the break away from longstanding friend relationships by choosing to study her A levels at Town College rather than Holy sixth form. Rachel had already begun to see her close group of girlfriends break up and, for this reason, their focus shifted toward other relationships.

While Rachel was making new friends at college, she noted that Claire’s relationship with her boyfriend had become very serious and this meant that there was less time for their friendship. This supports the work of Griffin (1985) who demonstrated the ways in which young women with steady boyfriends often lost touch with their girlfriends. Moreover, the result of these gradual shifts in relational practices and feelings of attachment meant that Rachel did not share the same sense of guilt or awkwardness when she imagined
herself with new friends at university. Nevertheless the process of imagining was still
difficult for her as she explains in the quotation below.

**Rachel:** I dunno, I keep thinking of myself as a ‘student’ and it’s weird because
that isn’t really me you know. I’m not very ‘studenty’ in the way I dress or where
I like to hang out […] I have this vision of being in halls with a bunch of geeky
girls who wear horrible clothes and I dunno. I just can’t see me fitting in that well
you know, not with people like that.

Rachel’s feelings of uncertainty were due in part to the fact that university was an
unfamiliar move for her. Like most of the Worriers, Rachel was the first in her family to
study at university. Therefore, when she imagined other young people at university she
was working with rather fixed stereotypes. Rachel came from a typically working-class
area within Millthorne and, as she expresses in the quotation above, she did not recognise
herself as typically ‘studenty’. As demonstrated in Chapter 4, there is not a strong
tradition of university study within Millthorne, particularly within the poorest areas.
Rachel was envisaging a particular, generalised other based on stereotypical, and classed,
notions of student identity. In seeing herself in contrast to this generalised other, Rachel
lacked a sense of affinity with imagined fellow students and this meant that that she also
lacked the confidence to believe that she would meet people like herself in Liverpool.
Rachel’s experiences thus provide a rather stark contrast to the Hopefuls who imagined
themselves blending in to life in London, Oxford or St. Andrew’s with relative ease.

In this discussion of the Worriers, I have demonstrated how and in what ways feelings of
ambivalence influence the ways in which respondents were able to imagine new
friendships at university. I have made a case for the role of emotion and morality in
individual action and decision making. Moreover, I have demonstrated the contrast
between the Hopefuls, who were able to draw upon important social and cultural
resources in order to engage in the process of imagining, and the Worriers whose social
and cultural resources made this much more challenging. In the final part of this
discussion, I explore the ways in which the Stoics imagined their new friend
relationships.

*The Stoics*
The following discussion is much shorter than the two previous sections and I shall explain the reasons for this. The process of imagining new friend relationships was not central to the narratives of the four young women who remained living at home because of the way in which they prioritised continuity and stability rather than transformation and change. The Stoics did not talk in great detail about making new friend relationships at university, nor did they identify this as a fundamental part of their university experience. It is important to remember that they were approaching university in rather different ways to the other respondents, and one must not assume that making new friends held the same appeal or significance for all the young women. As I have demonstrated, for the Stoics, the main concern was maintaining existing relationships with family and friends and, because of the trajectories which they imagined for themselves (marriage, motherhood etc.) the notion of making friends for life in different parts of the country, or the world, did not fit with their imaginings of their own future biographies. This is not to say however that these respondents did not want to meet people or make acquaintances at university. It is more the case that new friend relationships did not occupy their imaginary in the same way as they did for other young women. Fizza’s comments, below, demonstrate this.

**Fizza:** I haven’t really given [making new friends] too much thought to tell you the truth. I think I’ll be fine, I hope everyone is nice and that, yeah. They will be I think. I don’t think I’ll be there so much though so it won’t be the end of the world.

The Stoics clearly expressed strong desires to ‘fit in’ and be happy at university, but this was rather different to the kinds of symbolic identity work that the Hopefuls engaged in.

A final point to note regards methodological issues, specifically my position as a white middle-class researcher interviewing young working-class South Asian women. It may have been likely that this was not an area in which they felt comfortable speaking. It is important to remember that these young women lived in predominantly South Asian areas of Millthorne and attended schools in which Muslim students were well represented. Perhaps then, the prospect of attending university with a diverse student body was rather
daunting. Like the Worriers, the Stoics expressed strong commitments to their longstanding relationships at home but rather than addressing the popular narrative around ‘university friendships’, this was something which they actively avoided.

**Concluding Comments**

In this chapter I have explored the ways in which, prior to going to university, respondents engaged in the process of imagining their friend relationships. This process involved both new friendships (at university) and old friendships (based at home). Significantly, the interview data reveal the common conception that university is a period for new friend relationships to blossom and grow, while longstanding relationships are given less significance and are expected to dwindle and fade away. The young women who wished to pull away from home and, in so doing, chose universities at a distance from Millthorne, were hopeful and optimistic about how their friendships would play out once university began. These respondents were not worried about the fate of old friendships which had come to feel stale and rather dull because they were confident that better friends awaited them at university. They were able to speak in this way about their friend relationships because they had a familiarity and understanding of university through their parents and siblings and, also, they accepted that geographical mobility would be a key feature in their futures and that they were unlikely to settle in Millthorne as adults.

In contrast to this, the Worriers, many of whom chose universities which would allow them to stay within close proximity to Millthorne, were anxious about leaving their old friends and were unsure whether new friends could ever really be *best* friends. These young women were embedded within families and communities which had long histories in Millthorne and, because of this, geographical mobility and distance relationships were not a feature of their everyday lives. Their preference for local universities was indicative of their need to remain close to friends from home. Notwithstanding this, the power of popular narratives around university and friendship had a degree of impact on their
decisions about university and how they framed their narratives. It was not as easy for these young women to articulate notions of selfhood and independence when they were going to university with two or three friends from school or if they planned to return to Millthorne every week.

The Stoics expressed similar, although perhaps more assured, notions of attachment to longstanding friendships and it seemed that ‘making friends for life’ simply was not what going to university represented for these young women. There is limited data on the Stoics’ friend relationships and while this may reflect some methodological issues and barriers, it may also be the case that these young women had different concerns to those which I anticipated when designing this project. It is important therefore, not to assume that all respondents ought to be thinking about friendship at this time. Related to this, for the Stoics experiences of friendship and family often interrelated much more so than it did for other respondents. Often their closest friends were also cousins and so the boundaries between friends and family were perhaps a little more blurred for these young women.
This chapter completes the discussion of respondents’ friend relationships by examining data from the second and third stage of interviews. The aim of this chapter is to explore the ways in which respondents experienced making new friends at university. In addition, the discussion which follows looks at how and in what ways respondents managed and maintained their longstanding friendships in Millthorne. As the previous discussion in Chapter 8 revealed, before leaving for university respondents talked in particular ways about the friend relationships they were part of at home and those they imagined making at university. Generally speaking, respondents acknowledged the public story which places an emphasis on new, rather than old, friendships at university. They spoke in terms of ‘branching out’ and ‘making a break’ from established friendships and depicted new relationships as enduring ‘friendships for life’. Respondents’ narratives differed of course and while some were confident in their expectations others revealed a greater sense of ambivalence. The aim of this chapter then, is to explore the extent to which respondents’ early expectations around friendship translated into everyday experiences.

The Chapter begins by looking first at respondents’ experiences of new friend relationships. As in the previous data chapters, the discussion is organized around the three key experiences. In terms of respondents’ narratives of new friend relationships those experiences were, We Just Clicked, Like a Fish out of Water and Nothing to Report. Following this, the discussion turns to respondents’ experiences of maintaining longstanding friendships with school and home friends. In this regard the key experiences were, Old Friends in New Places, Moving on without Letting Go and Bumpy Friendships. As the following discussion demonstrates, respondents’ experiences of homecomings, shared living arrangements and their engagement with virtual and mobile communication technologies made for creative as well as challenging friend relationships.
New Friendships

During the stage 2 interviews, there was a natural tendency for respondents to speak about the new people they had met at university rather than their friendships based at home. At that time, university was still a very new experience and the novelty of housemates, course friends and living or spending time away from home was apparent. At just three months into their first year of study respondents were still settling in and each week brought with it a new set of faces. Chapter 8 revealed that most respondents had anxieties about meeting new friends at university and worried in particular about the quality of relationships which were based on such short histories. In fact, prior to going to university, less than a third of respondents felt positive and hopeful about the prospect of meeting new friends. As I shall demonstrate however, the common experience of meeting new friends at university was a positive one and most young women (16) stated that they ‘just clicked’ with people or a person at university. Only four young women said that they felt uncomfortable amongst their peers at university, with Anna noting how she felt ‘like a fish out of water’. For the four young women who remained living at home, new friendships featured much less in their narratives. I shall address this later in this discussion.

We Just Clicked

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Respondents who spoke in this way about meeting new people at university commented on the ease and speed with which they had established new friend relationships at university. The instantaneousness of new friend relationships came as a surprise to these young women and, even respondents who had been hopeful and confident about making new friends at university, were struck by how quickly these relationships had begun to take shape and become significant. Charlie, who was studying in Manchester, provides an example of this. Her decision to study in Manchester reflected her need to remain close to Millthorne so that she could continue to meet up with her friends from home and work weekends at a shop in town. Charlie kept to this routine throughout her first term, despite finding it increasingly difficult to prise herself away from her university friends each week. Charlie had not expected the strong sense of connection that she would feel towards her new friends at university and, in the quotation below, she explains how her sense of attachment to her flat mate, Matt, had developed very quickly.

**Charlie:** […] my flat mate Matt, we get on ridiculously well. We’re like brother and sister. It’s so weird how we just clicked, instantly. It’s like we’ve known each other for years.

Like so many respondents, Charlie was surprised at just how quickly she and Matt had become close. For many young women, friend relationships were understood in terms of shared histories and a mutual sense of belonging to place, however, their experiences at university had begun to challenge this. Because the instantaneousness of new friend relationships was at odds with their previous conceptions of ‘good’ friendships, respondents like Charlie spent time highlighting the quality of their new friendships. In
the excerpt above Charlie likens her relationship with Matt to a sibling relationship as a way of demonstrating their closeness despite only having known one another for short time. She emphasises the familiarity of their connection and although their friendship is new, she hints at the feeling of an established, long held connection. In addition, Charlie maintains that she and Matt ‘just clicked’. In so doing, Charlie creates a sense of something above and beyond the realm of the rational, hinting instead at the magical, inexplicable qualities of friend relationships. This phrase was widely used by respondents as they tried to articulate their experiences of accelerated intimacy, and it is a point which I shall discuss in more detail later in this chapter.

For these respondents, the experience of accelerated intimacy was understood as arising for a number of different reasons. The first and most common explanation was the unique context in which these new friendships were evolving. All the respondents who spoke in this way were living away from home in university accommodation, and it was the experience of shared living which added a new dimension to their friend relationships. By living amongst friends, as opposed to simply spending time with them in class or during lunch and break times, respondents said that they were experiencing friendship in new and different ways. For some young women the context of shared living meant that they had to quickly engage with and trust the new people they had met, so that they could depend on them in the absence of their family and friends at home. Furthermore, because they were living with and amongst their peers, respondents soon found that, as Emily who was studying in Buckinghamshire noted, there was ‘no escape’ from friends at university as there had been at home. This meant that respondents had to establish new norms and practices to deal with these shifts.

Heath (1999, 2001, 2003, 2004) has written extensively on the experience of shared living for young people. Within her discussion she notes the ways in which shared households have largely been neglected in existing literature on young people’s living arrangements (2004: 163). In addition Heath maintains that, with the exception of Kenyon’s study of student-shared households and Baum’s (1986) work on shared housing, few studies have focused on the dynamics of peer-shared living. Drawing on her own research – the Young
Adults and Shared Household Living project – Heath explores the ways in which shared living, as well as easing the financial burden of living away from parents’ homes, has the power to influence young people’s lives in very positive ways. This research certainly adds weight to that argument. Catherine for example, who was studying in Plymouth, discussed the impact of shared living on her sense of independence and wellbeing. She shared a student flat with four others, one of which was her friend Carrie who had become significant very quickly. In the quotation below Catherine reflects on this and how, through the experience of shared living she understood herself as developing new skills and competencies within her personal relationships.

Catherine: Living together and seeing each other every day does change the way you handle your friendships. At times I feel like we [flatmates] are a little family; you learn to read and deal with people’s moods and you don’t mind doing that. It’s a good feeling […] At school or college if someone was in a mood for no reason you’d just stay away from them and think that they were a bit of an idiot but it isn’t like that at university.

It is clear from Catherine’s narrative that the experience of shared living had a positive impact on her quality of life, and in making direct comparisons between her new friendships at university and her longstanding relationships at home, she demonstrates transformations within her relationships and relational practices. Catherine understands the tolerance, understanding and expressions of support which were characteristic of her new friendships, as borne out of the experience of shared living. In addition, reiterating Charlie, Catherine attributes family-like qualities to her new friendships and, in so doing, expresses the durability and ‘for better or worse’ nature of these new relationships.

According to Allan (1989, 1998) friendships constitute an important part of the social fabric, particularly through the way in which they facilitate forms of support, whether that is emotional, moral, practical or material. Many respondents found that their new friend relationships had quickly shifted from the level of acquaintanceships to something more meaningful and robust. They provided examples of the way in which they and their new friends had ‘pulled together’ and ‘been there’ for one another despite only knowing one another for a short period of time. Harriett’s comments, below, are an example of this.
Harriett was studying in Bristol and, in the excerpt, she describes the speed with which new friendships transformed into networks of care and support.

**Harriett:** One of the guys in our flat, he came to university with his girlfriend and in the second week they split up and we all rallied round him and got his chin up, yeah. It came so naturally too even though we hadn’t known each other that long.

The notion of care is significant here because although it is suggestive of practical help it is also a thoroughly emotional instinct. Respondents like Harriett and Catherine describe the ways in which tolerance and a sense of morality came to characterize their new friendships not merely because they *had* to be, but also because they *wanted* to be. As Heath notes, (2004: 168-9), sharing or discussing personal problems within shared households, undoubtedly constitutes the ‘emotional glue’ of household life.

In addition to creating new emotional spaces, the experience of shared living also created new physical and symbolic spaces for friendship practices, and also new temporalities. Specifically, living away from the family home and amongst people of a similar age meant that respondents could organize their friendships differently than before. The availability of friends (during the day and at night) meant that relational practices (watching films, chatting etc) could take place in different ways and at different times. Within the literature on friendship, and particularly with regard to the experiences of young people, the importance of disclosure and openness are recurrent themes. According to Brooks (2005) it is commonly held that as young people move into adulthood the nature of their friendships begin to alter as they develop new forms of intimacy with their friends that include ‘a more exclusive focus on openness to self-disclosure and the sharing of problems and advice’ (Brooks citing Hendry et al. 1993: 115). In the quotations below, Rachel, who was studying in Liverpool, and Katie, who was in Lancaster, describes new relational practices which characterize their university friendships and mark them as distinct. Both young women comment on the way in which the context of shared living opened up time and space for intimate friend relationships.

**Rachel:** My body clock is totally out, and when I’m home like now I don’t know where I am because I’m like back on family time. I normally sleep in the afternoon and stay up all night talking […] I never knew I could spend so much
time with the same people, day and night. But we do and we chat about all kinds of things, we’re just really close.

Katie: One time we didn’t even leave my friends room. We had this huge DVD marathon session for about two and a half days, solid. We just camped in there, brought all our duvets and chocolate and we ate pizza in there. It was amazing – we talked about everything and no one felt the need to leave or to do anything else you know.

The quotations above reveal the ways in which going to university, and specifically living away from home during this time, alters the traditional ‘getting to know you’ stage of new friendships. There is a sense from both Rachel and Katie’s narratives that they submerged themselves in their new friend relationships through the practice of sharing secrets, memories and past experiences. Respondents were able to quickly create a sense of familiarity with people they had known only days or weeks. There are echoes here of Giddens’ (1991) ‘pure relationship’, specifically the practice of disclosing intimacy which is understood as a key characteristic of such relationships. According to Heath (2004: 175) however, there is an assumption that peer-shared households are not normally sites where one would usually expect to find intimacy. She notes that, within her own research, such feelings of closeness amongst female housemates seemed to breach the usual limits of platonic friendship and interviewees felt required to offer explanations. The two quotations above reveal that shared living can be intimate and indeed rather intense and intoxicating. While much of the literature on friendship pays considerable attention to the social functions of these sorts of relationships (see in particular Allan, 1989) and also, provides a discussion of the relationship between friendship and the wider social structure what is missing is an account of the emotionality of friend relationships, particularly with regard to domestic intimacy which is more commonly associated with sexual partners than friends (Heath, 2004: 175).

So far, this discussion has focused on the importance of respondents’ new friendships, specifically within the context of providing support and care, as well as companionship and familiarity. These particular functions of friend relationships are undoubtedly

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significant, however it is also necessary to appreciate the ‘transcendental and intangible’ qualities of friend relationships if we are to ‘depict a more complex image of people’s lives’ (Smart 2007). Earlier in this section I discussed the ways in which respondents spoke about ‘clicking’ with their new friends at university. Respondents were referring to something other than care and support, familiarity and companionship. They were trying to convey a sense of immediate connection, a sense of knowing in a deeper, perhaps even ethereal way. During these conversations respondents spoke of having ‘gut feelings’ and ‘instincts’ about the people they had met at university, even sensing a friendship before its conception. It is difficult to know how and in what ways to theorise these issues, but they are nevertheless a crucial part of the way people speak and feel about friendships. The excerpt from Sophie’s interview, below, is an example of this. Here she describes the experience of meeting her course mate, Kate.

Sophie: We met early on; she’s on my course. I think it was the second week or something and we just clicked; even before we really had a proper conversation. It’s strange when it happens like that isn’t it? We kind of naturally paired off and went for coffee and it was one of the best days of university that I can remember. It made me feel great meeting someone like that.

In her discussion of the sociology of emotions, Smart (2007) discusses the way in which the discipline has tried to engage with and adequately theorise notions of affect. She maintains that it is the, ‘the realm of emotions which makes everyday living valuable and worthwhile rather than just sensible and inevitable’ (p. 58). It is clear from the discussion in this section that emotion constitutes friend relationships in a range of different ways. First, the experience of shared living at university is understood as developing relationships which are more emotionally in tune, mature and tolerant. In addition, the sharing of feelings of emotion within practices of disclosing intimacy, and equally within more mundane ‘how was your day’ routines provide the emotional glue within friendships and households. Finally however, it is clear that forming new friend relationships gives rise to feelings of emotion; feelings of happiness at having someone whom to share and to trust, to feelings of serendipity and connection which defy explanation. In the following section, and in my later discussion of respondents’ experiences of longstanding friend relationships, I shall demonstrate the ways in which friendships were often also the site of negative emotions, such as guilt, envy, isolation.
and betrayal. In the discussion which follows I shall explore the experiences of respondents for whom establishing new friend relationships at university was a challenging and sometimes painful process.

*Like a Fish out of Water*

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<th>Ashley</th>
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<td>Anna</td>
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<td>Caitlin</td>
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<td>Esther</td>
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This section explores the experiences of four respondents who, in their second and third interviews, reflected on some of the problems they encountered at university with regards to meeting new people and establishing new friendships. These four young women did not experience the immediate sense of connection and intimacy that I discuss above. They did not ‘click’ with others immediately and, for the most part, the routines and domestic practices they engaged in within their shared accommodation left them feeling different, self aware and ‘like a fish out of water’ (Anna, Interview 2). These four young women were quite different in terms of their class backgrounds, and also, with regards to their chosen universities. Caitlin for example was middle-class, she had a good understanding and familiarity with university through her older brother and parents and also, as Chapter 8 revealed, she was hopeful about making new friends away from home. Esther on the other hand was one of the Worriers. She was the first in her family to study at university, had ostensibly working-class origins and in choosing to study in Huddersfield she had remained relatively local. Sociological literature can overstate the significance of social class background, and the distinct differences between working-class and middle-class experiences, within the context of university and, also, friend relationships. What this research reveals is that there are often similarities of experiences which some conceptualisations of social class often overlook or cannot accommodate. Sociological theory must, therefore, think through the ways in which morality and emotion constitute social life and personal relationships.
As outlined in Chapter 4, Millthorne is a town which has a particular kind of traditional working-class identity as well as a number of social and economic problems. In that chapter, I discussed the ways in which feelings of belonging and attachment to place arise out of one’s own perceptions and also those of others looking in. As Savage et al. note, ‘one is placed by others on the basis of where one comes from’ (2005: 126). Therefore, although respondents represented diverse social class backgrounds, and had varying understandings and engagements with higher education through their families, it was their identities as ‘Millthorne girls’ which often became central as they moved away from home and into the new spaces of university. It was for Caitlin, who was studying in Nottingham, that this experience was particularly significant.

During her second interview, Caitlin explained that she had found it quite difficult to make friends at university. As she reflected on first meeting the people on her course or within her halls of residence, she noted that many of the other students were from the south of England, and that she felt like the ‘token northerner’ on her corridor. This experience left her feeling rather isolated and positioned her as an outsider. In fact, Caitlin admitted that, during her first few weeks in Nottingham, she felt like ‘a bit of a nobody’. This was a huge shift when compared to her experiences in Millthorne. At home, Caitlin’s family were relatively affluent, her father a pharmacist and her mother a local teacher and political campaigner. Caitlin was popular at school, she was one of the brightest students and saw herself as ambitious in comparison to her peers. In Nottingham, however, Caitlin found herself amongst more affluent, ambitious, high achievers and this had the effect of destabilising her personal habitus.

Caitlin: The thing is about my halls is that all the students are quite posh; there are a lot of people who went to boarding school and their parents are like interior designers for celebrities and it’s just like another world. […] There were no accents, not like mine anyway. I didn’t want to speak up in seminars because I felt really stupid. I just felt really, I don’t know, like somebody off Coronation Street!

Caitlin’s narrative reveals that, through her movement between different fields, she became aware of the dispositions (particularly her regional accent) and the cultural and social capital within her habitus. She had not studied at boarding school and her family
was not well-connected to celebrities. As she says, in Nottingham she was engaging in ‘another world’. Her early experiences of university thus left her feeling rather out of place, unsure how to think or act and this lead her to staying silent in seminars so that she might become invisible. Caitlin’s experiences highlight the importance of understanding how regional identities and attachments interweave with social class so that one cannot make assumptions about how and in what ways working-class or middle-class young people experience meeting new people within the context of university. As a middle-class respondent, Caitlin demonstrates that even when individuals display confidence and an understanding about what going to university might entail, their experiences may not be uniform or straightforward. This discovery is a particular benefit of employing a longitudinal methodology.

The literature on friendship has much to say about issues of similarity and difference, whether that is in regard to gender, social class, ethnicity or age. A number of empirical studies cite equality, or at least the perception of equality, as fundamental to the formation and maintenance of friendship (Brooks 2005: 55). Caitlin’s early experiences in Nottingham certainly seem to support the idea that friends help to locate individuals within a status hierarchy and convey messages about social position (Allan 1989: 62). In her final interview however, Caitlin was much more relaxed about her experiences and talked about the many ‘great’ friends she had made since Christmas. These friends, by her own admission, came from families that were considerably wealthier than hers and had the luxury of spending the long summer holidays abroad while she returned to Millthorne to work in her father’s chemist shop. It is clear therefore that ‘equality’ and ‘similarity’ are understood and experienced in much more complex ways in friend relationships than simply ‘sticking to one’s own’ and people are creative with regards to how and in what ways they generate feelings of equality when there are apparent differences.

Anna’s experiences reveal the kinds of creativity which was characteristic of respondents’ new friend relationships. Like Caitlin, she also understood herself as rather different to the people she had met in Newcastle. Anna expressed feelings of ambivalence with regard to moving away and meeting new friends. When she arrived in Newcastle she
noticed that many of the students were middle-class and spoke and looked different to her. Over time, Anna established friend relationships with the girls on her corridor, but this was only after a period of anxiety and self-reflection. In the quotation below Anna describes her experience of first meeting the young women who later became her close friends:

Anna: On my first day when I met the girls on my corridor I almost freaked because – and I’m going to sound so shallow here – I couldn’t see anyone who I might ever have anything in common with and I just thought ‘shit, I’m not going to have any good mates here’ it was awful… Anyway, we got chatting and the girls are actually so lovely, and they are great, great friends now […] they are not bothered about clothes or music like I am but I have really opened my mind since I came here [to university]. Like when we go to the shop or for a quick pint they will sometimes just put a hoody on, they won’t wear makeup or sometimes they won’t even brush their hair, and I’m always like, ‘wait up while I tart myself up!’

In the excerpt Anna describes her panic (and horror) when she first met the young women on her corridor. There was no mirror image of herself with which to bond and this unsettled her, compounding the doubts she had about making friends at university. As she reveals, however, the friend relationships she made at university allowed her to see herself in new ways. Despite the initial sense of panic then, these new friendships did not provoke long-lasting or negative feelings of anxiety but, as Anna says, enabled her to ‘open her mind’ and be playful with her own identity. This therefore supports the work of Reay’s (2010: 81) who maintains that there is often an over-emphasis on the negative connotations embedded in notions of ‘a divided habitus’ with its associations of instability and neuroses. As Anna’s case demonstrates, the self-awareness and reflexivity which can arise through the movement between fields can often have a positive impact.

It is clear therefore that the experiences of Caitlin and Anna challenge the notion that individuals naturally gravitate towards and ‘choose’ friends who share a structurally similar position in order to protect their status. While these young women were certainly aware of the class differences within new friend relationships, these were not barriers to new relationships although they did perhaps bring new issues to the table. O’Connor (1992) has argued that in many situations a shortage of similar others (in terms of structural position) may necessitate the creation of equal relationships out of those who
are socially unequal. She goes on to consider that, in some circumstances, friends may actually ignore differences in social location choosing instead to create a sense of equality via other means. While this was evidently the case for Caitlin and Anna, for Ashley, who was studying in Birmingham, negotiating differences was more problematic. Ashley was one of the Worriers and before leaving for Birmingham she expressed concern about separating from her school friends. Nevertheless she was adamant that she should branch out and create new relationships at university.

When Ashley was interviewed at Christmas, for the second stage of interviews, she showed signs of stress and anxiety. She had lost a considerable amount of weight and she was nervous and withdrawn. As she reflected on her first term in Birmingham, Ashley described her experiences of living with five other students. She noted the ways in which they partied late into the night, their music keeping her awake. In addition, they ate her food and used her toiletries without asking. Ashley felt isolated in her student flat, invisible even. These feelings were cemented when Ashley learned that her flat mates had secured a house together for the second year.

Ashley: They got their house in November so it was only half way through the term - just eight weeks in actually. It was quite a blow to my confidence really. Even though I knew deep down that we didn’t get on very well and I probably wouldn’t have wanted to live with them anyway, I felt like I was still getting to know them and hadn’t made my mind up about them completely. It was a bit hurtful that they had obviously made their minds up about me, all of them together and I just felt out of it all I guess.

Unlike Caitlin and Anna, for Ashley there was no positive solution and, indeed, there are many young people who go away to university and experience these kinds of difficulties. In her final interview Ashley explained how the late night parties had become even more commonplace but that, in her own way, she had dealt with the situation and made the best of it. Interestingly, and despite the fact that Ashley had a long term boyfriend in Millthorne, she decided to remain living in Birmingham for her second year of study. Ashley answered an advertisement and found a house with two other students. Ashley reveals how negative experiences and feelings of ambivalence can often lead to actions which go against traditional responses. Ashley was determined not to allow her flat mates
in Birmingham dictate the decisions she made or spoil her experiences of university, however it is clear that this negative experience gave her the motivation to continue living away from home. She was, in her own words, ‘not just going to give up’ on her life in Birmingham. It is clear that decision-making is a practice which is embedded in people’s experiences of relationships, both good and bad.

This discussion highlights the ways in which movement between fields and engagement with different others can lead to heightened self-awareness. For Caitlin this experience challenged her personal habitus and her understanding of self. In Nottingham she felt rather ordinary and this was a sharp contrast to her experiences in Millthorne. For Anna, the experience was more positive and, rather than challenging her personal habitus, she was able to see herself in new ways and find ways of being playful with her identity, reinforcing her image as the always-groomed, ‘blonde bombshell’ of her friendship group. Ashley’s experiences were the most challenging. By living with others’ who neither respected nor included her in their relational practices, she lost confidence and became depressed. Notwithstanding this, her narrative reveals how, even the most negative of experiences, can spur one into action and shape decisions made. This example therefore reveals the workings of feelings of ambivalence and how the experienced of polarized emotions can lead to a range of different actions and responses. In this instance, Ashley was motivated to continue building a life away from home however, Esther who was studying in Huddersfield, said that her (difficult) experiences of friendship at university had lead her to re-think her living arrangements for the following year. She had begun returning home with greater regularity and was unsure about whether living in Huddersfield was the best option for her.

For all the young women discussed so far, meeting new people and establishing new relationships was central to their experiences of going to university. Even if things had not worked out as they had expected or hopes, new friendships were part of what they imagined university to be. For the four young women who remained living in Millthorne however, new friendships were given far less significance. I shall discuss their (rather limited) accounts of new friendships in the following section.
This final discussion of respondents’ new friend relationships examines the experiences of respondents who remained living at home. As outlined in Chapter 8, respondents who remained in Millthorne did not engage in the process of imagining new friend relationships in the same way that others did, nor did they regard this as a significant part of their experiences at university. They understood the move to university in educational terms rather than as a vehicle for transformation (of the self and/or personal relationships). The decisions to remain living at home reflected their need for continuity and stability during their studies and, in this way, making new friends was not a priority for this group of respondents. Naturally, they hoped to fit in and be happy, but they did not expect to meet a new group of friends which would replace their old ones. For this reason, they gave the subject of new friendships considerably less attention than the respondents discussed already in this chapter.

When the young women in this group did reflect on their experiences of meeting new people at university, mostly they said that their fellow students were friendly and that they enjoyed lectures and seminars which often involved them working in groups. At times, however, respondents like Mira, quoted below, noted the ways in which living at home prevented them from engaging more fully with fellow students. As Mira states, arriving at lectures alone often lead to feelings of nervousness and self-awareness.

Mira: When I first got to university I found it really difficult to make friends. It was worse I think because I wasn’t living [in Manchester] and [other students] were, so they had all made friends and stuff. I’m still one of only a few Muslims too. There are other Asian girls but only a few Muslims that I have seen. And, in my [tutor] group [of 30] I am one of only two Asian girls. I think people look at
me and see that I wear [a head scarf] and that I travel in everyday and they back away, you know.

Mira recognized the ways in which her decision to remain living at home created barriers with regard to making new friend relationships. Because other students lived within the same halls of residence or, at the very least, shared in common the experience of living away from home, she felt isolated and left out. Clearly, this experience was made more complex because of her ethnicity and religion and in this way Mira’s comments support the work of Reay et al. (2001, 2005) who maintain that the preference for local universities and living at home during study, are often driven by both social class and ethnicity and that such decisions create challenges for young people with regard to ‘fitting in’ and meeting new friends. In a similar way, Husna, who was also studying in Manchester, said that she tried to ‘get in and out [of university] as quick as possible’ and that because of this, there was little time to meet and get to know new people at university.

At one level, one might understand Mira and the other young women’s experiences as difficult, problematical and in rather negative terms. These young women did not have stories of clicking with new friends or the sense of immediate connection that others talked about. As the following discussion of respondents’ old friendships reveals however, for these young women the overall experience of going to university was not defined by their ability to establish new, enduring relationships away from home. Thus, even though this one area of their experiences may appear to have been less successful or fulfilling than it was for others, they were nevertheless happy at university and they reflected on the other dimensions of their lives and relationships which had altered during this time. Within the literature young South Asian women are often depicted as having problematic experiences at university however these respondents did share their feelings of difference and otherness at university and did not meet ‘friends for life’, neither did Ashley or Esther, so one must be mindful of the complex workings of class and ethnicity.
Relating to ‘Old’ friends

This section explores the impact of university on respondents’ relationships with their friendships at home. Many respondents expected their longstanding friendships to change drastically or at least to fizzle out once university began. Only the four young South Asian women discussed above expressed a strong desire to remain embedded within their existing friend relationships and, as I shall demonstrate, in so doing they still experienced transformations to their relational practices and the nature and quality of their friend relationships. Following this discussion I shall examine the experiences of respondents who spoke of Moving on without Letting Go, and those who experienced Bumpy Friendships.

Old Friends in New Places

During their second and third interviews, the four respondents who remained living at home in Millthorne talked in terms of Old Friends in New Places. For these young women it was the preservation of existing friend relationships, rather than the development of new ones, which concerned them the most. They discussed the many ways in which their longstanding friendships had evolved and adapted to the new routines of their daily lives at university, developing new relational practices and contexts for intimacy. An example of this comes from Aayra who was studying in Preston. In the following excerpt she talks about the way in which university study and the shared experience of commuting to Preston added a new dynamic to her existing friendship practices.

Aayra: We’re together everyday either for lunch or to get the bus home. I love it; it’s like nothing has changed in one way but it kind of has, you know, in another.

Rather than signalling a break from longstanding friend relationships, Aayra and her friends understood the move to university as a new period within their friendship. In the short quotation above, Aayra conveys the way in which, by going to university together, she and her friends were able to reinvigorate their relationships with one another. As a result, mundane practices such as catching the bus or eating lunch together became more
exciting and were given a sense of significance. In a similar way, Mira discussed the way in which subtle transformations to the routines that once underpinned her friend relationships, allowed these friendships to take on new identities and meanings. Old friendships thus felt akin to new relationships, they were underpinned by feelings of excitement and represented Mira’s new and emerging sense of identity and independence.

**Mira:** Before [university], we all ran to the same timetable and lived in one another’s pockets but now we have much more time to ourselves which I really enjoy. We are all in Manchester but only two of my friends actually live over there and we aren’t at the same campus because we do different courses […] I think this makes things feel differently, yes. I would still say that I go to university *with* my friends though, because we meet for lunch once or twice a week and we go into Manchester shopping if we have time off. I would never do any of that on my own so it’s lovely to have them around.

It is easy to make assumptions about respondents like Mira and Aayra who chose universities close to home in cities where they would be amongst their existing network of friends. Indeed, these young women displayed the strongest examples of embeddedness at home and decisions based on feelings of relatedness in Millthorne. Notwithstanding this, as Mira’s narrative reveals, going to university was still a very exciting time for these young women and although they may be understood as experiencing this transition together, as a group, their different living arrangements, courses, timetables and locations within the city meant that they were also having separate and unique experiences by themselves. This suggests that young people’s experiences of going to university should not be judged simply on their ability to establish new relationships away from home. Instead, it is imperative to understand how and in what ways existing relationships and relational practices provide meaning at this time and also, how these are negotiated and transformed in everyday life.

Throughout this thesis I have made reference to the impact of public stories, specifically those which emphasise the importance of university-based friendships and neglect to consider the role that exiting friendships can and should play at this juncture. It was not only the four respondents who remained living in Millthorne who demonstrated feelings of embeddedness and a continuing sense of connection to friends at home. In fact, most respondents found that going away to university did not drastically alter their
relationships with friends at home. As I shall demonstrate in the next section, many respondents found ways of moving on to university without letting go of the relationships which mattered to them. For some this was a relief and for others a surprise. What is significant, however, is the way in which respondents’ everyday relationships differed from the public stories which shaped their earlier narratives.

Moving on without letting go

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<td>Catherine</td>
<td>Plymouth</td>
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<td>Charlie</td>
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The common experience for respondents was the integration of old and new friendships into their daily routines and practices. For most of the young women (15) who were living away from home during study, there were opportunities to actively create a sense of togetherness with their friends from home even though they were often spending considerable periods of time apart. Although initially many respondents expressed feelings of anxiety about how such a separation would impact upon the nature and quality
of the established friend relationships, by the second and third stage of interviews it was clear the move to university had not been the wrench many had anticipated. Of course, there were a number of respondents who expressed a preference for time away from old friends, stating that these relationships had begun to feel stale and out of step with their emerging sense of selfhood. Nevertheless, as I shall demonstrate in the following discussion, transformations in communication technologies meant that the process of disentangling from old friendships was more complex than they had first envisaged.

I shall begin my discussion by looking first at Hayley’s experiences. Hayley’s story is perhaps the most extreme example of the ways in which respondents carried the intimacy of old friendships with them to university. Hayley had planned to go to university in Liverpool however her A Level results were not as predicted and in the end she missed out on her place there. While this was disappointing for Hayley, she was able to secure a place on a design course in Salford, where she would be close to home and her other friends who were studying in nearby Manchester. Hayley and her friends created a ‘home away from home’ in Manchester and, in a similar way to respondents who lived at home, this new experience created a new phase in her existing friend relationships. Hayley explains this below.

    Hayley: I can’t believe I didn’t just pick Manchester in the first place. Everything has come together so well; the course, being near my boyfriend, the halls I’m in and being near home as well, like, the bus stop is on the main road and I’m home in half an hour […] two of [her friends from home] are [in Salford] with me. One was at university in London but she hated so she transferred here and she lives downstairs now so that’s great, and erm, my other friend from school just lives a few blocks away. There are others of us at [Manchester] Met so it’s just been perfect since the first day. We’re together all the time I love it.

Hayley’s narrative demonstrates the ways in which many respondents found means to incorporate their friends at home and their new lives at university. The excerpt also highlights they way in which Hayley was able to reflect on the expectations she had about her friendships at home when she was applying for university and how her feelings have changed since then. When respondents made projections about how and in what ways they thought their existing friendships might change, they were speaking in individualized narratives of selfhood and autonomy, albeit with different levels of comfort and
confidence. The longitudinal methodology of this project allows for an understanding of how people construct certain narratives at different times and how these are reflected upon, modified and made sense of at a later date. Thus, while respondents tried to speak to the public story around going to university (making a break, moving on, meeting ‘friends for life’) their everyday realities revealed embedded practices which were bestowed with meaning and significance and it was this which generated feelings of autonomy.

It was not only respondents who had made ostensibly local choices who revealed the continuing significance of established friendships at home. Jenny for example was studying in York, which is a considerable distance away from Millthorne\(^3\). Jenny’s first interview was typical insofar as she expressed a mixture of excitement and nervousness about moving away from her friends in Millthorne. Although some of her friends were relatively close by (Leeds and Newcastle) her best friend, Ruby, was studying in London. It was this friendship that Jenny worried about the most however during her later interviews, Jenny revealed that she and Ruby had found ways in which to be there for one another on what seemed to be an almost constant basis. They were both studying degrees in Accountancy and Finance and this provided a common ground and a sense of affinity. In the main, Jenny and Ruby remained connected through the use of their mobile phones. In the quotation below Jenny explains how, through the availability that mobile phones afford, she and Ruby were able to sustain the rhythm and intensity of their friendship.

**Jenny:** I speak to Ruby my best mate about five times a day! [Laughs]. My God, that sounds so excessive. It doesn’t feel excessive though honestly. She’s doing a similar course so it’s nice to have someone to talk to about that, but I just miss her general banter really. Like, I love everyone at university but there are just some conversations that only kind of happen between me and some of my old friends like Rubes. I miss it, so I have very big phone bills!

Jenny articulates the way in which mobile phones allow our daily experiences to be infused with spontaneous verbal (and text) exchanges with people whom we may not be physically close to. It was important for Jenny to have somebody like Ruby, with whom

\(^{3}\) 70 miles compared to 30 or 40
to share her thoughts about her course and her general experiences in York. Many respondents said that they felt more comfortable expressing worries about university to their friends at home rather than appearing nervous or foolish in front of new friends. Jenny’s regular mobile phone conversations with Ruby allowed her to draw on an existing and trusted source of support. In addition, the way in which mobile phones allow intermittent conversations to interrupt the flow of everyday experiences clearly brought a sense of familiarity to Jenny’s new life in York. Their conversations were not only ‘deep and meaningful’ but Jenny noted the ways in which she and Ruby would call each other simply to chat for one or two minutes. They would share rather mundane information about what they had done the previous evening or what they were having for lunch. This reveals how and in what ways the two friends were able to bring their ‘general banter’ with them into their new settings.

Focusing on the impact of telephony on strong ties, Licoppe’s (2004) research reveals the ways in which new communication devices do not simply take up time or spend time, but transform personal relationships. Licoppe (2004) argues that ICTs provide a continuous pattern of mediated interactions that combine into ‘connected relationships’, blurring the boundaries between absence and presence. According to Wajcman (2008), this ‘connected’ mode does not substitute or compensate for face-to-face interaction, but rather coexists with previous ways of managing social relationships in a changing communication technoscape. This research certainly supports the argument that mobile phones trigger ‘innovative patterns of interpersonal sociability’ (Wajcman, 2008: 71). In addition, respondents discussed the significant role that social networking sites (SNS) like Facebook and Myspace played in connecting with absent friends. Virtual, interactive SNS made it possible for respondents to feel surrounded by their friends at home while they were away at university. Therefore, transformations in communications technologies have reordered the experience of ‘going away to university’ such that the feeling of separation from friends at home is hugely reduced, creating virtual spaces in which old and new friend relationships can coexist. Emily, who was studying in Buckinghamshire, makes this point below.
**Emily:** Some of my uni mates have added\textsuperscript{37} my best mates up here [in Millthorne] as mates on Facebook. I wanted them to do this so they could find out about each other, you know, so they wouldn’t be strangers to each other. Even just knowing what they look like is a start.

Even respondents who had hoped to put distance between themselves and friends from home reflected on the benefits of SNS for keeping in touch with old friends. Sophie for example, was one of the Hopefuls and expressed some of the strongest views about getting away from her friends in Millthorne. Once she was in Warwick however, she found that disentangling herself from her established relationships was not as easy as she had first thought. Moreover, she quickly realized the availability of older, trusted relationships could have a positive bearing on her experiences of meeting new friends and settling in. In the following excerpt, Sophie illustrates the way in which her established friendship networks in Millthorne provided important emotional and social resources during her time away from home.

**Sophie:** We’re [friends at home] all on Facebook - I don’t know if you know it? It’s designed so you form networks on the Internet with either people you know or people you’d like to meet. I am there quite a bit chatting with old friends. Mainly though I have one friend [from home] and we gossip horribly and we’re on msn constantly together and it means that if someone is bugging me at university I can just tell her there and then and it’s private you know and no one can overhear me in the flat. I think if I didn’t then I would go crazy or have fallen out with people over silly things, especially living together you know.

Sophie illustrates the way in which, although hoping to escape her former friendships, by engaging with them on Facebook and msn she was actually able to draw on quite specific types of support as she found her feet at university. She was clearly aware of the benefits of having ‘old’ friends around her (albeit virtually) with whom she could ‘gossip horribly’ and without judgment. Despite her feelings at the outset of this research, Sophie found that her longstanding friendship networks were important in her move to Warwick.

It is evident therefore, that respondents were able to find ways of creating a sense of togetherness with friends at home despite being separated from them during term time. Transformations in communication technologies meant that respondents could experience

\textsuperscript{37} To ‘add as a friend’ - this means to allow another person access to your own facebook profile.
the same kind of intense, everyday interactions with friends at home whilst they lived away. Longstanding friendships were able to leak into respondents’ mundane, everyday experiences at university, thus producing a cushion of familiarity into which they could regularly sink back. There were however, instances in which respondents had maintained strong relationships with friends at home without ‘being there’ for one another in this all encompassing, everyday sense. In particular, there were two respondents who spoke about the ease with which they slipped in and out of friendships at home despite rarely finding the time to meet up with, email or speak to old friends on the phone. Other respondents maintained regular contact but nevertheless found it difficult to maintain the sense of easiness that once underpinned their longstanding friendships. These respondents are discussed below.

‘Bumpy friendships’

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<td>Rachel</td>
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<td>Sahia</td>
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This discussion examines the third key experience that respondents discussed when reflecting on their longstanding friendships – Bumpy Friendships. For these five young women, maintaining friendships at home was a challenging and complex process, characterized by arguments, secrecy and difficult emotions. Respondents did not necessarily spend less time with or speaking to their friends from home; in fact, some commented on the ways in which they had tried to sustain regular contact with longstanding friends. It was more the case that longstanding friendships had lost their easy, natural quality. Notwithstanding the problems that respondents faced with regard to their old friends in Millthorne, what emerged from the interviews was a willingness to sustain these relationships. As I shall demonstrate, this meant that respondents had to engage in new and creative relational practices in order to minimize the effects of going to university.
The first example comes from Tanya, who was studying at Edge Hill College in Ormskirk, Lancashire while her best friend Daniela was studying in London. Tanya had also considered studying in London. However, she eventually accepted a place in Ormskirk where her boyfriend was also a student in the second year. This relationship ended just days before she was due to begin her course. In the quotation below Tanya describes multiple shifts in her relationships with Daniela; the geographical distance, the beginning of new relationships in new places, as well as the termination of old ones. These shifts gave rise to new ways of organizing the friendship and new practices (secrecy, for example) which challenging the equality of that relationship.

**Tanya:** Daniela has changed a lot [since moving to London] and we have had major fall outs, major ones [...] Well it’s basically because she has turned into such an idiot. She basically met this guy yeah, when she first started [university] and since then she has acted really differently and she lets him talk to her in ways she never would if we [her friends at home] were around. She is normally like me, feisty and you know, she can handle herself [...] I can’t hide my feelings [about Daniela’s boyfriend] and I care about her. But the thing is now she hides things from me and I find out through other friends, so there are these secrets between us and it makes things really hard.

It is clear that Tanya’s relationship with Daniela had come under strain. However it is important to note that throughout all of her interviews Tanya continued to refer to Daniela as her ‘best friend’. For Tanya, there was no question that their relationship was centrally significant, despite the shifts that had taken place. What this reveals therefore is the willingness to hold on to friendships which are not always open and honest and which do not always generate positive feelings of happiness and care. Friendships are so often depicted as egalitarian and, especially amongst young people. It is often suggested that disclosing intimacy characterizes these relationships and while, as I have shown, that may be true in some cases, there are occasions when people avoid openness and particular kinds of intimacy because there are emotional consequences of this.

Respondents who experienced bumpy friendships thus revealed a commitment to their relationships and a willingness to make them run smoothly. Often, the presence of new relationships seemed to highlight the ways in which respondents longstanding
relationships were changing, and how lives were no longer overlapping and in syncrony. For Anna, who was studying in Newcastle, the move to university presented new barriers and made her feel cautious about sharing everyday conversations with her old friends. Her two best friends Kelly and Mandy were studying at Manchester and Sheffield respectively and, in the excerpt below, she reflects on the time they spent together in Millthorne at Christmas.

Anna: it’s kind of an unsaid thing between us: when we go home that’s as we are, or were, whatever. If something comes up I’ll say ‘oh, I went there in Newcastle with whoever’ but I won’t come home and bang on about university stuff, stories from up here. They [my friends] don’t either. Kelly doesn’t have all that much to say anyway because she’s home so much and life hasn’t changed much for her. Mandy and me maybe talk about stuff together a bit more, but not loads. I think it’s like if we do there will be too many questions like ‘who’s john?’ or ‘where’s whatever-bar?’ and then it feels really obvious that we’re not in each other’s lives anymore and that makes us sad I guess.

Anna reveals the way in which her new experiences at university upset the balance of her established relationships at home. Rather than providing common ground, conversations about university merely highlighted the differences and distances which separated the three friends. Feelings of closeness were challenged by the lack of shared understanding of each other’s lives. Moreover, Anna’s narrative reveals the differences in their individual experiences, her immersion in university life as opposed to Kelly’s continued engagement with home. These challenges are made visible through the avoidance of what ought to have been ordinary conversations. Anna’s case reveals how university often challenged the easiness of friendships at home and the strategies employed to counter this.

The final example from this group of respondents comes from Caitlin who was studying in Nottingham. In her third interview Caitlin commented on a particular situation which had arisen between her and Helen, one of her close friends at home. She did not mention this in her second interview because as I shall demonstrate, it took some time for the problems within their relationship to surface and be addressed. Again, at the root of her this situation was the sense that equality and mutuality were being challenged as a result
of Caitlin going away to university. In contrast to the examples I have already discussed in this section, Caitlin was largely unaware of the ways in which her friendships at home were changing and because she made fewer homecomings and maintained a lower level of email and telephone interaction with Helen.

As you may recall, Caitlin expressed a strong desire to pull away from her friends at home and was confident about making new friends at university. In the previous discussion of respondents’ new friendships, I revealed how her experiences of making friends at university turned out to be more complex than she had anticipated. Perhaps then, because of this, Caitlin invested more of her time into settling in Nottingham than maintaining her relationships at home. In her second interview Caitlin said that, during the time she was away in Nottingham she was often ‘too busy’ to reply to friends’ emails straight away but that as they were ‘all in the same boat’ this level of contact was acceptable. By her final interview however, as Caitlin explains below, she began to realize that her friend Helen had read the situation rather differently.

**Caitlin:** I have one friend [Helen] one of my best friends actually, well she dropped out of uni in January and she split up with her boyfriend of about three years at about the same time and well, I missed all of this because I was away […] the thing is she never told me [about dropping out of university or breaking up with her boyfriend] so I was like, ‘how was I meant to know?’ I hadn’t emailed because I’m a bit rubbish like that and she didn’t email to tell me because I guess she thought I should have made an effort to get in touch [with her]. She was basically being quite stubborn. But the first I heard about the whole thing was this fairly nasty email from her saying I was selfish and that I didn’t care about any of my old friends anymore and I was so shocked, so upset.

Caitlin’s shock at the mere accusation that she had moved on from her old friendships at home seems rather odd given that that is entirely what she had hoped to do. It is possible to explain Caitlin’s experiences – first her decision to study in Nottingham, away from home and away from friends, and then her horror at Helen’s charges of neglect – by looking at how distance is used here as a way of deflecting the emotionality of friend relationships. Perhaps Caitlin chose Nottingham because she thought it might shield her from the messy and complicated process of re-working the boundaries of friend relationships than if she studied closer to home and had regular interaction with friends.
In addition, Caitlin’s comments demonstrate the ways in which personal relationships are rarely allowed to just end when one’s circumstances begin to change; they are in fact ‘sticky’ (Smart, 2007) and sometimes take on a life of their own without people knowing. This therefore reveals the dynamic nature of friend relationships which may wax and wane throughout the life course however, there are perhaps a series of locations between best friend and old friend and these must be (re)negotiated at every turn.

**Concluding Comments**

This final empirical chapter has demonstrated the lack of congruency between the public story around friendship at this stage in the life course – specifically the idea of out with the old and in with the new – and respondents’ real-life, everyday experiences. In Chapter 8 I revealed that respondents expected, hoped and in some cases feared that going to university would spell the end for old friendships but as this chapter has shown, this was rarely the case. Transformations in communication technologies and the rapid growth of social networking sites like Facebook meant that respondents did not feel separated from their friends from Millthorne as they thought they would. They were able to create ways of feeling a sense of togetherness by sharing photographs on the internet and by making intermittent calls to their friends’ mobile phones throughout the day (and night). Respondents noted that old friendships continued to feel accessible, available and close despite the distances that sometimes separated them.

While transformations in technology had an impact on the ways in which respondents felt connected to their old friends it is also important to point out that, for the most part, many young women had a greater mix of friends who had decided to stay close to home as well as having friends who were pulling away. This combination of experiences within their friendship networks meant that there was a sustained engagement with home and the idea of removing oneself from webs of relationships in Millthorne was unrealistic. Perhaps in the past, the transition to university was a much more clear cut and uniform experience: people stayed home and did not go to university or they left home in order to study. For
the young women from Millthorne there was a real mixture with regards to how and in what ways they and their friends organized their experiences.
Chapter 10
Conclusion

This research set out to explore the relationship between young women’s experiences of going to university and their relationships with family and friends. In this thesis I have demonstrated the ways in which the public story of going to university is one which stresses notions of selfhood, independence and adventure. Moreover, in the UK, going to university is most often understood as going away to university, because there is a strong tendency for students to live away from home during study. Although this trend is beginning to shift somewhat, there remains a popular narrative which enforces a traditional view of (ostensibly middle-class) pathways into higher education. In short, going to university is largely conceived as a thoroughly personal journey, made by the individual for the individual. Such a focus on university study as an individual project is reflected in academic studies, which rarely examine young people’s experiences of kin and non-kin relationships during this period. Chapter 2 reveals that, even when young people’s personal relationships are brought into view, mostly they are considered in the period before university has begun; during the process of decision-making about what and where to study. An exploration of how and in what ways personal relationships are managed by young people as they move through their university studies is largely absent from this literature. In addition, studies which have explored the ‘impact’ of family on higher education choices have done so from an economic perspective. Young people are understood as the recipients of financial, social and cultural resources which they are thought to carry with them as they move into the spaces of higher education. Such an approach, once again, neglects to consider university study as a lived reality and not merely a decision to be made. More than this, however, by framing young people as recipients, this approach fails to recognize the many ways in which they understand themselves as contributing to the social, emotional and cultural fabric of their family networks.
The aim of this study was, therefore, to provide a corrective to research into young people’s experiences of going to university which, for the most part, provides an inadequate discussion of the role and significance of students’ close kin and non-kin ties. By focusing on ‘the process of relating’ (Mason, 2004) this research set out to reveal the ways in which 24 young women from Millthorne were embedded within networks of intimacy (both at home and at university). In addition, this study demonstrates how these networks shaped respondents’ decisions and actions before and during their first year of study. By placing respondents’ experiences of personal relationships at the heart of this research, I was able to capture the affective, as well as the more rational, dimensions of their experiences of going to university. As the previous chapters reveal, emotions, values, moral judgements and feelings of attachment often complicate traditional understandings of how and in what ways social class is lived in real life (Sayer, 2010). Moreover, this research has demonstrated the ways in which social class intersects with gender, ethnicity and localism, so that certain actions and identities are rendered more accessible, comfortable and even habitual, than others.

This research contributes to a growing body of literature which seeks to attend more fully to the matter and experiences of personal life (Smart, 2007). It is through the project’s innovative methodology that I have been able to capture the richness and complexity of respondents’ experiences of home and university. The qualitative longitudinal design of this research allowed for an understanding of the process of change, and reveals the shifting and dynamic nature of feelings of attachment, relatedness and self-identity over time. It is the matter of self-identity that I wish to address more fully here in the final chapter. So far my discussion has focused on respondents’ reflections on their relationships with family and friends, however, these experiences necessarily informed their experiences and expressions of selfhood. This became especially apparent in the final stage of interviews when respondents were naturally evaluative and reflexive about the year that had passed, and how their experiences had altered or reaffirmed their sense of self. Of course, as discussed in Chapter 3, self identity is not something which one merely has, but rather, it is something one is. Returning to Bourdieu’s concept of habitus, it is thought that gender, social class and ethnicity, as well as regional accents and ways
of being, are embodied qualities; inculcated within the self so that they are not so easily transposed. As I shall demonstrate in this concluding chapter, respondents’ understandings of selfhood were incredibly gendered, and classed, and were rooted in their experiences of family and local life in Millthorne. Respondents expressed a strong sense of history (personal and familial) in their final interviews. This not only shaped the ways in which they understood themselves in the present, but allowed them to engage in the process of imagining a future self. It is the dynamic relationship between past, present and future action which Bourdieu’s concept of habitus so carefully depicts.

In the following discussion I shall bring together the main findings of this research and also, by drawing on a small amount of data from the stage 3 interviews, say something about how respondents’ reflected the social or relational self as the project drew to a close. Interestingly, although transformation was a key theme at the beginning of this research, by the end of the fieldwork, respondents were keen to reveal the ways in which they were embedded within stable and constant networks of intimacy at home. As I shall demonstrate, respondents’ relationships with family and longstanding friendships continued to be centrally important to their everyday experiences. Moreover, their expressions of selfhood were based on, and indeed reflected, their experiences of relationships with kin and non-kin. This, therefore, reinforces the arguments put forward in Chapter 3 with regard to social individuality - a self formed through social relations (Burkitt, 2008) - and the idea that individuals are constituted through their close kin ties. Relationships are thus understood as playing a central role in the ongoing development of personhood and individuality (Smart 2007) and this makes it possible to think about how and in what ways relationships feed into the construction of ‘unique’ identities.

The second aim of this discussion is to call for a greater appreciation of the ways in which young people understand themselves as making valuable contributions to the social, emotional and cultural fabric of their family networks. Within education research young people are often seen as the products of family and parental support. This thesis reveals, however, that respondents played active and significant roles within the home and within their family relationships. Respondents made decisions about how and in what ways to
manage the move to university based on their individual positions at home. In addition, the young women were aware of the ways in which such decisions impacted upon the broader experience of family life at home. Using examples from the stage 3 interviews, I shall demonstrate how and in what ways the young women understood their actions as having consequences for family relationships and, also, their broader family biographies. It was during the final interviews that respondents considered the extent to which their own actions were reproducing the values and practices that were typical within their families. Most striking in this regard, was the way in which respondents were able to evoke a sense of ‘linked lives’ even when transformations across generations were apparent.

What has this research contributed?

This thesis has demonstrated the importance of young women’s relationships with places (specifically home) and with kin and non-kin in their experiences of going to university. As outlined in Chapter 4, Millthorne is a town with a particular working-class history and identity and this necessarily impacted upon respondents’ ideas about university, leaving home and personal relationships. Millthorne became a (sometimes unwelcome) marker of identity for respondents as they moved away from home but also, it provided a frame of reference for thinking about how and in what ways to structure their experiences. Respondents revealed feelings of attachment to home which were complex and contradictory, demonstrating the ways in which a sense of familiarity in place can be difficult to shake off, even when this is desired. Respondents carried Millthorne with them, in their habitus, through their speech, their values and the ways in which they moved through the new spaces of university. On occasion, respondents were given nicknames which played on their regional identities; however, this was not something they necessarily enjoyed. On a different level, the emotional (and perhaps, habitual) pull of home was often too great for respondents to resist, despite their efforts to make a break and be more independent. Even for respondents who said they had grown tired of Millthorne, returning home during vacations turned out to be a much more enjoyable experience than they had anticipated. This supports the idea that ‘home’ is not fixed or
merely representative of a physical space. Instead, home may be understood as a feeling; a fluid concept and people’s attachments to home and place can wax and wane over time.

Growing up in Millthorne meant that many young women were unfamiliar with the idea and reality of going to university until they began studying at sixth form. The local culture within Millthorne is characterised by localism, and gendered expectations around employment and care. Very few women in the town are employed in professional occupations and feminine identities are underpinned by strong notions of heterosexuality and ‘family’, in a very traditional sense. Thus, for most respondents, going away to university posed a challenge to ideas around gender, localism and proximity to kin which are strong themes in Millthorne. In addition, because going to university was a new experience for (most) respondents and their families, and because it represented (for all) a world removed from local life in Millthorne, there was an overwhelming sense of expectation that going to university would transform their lives and relationships. For the most part, respondents understood the move to university as taking them away from the clutches of family. For a small number of young women this was welcomed and, because they had an understanding of university through their parents, they were able to talk about the prospect of moving hundreds of miles away from home in confident and self-assured ways.

For many others however, the idea that family life and relationships would alter once university began was rather scary and was, therefore, met with a degree of caution and ambivalence. University study was an unknown entity for these respondents; they were the first in their families to go to university and their family relationships were characterised by a form of intimacy based on proximity. It was because of this complex combination of concerns, hopes and commitments that these young women tried to find a middle space between leaving and staying. They wanted to embrace notions of adventure and independence, yet they also wanted to remain close to home. Universities located within an hour of Millthorne thus held perfect appeal. For four of the South Asian respondents there was also an expectation that university would transform their everyday relationships at home. For this reason, these young women took measures to limit the
impact of university; they continued to live at home during study. It is important to remember that these respondents were operating within a very different value system to the other young women in the study and this meant that living away from home was less significant to them in terms of expressing a sense of identity and demonstrating autonomy. Often, it was the shifting dynamics within the family home (i.e. the marriage of an older sister) that provided respondents with new resources for identity and feelings of autonomy.

Respondents’ expectations of change were not limited to their family relationships. There was also a strong sense that university would signal radical changes to their friendship networks too. Generally speaking, respondents seemed to understand the move to university as a time to relinquish longstanding friendships and for many, it was a case of ‘out with the old, and in with the new’. If old friendships were to play a minor role during this time, then it was expected that new, richer friendships (formed within the university context) would take their place. Again, this idea was expressed with varying degrees of comfort and confidence. A small group of respondents felt they had grown away from longstanding friendships and said that they were ready to move on. Many others, however, did not want to let go of their longstanding friendships once university began. Articulating the need to sustain these relationships was not easy for these young women because to do so would go against notions of individualism and autonomy which underpin this experience. Respondents did not want to appear needy, burdensome or dependent on their friends at home. They were keen to display an autonomous self and found it difficult, therefore, to express a strong desire to keep their friendship networks together. This research thus challenges essentialist conceptualisations of young people’s friendships, which present them as open, unique and special (see Berndt, 1999; Duck, 1983; Hendry et al. 1993; Hunter, 1985; Reed-Danahay, 1999). This research reveals that friendships are, above all else, emotional investments. They are rewarding and risky in equal measures, and that task of navigating change within friend relationships is complex, no matter what stage in the life course a person is at. Respondents had no blueprint for how their friendships ought to be maintained, and this necessarily impacted upon how and in what ways they were able to be open and honest within their friendship networks. The
risk of rejection and embarrassment if other friends did not share the need to keep the network intact was always a concern.

Expectation was a strong theme during the first stage of fieldwork. However, chapters of the thesis which examine the stage 2 and 3 interviews reveal that while respondents expected life to alter significantly by going to university, there was often a divergence between those expectations and their everyday experiences of personal relationships. The interview data reveal that, in fact, family relationships continued to play a central and significant role throughout respondents’ first year of study. This was the case even for those young women who had hoped to pull away and make a break from home. In such instances, family relationships followed respondents to university in the form of text messages, photos and memories; leaking into new spaces at university which were defined in opposition to home. These young women usually made less frequent homecomings and this meant that - far from taking care of themselves - relationships with family required constant thought, reflection and renegotiation during the course of the year. This was not something any of these young women had anticipated. The interview data thus suggests that the families these respondents were living by were actually rather different to those they were living with (Gillis, 1997).

For respondents who were anxious about change, the situation was rather different. These young women found that by staying relatively close to home (within an hour of Millthorne) they were able dip in and out of family life on an ongoing basis. This constant sense of oscillation necessarily had implications for ability to feel settled in one place, and led some to question the authenticity of their student identity and experiences. On the other hand, however, regular homecomings meant that they were able to engage in the (local) practices which constituted family life. This was hugely important for their feelings of happiness and it was clear that day-to-day routines of family life were as important for their sense of self as the more distinct ‘student’ activities they were involved in. For respondents who continued to live at home, family relationships remained largely unchanged. The stability of family life in the present was essential for these young women because they could see bigger changes in the future (marriage and
children in particular). Success, for these respondents, was measured in terms of how and in what ways they were able to fit university study around their pre-existing practices and routines, rather than the extent to which their lives had been transformed.

With regard to friendship, there was also a disparity between respondents’ expectations and their everyday relationships. First, new friendships were much easier to establish than many respondents had imagined. The experience of shared living meant that new friendships were often characterised as immediate and intimate, yet this also meant that they could feel intoxicating and all-consuming. Although friend relationships are often experienced in ways that are both classed and gendered, this research reveals that the affective dimensions of these relationships - the joy of getting to know new people and feeling accepted within a new network, the excitement of meeting someone with whom to share a sense of connection – are not necessarily class-based experiences. Even the more middle-class respondents who had articulated a fairly pragmatic view of friend relationships found themselves swept away by the emotionality of their new friendships at university. It is important to remember however, that the spatial and temporal arrangements of student living allow for this style of relating and for new forms of intimacy to emerge. The experience of shared living did, of course, lead to more problematic experiences for some. A handful of young women felt incredibly alone and isolated in their shared accommodation. Living with their peers merely highlighted the ways in which they felt different to other students and intensified their feelings of ‘not fitting in’. Again, such experiences – though rare - were not exclusively working-class concerns.

It was respondents’ experiences of longstanding friendships that were most striking, however. As the project progressed it seemed that respondents found ways to integrate university into with their existing commitments and relationships at home. For respondents who had hoped to make a break from old friendships, it seemed that these relationships were incredibly hard to shake off; ever-present through Facebook, msn and mobile phones. For those who feared a period of separation, this was not the case. Friendships prospered under their new arrangements and the young women who remained
living at home said that their old friendships had been re-invigorated, taking on new significance in this new chapter of their lives. In each case it was clear that going to university had not turned out to be the wrench that they expected it to be. Perhaps then, because of transformations in communication technologies and also the growing tendency to stay within the local area, *going away* to university does not resonate with young people’s experiences the way it once did. Significantly, however, because respondents were embedded within networks of intimacy at home this meant that the very idea that they were free to move on from ‘old’ friendships was rather unrealistic. This research suggests that, removing oneself from networks of intimacy requires great effort. In fact – and especially in current time - friend relationships have ways of existing and permeating our lives even if our own investment in them has waned.

The stage 1 and 2 interviews were therefore, full of tales of expectation and everyday relationships. Throughout the year that the 24 young women were interviewed, they shared their various experiences of family and friend relationships, from the small interactions to the bigger issues and arguments. The stage 3 interviews took a slightly different tone, however. During that final stage, respondents were inclined to be reflexive; they took stock of the year that had passed since our first meeting and began thinking about how the various events and happenings had shaped their sense of identity. What was interesting about those final interviews was the way in which notions of transformation had been replaced by an emphasis on stability and constancy, particularly with regards to identity. In addition, even though respondents had previously articulated a version of selfhood which was individualized and disembedded, by the end of the project they seemed to understand self-identity as relational, social and embedded in history. This, therefore, calls to mind Bourdieu’s concept of habitus – the rich interlacing is past and present – and the ways in which gender, ethnicity and social class become embodied carried within the self, shaping social action and identities. The discussion which follows illustrates the workings of the habitus and the embodied nature of gendered and classed identities.
‘I’m still the same girl’

During their final interviews, respondents reflected on how their experiences had informed their sense of self. For the most part, they rejected notions of transformation preferring instead to speak of ‘growing into’ or ‘being comfortable’ with their existing identities. This was the case for respondents who described positive experiences at university as well as those young women who had shared more problematic accounts of friendship and living with peers. For example, both Caitlin and Ashley struggled to make friends at university when they first arrived. For Caitlin this was resolved over time, however she grew into her new friend relationships rather than experiencing the accelerated intimacy noted by others. In addition, her friendships at home had also been difficult to sustain and she found herself out of step with old friends who felt she had neglected the relationship while she was away at university. Ashley, on the other hand, experienced continual difficulties with her flat mates in Birmingham and her experiences of rejection left her feeling isolated and unhappy for most of her first year of study. Despite these differences, both young women commented on the ways in which their experiences of difficult and challenging relationships had enabled them to mobilise their identities and strengthen their sense of self.

**Caitlin:** I’ve grown in confidence and I can be confident in new environments now which, well, well you don’t know you can do that until you’re put in that position do you? But me, as a person, *I’m still the same girl*. If I’d changed then, well I don’t think I would still have my old mates and my boyfriend. [My emphasis]

**Ashley:** [going to university has] just well, it’s just helped me to learn more about myself and about the kinds of things I need and the kinds of things I like... *I haven’t let it change who I am*, it’s more that I’ve grown in confidence over the last year and I owe a lot of that to that situation; to dealing with that situation. [My emphasis]

In both quotations, it is clear that relationships were used as a resource for thinking about and articulating notions of selfhood. While, at the beginning of the project, respondents talked in individualised narratives, their final interviews reveal the ways in which self-identity is rooted within their experiences of personal relationships. For Caitlin,
sustaining relationships at home had not been without complication, however, the efforts she was making to reconcile differences and, also, her ongoing relationship with her boyfriend, provided ways of understanding the self as stable and unchanging (‘I’m still the same girl’). Equally, Ashley turned her problematic experiences in Birmingham into a force for protecting and maintaining her sense of self—*I haven’t let it change who I am*. Both of these examples demonstrate the way in which even negative experiences of relationships can act as resources for identity, reaffirming notions of selfhood even when one’s identity is shaken and called into question.

Respondents who had largely positive experiences of meeting new friends at university were also able to express a sense of stability within their self-identity. Harriett for example reflected on her new friendships in Bristol, stating that, ‘It’s so easy with them, *I’m just me, just myself all the time and I wasn’t sure if I’d be able to do that so quickly*’. Similarly, Sophie established good friend relationships in Warwick while also maintaining her friendships from school and sixth form. In the quotation below she echoes Harriett’s comments— the ability to ‘be myself’— and, in a similar way to Caitlin, Sophie finds ‘proof’ of the self in her longstanding friendships at home.

**Sophie:** It has just been so lovely, the whole year. I’ve just been able to *be myself* and I think that has helped my friendships at home. I got so ratty during A Levels and I felt very pressured about where I’d end up. Since starting [university] I’ve been me again and I think that’s why I’ve been able to, you know, to make [longstanding friendships] work. [My emphasis]

Sophie’s narrative reveals the ways in which understandings of the self are constituted through relationships with others. Her older friendships, which had come under strain at sixth form (and which she was keen to move on from), had actually blossomed since she moved to Warwick and this experience allowed her to articulate continuities within her identity. Sophie was one of six respondents who wanted to pull away from home and distance themselves from their relationships there. In the quotation above however, it is clear that she was, by her final interview, more open to articulating connections with home and her longstanding relationships. During the stage 3 interviews respondents generally seemed more able to speak about relationships, about love and commitment and the desire to remain connected, without fear of sounding dependent or unadventurous.
Perhaps this was a result of the rapport which had developed between us over the year; perhaps, by that time, they felt more comfortable opening up. Indeed, the value of longitudinal research is the way in which it enables a close relationship to develop between the researcher and the interviewee. More than this however, the longitudinal design of this project allows for an appreciation of the ways in which people speak differently about issues such as friendship and family at different junctures in their lives. At stage 1 respondents were attending to a particular narrative which stressed the idea of making a break and creating a unique and individual experience. At stage 3, the context in which these young women were speaking and acting was rather different and more settled and this is evident in their narratives.

From this perspective one is able to appreciate the power of public stories and the ways in which people attend to these in their personal narratives. In this case, the public story around going to university is based on what appear to be rather old fashioned (and ostensibly middle-class) notions of *going away* to study. Within this story there is an emphasis on the need for separation from family and friends in order to create a space and time for the self. It is clear, however, that this story is not one which resonates with the experiences of the 24 young women from Millthorne who were able to fit university study into their pre-existing commitments and routines. More importantly, perhaps, is that these young women were not only able to do this, but they very much wanted to blend university and home life together as much as was possible; something which became clear as they negotiated their relationships and homecomings during the course of the year. Had this research simply captured respondents’ expectations of personal relationships before they began their undergraduate studies, one might have drawn quite different conclusions. It is only through a consideration of the ways in which such *expectations* translate into *everyday experiences* that a fuller and more detailed picture of change, and also the working of the habitus, is able to emerge. It was only once they arrived at university that Caitlin and Ashley (and others) became aware of the ways in which their identities (particularly the ways in which they were perceived by others) were gendered and classed quite particular ways. This, therefore, reveals the active and relational dimensions of self identity.
The final point that I wish to discuss in this concluding discussion is the way in which young people understand their roles within their family networks as valuable and integral to the happiness and wellbeing of kin. Throughout the thesis I have made the case for a greater understanding of young people as active members of families rather than as mere recipients of care and (economic, social, cultural) support. As Holdsworth and Morgan note, it is important not to reduce family relationships ‘to a system of resources out of which young people emerge’ (2005: 128). The young women in this study understood their roles within family as significant and this shaped their ideas about university and their desires to remain close to home or to pull away. Those who made regular physical interactions with home did not simply feel obliged to do so; mostly they did not feel constrained in a negative way. In fact most respondents wanted to continue to contribute to their everyday relationships at home. In the same way, respondents who spent much of their time away from home, investing in their experiences at university also understood themselves as reproducing the values and practices which constituted their family habitus.

In the final section then, I explore the ways in which respondents saw their own lives as linked to their parents and siblings, and how they understood their experiences as extending and further colouring their family biography. As I shall demonstrate, even when there were significant transformations occurring across generations, respondents were still able to find linkages and points of connection. In so doing respondents were able to articulate a sense of selfhood which was embedded in family and history.

“I hope in some ways my life will be like mum’s”

In respondents’ final interviews they spoke candidly about their experiences of family life and how the past year had altered the dynamics at home. What was striking about these interviews was the way in which respondents described their roles within the family and the ways that they contributed to the overall experience of family life. Mira’s narrative is a good example of this. In the quotation below she reflects on how life at home had altered since her older sister, a trainee midwife, left for a placement in Malawi. What comes through in the excerpt is the way in which Mira’s presence at home impacts upon
the quality of family life, not only for her mother but also her younger brother too. Mira clearly understood how and in what ways her presence in the family home impacted upon the lives of her parents and siblings and this was an integral part of her sense of identity. In addition to those feelings of love, commitment and care, it is evident that Mira’s decision to remain at home was based on quite specific understandings of her new role as the eldest female child at home. Thus, Mira’s emerging sense of self – her habitus – reveals the complex intersection of ethnicity, gender and established family values.

Mira: Well since [my sister] left it has been strange yeah; none of us have ever not been here, living here. It’s very strange for me because we share a bedroom so at first I felt really lonely at night but then I was ok, after a while. It was more for mum that I worried, she really missed her and she was nervous that she was safe and well you know. So I have helped mum really and that’s why I’m glad I haven’t moved out [to study]. What would she have done then, with two of us gone? I think I’ve grown up you know, I’ve had to fill some extra space, keep things normal for [my younger brother] too.

There were many other quotes which evoked similar sentiments to those expressed by Mira. Respondents understood themselves as occupying important roles at home and as contributing to the happiness and well being of others around them. From this perspective, one is able to appreciate local choices as expression of love and commitment rather than simply evidence of constraint. This supports the work of Fiona Devine who maintains that sociologists must appreciate comments ‘the dignity of ordinary people’s lives, their pleasures in life as well as their pains, their hopes and dreams as well as their setbacks and losses’ (2010: 155). It was a similar story for respondents who lived away from home too. In her final interview Caitlin described her father’s happiness when she received her exam results for the first year: ‘I think he was more chuffed than I was’. By living away and achieving success in Nottingham, Caitlin was reproducing the values of her parents and the family habitus in which academic success was central.

The final stage of interviews revealed the ways in which respondents saw their own lives as embedded within their family habitus. They understood their existing and future identities in ways that were gendered and classed, and rooted within family practices. However, their experiences of going to university and their ambitions for the future often presented challenges to this way of conceptualising the self. Nevertheless, and despite the
differences which they saw emerging between themselves and their parents, respondents tried to make connections so that their own experiences could be understood in relation to wider family experiences, particularly those of their mothers. They spoke about their hopes to reproduce the kinds of families within which they had grown up. These families were typically based on the norms of heterosexuality, in which a ‘good’ mother was one who stayed at home. Generally speaking, respondents’ mothers did not work in professional occupations they had not spent time living or travelling abroad and their lives were lived in a very local sense. As the excerpts below reveal, however, career ambitions and the desire to travel often complicated the ways in which respondents were able to recognize their own lives as similar to their mothers. Notwithstanding this, making connections was important for the young women and also, it reveals the ways in which they understand their actions and identities in ways that were deeply gendered and classed.

**Serena:** Well I suppose that a housewife [her mother’s occupation] and a doctor [Serena’s desired profession] seem very different; are very different things. But, as a mother, which I hope to be one day, well that isn’t so different is it? I hope I can be as good as my own mother, and support my children like she has with us.

**Stacey:** I want to travel and live in different places like Canada, but I like the life that I have had and I like the way I have been brought up so I hope in some ways my life will be like mum’s’.

Both Serena and Stacey recognized that, through pursuing professional careers and by going to university, their ambitions and imagined futures were rather different to their mothers’. For Serena this meant entering a middle-class occupation which contrasts starkly to her mother’s role as ‘housewife’. Stacey’s time at St. Andrew’s had allowed her to make friends from Canada, and working abroad (rather than living in Millthorne) was now part of the future she envisaged for herself. These shifts obviously create tensions with regards to seeing continuities across generations, however, both respondents recognized the values and practices which constituted their families as things that they hoped to replicate in the future. These young women realised that their lives would undoubtedly be different from their mothers’ yet they were also mindful of the gendered expectations around family and motherhood which still carry considerable weight.
Bourdieu’s concept of habitus is particularly useful in thinking about shifts across generations, such as this, without underestimating the ways in which gender is embodied and carried within the self, continually shaping thought and action in subtle ways.

It was in Catherine’s third interview, however, that these kinds of tensions were most apparent. Still, however, like many other respondents Catherine was keen to draw similarities and points of connection as a way of fashioning and understanding her self-identity. In addition, Catherine’s narrative is another example of how and in what ways these young women recognized their impact upon family dynamics. She understood her experiences of going to university as something which was shared by all the family and when she returned home, she brought with her a sense of where she had been and what she was achieving. Neither of her parents had studied at university but they valued education and wanted both of their daughters to achieve academic success. In her final interview, Catherine reflected on her poor exam results and the fact that she would have to re-sit the first year of study in Plymouth. As she spoke about this and the dilemma of if and how to break the news to her parents it was clear that this experience of failure was an individual concern but also one which impacted upon the whole family and Catherine was aware of this. As a result she decided to withhold this information from her parents and deal with the complications of an additional year of study at a later date. Catherine reflects on this decision in the quotation below:

**Catherine:** I doubt [my mother] would see [the first year] as a success, no. She’d say I haven’t worked hard enough that’s why I can’t tell [my parents], they won’t get it. My mum had a much harder life than me; you know when she was my age. She didn’t have all the things, the opportunities that I do. I am far more privileged I think. When I think back to my childhood I was never, ever sad and I always had everything I needed and normally everything I wanted too. We’re very different in that way I suppose…There are things that I’ll definitely do with my own children, like I will definitely send my kids to a church school and mum says don’t have babies ‘til you’re 30 and that makes sense to me; I’ll keep to that. The only thing that will be different for me is that, having come from a more privileged background than my mum, I’ve always had nice things and a nice home, so I’ve kind of come to expect those things. Maybe that has made me a bit lazy; maybe that’s why I’ve failed.

There are many different layers to Catherine’s experience. First, while feeling a sense of shame about her poor grades she was more concerned at how this news would be received
by her parents whom she depicts as ‘hard working’ and as achieving success ‘against the odds’. Catherine was scared to disappoint and even hurt her mother and father who did not see success in her terms (e.g. new friends, a healthy bank balance, an active social life). On a different level, Catherine knew that telling her parents about her poor results would impact upon the dynamics and relationships at home, and because she was only in Millthorne for the summer this was not something she wanted to risk. She wanted that time to be happy and for her family to get along after a long period of separation. Finally, Catherine’s narrative reveals the ways in which she was able make sense of her own experiences as a consequence of the shifts and changes which had occurred within her family over a longer period of time. By placing her actions in the context of her experiences of growing up – specifically how these contrasted with her mother’s childhood years – Catherine was able to thread together the various experiences and values which constituted her family habitus, so that there was coherence and a sense of connection.

The work of Pierre Bourdieu (1977) provides a way of understanding experiences like Catherine’s and the complex relationship between past and present. Within Bourdieu’s conceptual framework, the habitus is envisaged such that, even though individuals are disposed to experience the world in the same way as the older generations of their family and community, reproduction from one generation to the next is never perfect. The examples cited in this discussion certainly suggest this. It is the concept of ‘field’, however, which is important here; crucially the relationship between habitus and field. Fields give rise to certain responses, causing the individual to respond both to themselves and to their surroundings (Adams, 2006). The habitus is thus understood as permeable and responsive to what is going on around it. One can see, then, that Catherine recognized her own life as following a different path to her parents and as being guided by different values (born of a different social context). At the same time, however, she also recognizes the norms and practices which underpin her family life as things that she hopes to carry with her into the future.
This discussion has demonstrated the ways in which Bourdieu’s conceptual framework, particularly the concept of habitus, allows for an understanding of continuity and change across generations. Habitus weaves together past, present and future orientations so that one can identify the ways in which gender, ethnicity and social class become sedimented within the self. Thus, the habitus provides a way to explain elements of variability and potential creativity immanent to even the most routine reproduction of gender/class/ethnic identity (McNay, 1999). Just as Serena was aware of her role as a young Muslim woman, and how becoming a GP might problematise some of the cultural expectations that come with this identity, Catherine saw her own experiences in the context of her social class background, or at least her parents’ class origins. Perhaps Catherine told her parents about her grades before she left to begin her second year, perhaps not. I have often wondered how this situation worked out for her.

Closing Comments

Although there has been a shift toward understanding the powerful emotional component underpinning young people’s experiences of university (see Christie, 2009) this study has demonstrated that it is not only ‘non-traditional’ students who experience feelings of disappointment, isolation, embarrassment and an increased sense of self-awareness during the move to university. Moreover, this research reveals that there are many other, positive emotions which underpin this experience such as love, longing, happiness, and feelings of attachment and affinity to new and pre-existing relationships. It is these positive feelings which are so often overlooked in research of this kind. It is only through the use of a longitudinal, qualitative methodology that I have been truly able to capture the complexity and diversity of emotions which characterise this transition out of home and into adulthood. Follow-up interviews mean that social life may be understood ‘in action’ and decisions can be seen as a process and as having repercussions and reverberations, rather than as one-off events, contained within a vacuum. As this thesis has demonstrated, decisions are rarely individual but involve and impact upon a person’s entire constellation of relationships. Moreover, decisions are a constant work-in-progress;
they are constantly re-evaluated and re-negotiated in the light of past events and future plans.

This research set out to explore the experience of personal relationships and put to use the concept of relationality in order to think about identity and action in ways which challenge notions of individualism. Like any theoretical concept, relationality can often feel like an abstract idea, devoid of context, removed from reality. What this research demonstrates however, is how relationality and feelings of relatedness manifest and operate at the level of everyday experiences. The 24 young women from Millthorne were real people, feeling real emotions about relationships which mattered to them. This research highlights the importance of sociological theory and research which captures the richness and complexity of social life and role of emotions, values and morals within personal experiences. While notions of affect certainly lie at the heart of social life, imbuing actions and identities with meaning and significance, those actions and identities are nevertheless embedded within practices and structures which shape them. It is, perhaps, the concept of habitus (Bourdieu 1977) which best captures and offers ways of explaining the embodied and embedded nature of identity and action. I have demonstrated here, in this concluding discussion, how and in what ways habitus may be used as a way of making sense of continuity and (subtle or more obvious) changes across generations. More than this, however, for sociologists interested in the workings of gender, social class and ethnicity, the concept of habitus perfectly depicts the ways in which these aspects of the identity are carried within the self in the modern moment.
## Appendix A

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Respondent</th>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
<th>Location within Milthorne</th>
<th>Sixth Form/College</th>
<th>University</th>
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<td>Local</td>
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<td>Local</td>
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## Appendix Ai

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# Appendix B

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<td>A Postgraduate Research Project</td>
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## Some Useful Information

### The Researcher

I am Kirsty Finn, 24 years old, originally from ‘Millthorne’ and now living in Leeds.

I first studied at the University of Newcastle-upon-Tyne, where I gained a degree in Sociology. After this, I moved to Leeds where I studied a Masters degree in Social Research Methods. After working for the University of Leeds as a researcher I moved to the University of Manchester where I am a registered postgraduate student (PhD). My research interests are young women, personal relationships and higher education.

### The Project

I am particularly interested the cultural and lifestyle issues associated with moving away from home and living at university. This study attends to these issues by focusing on young women who are in the process of making the geographical move to university (i.e. those who live on campus rather than commuting).

I plan to interview a number of young women from various institutions in the Millthorne area before university begins in September. I then hope to interview volunteers again, later on during the first year of study. The interviews will be in-depth, focusing on things like family, friendships, expectations and general lifestyle issues. The first stage of interviews will take place during the summer of
2006 after A Level exams have finished. Each interview should last no longer than an hour.

**Ethics and Confidentiality**

As a member of Manchester University I am aware of the committee’s stringent ethical code with regard to research procedure, especially with vulnerable groups and individuals under the age of 18. My project has been granted approval by the university and is guided by both of my supervisors (Prof. Carol Smart and Prof. Fiona Devine) who have an excellent track record in ethical social research.

All interviews will be recorded for the purpose of later analyses. However, recordings will only be heard by the principal investigator (Kirsty Finn) and upon write up, names of the respondents will be substituted with pseudonyms to ensure anonymity.

**Contact:** 07813925290 (mobile) / [kirsty.finn@gmail.com](mailto:kirsty.finn@gmail.com) (email)
Appendix C

Aayra
Aayra lived with her parents and her younger sister (12) in Inner Millthorne. Aayra was born in Millthorne and has lived there since birth. Aayra is British Asian of South Asian (Pakistani) heritage. Her mother did not work and her father was a taxi driver. She attended Local Sixth Form College and was the first in her family to go to university. Aayra studied Business Studies at Preston University.

Anna
Anna lived with her parents and her younger brother (14) and sister (16) in Outer Millthorne. Anna was born in Leicester and moved to Millthorne when she was 8 years old. Anna is White British. Her mother was a nurse and her father self employed in the haulage industry. She attended Local Sixth Form College and was the first in her family to go to university. Anna studied Business Management and Marketing at Newcastle University.

Ashley
Ashley lived with her mother and older sister (20) in Inner Millthorne. Ashley was born in Leeds and moved to Millthorne when she was 2 years old when her parents separated. She did not have regular contact with her father. Ashley is White British. Her mother was a retail manager. She attended Hillside Sixth Form College and was the first in her family to go to university. Ashley studied Business Management at Birmingham University.

Caitlin
Caitlin lived with her parents and older brother (20) in Outer Millthorne. Caitlin was born in Millthorne and lived there since birth. Caitlin is White British. Her mother was a teacher and her father was a pharmacist. She attended Local Sixth Form College. Her father and older brother both went to university in the south of England and her mother went to university in the North West. Caitlin studied History at Nottingham University.

Catherine
Catherine lived with her parents and younger sister (16) in Outer Millthorne. Catherine was born in Millthorne and lived there since birth. Catherine is White British. Her mother worked in an administration for the NHS and her father was a self employed tradesman. She attended Valley Sixth Form College and was the first in her family to go to university. Catherine studied Geography at Plymouth University.

Charlie
Charlie lived with her parents and younger brother (13) and sister (16) in Outer Millthorne. Charlie was born in Millthorne and lived there since birth. Charlie is white British. Her mother worked part time as a school secretary and her father was a self employed painter and decorator. She attended Hillside Sixth Form College and is the first
in her family to go to university. Charlie studied Media Studies at Manchester Metropolitan University.

**Emily**
Emily lived with her parents and older sister (21) in Outer Millthorne. Emily was born in Millthorne and has lived there since birth. Emily is White British. Her mother was a retail account manager and her dad worked in a management role for a large insurance company. She attended Greenside College and although her sister went to university in the north west of England, Emily was the first to move away from home. Neither of Emily’s parents studied at university. Emily studied Music Management and Marketing at Buckinghamshire University.

**Esther**
Esther lived with her mother, her twin brother and her older sister (21) in Outer Millthorne. Esther was born in Millthorne and lived there since birth. Esther is White British. Her mother owned and ran a fish and chip shop where her sister was also employed full-time. Her father died when she was 16. She attended Hillside Sixth Form College and she and her twin brother were the first in their family to go to University. She studied physiotherapy at Huddersfield University.

**Fizza**
Fizza lived with her mother and father in Inner Millthorne. She had no siblings. Fizza was born in Millthorne and lived there since birth. Fizza is British Muslim of South Asian (Pakistani) heritage. Her mother did not work and her father worked as a taxi driver. She attended Town College and was the first in her family to go to university. She studied Business Studies at Leeds University.

**Harriett**
Harriett lived with her parents and older brother (21) in Outer Millthorne. Harriett was born in Millthorne and lived there since birth. Harriett is White British. Her mother owned a dry cleaning and clothing alteration business and her father was a railway engineer. She attended Valley Sixth Form College and is the second person in her family to go to university. Her mother went to university part-time when Harriett was a young child in the north west of England. Harriett studied Psychology at Bristol University.

**Hayley**
Hayley lived with her parents, older brother (20) and younger sister (16) in Inner Millthorne. Hayley was born in Millthorne and lived there since birth. Hayley is White British. Her mother worked in a sandwich shop and her father was worked in electrical sales. Neither of her parents studied at university however her older brother was in his second year at Liverpool University. Hayley attended Holy Sixth Form College and studied Graphic and Web design at Salford University.
Husna
Husna lived with her parents and older brother (20) and younger sister (10) in Inner Millthorne. Husna was born in Millthorne and lived there since birth. Husna is British Asian of South Asian (Pakistani) heritage. Her mother did not work and her father worked in factory. She attended Local Sixth Form College and was the second in her family to go to university. Her brother went to university locally. She studied Business at Manchester University.

Jenny
Jenny lived with her parents and younger sister (15) in Outer Millthorne. Jenny was born in Millthorne and lived there since birth. Jenny is White British. Her mother worked as a teaching assistant and her father owned a photo reproduction business. Her father studied a degree in photography locally at Manchester Metropolitan University. Jenny attended Hillside Sixth Form College and studied Accountancy at York University.

Kat
Kat lived with her mother and younger sister (14) in Inner Millthorne. Her mother and father are separated and her father had recently moved back to Pakistan. Kat was born in Millthorne and lived there since birth. Kat is British Asian of South Asian (Pakistani) heritage. Her mother worked in a supermarket. She attended Town College and is the first in her family to go to university. She studied Marketing at Leeds University.

Katie
Katie divided her time between both her parents who separated when she was much younger. With her father, she lived with her older step brother (19), older step sister (22) and younger sister (16) in Inner Millthorne. At her mother’s house, she lived with her mother and older brother (20). Katie was born in Millthorne and lived there since birth. Katie is white British. Her mother worked as a part time sale representative and her father was taught performing arts and music at a further education college in a nearby town. She attended Valley Sixth Form College and was the second, after her father, to go to university. Her father went to university in London. She studied Psychology at Lancaster University.

Megan
Megan lived in Millthorne with her parents in Inner Millthorne. She had no siblings. Megan was born in Millthorne and lived there since birth. Megan is White British. Her mother worked in a supermarket and her father was a building site foreman. She attended Holy Sixth Form College and is the first in her family to go to university. She studied Psychology at Preston University.

Mira
Mira lived with her parents, younger brother (15) and older sister (21) in Inner Millthorne. Mira was born in Millthorne and lived there since birth. Mira is mixed heritage; her father was born in Pakistan and her mother was born in North Africa. Her mother worked at a supermarket and her father worked part-time as a taxi driver and part-time in a factory. Mira attended Valley Sixth Form College and was the second, after her sister, to go to university. Her older sister studied midwifery in the north west of England and lived at home during study. Mira studied Primary School teaching at Manchester Metropolitan University.

**Rachel**
Rachel lived with her parents and younger brother (14) in Inner Millthorne. Rachel was born in Millthorne and lived there since birth. Rachel is White British. Her mother worked as a school secretary and her father was a joiner. She attended Greenside College and is the first in her family to go to university. She studied Early Years Teaching at Liverpool University.

**Sahia**
Sahia lived with her parents, older brother (21) and sister (19) and younger brother (12) in Outer Millthorne. Sahia was born in Millthorne and lived there since birth. Sahia is a British Muslim of South Asian (Pakistani) heritage. Her mother did not work and her father worked for the local council. She attended Hillside Sixth Form College and was the third in her family to go to university. Both her older brother and sister studied within the north of England. Sahia studied at London School of Pharmacology.

**Serena**
Serena lived with her mother and two older brothers (19 and 22) in Inner Millthorne. Serena was born in Millthorne and lived there since birth. Serena is a British Muslim of South Asian (Pakistani) heritage. Her mother did not work and her father died when she was 15. She attended Valley Sixth Form College and is the third in her family to go to university. Her father went to university in Pakistan and her brother went to university in the north west of England. Serena studied Biomedical Sciences at the University of Leeds.

**Sophie**
Sophie lived with her parents and younger sister (16) in Outer Millthorne. Sophie was born in Scotland and, as her father is in the RAF, she had lived all over the UK. Sophie is White British. Her mother worked as a teaching assistant. She attended Valley Sixth Form College and studied English and Theatre Studies at the University of Warwick University. Her father had also studied at university.

**Stacey**
Stacey lived with her parents and younger brother (14) in Outer Millthorne. Stacey was born in Millthorne and lived there since birth. Stacey is White British. Her family is from...
the South of England. Her mother worked as a librarian and her father was a Head Master of a secondary school in a nearby town. Stacey attended Valley Sixth Form College and studied Social Anthropology and History at St Andrews University. Both of her parents had studied at university.

Tanya
Tanya lived with her parents, in Inner Millthorne. Tanya was born in Millthorne and lived there since birth. Tanya is White British. Her mother worked in various casual, part-time jobs such as cleaning and altering clothes, and her father was a factory worker. Tanya had two older half-siblings on her mother’s side (28 and 32). She attended Holy Sixth Form College and studied Theatre Design and Production at Edge Hill University College in Lancashire.

Wendy
Wendy lived with her parents and older sister (21) in Outer Millthorne. Wendy was born in Millthorne and lived there since birth. Wendy is White British. Her mother worked as a business administrator and her father was a lorry driver. She attended Hillside College. Wendy’s older sister went to university in the north of England and her mother had studied at university part-time when Wendy was younger. Wendy studied Earth Sciences at Lancaster University.
Appendix D

Stage 1 Base Data Questionnaire

Nationality

Date of Birth

Country of birth

Town of birth

Can you tell me who is in your family?

Ages of siblings

Who lives at home?

Ages of parents between:

- 37 & 43
- 44 & 50
- 50 & 60
- 60+

What universities did you apply to?

Which University are you hoping to go to?
Friends/relatives at university?

Ethnicity?

Religious belief?

Car?
Stage 1 Interview Schedule (June 2006)

Opening/Ice-breaker

- How do you feel now that you’re A Levels are over?
- What are your plans for the summer?

Home/Local life

- Can you tell me a little bit about your life in Millthorne?

PROMPTS:
Have you lived here all your life?
Where are is you extended family based?
What is the area like?
What makes you feel at home here?
How would you describe area to a stranger?
What kinds of things will you miss about home when you go away to university?
Come home regularly?

Family Life

- Can you tell me a little more about your family?

PROMPTS
Parents occupations, patterns, holidays
Siblings – bedrooms, space at home, journeys to school sixth form
Family and university – older siblings, parents? Link to base data questionnaire
Family and Millthorne – mobility, long histories?

How do parents/siblings/grandparents feel about you going to university?

Involvement in decisions, open days?

How do you think you are similar/different to your parents/siblings?

Friendship and Peers

- Can you tell me about your friends here in [town]?

PROMPTS

What are your friends’ plans regarding university?

How has the prospect of going to university influenced your relationships with friends?
  - do you discuss it? Open days together? Individual/mutual choices?
  -

What kinds of things do you do with friends?

Have you thought about how this might change in the future?

What kinds of things do you and your friends have in common?

Have you thought much about making new friends at university?

How important is this to you?

Educational Background

- Can you tell me a little more about [sixth form institution], size, location etc?

- How would you describe your experience of college life?

- Where did you study prior to this, for your GCSEs?

- Did you come to [institution] with many friends from high school?
- How did you find the shift from high school to Sixth form?

**Education and the future**

- You have applied at [universities] and your first choice is [institution] can you tell me what it is about these places or these universities that attract you?
  - Place
  - Course
  - Reputation of university
  - Friends going too
  - Proximity to home
- How do you feel about starting university and living away from home?
  - Excited
  - Concerned
  - Anxious
  - Prepared
- When you think about starting university, what kinds of thoughts/images come to mind?
- You have [some/none] friends going to [city/university] with you in September, how do you feel about having somebody familiar around/being away alone?
  - New start
  - Safety net
- Do you think life will change much once university starts?
- How do you feel about this?
- What do you think going to university should entail?
- What was it about this project that made you want to get involved?
Appendix E

Stage 2 Research: Pre-Interview questionnaire (Financial Information)

The following questionnaire relates to general financial information. To indicate your answer please tick the relevant statement or write your answer clearly in the space given. Please answer all of the questions however, if there are any questions that you do not wish to answer please leave these blank.

1a. Do you work part time,

A) during term time,
B) during university holidays only,
C) during both term and vacation time,
D) not at all?

1b. How many hours do you work per week,

A) up to 5 hours
B) 6-10 hours
C) 11-15 hours
D) 16-20 hours?

1c. What do you do?........................................................................................................................................

2. Do you receive a contribution from your Local Education authority (LEA) towards your tuition fees?
.............................................................................................................................................................

3. Do you receive a contribution from your parents/guardian towards (please tick as many as required),

A) tuition fees,
B) accommodation costs
C) additional living expenses
D) not at all?
4. Have you taken out a loan from the Student Loans Company to help fund your Studies?

.................................................................................................................................

5. With 1 being the least positive and 5 being the most positive, please circle the number which best describes your feelings about your personal financial situation since starting university:

1 2 3 4 5

Stage 2 Research: Interview Schedule

- Can you tell me about your first experiences of university?

PROMPTS:

Can you tell me about the people you have met at university?
- roommates?
- course mates?
- other friends?
- lecturers?
- similar to old friends?
- close intimate friendships Vs acquaintances

What were your first experiences of meeting people at university?

How do you spend your time at university?

What kinds of things do you talk about with new friends at university?

What have enjoyed the most/least?

Do you feel at home at university?
- How/in what ways have you made yourself 'at home' at university?
  - the place itself?
  - halls/flats?
  - personal areas/bedroom?
  - common areas?
  - decoration?

Can you describe your halls to me?

- Can you tell me what it’s been like spending time away from Millthorne?

PROMPTS
Keeping in touch, family/friends
- phone
- email
- visits to universities
- difficulties

How often do you speak to family members while you are away at university?
- parents
- extended family
- siblings

How do you think university affected your relationships at home?

Can you tell me how it feels when you come home to Millthorne?

And when you leave?

- adjusting to house rules
- missing university life
- missing family life
- managing frequent trips home

How might you do things next term?

How is living at university different to living at home?
How has travelling to university daily changed the way you spend time at home?  
- meal times?  
- social times?  
- weekends away?  
- missing out (at home/at uni)?  

Did you decorate your room/flat for Christmas?

Do you still feel at home in Burnley now that you are back/despite spending so much time away?

- How well prepared do you think you were for university?  
  - workload?  
  - lectures?  
  - friends  
  - domestic

Can you tell me about your course?

Do you feel happy about your choice of institution and course?

What are you most looking forward to next term?
Appendix F

Stage 3 Interview Schedule (June 2007)

Opening:

- Can you tell me how you what you’re doing/been doing during the summer?
  - Travelling
  - Working
  - Seeing friends (from home/from uni)
  - Holidays

- How did you feel about coming home/being at home?

- How do think things at home have changed much during the past year?
  - Millthorne
  - Family home/relationships
  - 2 homes?
  - Shifts between Christmas vacation and summer vacation

Pick up on key issues/narratives from stage 2

{See notes for each individual respondent – relationships, worries, course}

- Can you tell me a bit more about your life at university?
  - Different to first term?
  - Relationships?
  - spending more time away/at home?

- How regularly have you been coming back to Millthorne?
  Does this arrangement work?
  Miss home?
  Miss university?
  Combine or separate home/uni life
  Keeping in touch? Mobiles/facebook

- Who are the significant people in your life at the moment?
  - How has the last year changed the order of things?

Reflective/Evaluate Prompts
• If you walked down the street tomorrow and bumped into yourself a year ago, what do you think you would say in terms of advice and information about starting university and all the changes that come with it?

• How do you imagine your life will compare to that of your mothers/fathers/siblings as you grow older?

• What do you think you will be doing in 5 years time?
  - location?
  - Significant people?
  - Job/study?
Appendix G

Respondents interviewed at each stage

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Blacked out cells denote ‘no interview conducted’.
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