How are the career related decisions of young people from disadvantaged backgrounds shaped during their transition towards the end of compulsory schooling?

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Abstract

This thesis explores the two year transition period leading towards the end of compulsory schooling. It asks how young people who live in disadvantaged locations make career related choices, and is concerned with why such people often do not choose in ways that are advantageous to them. In order to provide a comprehensive understanding of how young people’s career related decision-making is shaped, this study uses an approach that is both theoretically engaged and young person focused.

Thirteen young people took part in the research over two years; interviews utilised visual research and analysis methods to engage with the experiences of these young people towards the end of their time studying at a secondary school in the North West of England. Data is analysed using a conceptual framework that incorporates selected ‘thinking tools’ from Bourdieu (1977) to explore the structural influences shaping career ideas that are typical for this group (i.e. ‘field’, ‘habitus’, ‘social capital’ and ‘cultural capital’). The concept of reflexivity is also used to consider the presence of and potential for these young people to exercise agency within the structurally embedded context in which they are situated.

The study demonstrates the ways in which the career ideas of these young people are heavily shaped by the environment they inhabit and, therefore, typically reproduce the existing, limited range of occupations already prevalent within the community. The social networks participants engage with when contemplating their ideas are critical in this process of reproduction since they mediate transference of cultural capital to the habitus. Such networks tend to be insular and made up of close family and friends. However, there is also evidence that reflexivity within this context is possible, and this can be vital in promoting social mobility - but this requires the creation of spaces where young people can reflect and discuss their experiences and options with actors who are genuinely seen as trustworthy (I argue that this occurred for some participants through this research process). Finally, the study concludes that although reflexivity is atypical for students from socially disadvantaged backgrounds, in certain circumstances it shows the potential to be transformative.
Declaration of Original Contribution

No portion of the work in this thesis has been submitted in support of an application for another degree or qualification from this or any other university or institute of learning.
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Thanks also to my family for instilling a healthy curiosity in me for life and for shaping the foundation of who I am today; my friends, for being patient with me and not making me feel too guilty for my prolonged absence; all other members of staff, PhD students and undergraduate students who have helped to shape me into the professional I have become and am continuing to become; especially, thank you to my research participants for sharing your thoughts and dreams with me.

Finally, I would like to dedicate this thesis to my wife, Laura Pask, who has been my rock throughout a very challenging five year journey, and without whom I have no doubt this thesis would not have been written.
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<tr>
<td>BTEC</td>
<td>Business &amp; Technology Education Council</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DfE</td>
<td>Department for Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DfEE</td>
<td>Department for Education &amp; Employment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DfES</td>
<td>Department for Education &amp; Skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EET</td>
<td>Education, Employment &amp; Training</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FSW</td>
<td>Family Support Worker</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ICT</td>
<td>Information &amp; Communication Technology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NEET</td>
<td>Not in Education, Employment or Training</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NVQ</td>
<td>National Vocational Qualification</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ofsted</td>
<td>Office for Standards in Education</td>
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<tr>
<td>PSHE</td>
<td>Personal, Social &amp; Health Education</td>
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Chapter 1: Introduction

This chapter introduces myself, the research area and the thesis. It will outline: my professional background, a central factor shaping both the research and the approach taken to data gathering and analysis; the literature that has informed the focus of this research; and the overall structure of this thesis that addresses this research focus.

1.1 Professional Background and Research Focus

I come from a youth and community work background, having worked in this sector for 15 years following the completion of my undergraduate degree. My practice has informed both my interest in youth transition and the need for a young person focused approach to gathering and analyzing data. Although my practice has spanned several areas, both in the UK and abroad, my professional interest has remained focused upon supporting young people from disadvantaged backgrounds during their transition from compulsory to post-compulsory education and training. Just prior to starting work on this thesis I was employed with the Connexions service, a government initiative set up to support young people in their transition to adult life. During my time in this role, I recognized that despite significant resources and a very capable staff team, the ability of my colleagues and myself to meet targets for clients perceived as ‘high risk’, and therefore experiencing multiple ‘barriers’ to transition, was hampered by the powerful effects of disadvantage. These young people often struggled to gain and maintain places on vocational courses; courses that had the potential to lead to a very narrow selection of highly competitive career trajectories. Two problems became evident: the frequency with which these young people were choosing a narrow set of career pathways and young people’s retention in these pathways.
With regards to the choosing of narrow pathways, I was keen to understand why the young people I worked with, all of whom were located in the area where this research took place, were choosing similar trajectories, particularly vocational routes such as care assistant, vehicle mechanic or hair and beauty therapy. Apart from opportunities for progression within these areas of work being limited, I was also aware, through my role, of a noticeable shortage of jobs locally. With regards to retention, I was concerned with why many of the young people I worked with struggled to maintain their place on vocational courses chosen. Frequently, young people would fail to maintain attendance on courses despite willing support from a number of voluntary and statutory services.

Having developed significant relationships with hundreds of young people, I began to recognise some of the difficulties they faced. I could see their frustration to get on in life, and began to understand that the problems they experienced were more entrenched than is often anticipated in policy and practice. Furthermore, it became clear that the Connexions strategy was inadequate in terms of facilitating their engagement in career decision making. As a result of this, I wished to understand the issues and difficulties I faced as a practitioner on a deeper level.

I was originally interested in choice and retention in career pathways at the post-16 level. However, my PhD studentship was school based and this provided access to research participants within school, which meant that my circumstances were better suited to exploring the processes by which young people arrived at decisions as they approached the end of compulsory schooling. This suited me well, as through informal conversations with students in the school I learnt that, like the young people I had encountered through the Connexions service, these young people were also drawn to a similar range of narrow career trajectories. In England, the end of compulsory schooling at the age of 16 is a critical moment for young people
in shaping their future trajectories. They are required to make choices regarding the type of qualifications they will pursue in further and higher education (vocational and academic) – choices that are fairly decisive in narrowing the possible range of careers they can pursue (this is more so in England than in other countries) (White 2007). Therefore, it seemed particularly important to investigate how these decisions and their associated career/educational trajectories are shaped by young people’s social environment. The question I chose to address at this point was as follows:

How are the career related decisions of young people from disadvantaged backgrounds shaped during their transition towards the end of compulsory schooling?

1.2 Research Approach

The approach I have used to address this problem was also informed by my background in youth and community work. It was essential to me that I understood young people’s experience of transition through their eyes as authentically and as richly as possible. Having worked with a range of young people navigating difficult transition experiences, and having used peer-led research to inform/gain an understanding of the experiences and needs of young people in order to change policy and service delivery, I had learnt the value of practice being embedded in a young person focused approach. This had led to me developing a deep respect for facilitating the voices of young people in matters that concerned them.

In conducting this research, I was also keen to develop an approach that recognised the social disadvantage these young people experienced and that sought to explain how this might impact on their decision making at 16. This led me to draw on theory and build a conceptual framework that could
address this. Therefore, this thesis will utilise the work of Bourdieu (Bourdieu, 1977, 1984 – 2010 reprint, Bourdieu and Passeron, 1990, Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992), which, I argue, provides the tools to interpret the data collected in a way that adheres to my participants' reality. This framework has allowed me to recognise that multiple ways of understanding the world exist, and that this is shaped and produced by one's social location. Both my wish to recognise the voice of my participants and the need to build an analytical framework that critically explored how social disadvantage might impact this 'voice' led me to adopt naturalistic inquiry (Lincoln and Guba, 1985) as a methodology. This approach recognises that there exist multiple constructions of reality and suggests that the purpose of research is to establish these constructions with participants. In chapter 4, I will explain this approach more fully.

1.3 The Location of this Research in the Literature

This thesis is located within the youth transition, career decision making literature, and, as stated, the conceptual framework and methodological approach that underpins it draws primarily from Bourdieu (1977) and Lincoln and Guba (1985). The work of theorists such as Furlong, Raffo, MacDonald, Willis, Beck and Archer have been particularly useful (Furlong and Cartmel, 1997, 2007, Raffo et al 2010, Raffo and Reaves, 2000, MacDonald and Marsh, 2005, MacDonald et al 2012, Willis, 1977, Beck, 1992, 2000, Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2002, Archer 2007, 2012).

The works of Furlong, Raffo, MacDonald and Willis have been helpful in supporting insights into youth transition (both past and present), and have provided valuable empirical examples that have helped me to operationalise and develop some of the key concepts used in this research. This literature has enabled a richer understanding of the relationships between the conceptual framework and the data, through the exploration of concepts

Beck’s work (Beck, 1992, 1998, 2000, Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2002) has also allowed me to connect disadvantaged young people’s over exposure to risk and their awareness of it, building this into an account of how the reproduction of social inequality is manifesting through the decisions these young people are making. The work of Bourdieu is central in providing a context for this understanding, supporting an approach that is critically aware of structural influences shaping career decisions. The presence and potential for agency within a Bourdieusian approach is considered through the use of the work of Archer (2007, 2012).

Wider literature that explores the youth transition period in the UK is limited in the following ways. Considering the relative importance of engaging with the voices of young people in subjects that concern them, there is a lack of current young-person-focused research that explores the school-to-education-or-employment period of transition. Limitations also exist in literature that engages in theory, which recognizes the implications of social class and place upon these experiences. Literature tends to be either theoretically informed but not embedded, or embedded but not theoretically informed. This thesis uses theory in an engaged way through young people’s accounts.
1.4 Structure of Thesis

This thesis will be presented in five parts: it will be introduced, the literature outlined, the study design presented, the findings presented and conclusions drawn. The first part will introduce the research questions, approach and position within the literature; the second part will position the research within the debate on youth transition, and outline how the research questions will be answered. This will be done through the literature review and critical framework chapters (chapter 2 and 3). With the considerable impact that changes to the transition environment have had upon the way young peoples' decision making has been conceptualized, the literature review has three purposes: 1) to summarise popular interpretations of how young people's experience of transition has changed over time; 2) to outline the subsequent theoretical and methodological trends popular within the youth transition literature; and 3) to argue, with these trends in mind, both that there is a need for a critically structural approach in theorizing young people’s experience of transition and that an account of agency should be considered from within this understanding. Chapter 3 presents the conceptual framework, and will unpack the argument for a structural approach to understanding the research problem and to recognising reflexivity as a form of agency within this structural framework. This chapter will detail the appropriateness of a Bourdieusian approach, and in doing so will seek to incorporate the concept of reflexivity into this framework.

Part three outlines the methodological approach and methods used, detailing how this enabled the voices of participants to be heard. Here, I will argue that a naturalistic inquiry approach is necessary when using Bourdieu in this way, as it recognizes the range of possible realities that exist and supports the detailed construction of participants' reality.

Part four presents the thesis findings and is separated into 3 chapters. The first - Chapter 5 - maps the environment and structural disadvantage present
within the participants' lives using Bourdieu's concepts of field and capital. The second - Chapter 6 - outlines the structure of participants' typical social networks and the social capital contained within them. The third - Chapter 7 - explores the engagement with and potential for reflexivity given the structural disadvantage present.

Finally, part five concludes this thesis and will be presented in two chapters: the first (chapter 8) provides a summary of the findings and conclusions drawn, emphasizing the empirical and methodological contributions this study makes to the youth transition literature. The second (chapter 9) presents my response to the research questions upon which this thesis will be based and its contribution to knowledge and recommendations for policy, practice and future research in relation to education and career guidance.

1.5 Chapter Summary

Whilst this thesis draws on social theory to understand the research problem, the focus of the research is very much about unpacking young people's career decision making in order to inform practice and policy. This will be done using school based research and a methodological design that encourages open and authentic data from research participants. It will be through this approach that I will seek to present an understanding of how young people from disadvantaged backgrounds engage in career related choices, and the extent to which agency is possible considering the structural constraints present.
Chapter 2: Literature Review

This chapter will build on the previous, which presents the reasons for the thesis focus and methodological approach from a personal perspective by moving towards a rationale for the conceptual framework and overall research design by reviewing literature, policy and practice in the area of transition and career decision-making. This rationale is vital to the selection of components that make up the conceptual framework and, ultimately, the lens through which data gathered will be analysed. These components are central to drawing from the data an understanding of the reality and complexity of young people’s decision making, as argued in chapter 1, and in line with the study’s research questions.

The transition literature draws strong ties between disadvantage and outcomes regarding labour market futures (Raffo et al, 2010). The reasons provided for the prominence of this relationship vary – I will explore three ways of understanding it, which will be referred to metaphorically as ‘the train journey’, ‘the car journey’ and ‘the interpretation’. These positions will help to orientate the reader in understanding the rationalisation of transition trends across time and political ideologies.

The train journey represents a structural account popular prior to the 1970s (White, 2007), and the car journey is a more modern, individualised account of transition, but one that recognises the role of our political structure in amplifying inequality. This position considers how disadvantage affects people on an individual level, and I will present this as embedded within ‘the landscape’ - a description of transition and how it has changed. The differences between collective and individualised journeys will be central here. The final position is an account of how this theory has been interpreted through a neo-liberal lens, and the effect of this interpretation upon practice. The Connexions initiative will be provided as an example of a strategy that
has come from this interpretation. It sees young people as individually responsible for their transition, and that reflexivity is valuable to successful transitions; consequently, the initiative supports young people to be more reflexive. Reflexivity is a popular solution to changes identified within young people’s transition journeys, and in this thesis it will form a key component of the critical framework. The final section of this thesis will argue for the importance of reflexivity being embedded within a structural understanding of decision making. It will begin to tease out the characteristics of components that will support this structured approach to form a critical framework capable of sufficiently exploring the complexity of young people’s decision making.

2.1 The Train Journey

A structural account of young people’s transition journeys has been especially popular in early literature from the 1970s and 80s (White, 2007). White argues that social structures at this time were viewed as determinants of labour market careers, and, consequently, literature focussed on understanding these predetermined ‘pathways’, since the social climate appeared to lack class mobility. When recognising pathways in young people’s transition, the effect of constraints such as class, gender and location were seen as powerful determinants of labour market futures. These are factors that structured inequality, and limited the kinds of transitions young people were likely to follow.

Structural accounts have been presented as likening young people’s transitions to travelling by train rather than by car, where those from similar backgrounds travelled along similar transition journeys (Furlong & Cartmel, 2007). The train boarded and the career pathways followed were the result of one’s position in society, as determined by the structural factors mentioned above. Once a train had been boarded, there were limited opportunities for deviation. Passengers travelled with others like them who came from similar geographical locations and social backgrounds, and as a result a sense of camaraderie and shared experience was felt. This metaphor demonstrated
the experience of collective transitions where pathways were understood to be predictable and highly structured. The train journey metaphor implied a lack of agency due to its implication that limited opportunities existed for deviation from the status quo.

Figure 1: Structure Agency Position

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Focuses upon the wider constraints such as class, location, gender, ethnicity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collective</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strong collective intensity</td>
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<tr>
<td>Collectivist traditions</td>
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<tr>
<td>Choices made as a collective</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Agency position</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Focuses upon individual characteristics such as capability, ability to be reflexive, to take risks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individual</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strong individual values</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individualist activities</td>
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<tr>
<td>Choices made Individually</td>
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As suggested in White’s summary of the literature, strongly structured accounts of youth transition have become less prominent following changes to the social climate. White (2007) argues that authors now look to agency focussed theories in understanding the relationship between disadvantage and outcomes. This shift is argued to be the result of a lack of predictability in young people’s life chances, and that lifelong trajectories appear to now look quite different to how they once did (Furlong & Cartmel, 2007, White, 2007).

Beck’s theory of ‘risk’ (1992, 1998), and its subsequent popularity, is an example of a theory that has come from a recognition of changes to the transition landscape. This theory is presented as a way of understanding individual journeys within the context of a neo-liberal political structure. The implications for this structure, or lack of it, will be outlined by looking at the
process of transition, the environment itself and changes that have taken place. In doing so, the popularity of Beck’s work and research that takes a more individualised position on transition may be understood.

2.2 The Transition Landscape

The process of transition is underpinned by passing from one point to another; for example, from living with parents or carers to rented accommodation or home ownership (Heath and Cleaver, 2003). Young people’s career transitions can refer to several periods where a number of important choices are faced. Empirical research in this area clusters around periods between primary to secondary, secondary school onwards and the first few years of work or further education (White, 2007:15). The final two years of school, the period of time when data was collected for this study, is considered by White (2007) to be one of the most crucial points when young people are expected to exercise agency during their transition from child to adult. In this thesis, I argue that this particular point of transition is capable of providing insight into how both agency and wider structural influences impact upon the career trajectories of young people. For this reason, this point of transition is argued to offer a vantage point from which to observe wider processes of social change (Furlong & Cartmel, 2007).

In the past (in line with the train journey metaphor), this period was argued to have required little thought on the part of individuals. Large manufacturing and mining industries offered the opportunity for many young people to follow generations of their families into the same type of work, sometimes even within the same company; therefore, engagement in decision making was assumed to be minimal (Haynes, McCrone and Wade, 2013). This changed during the 1980s, when globalisation and the introduction of new technology triggered a shift and then a continued transformation in the occupational structure of the national labour market (Nayak, 2006). Strong trends were observed in the depletion of low-skilled manual work in Britain and other industrial countries around the world (Bradley & Devadson, 2008, Furlong,
Biggart & Cartmel, 1996, Furlong & Cartmel, 2007, MacDonald & Marsh, 2004). For Britain, the decline in manual work has been replaced by increases in clerical, professional and managerial work (Gallie, 2000), a spread in ICT (Bradley & Devadason, 2008) and the development of a high end knowledge sector such as that within finance and media (Brown, 1999).

Two accounts of these changes will be presented: Ulrich Beck’s understanding, where the new environment is described as turbulent and fragmented; and a developing neo-liberal perspective, where greater freedom of choice is argued to be possible. Starting first with Beck, the changes outlined are recognised as differences between an industrial and post-industrial economy (Beck, 2000). Where industrial work has declined, that which has replaced it has become irregular, unpredictable and exists in non standard forms (Beck, 2000). The changes from standard to non-standard forms of work is, according to Beck (2000), apparent in industrial production, but less so in the expanding knowledge sector of the service society. He describes this sector as characterised by combinations of part-time work, casual contracts, now seen in the form of zero hours contracts, and unpaid and voluntary activities for public good (Beck, 2000). Beck’s analysis of these changes, within his chapter ‘Brazilianisation of the West’ (Beck, 2000), highlights the unpredictability of a labour market where a shift has occurred from a society with clearly defined boundaries, securities and certainties to one where these boundaries are depleted and insecurities are rife (Beck, 2000: 70). These characteristics are described repeatedly within the youth transition literature (Furlong & Cartmel, 1997, 2007, White, 2007, Raffo & Reaves, 2000), and the effects are so significant that they are referred to as a new phase, or ‘new modernity’ (Beck, 1992).

Beck (2000) strongly suggests these conditions to be a consequence of the ‘success’ of a capitalist economy (2000: 2) - although Beck’s tone is one of contempt for capitalism. He states that changes may at first be ‘symbolically covered over, discursively sweetened’ by the rhetoric of ‘independent entrepreneurial individualism’, but Beck believes that, as the implications of capitalism continue to become apparent, they cannot continue to be
disguised as opportunities (Beck 2000:4). Authors such as Beck (2000), Furlong and Carmel (2007) and Archer (2007, 2012) recommend that, when dealing with the impact of this unpredictable labour market, young people can no longer behave as passive recipients; they must take responsibilities for driving their transitions. Whereas, in the past, transitions have been described as train journeys, in this new environment they are compared to travelling by car (Furlong & Cartmel, 2007).

2.3 The Car Journey

Considering, then, that there is now an expectation that young people will lead their own transition journey, it seems more appropriate to use the metaphor of a car rather than a train journey, in the sense that driving a car requires active rather than passive decision making. For example, when travelling by car, young people must make decisions regarding where to travel to, which road to take, how fast to travel, who to travel with and so on. This shift from experiencing journeys collectively as groups to actively navigating journeys alone, and the lack of linearity to transitions, is characteristic of a shift that has taken place in many areas of society. An example is in housing, where linear transitions into a house and family of one’s own have been replaced by ‘fragmented routes and proliferations of possibilities’ (Heath & Cleaver, 2003: 1).

For youth transition, two factors appear to be central to this shift from collective to individual; changes that have occurred within the labour market; and expectations regarding young people who should now be active in their decision making. In relation to the former, the loss of a huge industry that harvested community and collective identity has resulted in these identities beginning to lose their relevance, and weaken.

In the past, young people could be identified as having strong working class identities, including a clear sense of who they were and what their futures might look like – ‘working class jobs for working class kids’ (Willis, 1997). In
the present day, the relationship between class and future is less apparent for these young people. ‘Class consciousness’, at least among lower socio-economic groups, has diminished significantly (Simmons, Russell & Thompson, 2014). According to the ‘car journey’ metaphor, the result is that young people are now starting to operate as individuals rather than as a collective. Individualist values have intensified (Furlong & Cartmel, 2007), and young people are more likely to look to themselves for their success or shortcomings (Ball, MacGuire & Macrae, 2000), and operate in the belief that luck, hard work and sheer determination are the basis of ‘success’. A self-belief that their future is in their hands suggests that young people are responsible for the opportunities open to them in life. ‘Needing to become what one is, is the hallmark of modern living’ (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 2002).

There is now significant tension between young people’s perceived feelings of autonomy and control and the influence of social structure (Helve & Bynner, 2007). The individual is expected to take responsibility for his or her life, and young people seem to accept this (Helve & Bynner, 2007) - they expect to do well (or fail) by their own efforts. Looking to themselves rather than to the structures present in society has led to the weakening of subjective class ties (Beck, 1992), and young people are now less able to recognize the implications of class. However, I argue, along with others, that the ties themselves have remained strong, partly due to traditional orientations towards work and education continuing to remain important for many young people (Shildrick, MacDonald, Webster and Garthwaite, 2012). In fact, Helve & Bynner (2007) believe that opportunities for social mobility for young people from disadvantaged backgrounds are fewer today than 20 years ago. There is arguably more choice of transition opportunities, but young people are not equally able to capture it.

Seeing inequality when these class ties are less apparent is more difficult (Furlong & Cartmel, 2007). There is a danger of these relatively hidden structures being overlooked when the individual, rather than structures that guide them into particular types of futures, has become the focus. The result
is the internalization of perceived failure, rather than attributing failure to a lack of resources or other consequences of disadvantage (Heath & Cleaver, 2003). ‘Individualisation as a reflexive project of identity-formation, mute and obscure the continuing class based nature of structural inequalities’ (Ball, Maguire, MaCrae, 2000:3).

Beck recognises that, although transitions are now navigated individually, where young people are required to adopt calculative, strategic and reflexive strategies, rather than follow obsolete ‘solutions’ traditionally associated with their collective class, ethnic or gender identities, environments continue to shape life chances, and young people can still experience structural inequality. Although he is criticised for not understanding inequality as endemic (Furlong and Cartmel, 2007, Heath and Cleaver, 2003, Ball, Maguire, Macrae, 2000, Pollock, 1997), Beck does recognise that, following changes to transition, inequalities display an ‘amazing stability’ (Beck, 1992:91). Believing previous frameworks to be no longer appropriate for understanding inequality, his understanding of how it can be experienced in this new transition environment is developed through his theory of ‘risk’. Beck (1992) argues that, as a result of ‘hazards and insecurities induced by modernisation itself’ (1992:21), young people must now manage an increasing number of risks, and those who live in disadvantaged areas experience an unequal distribution of them, which make progress difficult (Beck, 1992). Not only do disadvantaged young people manage greater risk; wealth (in income, power or education), which can purchase safety and freedom from risk (Beck, 1992:35), is also unequally distributed. ‘Like wealth, risk adheres to the class patterns, only inversely: wealth accumulates at the top, risk at the bottom. To that extent, risk seems to strengthen, not abolish, the class society’ (Beck, 1992:35).

The risk Beck describes can be understood again through Furlong & Cartmel’s (2007) car metaphor. Depending upon the car being driven and the area being navigated through, transition has the potential to feel very different for young people from disadvantaged backgrounds. They may drive a car not fit for purpose, and consequently experience a number of technical
problems resulting in false starts; the environment being driven through may be the subject of poor road maintenance, obstacles and dead ends. As a result, they are more likely than most to experience a number of problems or risks that make reaching a desired destination difficult. In contrast, a young person from a relatively advantaged background may drive a reliable car along a well-maintained motorway; for them, transition is likely to feel very different. For this young person, making choices regarding which course to take may be filled with anticipation and excitement rather than trepidation and concern.

Although Beck and other serious scholars, such as Furlong and Cartmel (2007), Hodkinson and Sparkes (1999) and MacDonald and Marsh (2005) recognise the presence of structural inequality within individualised transition journeys, there is a danger of these relatively hidden structures being overlooked or underplayed, through a shift in focus from the collective to the individual. Bourdieu provides concepts that offer more than this: he has developed comprehensive and powerful thinking tools that enable insight into the structures that, I argue, are still present in young people’s experience of transition today. In building a conceptual framework, Bourdieu’s contribution is central to understanding why certain types of choices enable social mobility and others do not, and then why these young people are choosing decisions and career pathways that do not lead to social mobility.

2.4 The Interpretation

The final position to be outlined here is that which relates to how individualised transition journeys have been interpreted, through the example of the Connexions strategy, which sees the relationship between disadvantage and transition outcomes through a neo-liberal lens. In this sense, it is representative of wider neo-liberal thinking that drives policy and practice in the area of work and skills. This strategy is embedded within an ideology of free will, free choice and individualism, and offers a response to the transition and labour market changes outlined above, which for Britain
have led to the demand for a better educated, more skilled labour force (Furlong and Carmel, 1997). This policy responded by aiming to narrow the skills gap amongst young people, focusing resources upon the supply of a more flexible and skilled work force (DfEE, 1999), and, thereby, better supporting the development of a healthy labour market.

Connexions was a major piece of policy that was described by Tony Blair as ‘our frontline policy for young people’ (DfEE, 2000:4). It had a budget of £450 million per year (Coles, Britton & Hicks, 2004), and aimed to bring together a significant number of existing agencies, such as the health service, police and probation, the youth service, social services, youth offending teams, voluntary and community organisations and many more, to deliver integrated support to all 13-19 year olds across all agencies (SEU, 1999). This strategy had a significant effect upon how young people were worked with over the duration of their transition from compulsory schooling to full time work, and is responsible for continuing to shape how young people are worked with today in that schools may employ private providers whose approach is often modelled on a Connexions approach (DfE, 2014).

This major initiative focussed upon the role of the individual in meeting the demands of the UK economy. Beck’s critique of neo-liberalism as the cause of increased ‘risk’ and its unequal distribution amongst young people in society was re-interpreted here, and, in doing so, risk was stripped of its complexity and used to identify individual young people who might be perceived as problematic, or ‘at risk’.

As such, the responsibility for meeting the needs of the economy was placed upon the young people. Young people were therefore the focus of this policy initiative, and were seen as responsible for reflecting upon their options to manage their own engagement with the labour market. Beck (1992) recognised this neo-liberal agenda well before the creation of this policy when he warned that presenting the labour market as something that needed to be responded to and handled with flexibility by individuals was problematic, since it suggested a redistribution of risk away from the state
and economy and onto the individual. In the Connexions Strategy, the impact of structural influences upon the supply of a more skilled workforce through greater inequality was not recognised, and this strategy focused instead upon the role of young people in making rational, informed decisions in order that they ‘become’ this desired workforce. As suggested, the Connexions Strategy promoted reflexive decision-making in order to ensure that young people could be ‘helped to make successful transitions to adult life’ (SEU, 1999: 19).

In this way, young people were supported but were essentially responsible for making rational and informed choices regarding their future that were in line with the expectations of this service. The support offered had two parts: the first was to provide a generic service for all young people that offered information, advice and guidance at key moments during the transition journey; the second was a targeted service for particular groups of young people identified as ‘at risk’, who, due to their circumstances, were likely to experience significant problems in making successful transitions to adult life. The particular groups of young people who were identified as being at greater risk included young parents, young carers, substance misusers, young offenders, homeless young people, young asylum seekers and refugees, and young people at risk of underachieving in mainstream school due to truancy, resistance or school refusal. These young people became the focus of more intense ‘intervention’ (SEU, 1999: 19). The purpose was to support them in making decisions that resulted in the removal of barriers to education, employment or training.

Young people were categorised as either level 1, 2 or 3, depending upon their identified level of risk. In doing so, any agency disappears with the idea of risk of failure. High risk ‘clients’ would be flagged as level 1, as they were thought to be at highest risk of becoming NEET (Not in Employment Education or Training) due to factors such as having recently received a youth offending order, school attendance falling below 50%, social services involvement and so forth. The more risks a young person was identified as having, the more intense the level of engagement required. The allocated
resources were targeted at working with young people as early in their ‘risk careers’ as possible, in order to prevent them becoming NEET (Hoggarth et al, 2004).

Each level 1 client was provided with a Community Personal Adviser (CPA), a worker who specialised in managing a high-risk caseload. Work with these young people often began with an 18-point evaluation framework, APIR (assessment, planning, implementation and review), that attempted to systematically personalise young people’s ownership of their career decisions and actions with a view to empowering them to remove barriers to education, employment or training (EET) (Raffo, 2006). Once barriers had been identified with the young person, the adviser worked with them to reflect upon what needed to happen in order to move forward, so that they could be one step closer to achieving an EET destination. Having made a choice based on this individualised reflexive thinking, young people were then expected to carry out actions to meet their aspirations and needs (Raffo, 2006). If barriers to EET were removed, and the young person was thought to be relatively stable, they were promoted to level 2 on the system. All interventions, whether targeted or not, were recorded by a team of Personal Advisors onto a database system called ‘core’. This was a national database that had a record of every young person between the ages of 13-19, and it included all interventions performed by Connexions staff and other agencies with information sharing agreements. It was on this database that young people were categorised as either level 1, 2 or 3, depending upon their identified level of risk. Level 2 and level 3 clients, who were thought to be at least risk, were only required to be worked with once, at the end of either year 10 or year 11.

The Connexions Initiative has now been disbanded, and the budget for this work has been given to schools. The Department for Education ‘Careers guidance and inspiration in schools’ (2014) report outlines what is expected of schools with regards to supporting students’ transitions. Schools are now responsible for securing independent career advice for students with an
emphasis on this being through ‘real life contacts’, that this will be assessed through Ofsted and that vulnerable, at risk young people will be prioritised.

Having outlined the Connexions approach, its interpretation of Beck’s concept of risk and also reflexivity from a neo-liberal standpoint, I will now move on to critique this position in order to anticipate the requirements for a conceptual framework that offers more. There are two fundamental problems with the neo-liberal position discussed: one, that it is structurally weak; two, that it operates a deficit model when working with young people. With regards to the former, the structural weakness stems from the lack of acknowledgment of powerful structural factors underpinning what Ball et al (2002) refer to as ‘decision making’, rather than choice due to decision making, alluding to both power and constraint. Ball et al (2002) argue that the presence of choice as central to a neo-liberal ideology assumes a kind of formal equality that obscures the effect of real inequality. I argue that structural factors are still central to how young people make career related decisions, especially given the social and economic changes outlined in this chapter.

Furlong and Cartmel (2007) state that, from within an understanding of individualisation and risk, ‘experience[s] can still largely be predicted using knowledge of individual locations with social structures, class and gender divisions remaining central to an understanding of life experiences’ (Furlong and Cartmel, 1997:2). Sparkes and Hodkinson (1996) furthers this, stating that although young people may now go through different processes during transition, the outcomes are essentially the same. They believe that structures are so strong that an expert outsider may predict the range of opportunities and types of trajectories young people will follow - not individual destinations but significant trends regarding types of trajectories. We know from exploring Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (2002) that it is possible to present an individualised account of the structural factors. Roberts et al (1994) calls this: ‘structured individualisation’, where the focus is placed upon the hierarchical relationship between people themselves rather than the structures that position these people according to, for example, resources...
held. The Connexions policy and the ideology that informed it failed to see the presence and complexity of structure, and it therefore does not engage with a realistic portrayal of decision making amongst young people in disadvantaged areas and how they can best be supported.

In addition to the absence of a structural account, the responsibility placed upon individual young people for their successful transition, and the singling out of those who are in danger of not transitioning ‘successfully’, has led to the operationalisation of a deficit model. As well as problematizing large numbers of young people, the designation of young people outside of or at risk of being outside of education and work as NEET individualises non-participation and, at least in official discourse, tends to overlook social and economic inequalities (Simmons, Russell & Thompson, 2014). As predicted by Beck (1992), this reframing had the consequence of firmly shifting blame away from the state and economy to the young people themselves. Young people were being held responsible for their ability to deal with a number of damaging risks affecting their opportunities in life. Furlong and Cartmel (1997) argue that young people believing they are responsible for their own failure has become a more popular way of understanding differences in society, arguably more so than class positions.

2.5 Reflexivity

The concept of reflexivity has been adopted as a solution to navigating transition in the new environment of late modernity in order to address the skills gap and up-skill the workforce (DfEE, 1999). Ball et al (2002) believe that this was always the plan, and that the concept of choice was adopted by New Labour to argue that young people may overcome disadvantage by adopting a reflexive approach to planning their future (Ball et al, 2002). This theory seems to have an underlying assumption that if only young people from disadvantaged backgrounds would think a little harder about their future, then they would make better decisions, i.e. decisions in line with contributing towards a healthier labour market.
Reflexivity is a popular concept both in literature, practice and policy, and although it can come from an individualist, neo-liberal position, this is not always the case, and there are other researchers who come from alternative positions when considering the potential for this concept within youth transition (Archer, 2007, Beck, 2002).

Beck, for example, sees reflexivity as a method for safeguarding against risk when discussing the unpredictability of jobs, believing that it is unclear how young people should respond to this ‘turbulent market’ (Beck, 2000:3). He uses language such as that people are ‘forced’ to take charge of their own lives, emphasising the importance of managing risk (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 2002). Young people must conceive of themselves as do-it-yourself producers of meaning and biography - ‘each person’s biography is removed from given determinations and placed in his or her hands, open and dependent on decisions’ (Beck, 1992: 135). Therefore, it seems that Beck believes that although young people should not be held responsible for navigating these environments, ultimately they are.

Although this argument recognises structured individualism (Roberts et al, 1994), it is still argued by some (Health and Cleaver, 2003) that Beck’s framework doesn’t adequately elaborate upon the structural conditions that neo-liberalism downplays. For him, the attention placed upon structurally embedded inequality is insufficient. Beck does not recognise inequality to be endemic, and instead he is surprised by the stability of transition trends. As a result, the form of reflexivity his theory suggests does not specify the different experiences of reflexivity associated with individuals in different social locations.

As identified by Brann-Barrett (2011), there are variations in how young people experience transition, and subsequently how they respond to it through reflexivity. What it means for a person within a particular discourse to walk, talk, dress and think reflexively is bound by other factors (Bialostock, Whitman & Bradley, 2012). The neo-liberal conceptualisation of reflexivity assumes that young people want certain types of jobs, though these jobs
may or may not fit their aspirations. This notion of reflexivity offers a narrowly middle-class model of identity and cultural value (Brann-Barrett, 2011). Therefore, in order to develop a realistic understanding of the potential for reflexivity to shape outcomes in light of structural powers, we require not only an understanding of these structures but also to recognise their effect upon young people’s engagement in reflexivity and subsequent outcomes.

Throughout this thesis I will build upon Beck by arguing that in order for an account more faithful to the lived experience of young people to be presented, the environment in which decision making is taking place must be understood. This will be achieved through the development of a conceptual framework that not only understands inequality structurally, but then allows for an account of the potential for agency through the concept of reflexivity. I will consider how reflexive decision making is shaped by the structural environment in which young people are located physically. In doing so, the intention is to understand how young people might best be supported to achieve their desires in the complex worlds they navigate.

2.6 Chapter Summary

To summarise, then, this chapter has outlined three distinct positions that rationalise trends in transition outcomes for young people such as those involved in this study. These arguments or standpoints are historically located, as well as varying their focus on structural processes or agentic action and reflexivity. By exploring these arguments critically, I have begun to suggest the rationale for how this thesis will understand transition outcomes; an understanding that will be supported through the operationalisation of a critical theoretical framework that will be outlined in the next chapter. I have suggested the need for a research approach that recognises both structural influences and individual agency, and sees young people’s decision making as a social process mediated by both. It is only by using such an approach that we can explain endemic and unequal trends in young people’s decision making regarding their career and college options, which continue to relate to
social location. However, in doing so we must also allow for the possibility of social mobility on the part of individuals. Therefore, this critical framework will position reflexivity within a structural account of decision making in order to understand the effect of these constraints upon the kind of reflexivity taking place.
The previous chapter has presented an overview of youth transition literature in relation to the research focus. This literature has been organized around explanations for why young people from disadvantaged backgrounds choose certain types of transition pathways. In outlining how trends in these explanations have changed over time, it highlights a number of limitations in previous research and moves towards an approach that balances a critically structured account of young people's decision making with an embedded understanding of agency. Here, I argue that such an approach requires a conceptual framework that enables an interpretation of how decision making is mediated by structure while also considering the potential for agency within structural constraints. It is only by utilising such a framework that it is possible to provide a comprehensive understanding of why disadvantaged young people choose in the way they do.

This framework will begin with a structural account of inequality using Bourdieu's theory of cultural and social reproduction. In his book, ‘Outline of a theory of practice’, Bourdieu presents a theoretical framework concerned with how human action should best be understood (Bourdieu, 1977). Within this, and in his wider work, he has created a number of ‘thinking tools’ that are invaluable in understanding the nature and process by which structural inequalities are produced and reproduced across a range of social institutions and practices. The tools presented in this book can be used to investigate the endemic nature of inequality, which produces and reproduces the take up of occupations that are classed and gendered. Therefore, to understand the process of decision making within career transition, a selection of these tools are utilised to see why young people choose in ways that are not necessarily advantageous to them.

The tools selected from Bourdieu’s portfolio of concepts are: Social Capital, Cultural Capital, Field and Habitus. In addition to these concepts, reflexivity
will be used to consider the extent to which agency is possible within the structural framework provided by Bourdieu's theory. This will help me to explore the nature of young people's capacity to reflect, and to explore its prevalence within the group of young people I have worked with. Each of these concepts performs a very different role in unpicking the complexity of the research data. This chapter will be structured, then, by presenting the role of each element of the conceptual framework in turn. It is through an understanding of these concepts that insight is provided into the tensions participants experience when navigating their transition journey.

3.1 Summary of the Concepts

In the following sections, each concept will be presented in turn, and suggestions made regarding how they will be operationalized through the research. First, though, the relationship between each of the five main concepts will be summarized in order to gain an overview of how they work together as one framework.

In summarizing these concepts, capital is a useful starting point; it enables an understanding of the structuring and arrangement of people, institutions and places in society. This concept acts as currency within spaces or 'fields' (Bourdieu, 1977) that people inhabit. There are four types of capital: financial (an individual’s income or savings); human – sometimes also referred to as cultural capital (the education and skill a person has gained); physical – also known as symbolic capital (material goods such as a Playstation or books); and cultural capital (cultural knowledge, abilities and experience) (Bassani, 2007). We can interpret an individual young person's habitus as made up of different forms of capital. As fields vary in their possession of capital, so do habituses embedded within them, as they reflect each other.

Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992) refer to different forms of capital as 'species' of trump cards in a game, stating that three forms or species remain present in each field or 'game' (cultural, social and financial), but that the relative
presence of them and value attributed to their type varies depending upon the field concerned. As a consequence, the level and types of capital held by people occupying fields should be understood as relative to that which is contained and valued within the field itself. Understanding the position of these people within their field depends as well upon the form and level of capital held inside their habitus, and the relative value of this capital considering the field occupied (Bourdieu, 1977, Bourdieu and Passeron, 1990).

The types of capital that will form components of my conceptual framework here are social and cultural capital. The content and structure of social networks are central to the types of cultural capital utilised from the field; this concept enables the placement of focus upon these networks and the capital they typically produce. I will outline this process in more detail below.

Moving on from capital to the concept of field (Bourdieu, 1977, Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992): as stated, this term refers to the environment that dictates which capital is or is not valued. A society can be broken down into many fields; what defines a field is the capital valued within it, and the habitus of individuals who occupy it. Families, schools and industries are examples of fields that can be studied through this concept, enabling an understanding of how different parts of society are structured in relation to one another (Bourdieu, 1977). The capital contained within a field, and the value attached to it as determined by the field of power (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992), will affect its position in relation to others like it. Habitus (Bourdieu, 1977, Bourdieu, 1984 – 2010 reprint) is largely responsible for determining the capital present within fields, as the capital contained inside the habitus of actors who occupy them is significant in shaping what is available. This creates a structure that, although fluid, is self managing, and continues to reinforce advantage and disadvantage through the structured accumulation of capital by groups in positions of power, as dictated by the field and the field of power.
As stated, the concepts that have been selected and outlined above are intended to provide a structural understanding of decision making, presenting it as part of an embedded social practice. However, agency lies in the space for change within this structure, and can, over time, shape the positioning of habituses, fields or even the structure itself through individuals acting in ways that contribute to and reproduce these existing structures, or in ways that contribute to them changing. This is important when considering how we might develop practices that support decision making in ways that support social mobility.

In order to consider the potential for agency in my research, I will also include reflexivity in the conceptual framework and argue that this provides a space between habitus and ‘practice’ (Bourdieu 1977); to reflect on decision making, in this case. My version of reflexivity includes an awareness of the social structure and a willingness to make decisions that change it, i.e. to enable social mobility. By including this concept in my framework, I am able to explore the presence of reflexivity in students' accounts of their decision-making, and how this is mediated by the other concepts of capital, field and habitus. This is not to say that Bourdieu did not recognize the value in reflexivity as a tool for social change; whilst Bourdieu's theory is frequently used for and accused of structural determinism, he also wrote about reflection (e.g. the reflexive sociologist), and was adamant that this was an essential tool for social change. However, as I am interested in capturing young people’s use of reflexivity, and Bourdieu’s version refers to sociologists, this version of reflexivity is inappropriate. Now that a summary of the components of the conceptual framework have been outlined, the relationship between each can be understood.

3.2 The Concept of Field

The concept of field will be used to understand and explore the research environments that participants occupy, so that the content of these environments can be located within a wider landscape of structured,
interconnected and overlapping fields. Each field is defined by the forms and levels of capital typically present within it (Bourdieu, 1977), and, although fields are complex and difficult to pin down, they can be separated by boundaries. These boundaries are defined by Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992) as ‘situated at the point where the effects of the field cease’ (1992:100), who go on to refer to them as ‘dynamic borders which are the stake of struggles within the field itself’ (1992:104). For example, the school field’s boundary stops where its influences cease; learning may cease outside the walls of the school building or it may continue into the home through homework or other activities. This field is part of a number that form the wider field of the education market. Field areas such as this are dominated by a field of power that sits at the top of this hierarchy, dictating their structure by controlling what capital is of value in subsequent fields; other fields are not just independent and autonomous but look to the field of power and the capital it holds. The extent to which subsequent fields contain forms of capital that are valued by the field of power structures their position, creating the structured landscape of fields that cover society. The position of a given field therefore directly relates to how much valued capital is available within it and the opportunities for actors to acquire this capital.

In this thesis, field position will be understood as contributing to the type of reality participants construct with regards to how they see and experience transition. I will argue that the fields relevant to how research participants make career related choices are family and community, school and peer fields. Due to the location of these fields being in a disadvantaged area, the forms of capital available within them are not sufficiently valued by the field of power; therefore, although they contain various forms and levels of capital, the ‘transposability’ (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990) of this capital is limited. Transposability refers to capital being capable of generating practices conforming with the principles of a greater number of different fields (Bourdieu and Passeron 1990: 33). Therefore, capital which lacks transposability holds limited value outside of the field concerned and perhaps certain other fields of low status. In other words, fields in deprived areas contain deficient amounts of valued capital, and that this subsequently
maintains and reproduces their low-status position in relation to the field of power and the position of actors within them. In contrast, valued and therefore transposable capital (in relation to the field of power) is concentrated in affluent areas. This correlation is due to the influence of the field of power structuring all other fields, and therefore dictating what capital is valued in a wider sense.

An example of capital with limited transposability is that generated within the school field in this study. The school involved in this research mostly offers vocational qualifications to students, such as BTECs in hair and beauty and construction; as such, this type of qualification is the school’s major form of cultural capital. Although these qualifications are valued in the school, family and community fields within the area of the estate, the value of these subjects is limited in the broader field of power, as well as many other fields of power within the employment market. One might argue that higher-level fields tend to perceive academic rather than vocational qualifications as representative of ability, and therefore holding greater legitimacy.

Although fields in disadvantaged locations are limited in capital that is valued in other fields, Bourdieu and Passeron (1990) do recognize, to a certain extent, the importance of capital with specialism. This term refers to capital having value mainly within the field of interest. For example, some of the young people I interviewed spoke of their informal skills in hairdressing, which was highly valued within the peer field, providing them status here. However, capital with specialisation does not necessarily have transposability, and even highly developed skills in creating certain types of hair styles, those that offer distinction (Bourdieu, 1984 – 2010 reprint), for example, within the peer, school and perhaps community and family fields, lose value in fields that sit outside of these, as a result of differing tastes and value judgments. Therefore, the potential for hairdressing skills to be transposable to other fields, especially those that sit closer to the field of power, is low. Cultural capital has highest value when it is a) most highly formed and b) optimised in terms of transposability (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990).
Capital not having transposability affects both the field’s position in relation to other fields and the habitus of actors present within. The school field sits on the periphery of the wider education market, and its participants are therefore restricted in their access to other fields due to their access to capital with transposability. The school field, therefore, shapes students’ educational and career trajectories through the types and levels of cultural capital present within; this goes on to reshape the school field, as the field itself could not exist without its collection of habituses, as it is the organization of actors within the field acting upon the content of their habitus that populates it, and provides it with its capital, rules, structure and purpose.

With this in mind, the capital present within fields and the value attributed to this capital structures the field. Field structure is both flexible in some senses and constraining in others, as these structures limit the reshaping of the field (reproduction rather than production), and tend to keep fields fairly consistent. A field therefore contains potentialities, and those within it have a probable future - i.e. a future trajectory that is defined by the relation of the habitus and field. Probable futures are the result of the habitus becoming adapted by time in the field, the consequence of which can be referred to as ‘collective consciousness’ (Bourdieu, 1984 – 2010 reprint), the type of habitus common for the field. In the case of the young people I interviewed, this collective consciousness can be recognized in the employment ideas, college ideas and qualifications common for participants to want to pursue. Conversations within interviews were where these potentialities were communicated, and, therefore, I will argue that the interviews revealed some degree of the collective habitus present within the participants' fields (peer group, community, family). In this sense, we can say that there is a typical

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1 Although the school offers BTEC qualifications which could theoretically be exchanged for higher status positions in higher status fields (i.e. university) - typically this was not the case. Since a) they were level 2 qualifications mostly and b) they were in vocational subjects which are less likely to be seen as university entrance qualifications. In fact given the status of the fields outlined here, the habitus produced was not disposed to see entrance to university as a possibility and as such qualifications were not seen as transposable even if theoretically this could be done.
future trajectory that many of the young people interviewed aligned with, and that this was the product of both the fields they belonged to and of the collective habitus defined by those fields.

At this point, it is important to note that whilst I will outline multiple fields in this study, there was some commonality amongst these fields, particularly in relation to career options and decision-making.

3.3 The Concept of Habitus

Bourdieu (1977) refers to the habitus as a system of dispositions that are permanent manners of being, seeing, acting and thinking; these 'manners' produce individual and collective practices (Bourdieu, 1977:82). More than this, the habitus holds capital that is central to how practice is informed, and defines what is possible considering the relationship between capital held and the value attributed to it in the field (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992). In the case of this study, it is these dispositions that affect the career pathways followed; pathways that are likely to be typical of others occupying the fields. With this in mind, activities that contribute to the shaping of the habitus will now be considered.

As has been suggested, the shaping of the habitus is an extremely complex process. It is the result of time spent inhabiting different fields, and is developed through the continual repetition of different types of 'pedagogic action' (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1990) by actors who share and are aligned with the field, creating a 'cultural arbitrary' (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1990), a space where certain ways of being and acting exist. Pedagogical actions and cultural arbitrary are intentionally broad concepts, when referring to the first term Bourdieu states: 'They apply to any social formation, understood as a system of power relations and sense relations between groups or class' (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1990: 5 original emphasis). In this way power relations are causing certain types of actions among, in this case, classed members. For example, like the telling of a story regarding a college visit,
within which messages regarding what is valued and feared are communicated (pedagogic action). The repetition of stories like this, with similar messages, creates and reinforce values and expectations regarding the type of colleges desired (pedagogic arbitrary).

It is best to imagine the habitus as developing over time in the given field, and Bourdieu assigns disproportionate weight to actions that take place earlier, i.e. early in life, ‘since the present amounts to little compared with the long past in the course of which we were formed and from which we result’ (Bourdieu, 1977: 79). Early experience in childhood is central, especially regarding actors’ reception of and assimilation to the pedagogic message (Bourdieu, 1977: 87) of particular fields. Activities within the family field, therefore, underline the structuring of school experiences. The diagram below (proportionate influence of fields) demonstrates the disproportionate weight given to the influence of fields occupied earlier in a person’s development.

Figure 2: Proportionate Influence of Fields

In this way, family experience underpins school experience, which then underlies the structuring of the further education or work experiences and so forth; the earlier the experience, the more significant the influence. Fields occupied and positions within them are, therefore, the result of a series of chronologically ordered pedagogic actions that are shaped by the pedagogic arbitrary of the field concerned. Dispositions of the habitus are consistently shifting and developing over time. The ‘deep, interior, epicenter containing many matrices’ described by Reay et al (2011) is made up of the internalization of layer upon layer of experiences both past and present.
Habitus variations (i.e. between individuals) are strongly linked to field position, the timing of activities that take place within them and the position of actors within the field. This leads to the unique integration of actors within fields where certain types of habitus fit, and, thus, actors feel comfortable spending time.

Coming back to the idea of ‘collective consciousness’ (Bourdieu, 1984 – 2010 reprint), fields create experiences statistically common for members of that class or group. The result of the creation of the habitus, then, is that it becomes the basis of all perceptions and apprehensions of all subjective experience. It creates actors' worldviews, enabling the anticipation of certain reactions that become unconscious - i.e. the second nature of the habitus. A person’s habitus creates a framework that makes some possibilities inconceivable, others improbable and a limited range acceptable. Therefore it is the habitus, molded by time in the field, that shapes the decisions young people make in relation to their future. The habitus incorporates everything these participants are, ‘a complex internalized core’ (Reay, 2011) responsible for all internal and external thoughts and actions. Even more than this, it is in a never ending process of construction, with individual biographies and stocks of capital in constant tension or alignment with the field, thus enabling the thoughtfulness of the habitus as a factor that in turn enables people to go about their daily lives without having to consider every move (Bourdieu, 1977).

Heath, Fuller, & Paton (2008) refer to Bourdieu when stating that the habitus shapes future actions, disposing individuals towards following certain courses of action and regarding certain types of behavior as ‘normal’. In the case of this study we will see that 'normal' pathways tended to be vocational, gendered, low-skilled occupations, requiring the attendance at known local colleges offering vocational qualifications in a narrow selection of acceptable courses. In Bourdieu’s terms, habitus is the key to cultural reproduction because it is central to generating and regulating the practices that make up social life (Heath, Fuller, & Paton, 2008). In Dyke, Johnston and Fuller’s
(2012) critique, they refer specifically to Bourdieu's well-quoted statement: 'we are nothing beyond what society makes us' (ref in Archer, 2000:4). As is the danger when interpreting such complex theory, this statement is taken a little out of context. Bourdieu does focus upon the structural factors that affect practice, but, as has been noted, he also recognizes that flexibility exists within this.

3.4 The Concept of Social Capital

When capital is transferred from the field to the habitus through social networks, it is referred to as social capital. Social capital can be defined as resources based on connections and group membership (Bourdieu, 1997, 1986), the product of investment strategies that can be located at both individual and/or collective levels, and can be conscious or unconscious. This concept is aimed at establishing or reproducing social relationships that are directly useable in the short or long term (Bourdieu, 1986: 251). The value associated with these relations as a consequence of the capital they hold is defined by the fields involved.

At the heart of social capital theory, is the ability and willingness of people to build networks that facilitate their access to higher status types and levels of social capital; the more networks a person builds, the more potential there is for them to access ‘valued’ social capital (Coleman, 1988). However, as stated in the eyes of people concerned, the value associated to these relations is the consequence of the fields involved, rather than the high status fields that would result in the accumulation of high status capital. This is critical to this study, and I will argue that levels of social capital are a crucial part of the process by which young people make the career and educational decisions they do. This is in line with Putnam’s work, who suggests that it is possible for individuals to break free from the constraints of their upbringing and social class background and engineer a change in their habitus through the broadening of their social networks for the purpose of achieving higher status capital (Putnam, 2000).
For people living in disadvantaged locations, wider diverse networks, sometimes referred to as ‘bridging networks’ (Putnam, 2000), have the potential to provide access to capital that has greater ‘transposability’ (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990) than that available in networks more embedded within the fields occupied. ‘Bonding networks’ (Putnam, 2000) located within fields in disadvantaged locations are limited in capital that holds transposability. The types of connections within a social network result in access to different types of social capital (referred to as either bonding or bridging capital). Given this, with the advantage of developing bridging social capital in mind, there is an assumption in social capital theory that young people from disadvantaged backgrounds should be more interested in acquiring bridging social capital with transposability than with specialism (i.e. that which is valued across fields rather than within them). This form of capital enables them to take advantage of opportunities to look outside of their own community, and, therefore, can be connected to social mobility. My analysis will explore the extent to which this assumption is evident in the young people's account of their decision-making.

Focusing first on Bonding social capital: these types of connections refer to strong, trusting relationships, developed over time with people who share similar types and levels of capital, and who may share similar experience and values (Coleman, 1988). Granovetter (1973) emphasizes the density of these relationships (who knows who), and the relative lack of weaker ties to other (non-familial) groups and communities. As mentioned, these networks are more likely to offer specialized capital that is valued within a particular field, rather than transposable cultural capital. In contrast, bridging social capital refers to relationships that lack trust and depth, and are often less embedded in the fields inhabited. These types of networks have the capacity to offer resources valued in other fields. For people inhabiting disadvantaged environments, this form of capital is perhaps a unique opportunity to acquire cultural capital that is transposable in fields that sit closer to the field of power. Therefore, supporting disadvantaged young people to bridge out of
their communities (Helve and Bynner, 2007), to get by and to get ahead, can be seen as paramount (Holland, 2008).

Although bridging networks have the potential to offer social mobility, a factor that tempers the ability of young people from disadvantaged backgrounds to develop bridging capital and obtain social capital with transposability is the requirement of trust. Trust is recognised within literature on social capital theory, and within findings, as central to the development of relationships that form the social network (Coleman, 1988, Cattell, 2004), especially for young people from disadvantaged backgrounds (Heath and Cleaver, 2003). As I will illustrate within the findings chapters, the young people I interviewed also recognised trust as central to the inclusion of network members. Participants often struggled to develop trusting relationships with others, especially professionals from outside fields, who might be their most accessible form of bridging capital. This is perhaps due to the importance of ‘similarities’ and ‘familiarities’, which are, according to Archer (2007), ‘warranties’ for trustworthiness. Archer uses these terms to refer to ways of thinking that people are drawn to, and states: “they speak in the same way, share the same word meanings, draw upon a commonwealth of references and a common fund of relevant experiences” (Archer 2007: 85). With this in mind, it would seem likely, then, that people are drawn to others who occupy the same fields they do, due to the ‘collective consciousness’ (Bourdieu, 1984 – 2010 reprint) of the habituses of that field.

The dominance of bonding rather than bridging relationships within disadvantaged communities can be referred to as ‘networks of intimacy’ (Raffo & Reaves, 2000, Greenbank 2009, 2010, Fuller, Foskett, Johnston, Paton 2007, Heath, Fuller & Paton, 2008, Health & Cleaver, 2003). This definition goes beyond the concept of bonding social capital to describe a very particular structure; it refers to a tight web of selected people who the subject knows well, an insular network of highly developed relationships consisting primarily of family members, friends and peers (Heath, Fuller & Paton, 2008). Raffo and Reeves (2000) coin another term when discussing networks of intimacy -‘individualised systems of social capital’, similarity
defining each as 'a dynamic, social, spatially, culturally, temporally and economically embedded group, network, or constellation of social relations, which has the young person at the core of the constellation and which provides authentic opportunities for everyday learning' (2000: 148). In considering their content Health, Fuller & Paton (2008) describe them as 'sites of varying forms of capital, cultural and economic capital, providing a critical context within which individuals’ thinking [...] is embedded and co-constructed across the life course (2008: 221). I will explore how these concepts are evident in participant's accounts, and how, subsequently, networks of intimacy mediate career decision-making.

If it is true, then, that bonding social capital maintains disadvantage, and that bridging social capital has the potential to facilitate social mobility (Putnam, 1990), a predisposition towards bonding networks and a reluctance to develop bridging relationships results in limiting the potential for social mobility. In the case of young people’s decision making, cultural capital transferred through networks of intimacy is likely to present clear norms regarding what is and is not a potential career idea. The result is the promotion of a very narrow set of trajectories that reflect the cultural capital embedded within the field, and consequently generate outcomes typical for that field.

Through social networks, individuals learn what to expect from life, how likely success in different types of career pathways is, and how others will respond to them if certain choices are made (Dyke, Johnson, Fuller, 2012). Granovetter (1973) famously indicates the potential for bridging capital when he referred to it as ‘the strength of weak ties’, going on to discuss ‘weak[er] ties provid[ing] people with access to information and resources beyond those available in their own social circle’ (Granovetter 1973:209). Bourdieu (1986: 251) argues that social capital should be continually worked for; investment should aim to establish or reproduce social relations that are directly useable in the short term. However, Bourdieu is suggesting that young people should perceive their social network as a resource. For many,
networks provide a sense of community and belonging, even in the current individualized society (Beck, 1992).

3.5 The Concept of Cultural Capital

The most prevalent factor that appeared to influence career ideas in the context of this study was career related knowledge - a form of cultural capital that was transferred to the habitus through social networks. Nevertheless, the term 'cultural capital' within Bourdieu's theoretical framework means much more than this. On an individual level, it can be defined as the embodied dispositions, resources and knowledge/education held within the habitus (Bourdieu, 1977, 1986). In a wider sense, it can refer to the type of culture or cultures existing within the field. It dictates the dispositions and subsequently the capital that is valued, and can also refer to the understanding and knowledge that complements it.

Cultural capital is central to decision making, as that which is valued in dominant fields, although not intending to, influences the career related decision making of participants. In relation to the young people in this study, cultural capital is shaped and defined by a kind of collective consciousness within a given field that encourages forms of skill and knowledge that provide status in these fields, such as skills in playing football, styling hair, choosing clothes etc.

As Bourdieu (1977) argues, participants gain stock of the types of cultural capital that are highly valued through practice, and, subsequently, occupations (or practices) that require these stocks become highly valued in these fields. As a result, this capital creates a set of employment and college expectations that often inform a desire to pursue certain career pathways.
The cultural capital that exists within a field is central to the structuring of positions of actors within it. This is because the capitals held within the habitus are judged according to the culture of the field. This culture, which permeates the field, creates common dispositions and capital that hold differing levels of value within the field by the actors present. As well as capital, dispositions of the habitus together with knowledge also carry value, and certain types become common amongst occupants of the field. It is these forms of knowledge and dispositions that underpin the principles, values and awareness that inform decision making (Bourdieu, 1986). A person’s ability to pursue these decisions is the result of capital, in this case primarily social and cultural capital, and this, therefore, also contributes to transition journeys that are typical.

In summary, choices are strongly influenced by career related knowledge, which is the result of cultural capital transferred through the social network. Exploring the transcendence of this knowledge supports an understanding of what is typical. The transference of information through the repetition of different activities is a form of pedagogic action (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990) responsible for transforming and reinforcing transition ideas, and leading to transition journeys that are typical. The culture of a field can be a powerful influence, and it is often not the intention of young people to gain knowledge or cultural capital that facilitates a wider understanding of career options, but to make positive choices in line with what is known, valued and feasible, considering the capital they hold.

Cultural capital in affluent areas complements transition journeys that are deemed successful; however, in disadvantaged locations, as has been seen through structures explored, this is not the case (Bourdieu, 1977, Bourdieu and Passeron, 1990). Cultural capital that is present within fields located in disadvantaged locations value dispositions and capital with limited potential for transposability – however, within the field, they are specialised and valued. A visual representation of the transference of cultural capital from the social networks located within fields occupied to the habitus can be seen in figure 3.
3.6 The Concept of Reflexivity

The Bourdieusian concepts explored so far can be summarized as presenting career decision making as an embedded social practice shaped by the habitus, the product of a person’s network that mirrors the particular environment it is located in. Understanding the influence of the habitus, and how it is shaped by social and cultural capital from the field, enables a structural understanding of constraints central to young people’s career decision making. However, these concepts are limited in their ability to explore agency in all of this. This is not to say that Bourdieu is deterministic; he recognizes that the habitus is open to potentialities and possibilities rather than fixed certainties, and says that it includes the ‘permanent capacity for intervention’ (Bourdieu, 1984 – reprinted 2010: 63), and that it is constantly changing through practice (1977). However, when considering the relationship between determinism and freedom, he states that the ‘conditioned and conditional freedom the habitus secures is as remote from the creation of unpredictable novelty as it is from a simple mechanical
reproduction of the initial conditioning’ (Bourdieu, 1977:95). From this we understand that Bourdieu is ruling out the possibility of unprecedented occurrences, such as young people from disadvantaged backgrounds applying successfully to very prestigious programs like NASA, as well as any sense of absolute determinism. He recognizes that many possible pathways can come from a particular ‘conditioning’ of the habitus, and although the focus of this area of his work is upon structural and essentially reproductive forces that shape practice and the habitus (Bourdieu, 1977, Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990), he recognizes possibilities and potential for action (agency) that are outside of these reproductive, patterned trajectories. Therefore, although Bourdieu does see that the concepts he has developed allow for flexibility, they do not enable the necessary focus upon the potential for agency that is required of this conceptual framework.

With this in mind, I turn to the notion of reflexivity - a popular concept within policy, practice and the youth transition literature. Reflexivity has been argued by some to be an essential tool through which the deterministic structures discussed can be transcended. In this thesis, it will be used to consider the extent to which agency is possible within young people’s decision making process. I will argue that over time reflexivity is able to create actions that are transformative, the consequence of thinking in a more objective way upon possible options. This means that reflexivity creates space between actions that are habitual, the direct result of Bourdieu’s concept of habitus, and action that has the potential to challenge structural influence (Archer, 2007, 2008, 2010, 2012). Therefore, in contrast to the social structure determining practice, the concept of reflexivity has the potential to facilitate a different reality to one that might have been the case without this engagement.

Archer (2012) highlights that engagement in reflexive thinking takes place at particular moments where there is misalignment between the field a person occupies and their habitus. In the new social structure of post modernity, the stability of the relationship between these two concepts has been affected. As discussed in chapter 2, transitions in different areas of society are no
longer linear and predictable, and, according to Archer (2012), this means that the habitus / field relationship may be assumed unstable. With this in mind, she is suggesting the environment of post modernity will lead to the increased presence of reflexive thinking. Perhaps partly for this reason, reflexivity is argued to have considerable potential, or is necessary, in this new transition environment (Beck, 2000, Archer, 2007, 2008, 2010, 2012, Furlong and Cartmel, 2007).

This emphasis on post modernity and the demands of the new transition environment partly explains the popularity of reflexivity as a solution for the inequalities observed in youth transitions, and, subsequently, the presence of an array of strategies aimed at supporting such thinking amongst young people. However, I argue that literature that promotes reflexive thinking as a necessary requirement in young people (such as the Connexions approach outlined in Chapter 2) often fails to understand the conditions and processes through which such thinking might develop; i.e. what is required in supporting young people to become reflexive (Beck, 2000; Archer, 2007). As such, the concept itself is often seen in isolation, without its structural context.

Throughout this thesis, I argue that in order to understand the potential for reflexivity as a concept, it must not be assumed to be happening and it must be understood from within a structural account; that in order to understand agency as embedded within structure, it needs to be integrated with the concepts already outlined (i.e. habitus, capital, field) to support a far more comprehensive and critical understanding of reflexivity in its structural context. The process by which people can engage in reflexivity and how this process is shaped by structure will now be discussed.

To outline what is meant by reflexivity within the context of this study, Archer’s (2007) definition is helpful, referring to it as a process of conscious and purposeful human action, separating deliberate action from an automatic reaction. Archer promotes efforts that enable people to construct courses of action to navigate through the social world (2007:64). She views reflexive agency in relation to consciousness, which can be located along a continuum
where unconscious or habitual decisions sit at one end and conscious or reflexive decisions sit at the other. As stated, the process of consciously engaging with possible actions in this way is argued to have the potential to be transformative in that it disrupts structural determinants; where conscious engagement occurs, alternative decision-making becomes possible.

An important factor in achieving conscious decision-making is the mental construction or design of a possible action (Archer, 2010). This can be achieved through ‘self talk’, talking to ourselves about ourselves in relation to our environment (2007). Within this process, possible decisions and the detail around them can be constructed, along with details regarding a construction of self in relation to these decisions. Constructing the self is highlighted by Archer (2007) as involving a clear sense of identity and an ability to see oneself objectively in relation to others.

The way that ideas sit with an awareness of self informs a process of deliberation; for example, the comfort of fit with a career idea. It is suggested within the reflexivity (Archer, 2012, 2007) and social capital (Putnam, 2000, Coleman, 1988) literature that young people would benefit from seeing their network as a resource. In this case, in order to acquire additional cultural capital in the form of career related information so that the process of self talk could be supported. Smyth and Banks (2012) discuss this process, where actors seek out information on different options in order to evaluate these alternatives, in order to inform action. Archer (2007) also recognizes this as a process of planning and foresight, and that it informs a person’s ability to become aware of their surroundings, what they have, and what they need in order to move forward. This process benefits from an awareness of the potential for a network to offer information, and then from the engagement with it to acquire this capital. Being strategic in this way informs the detail, enabling the deliberation of possibilities with new information at hand. With this in mind, the interaction between awareness of self and awareness of career ideas could be seen as a significant factor in shaping decision making. According to Archer (2007), this awareness supports an individual’s objective view of themselves in considering possible career
ideals, and has the potential to open up possible pathways by developing understanding and familiarity with these ideas.

With this process of reflexivity in mind, a willingness to become aware of social networks and what they can offer is useful in providing information on particular types of pathways, or perhaps a range of different types of career ideas. Transference of cultural capital through networks is discussed by Lin (2001) when she emphasised the importance of developing an awareness of the social capital available from a network in order to evaluate what is needed from it. Archer (2007) explains, through her concept of reflexivity, that, once several possible actions are identified, actors are able to produce a description to inform deliberation between one course of action or another. The level of detail regarding these possible actions affects the level of this awareness.

The development of and awareness of self through reflexivity resonates with the concept of habitus in the sense that it supports a level of objectivity regarding oneself. Ultimately, though, the foundation for this is the habitus. The habitus is responsible for the presence of and type of reflexive thinking engaged in. Reflexivity is the consequence of a particular type of habitus, one that is socially located in the social structure and has developed in such a way that it disposes the individual to engage in the kinds of thinking and behavior that Archer talks of, where, rather than habitual action, a kind of reflexive action is engaged in as a response to decision making problems.

In order to see reflexivity, a longitudinal research design was necessary. This supported the development of relationships with trust, a necessary component in facilitating the co-production of a space where reflecting upon career ideas and pathways was encouraged. This space enabled the identification of conditions needed for the development of a habitus that was capable of reflexive thinking, and enabled the potential for this process to be considered. The creation of this space and the implications of it for conclusions drawn will be outlined in chapters 4 and 8.
3.7 Redefining the Research Question

In light of the development of this conceptual framework, I subsequently refined the main research question for the study in order to capture the 'reality' that these theoretical concepts seek to portray. This shifted from:

How are the career related decisions of young people from disadvantaged backgrounds shaped during their transition towards the end of compulsory schooling?

To

How do the fields that young people occupy shape their habitus responsible for career decision making? And to what extent is reflexive agency possible in transcending their social position and achieving social mobility?

The second set of questions have been developed through my use of theory as a tool to unpack something that is complex and not easily explained. They provided a focus through which the research design was constructed and the findings analyzed. In addressing these questions, I will argue that the structural concepts identified are central to decision making, and that reflexive thinking is the result of a particular type of habitus that is socially and culturally produced (and potentially reproduced) depending on fields occupied and capital available, and value within them transferred through social networks.

3.8 Chapter Summary

This chapter has presented the conceptual framework through which this data will be analysed. The concepts of field, habitus, cultural capital and social capital will allow exploration of the data in relation to the structural forces that shape decision making, and particularly in relation to the role of social networks in the transference of cultural capital to the habitus of participants. I will also consider the repercussions of this upon the type of
habitus that is common considering the fields participants inhabit. It will enable the consideration of the power of the habitus in shaping what is possible, and therefore the effect of environment upon young people’s decision making. Exploration of the potential for reflexivity will enable the strength of these structures to be considered again in light of participants’ attempts to achieve agency in their lives through the deliberation of the options they perceive to be possible. Exploring the presence and the consequence of reflexivity with these structures in mind will enable consideration of the potential for this process to be transformative.

Reflexivity, together with Bourdieu’s more structurally focused concepts, will provide a lens through which this data can be explored. The aim will be to provide an authentic account of how participants like these are engaging in decision making during this particular moment of transition. To this end, questions will be asked, such as: to what extent are participants engaging in reflexivity? What is the potential for it in this process? Is a process of self-talk ultimately leading to the same conclusion as habitual action? It is only through this framework that such questions may be explored.
Chapter 4: Methodology

4.1 Researching Career Decision Making

This chapter will demonstrate how the conceptual framework outlined in the previous chapter was engaged with through the research design, and in doing so will expand upon the research approach outlined in chapter 1 by outlining how my practitioner background, the research questions and the conceptual framework connect to the methodological position taken and the methods used to gather data.

In gathering data that supports the conceptual framework, I will demonstrate how my practitioner background and the research question also connect to the methodological position taken and the methods used to gather data. In gathering data that supports the conceptual framework, a methodological position that recognizes that people have multiple constructions of realities is necessary; naturalistic inquiry is able to recognize this. With this approach in mind, this chapter will outline how, under a naturalistic inquiry methodological approach, the actual process of gathering data took place. Here, I will show the benefits of methods used in supporting credibility, since they were crucial to generating trustworthy constructions of reality with participants through the research process. I will also outline the challenges involved in conducting the research, both for the interview participants and myself as the researcher.

This chapter will be structured, then, by first revisiting my background as a youth and community work practitioner - this will outline some of the values that underpin this work and how they relate to my methodological position. I will argue for naturalistic inquiry as an appropriate research paradigm to guide the collection of data, as it enables an engaged approach and provides a rich, descriptive account of participants’ realities - a comparison will be made to positivism for the sake of demonstrating the relative appropriateness of a position that responds to the research participants and environment in a
way that enables the reality of this environment to be reflected in the data. This comparison will be based around 5 sets of assumptions: ‘the nature of reality’, ‘the relationship between the knower and the known’, ‘the possibility of generalization’, ‘the possibility of causal linkages’ and ‘the role of values’.

Secondly, an account of the research participants will be provided, and this will also demonstrate the importance of naturalistic inquiry as a means to understand and represent their lives and experiences. It will discuss the challenges this invokes before looking at how the research design and methods used anticipated and accommodated these challenges. Thirdly, the selection of naturalistic inquiry as an appropriate methodological approach in addressing the research question and responding to the characteristics of the sample will be outlined. In doing so, the relevance of the research methods in strengthening trustworthiness through credibility will be discussed. Finally, this chapter will discuss how the data gathered was managed, how the conceptual framework presented in chapter 3 was tested, how trustworthiness was supported, and how the depth of analysis was achieved through the process by which the operationalization of the conceptual framework took place.

4.2 Methodological Position

As mentioned in chapter 1, my own experience of working within the youth and community work sector has highlighted to me the importance of structural factors in the retention of young people in pathways and the choosing of these pathways. For example, when working for the Connexions service in the same location as the school where the research took place, the influence of the school environment on the career ideas being considered by students was evident. In Chapter 2, I have shown how the literature in this area recognises the effects of a political shift on how young people experience transition, but I have suggested that this literature has struggled to emphasise the continued embedded nature of these structural factors on contemporary transitions. The research question outlined at the end of the
previous chapter highlights these structural factors, and this, therefore, presented me with a need to develop an approach that unpacks the complexity of young people's decision making. In the next section I will outline the development of this approach based on my starting point as a practitioner.

The profession of youth and community work recognizes that people see and think differently about their lives, and that ways of seeing and engaging with the world are vast, and shaped by the structural position they are born into. Youth and community work practice is concerned with addressing forms of structural disadvantage wherever possible, and recognizes the value in building relationships with young people, such as those from disadvantaged backgrounds, in order to understand how they perceive and view their lives so that services may be offered that are grounded in this understanding and are therefore appropriate to these needs (Sapin, 2013, Batsleer and Davies, 2010).

As a consequence of this agenda, significant value is placed upon understanding the lives of young people. Developing trust and demonstrating respect for young people in all their individual richness and complexity is seen as the basis for open, clear and realistic communication; these are priorities that support this understanding. An understanding of young people's lives provides the foundation for an informed approach that is tailored to young people's needs, and provides the potential from which to motivate and support them to go beyond these starting points into new experiences and learning (Batsleer and Davies, 2010:2). This way of working with young people has the added bonus of supporting engagement, since such activities may be seen as worthwhile if they appear to respond to young people's needs and understand them as complex individuals.

Similarly, a recognition that people have different ways of viewing the world, which are rooted in their position in the social structure, is also shared by many post-positivist methodologies. These emphasise and value the perspectives and 'constructions' of participants (in this case young people).
Naturalistic inquiry is a major approach to research within this area, and has been developed by noteworthy authors Lincoln and Guba (1985). It refers to a paradigm of research that is interested in observing ‘human subjects’ (Lincoln and Guba, 1985) in their natural habitat in order to answer questions of importance. This approach focuses upon the construction of meaning and how this takes place; it is about exploration and examination of both the research context and participants, as both are interconnected. Naturalistic inquiry recognises knowledge as co-constructed, and recognises the importance of allowing meaning to emerge through close reading of the data, but guided and structured through the conceptual framework.

Furthermore, recognising that reality is understood differently depending upon perspective is central to addressing questions regarding career decision-making, since by understanding alternative constructions we can recognise why it is that people do not always choose in ways that are advantageous to them. Central to this is an understanding of what choices people are aware of and how these choices are perceived; for example, are they considered realistic for them? Throughout this thesis, I argue that recognising differences (and similarities) in how decision-making and choices are framed by young people's understanding of the social world is central to addressing the research question.

However, this requires a holistic interpretation of the individual's reality. This understanding can best be thought of through the lens of the conceptual framework outlined in the previous chapter. The way that people understand and make sense of the world is the consequence of their habitus, a complex internalised core that is shaped by the various fields they occupy, their position within these fields and, consequently, the experience and capital typical of these field positions. Therefore, we can argue that the variation in the development of different habituses is responsible for creating the existence of multiple constructions of reality (Lincoln and Guba, 1985), and, therefore, multiple ways of experiencing career transition. With this in mind, a methodological approach such as naturalistic inquiry is necessary in order to adequately focus on the developing habituses of research participants, which
can be defined by considering the fields they occupy and the forms of capital available within them.

Both youth and community work practice and naturalistic inquiry offer practical methods when working with participants that enable the interpretation of their personal construction of reality. For example, in youth and community work practice, workers strive to develop relationships that contain trust and respect, as it is the development of these kinds of relationships that enable open and honest communication, which facilitates this understanding (Batsleer & Davies, 2010). Batsleer and Davies (2010) compared youth work to great jazz in the sense that it is well prepared and highly disciplined, yet improvised; and, while responding sensitively to the signals and prompts of others, it continues to express the worker's own intentions, insights and ideas, feelings and flair. Similarly, naturalistic inquiry recognises the value of both flexibility and prolonged engagement, where the researcher again develops a relationship with participants over a period of time that encourages open and honest communication. These approaches complement each other, as they are both interested in creating an environment where authentic constructions of reality are shared. With this in mind, I have designed this study to synergise practice (youth work), theory (Bourdieu) and methodology (naturalistic inquiry) to understand the problem identified (see figure 4).

The alignment of all three here is necessary to understand the research problem. My practical experience as a youth worker has, I argue, provided the necessary skills to work with and communicate with young people from socially disadvantaged backgrounds in order to understand their worlds. The theoretical framework captures the complexity of structure-agency (objectivity-subjectivity dialectic) relationships which, I have argued in Chapter 3, is crucial to understanding young people's career decision making as shaped and formed by structural differences such as social class, gender etc. Finally, the methodology, naturalistic inquiry, has enabled me to establish a research design and approach that emphasises the participants' realities. All three elements are needed, as this holistic approach enables us
to explore young people's decision making in a way that recognises their location in the social structure, but also to ensure that their accounts are authentic and capture their voice in a way that is experientially real to them.

Figure 4: Integration of Approaches

4.3 Comparing Naturalistic Inquiry with Positivism

In order to highlight the key components of a naturalistic inquiry approach, I have used Lincoln and Guba’s five axioms. These axioms demonstrate the assumptions that lie behind a naturalistic position, each representing a way of thinking about conducting research. The positivist research paradigm has been used as a comparison when discussing the naturalist position. To provide an overview and orientate the reader, both have been summarized in figure 5 (Lincoln & Guba, 1985:37). An additional column has been added, ‘relevance to research’, where the implication for each position or assumption has been summarized in relation to the research context.
Figure 5: Contrasting Positivist and Naturalist Axioms

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Axioms About</th>
<th>Positivist Paradigm</th>
<th>Naturalistic Paradigm</th>
<th>Relevance to Research</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The nature of reality</td>
<td>Reality is single, tangible, and fragmentable</td>
<td>Realities are multiple, constructed, and holistic</td>
<td>Participants’ constructions of reality are sought</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The relationship between the knower and the known</td>
<td>Knower and known are independent, a dualism</td>
<td>Knower and known are interactive, inseparable</td>
<td>Identify the 'reality' of the knower through a reflexive approach</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The possibility of generalisation</td>
<td>Time- and context-free generalisations (nomothetic statements) are possible</td>
<td>Only time and context-bound working hypotheses (idiographic statements) are possible</td>
<td>Care has been taken to locate the study contextually by mapping the relevant fields</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The possibility of causal linkages</td>
<td>There are real causes, temporally precedent to simultaneous with their effects</td>
<td>All entities are in a state of mutual simultaneous shaping, so that it is impossible to distinguish causes from effects</td>
<td>To understand the processes that shape decision making - recognising the mutual, bi-directional relationships between factors such as cultural capital - decision making - cultural capital</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The role of values</td>
<td>Enquiry is value-free</td>
<td>Inquiry is value bound</td>
<td>The values of the researcher and the framework adopted shape the research, and the relationship between researcher and researched. You will be explicit and reflexive of such values throughout the thesis</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In relation to the first axiom, the nature of reality, a positivist position assumes that truth is possible and that there is a single tangible reality. Within this type of research, this one reality can be divided into variables and processes that can be studied independently. This is in contrast to naturalistic inquiry, which is built on the understanding that there are multiple possible constructions of reality, and that these realities are wholes that cannot be understood in isolation from their contexts. Therefore, whilst this approach recognizes that realities are socially constructed, it also recognises that some ways of thinking are more dominant than others. The reason for certain ways of seeing the world being more powerful or having more value than others is because they align with dominant positions in the field, as discussed in the conceptual framework chapter. In positivist research, it is this dominant position that is heard and potentially 'mis-recognised' as 'scientific truth'; however, from a naturalistic perspective, no single tangible reality exists (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). Naturalistic inquiry is interested in representing the way that research participants understand their world, in as much detail and as authentically as possible.

The second axiom highlights a distinction between the relationship of the researcher and the participant; 'the relationship between the knower and the known'. In positivist research, the two are assumed to be independent; it is believed that research bias can be controlled if the appropriate methods are used and an emphasis is placed upon objectivity. In this paradigm, the researcher is positioned as expert, extracting the required information from participants; as a consequence, a hierarchical relationship is likely. Both naturalistic inquiry and community and youth work practice see this relationship quite differently; complete objectivity is not considered possible due to the researcher having their own construction of reality. So, rather than ignoring this, understanding the perspective of the researcher is encouraged in reducing potential bias. Bourdieu (1977) recognises that the separation between subjectivity and objectivity is false - both are necessary and essential in building a whole understanding of the research environment. Consequently, he recognizes the value in understanding and therefore being part of the research environment, referring to this as having a ‘place in the
game’, and states that to resist learning the ‘language’ of actors is limiting, and that in order to see ‘individual consciousness and wills’, as well as to ‘construct the social world as a system of objective relations’ (1977: 4), it is necessary to embrace subjectivity. Bourdieu uses the example of gift giving, pointing out that the actions may be the same but the reasons for these actions very different (the gift is meant to be experienced or the gift is meant to be seen from outside); only by looking beneath (by combining an objective and a subjective approach) can the reasoning be understood.

Within the research/researcher relationship, the focus is therefore on the co-construction of knowledge rather than its extraction, meaning that the participant is seen more as a partner in the process; they are called upon to help develop a subjective understanding of the research environment and their role within it. It is their construction of reality that is valued; they are seen as the experts, and it is the role of the researcher to interpret carefully their voice. The relationships of engagement that were created within the interviews resulted in the hierarchical dimension of researcher / researched being less of a determinant of what participants were able to voice.

The following quote demonstrates Lincoln and Guba’s recognition of the relationship between the ‘knower’ and the ‘known’ as working together during the research process in the construction of this new knowledge: "realities which are multiple, constructed and holistic, knower and known are interactive, inseparable: only time and context bound working hypotheses are possible; all entities are in a state of mutual simultaneous shaping, so that it is impossible to distinguish causes from effects; inquiry is value-bound" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985:37). In recognising the relationship between the research and participant, seeing the two as partners in the construction of knowledge requires the creation of an environment where open and honest communication is supported. Relationships of trust may be developed, and such relationships are central to the development of honest constructions of participants’ realities.
The third axiom, the possibility of generalization, considers how representative data is of a given population, and therefore the extent to which findings may be transferable from one case or context to another. This axiom highlights a difference between the two paradigms in the applicability of findings. In positivist research, findings are taken to be context free. Larger samples are popular, which are selected to offer representative data. In this paradigm, generalization is aimed for by using methods such as statistical tests, which aim to determine how predictable findings are, or how representative data is of a given population. In contrast, naturalistic research understands that the research environment is integral to the generation of data, and, therefore, researchers are conservative regarding the extent to which findings are applicable to other contexts. Rich descriptions are preferred over large samples, and contextual data is important in enabling the consideration for transferability of findings.

The fourth axiom, ‘the possibility of causal linkages’, relates to how relationships between factors are perceived. In positivist research, it is believed that every action can be explained as a result of a cause. Naturalistic enquiry understands the relationship between causal linkages to be much more complex than this. There is an understanding that influences are shaped by each other, rather than perceiving the relationship as linear. This resonates with Bourdieu (1977), who recognizes the interdependent relationship between the structural (objective) and the individual (subjective) to be mutually dependent upon each other, and that they must be recognized as such. This understanding also links back again to a recognition of the complexity of the research environment, with fields, habitus and capital mutually relating to and shaping each other. This suggests the need for research that can explore this complexity.

The fifth and final axiom relates to the role of values. In a positivist paradigm, when the ‘right’ approach is taken and where instruments are carefully selected, research is understood to be value free; this is in line with the research being seen as objective. In naturalistic research, values are seen
as central; they are understood as entwined, and part of how the research is shaped.

Through presenting a summary of the differences between a positivist and a naturalist position, we can see that naturalistic enquiry is underpinned by an awareness that reality is multi dimensional, complex, and context and value bound. As a result of this understanding, it is not possible to simplify this complexity in the way that a purely positivist paradigm might. However, although outlining these extremes is useful for the purpose of comparison, few researchers adopt a purely positivist stance; most educational research falls somewhere between the two positions outlined here, and uses elements from both extremes.

This study comes from an understanding that research, like society, can be understood through many different lenses, but that without subjectivity we cannot explore how 'practice' is produced and reproduced. It is only with such a perspective that the complex structures identified in the conceptual framework chapter can be recognised within the data. A recognition of the presence of and relevance of subjectivity is a central part of collecting the kind of data needed to adequately address the research question, which is interested in the effect of these structures on practice, asking why people choose and therefore create the futures they do. It is recognized that, to support the collection of rich, full, trustworthy and revealing data, an approach that recognises the complexity and richness of life is needed.

Before moving on to look at how this study facilitated the development of this type of construction, the research sample will be outlined. This will enable consideration of their relevance to addressing the research question, and the identification of challenges in engaging with and interpreting their/our reality. I will show how the identification of these challenges informed the selection of the most appropriate methods of data collection using a naturalistic inquiry standpoint.
4.4 The Research Sample

The research sample were a group of thirteen young people who lived within and attended a school located in a disadvantaged town near a large city in the north west of England. The disadvantaged nature of the area is best demonstrated through the Indices of Multiple Deprivation (IMD). The IMD is made up of Lower Super Output Areas (LSOA), of which there are 34,378 in England and Wales; on average, one LSOA covers an area with a population of 1500. A higher rating depicts a greater proportion of residents experiencing deprivation across a range of indicators, such as crime rate, progression to further and higher education, occupancy of social housing, general health and so on. The region where the school is based is in the top 10% of the most deprived LSOA in the country. The national IMD in September 2010 (the first year of interviews) was 21.7; the nearby city average was 44.5, and of the 5 wards the town where the research took place is divided into, 4 had a rate above the already high city average (NHS, 2010).

As a consequence of this area’s high level of disadvantage, I argue that these students were subjected to a number of structural factors that impacted both the educational and the career options available to them. The influence of labour market change has been strongly felt by this community, due to it originally being set up as a ‘garden city’ between 1920 and 1960, and was therefore intended to rehouse urban workers from the inner city; at the time they were supported by industry and agriculture (Deakin, 1989), much of which no longer exists. Garden cities were a form of town planning initially intended to be self contained communities surrounded by green belt land; however, like many others, residents in the area where the research took place now struggle with higher levels of unemployment. The nearby city average of 5.7% in September 2010 can be compared to the national rate of 4.2%, and with all wards in the town the study took place in having a rate above the city average, with one rated at 8% (NHS, 2010).
The area was intended to house over 100,000 people, reaching this figure in the 1960s (Deakin, 1989), and although a considerable 70,000 still live here, much of the industry and agriculture that had supported residents is no longer available, as stated above. The 2 major employers nearby are the airport, which has existed on that site since the 1930s, though the majority of jobs available for local people tend to be low-skilled, such as baggage handlers; and the university hospital, where, again, many jobs are low-skilled, such as porters or cleaners (conversation with a member of staff from the Regeneration Team May 2013, research diary entry, 2013). Many of the industries that residents were trained for have left the country to find a cheaper work force, or are now obsolete (Deakin, 1989); this has meant that the majority of residents have struggled to navigate the unpredictable and turbulent labour market that has replaced relatively predictable trajectories. These residents have, and still are, living the consequences of global and political changes outlined by Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (2002) that were discussed during chapter 2. These changes have had significant effects upon the lives of families in this location.

The school where the research took place houses over 1000 pupils from the local area. The effects of these labour market changes have contributed to parental income being so low that, at the time the research took place, 40% of pupils who attend the school were eligible for free school meals (Ofsted, 2011), well above the then national average of 15.9% (DfE, 2011). The participants themselves were selected from the school’s year 10 cohort. This sample was based on participants being broadly representative of their year in terms of attainment in English, mathematics and science, as well as the gender split for the year. Since these participants are broadly representative of the school’s intake, and living in the area where the school is located, these young people had first-hand experience of the structural disadvantage that influenced the fields they occupied, their position within these fields, and the capital they subsequently had access to and valued. For these reasons, this sample of young people were ideally positioned to help address the research question.
4.5 The Research Design

The process of conducting the research with these participants involved four phases of data collection. Each of these phases is summarised in figure 6 below, where the date of interview, number of participants, methods used and data gathered can be seen. Looking first at the interview dates, these were roughly 6 months apart, and they took place over two academic years, with two sets of interviews being conducted per year. The final phase was a slight exception in that it was conducted only one month after the interview before it. This was to ensure that all participants took part, as, following the exam period in January 2011, year 11 timetables were significantly reduced. As a result, participants were in school only one or two days a week, mostly for specific lessons.

Figure 6: Interview Phases

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Phase 1</th>
<th>Phase 2</th>
<th>Phase 3</th>
<th>Phase 4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Date of interviews</td>
<td>Dec 2010</td>
<td>June 2011</td>
<td>Dec 2011</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of participants interviewed</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Method/s used</td>
<td>Drawings / mind maps Career map notes</td>
<td>Career maps</td>
<td>Career maps Mind maps</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data gathered on</td>
<td>Background information Career ideas Career influences</td>
<td>Career ideas Career influences</td>
<td>Career ideas Career influences Social network information and capital</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

With regard to the number of participants interviewed, a total of 13 took part in the research, and, as seen in the table, four were selected from the
original sample to be interviewed in the final two phases. This was to develop a richer account of factors identified as influential during previous interviews, such as developing an understanding of their social network or family field. The level of detail of the data collected for these participants would not have been possible in the time available had the full sample been interviewed.

The interview format for all four phases was that of semi-structured interviews, a format flexible enough to support an emergent design (Lincoln and Guba, 1985), and which facilitated the development of participants’ accounts or constructions of reality. This was achieved by allowing the direction of the study to respond to themes emerging from the data as needed. For example, as the importance of people in shaping participants' career ideas became apparent, emphasis was placed upon identifying the people participants were discussing their career ideas with. This level of flexibility allowed participants' understanding to play a major role in the shaping of the research, enabling me to adjust my approach to generating the findings while keeping the overall aims of the research in mind.

Semi-structured interviews also involved the incorporation of several techniques for data gathering in order to try and tap into this particular group of participants' realities. These methods varied over the duration of the four stages, but tended to be visual in nature. They were selected because of their potential to assist young people in explaining their ideas, as well as being transparent and simple enough to enable member checks. Such methods included drawings, mind maps and concept maps.

The final column of figure 6 summarises the aims of data generation for each phase. As can be seen, these aims are broad, to enable interviews to respond to participants’ accounts, and mostly focused on gathering data around career ideas and career influences. There was some variation in the first phase, which also gathered background information, and the final two, which, as a consequence of preliminary data analysis, focused upon the collection of information regarding the role of social networks and the capital contained within them on shaping career ideas. This was an area identified
as influential during preliminary analysis, and it was at this point that social network data was collected by mind mapping information from previous interviews, and that this was used as a stimulus for further discussion and participant verification. Having outlined the overall research process, each of the four phases will now be described in turn.

4.6 The Phases

4.6.1 Phase 1 (December 2010)

The first set of interviews began with an introduction, allowing time for participants to settle, since often they had come straight from a class or break. I found that some informal conversation and a relaxed description of the interview content helped in establishing a suitable frame of mind. Following this, participants were asked to prepare either a drawing or mind map of the people, interests and places important to them, such as their home, family, friends and hobbies. The idea for this activity came from ‘community mapping’ or profiling, a technique used in youth and community work practice and participatory research (community auditing) (Sapin, 2013). This relatively non-structured activity enabled me to get to know each of the participants in a fairly informal sense. It provided me with a way of breaking the ice; this worked especially well with those who were shy or reluctant. Participants often became absorbed in the activity, and discussion of the content supported relaxed conversation as they thought about career ideas. Having the option of selecting either a mind map or a drawing enabled participants to choose according to preference, and this potentially supported greater engagement in the research. Following the development of either a drawing or mind map, I asked for a description, and encouraged participants to elaborate on different aspects of their drawing or mind map. An example of both a mind map (7) and a drawing (8) can be seen below.
Figure 7: Mind Map

Figure 8: Drawing
Following this activity, an informal discussion took place that focused upon participants’ career ideas and factors shaping their selection. As participants talked, I made notes of responses in diagram form, so that I could check with participants that I had understood correctly. These notes were then developed into career maps using interview recordings and a piece of software called ‘Inspiration’ (see figure 9 for an example of a career map). These were an important element of my research, and were used consistently as a summary for career ideas and influences, for gaining participant verification, as a stimulus for discussion, and as an analysis tool. These diagrams show ideas and influences impacting upon them. Both ‘positive’ – those which positively encouraged or developed an idea - and ‘negative’ – those which dissuaded them - career influences are clearly marked using differently shaped borders (see figure 10).
Figure 9: Career Map: Mark
To aid in understanding the content of these diagrams, a brief summary will now be presented. To differentiate between career ideas and influences within a career map, the size of each shape and the thickness of its border differed to reflect its relative strength. Strength was determined by considering the number of times the theme was mentioned and the importance placed upon it during the interview. Importance was assessed through discourse features, such as recognising the emotion in the voice through tone, volume and pitch (Robson, 2002). The strength of prominent career ideas could therefore be seen, as well as the strength of influences acting upon it. Where negative influences were present, they counteracted positive influences and weakened a potentially strong career idea; these influences were placed within a diamond boarder rather than a rounded square, as can be seen in the example of Mark, above. Maps became very messy as the numerous influences were incorporated into the various career ideas. Therefore, once a map had been created, it underwent an element of ‘tidying up’. This involved grouping influences under themes, curving arrows and/or rearranging factors. This process made the map easier to interpret both for myself and the young person, and the identification of codes/themes that supported analysis more immediately apparent.
Figure 11: Influence Strength Example; Zara
Each career map told a story through the arrangement of influences and ideas that the participants referred to in their interviews. An example of a career map and the story it tells is demonstrated through Zara, see in Figure 11. This diagram shows that Zara has almost no interest in becoming an air hostess due to a dislike of flying (border thickness for ‘dislikes flying’ and ‘enjoyment’ is x4). Her mother suggested this profession, and Zara is tempted by the opportunities it would present to travel. However, job enjoyment is important to her, and this has cancelled out the influences of the family and lifestyle. As can be seen, ‘Opportunity to travel to different places’ is larger and has a thicker border (x2); ‘lifestyle’ also has a thicker border (x2); however, these positive influences are not significant enough to strengthen the idea of ‘air hostess’ due to a dislike of flying cancelling them (x4). As can be seen through this example, these maps enable a story to be told of each participant as they consider their career ideas at each point in time, in this case during the first interview. By collating several participants’ maps, I was able to build an understanding of their progression in relation to career decision making, demonstrating how these ideas change over time. These maps acted as interview summaries, and supported the initial stages of data analysis.

4.6.2 Phase 2 (June 2011)

During the second phase, the career maps discussed were used to verify information gained during the previous interviews, and as a stimulus for discussions. A hard copy of the map was presented, and used as the basis for a verbal summary of the previous interview. The importance of gaining an accurate account of this interview was then emphasized, and participants were encouraged to critique this summary; notes were made of any additional details or amendments. Other forms of verification had occurred during this particular interview, but this was a final opportunity during phase 2 to check that the participants’ accounts of their career ideas and influences had been interpreted accurately. With a detailed examination of the diagram, and on being encouraged to be critical, the young people mostly felt the
maps to be a fair representation of the interview, and alterations tended to be minimal at this stage.

Once any changes had been noted, I asked each young person to grade the strength of their career ideas from 0-5 according to their thinking in the previous interview. Usually, the relative strength that they had given to each career idea was roughly in line with that which I had given based on the analysis. Where differences did exist, I used this as an opportunity to ask various questions in order to better understand how influences were working together to inform career ideas. This allowed me to gain better insight into the young person’s thinking regarding the career ideas, and to better reflect preference with border width. The activity tended to work very well, and felt like a relaxed way to lead into the interview.

As the interview proceeded, the career map was used as a stimulus for discussion in a way that provided a means for the participants to compare their previous and new situation. I began this dialogue by asking: ‘So, that was then. How have things changed or stayed the same since the last time we met?’ This usually generated a healthy discussion, and notes were made in the form of a new map, allowing me to be transparent regarding the interview data I was collecting. I could also seek immediate participant verification due to the format of the notes, as well as cross reference between the previous and the current mind maps easily. Cross referencing was useful in ensuring that I discussed all career ideas considered in the previous interview, therefore supporting a complete exploration of ideas as they emerged.

4.6.3 Phase 3 (December 2011)

For phase 3 I used the same data generation methods and followed the same structure as phase 2, with an introduction followed by a two part discussion. However, as can be seen in figure 7 above an additional activity was used to generate further background data. In preparation for this activity,
I extracted relevant information from the transcripts from phases 1 and 2. This was then organised and presented in the form of a ‘mind map’. Similar to the career maps, mind maps were used as a basis for a verbal summary of the previous interview so that the information could be checked and then used as a stimulus to gather additional information. These mind maps summarised all of the people that participants had mentioned when discussing career ideas and influences; next to each was any additional information such as relationship, age, job, where they lived and so forth. The advantage of using mind maps for organising and presenting participants’ social network information was that participants were familiar with the format, due to it being used in school classes. These maps also provided a clear and natural way of structuring the network to record its members, followed by any additional data relevant to them. One of Clare’s mind maps can be seen below in Figure 12. The highlighted sections refer to information added following participant verification.
Figure 12: Mind Map Example: Clare
During the final phase, the tone centered on looking back at previous career ideas and influences to focus on emerging patterns at an individual level, as well as looking forwards to how participants perceived the implications of the choices they had made. These interviews used the same data generating methods as phase 3, though, in addition to the career map from the previous interview, I also presented a table giving an overview of all interviews and how their employment and college ideas had changed over the duration of the research. The example of Matt’s table can be seen below:

### Figure 13: Matt’s Career Ideas

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Who</th>
<th>Career ideas (interview one)</th>
<th>Career ideas (interview two)</th>
<th>Career ideas (interview three)</th>
<th>Career ideas (interview four)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Matt</td>
<td>Chef</td>
<td>Chef</td>
<td>Chef in a restaurant</td>
<td>Chef in a restaurant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Police officer</td>
<td>Police officer</td>
<td>Self employed chef</td>
<td>Self employed chef</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>ICT</td>
<td>ICT</td>
<td>Chauffer</td>
<td>Chauffer</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Matt | No college ideas | Might attend: 1. College in C park (unidentifiable), 2. BG college (M college, BG campus) | Wishes to attend: 1. D Academy to study Apprenticeship in professional cooking, level 2 or 2. T College to study professional cooking, level 2. | Wishes to attend: T College to study professional cooking, level 2 – Application submitted. No longer very interested in attending: D Academy to study Apprenticeship in professional cooking, level 2 or 2. |

The use of these tables felt like an appropriate way of feeding some of the data back to the participants, and in several cases it prompted some further useful discussion, such as which career and college ideas had been sustained and which had not. The career map and table were used for both
verification and as a stimulus, and, for both, a final set of notes were made
and agreed upon to inform the final career map. This was due to a final
verification for this table being impossible, as it was the final interview. This
final phase of the data gathering process was explicitly focused on looking
back and reflecting on the research process with participants.

The recording of what was said using all of the methods I have outlined
became crucial. This is where ‘Livescribe’ proved to be valuable. Livescribe
is a pen that records visual data as it appears on the page, as well as an
audio accompaniment. It does this using a microphone, a miniature camera
behind the tip of the pen, and electronic paper. The microphone records
audio parallel to what is written, and tapping the pen on any area of the
diagram or notes plays the audio recorded as it was made. Further
information can be found at: http://www.livescribe.com/. This device was
used to record all notes, drawings and mind maps.

The software enabled me to record, and later view, the development of the
visual and audio data simultaneously; this was very useful in supporting
navigation of the data, especially when developing the career maps from
notes into digital career maps. It enabled me to flag important points to be
returned to later, and encouraged me to attend carefully to what was being
said. It also supported the clarification of visual data, as I encouraged the
participants to describe anything that was unclear while they drew. Having
the audio enabled completeness, and allowed me to review as often as
needed to ensure understanding was achieved, enabling me to review
information such as tone, pitch, volume, etc. Finally, I did not need to rely on
memory to compose summaries when needed. Livescribe therefore enabled
the research to benefit from improved access to both visual and audio data.

4.7 Ethical Considerations

This study has been designed in such a way that the wellbeing and voices of
participants have been of central importance. This is partly due to my own
background as a youth and community work practitioner and researcher, where the wellbeing of young people has always been prioritized in work that ultimately seeks to improve young people’s lives, either as individuals or as part of a larger collective. Additionally, my interest in representing the voices of participants was also influenced by the aims of the research, which were to represent and co-construct participant’s realities with them. The process through which this was achieved will now be outlined.

To ensure the wellbeing of participants both prior to and during the study, openness and transparency was embedded throughout the research process, and care was taken to keep participants fully briefed regarding the purpose and requirements of the study. With this in mind, their voluntary and informed engagement with the research was seen as central.

A process of gaining informed consent was conducted in accordance with the University of Manchester’s ethical guidelines, and consent was gained from both the young people and their parents or guardians. This process was as follows: the school, specifically the head of year, selected an original sample of 15 participants, based on criteria including gender and attainment levels, in order that the sample was deemed representative of their year group. A letter was sent to all potential participants’ home addresses that included information regarding the study, the contact details of the head of year and myself for further information, and two consent forms, one for the young person, the other for the parent or guardian (see appendices 1-6).

Once study information had been distributed, an information session was held for all potential participants a week after the distribution of the letters; this gave the young people an opportunity to find out more and ask questions. During this session, I outlined the research area and what would be involved. Following this meeting, I allowed a further two weeks for students to consider whether or not they would like to be involved in the research. A second session was then held to confirm which students wished to volunteer, and at the start of the first interview the final consent checks took place. Following this process, 13 of the original 15 confirmed their
interest in being included in the study. Although the risk of disengagement was likely to have been high, due to the research involving vulnerable participants over an extended period of time, no participants chose to withdraw their consent once they had begun their engagement with the research. To ensure that participation was continually voluntary, I used ongoing consent checking throughout the research process.

4.8 Rationale for the Research Design

Now that the interview participants have been introduced and the research design outlined, the rationale for carrying out the research in this way will be presented. In considering why this was the best way to conduct this study, the research aims, the background of participants and my own potential bias as a researcher are important factors. The research aims required honest interpretations of the accounts of participants; the research participants’ backgrounds added an additional challenge to accessing these realities, and so did the position of the researcher acting as the ‘instrument of enquiry’ (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). With the research aims and these additional challenges in mind, care was needed when seeking to accurately represent the realities of the research participants. Trustworthiness was of central importance. Indeed, Lincoln and Guba state: “All the while the naturalist must be concern[ed] with trustworthiness. In the final analysis, the study is for naught if its trustworthiness is questionable” (1985: 287). Considering that ‘credibility’ is achieved when findings are representative of the realities of the research participants (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), the methods through which this 'credibility' was enabled will be central to judging the trustworthiness of the study.

Lincoln and Guba’s (1985) way of judging the trustworthiness of findings is part of an alternative framework and language that Lincoln and Guba developed to replace the positive terms: internal validity, external validity, reliability and objectivity. They believed it unfair to judge the worth of post positivist research by positivist values. As Merriam (1998) points out, if the
rationale for conducting an investigation is gaining an understanding of a particular research environment, the criteria for trusting the study will be different to one where the objective is to discover a law or test a hypothesis. With this in mind, Lincoln and Guba developed an alternative set of terms to replace those from a positivist paradigm. ‘Internal validity, external validity, reliability and objectivity’ are replaced with ‘credibility, transferability, dependability and conformability’. Essentially, the concepts developed are better able to deal with the complexity of human subjects, of the research environment, of the multiple constructions of reality and of the continual shaping of knowledge. As stated, when considering the importance of really hearing the voices of participants in understanding their worlds, it is the ‘credibility’ of information that is of most relevance here when considering the extent to which data can be trusted. With this in mind, it will be the achievement of credibility within the collection of and analysis of data that will be prioritized.

As already mentioned, both the participants' background and my role as the researcher acting as an instrument of inquiry presented certain challenges to the research. Some of these related to the issue of credibility, and will be outlined below, but they also posed challenges in establishing the trustworthiness of the study. Firstly, with regards to the participants' backgrounds, young people who live in disadvantaged areas tend to be less willing than those from more affluent backgrounds to trust and speak openly, especially to those who they perceive as being in positions of power (Helve and Bynner, 2007). Therefore, the development of a relationship between myself, the researcher and the participants that was as equal as possible, and where honest and open communication could take place, was an important priority. This was supported through the research design and methods used; for example, visual diagrams that could be presented back to participants easily helped to develop trust and the two-way flow of knowledge.

Secondly, in terms of the researcher acting as the ‘instrument of enquiry’ (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), and therefore being integral to the collection of data,
it was recognized that the researcher is not excluded from the multiple constructions of reality that exist (i.e. they also come with their own way of understanding the world that has the potential to be projected upon the way that data is interpreted). Without building in techniques for enabling trustworthiness, the values and perspective of the researcher can affect what they understand the data is telling them, resulting in research bias.

In addressing these challenges while representing the perspectives of participants with as much credibility as possible, three key components were felt to be central: a) that participants should recognise their own explanations as authentic b) building a trusting relationship between participants and researcher through prolonged engagement, and c) reflexivity on the part of the researcher and the values/beliefs (or habitus and capital) that they bring to the research process. The way that these methods built credibility into the study design will now be outlined.

4.9 Supporting Credibility Through Members’ Checks

With regards to building trusting relationships and checking that participants recognised their own explanations as authentic, ‘Member checks’, or participant verification (Robson, 2002), were central. Lincoln and Guba (1985: 314) described this as ‘the most crucial technique for establishing credibility’. These terms refer to directly checking that information heard or recorded is as close as possible to what the research participant intended. As well as increasing the trustworthiness of the actual data, conducting member checks also facilitated trust, and enabled a more equal researched/researcher relationship by demonstrating my interest in understanding participants’ perspective. These additional benefits were valuable due to the characteristics of the young people involved. As has been discussed, trust is required when facilitating honest accounts, as young people from disadvantaged locations tend to be less open to sharing their experiences, especially with people who occupy positions of power. According to Heath et al (2009), this is due to a higher potential for anxiety regarding what is
expected of them and their ability to meet this. Such feelings can lead to uneasiness, resulting in responses being suppressed, causing participants to answer questions in ways that represent what respondents feel the researcher wants to hear rather than what they believe (Heath et al, 2009). I noticed this when I asked open questions within the first interview; for example, ‘what would you like to do following school?’, which was interpreted as ‘are you planning on attending university, and if so, why?’. These responses were likely to have been affected by the way I was perceived as a researcher from a University; I will return to the issue of my own role as a researcher later. The benefits of member checks became evident in a noticeable reduction in such responses in later phases of the research. Together with prolonged engagement, the development of more equal and trusting relationships were enabled, where participants felt comfortable and recognized the value of discussing their thoughts and ideas in an honest and open manner.

The development of a relationship was achieved over time by demonstrating that I was genuinely interested in participant’s opinions, decisions and constructed knowledge. I checked regularly that I had understood by summarising participants’ words and asking questions if clarification was needed. Notes were made in diagram form, allowing central themes to be easily read. I referred to these notes, allowing me to be transparent regarding the interview data I was collecting, and gaining immediate participant verification. I then wrote these notes up, and, with the help of the interview recording, developed them into concept maps, which were presented back to participants at the start of the following interview (as outlined earlier). This provided a final check and allowed for this interpretation to be explored and questioned. As well as career maps, mind maps were also used as a final method of gaining participant verification. They were used in a similar way to career maps in that they were developed from interview data, but this data was gathered from across several interviews rather than just one, and a focus was placed on gathering background information rather than career ideas and influences. A recognition that their perspective was valued was also supported by
clarifying the purpose of the research at particular moments, emphasising my wish to really understand different people’s thinking behind why certain career decisions were being made. I re-iterated that the point was to really understand as thoroughly as possible, and that there is therefore no right or wrong answer. Participants seemed to really hear this, and many worked hard to explain to me in as much detail as possible why they leaned towards certain ideas over others.

As a consequence of these processes, participants were recognised as experts in their own lives, understanding was co-constructed rather than extracted, and incorporating this level of respect and value for the views of participants aided the development of trust. Research participants seemed impressed by the level of detail with which I was able to recount conversations from 6 months ago, and by the fact that I had taken the time to draw this information up into a diagram, enhancing engagement and interest. This was evident in body language and tone of voice that displayed a heightened level of interest and surprise; this was complemented by statements such as: ‘yeah, that’s right that!’ (Carrie, phase 2). The use of member checks over an extended period of time helped to define my role as interpreter within the research process.

4.10 Supporting Credibility through Prolonged Engagement

Prolonged engagement is defined by Lincoln and Guba as ‘the investment of sufficient time to achieve certain purposes’ (1985: 301) - in this case a rich account of what shapes participants’ career related choices. Within this study, the duration of the data collection period was two years; I used this time to develop a rich understanding of the research environment to aid interpretation of the data and build trust with research participants so that the facilitation of honest accounts could be supported. In addition to my time with the research participants, my prolonged engagement also refers to time in the research setting.
I already had an understanding of the area where the school is located from working there for three years prior to returning to full time study. This gave me considerable insight into the culture of the estate (McDonald, 2005). I also believe that working in this area, and with schools managing difficult intakes, gave me empathy for the pressure the school was operating under, therefore supporting the development of relationships within the school.

Over the course of the research, I spent one day per week in school during the first year and one day per month in the second and third years. While there, I worked from the family support workers office, ate in the canteen and attended staff events and meetings. This enabled me to build a series of trusting relationships with staff. As a consequence, I was given greater access within the school than might otherwise have been the case.

Access operates on an ‘incremental continuum […] where the researcher is gradually able to move from the initial permission to enter the building to a series of developed and trusting relationships’ (Walford, 1991: 34). Therefore, although initial access had been granted through the university, prolonged engagement facilitated additional access to the school via a school network login, a fingerprint login and the allocation of a desk in the family support workers room. This provided opportunities to socialise with staff, navigate the school without an escort, and provided me with autonomy when setting up and reserving spaces for interviews. These privileges supported a greater understanding of the research environment that was invaluable when interpreting the research findings.

Significant relationships with staff included the assistant head, who agreed to initially act as my link to the school. We met every 2/3 months for informal chats during the research design phase, where she provided a sounding board and valuable knowledge of the school. In return, I helped on a number of small projects, maintaining an allotment with a group of non or infrequent attenders, and supporting a similar group to learn building skills. As a result, the head of year and family support worker for year 10, then year 11,
supported me in the identification of the sample, in gaining consent, and in identifying an interview space and distributing certificates.

Prolonged engagement has the potential to improve the interpretation of findings by maximising the ability of the researcher to grasp motives, beliefs, concerns, interests, unconscious behaviours and the customs of participants (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). I became especially aware of the benefits of my prolonged engagement when interpreting findings, in that it supported me in seeing the world as the participants did, and I felt that I had an understanding and appreciation of the culture in which the research was situated.

In terms of the advantages of my prolonged engagement with the research participants (i.e. the students), this method was particularly useful in developing trust and building relationships due to this being a potentially hard to reach group, as discussed. Spending longer with research participants and checking their understanding through participant verification facilitated the development of relationships that became far more relaxed, and that resembled much more of a partnership than a hierarchical researcher/research dynamic. The space that prolonged engagement enabled in opening up communication with participants was evident across interviews. As the interviews progressed, participants were generally more open to discussing their fears and anxieties, and how these feelings affected their decisions, rather than providing rationales that seemed more logical, such as hearing it was a good college. For example, in Carrie’s final interview, the conversation was geared more towards reflecting upon anxieties regarding moving forward, starting college, leaving friends, confirming where she is going, and looking forward to the kind of life Carrie hoped for.

In addition to carrying out member checks and conducting the research over an extended period of time, I also crosschecked the data gathered for inconsistencies. This was done by checking each participant’s data across the four phases, and identifying inconsistencies both between and within interviews. This process was supported during data gathering by returning to
matters previously discussed with the participants and generating additional data through rephrased questions. I also used triangulation (Robson, 2002), in that more than one data gathering tool was used to gather information on the same topic. For example, ‘drawings’ and ‘mind maps’ were both used to gather background data. Prior to data analysis, I was able to use these varied sources to clarify any inconsistencies within the data, such as which brother was being referred to, or whether they meant their sister who lived at home or another.

4.11 The Role of the Researcher

In achieving credible findings, I have recognised my own role within the research and the influence of this upon the interpretation of data collected. Coming from a youth and community work and a naturalistic position, I recognised the importance of seeing knowledge as subjective as well as objective (Bourdieu, 1977), and that what is observed must be understood as being constructed in people’s minds as a result of what they see and experience, and therefore that I understood that I was not exempt from having my own ‘construction of reality’ (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In recognising this, I understood the significance of my role as the ‘instrument of inquiry’ (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), and the care that was needed in handling the accounts that participants shared with me.

With this in mind, to strengthen the credibility of my interpretation of the data, I took a number of precautions. First, as explained, I used member checks throughout data collection; I also cross-checked information, such as family background and peer influence, prior to analysis; in addition, I kept a research diary. This supported credibility, as it enabled me to develop and reflect upon my own interpretation of discussions with participants. Commentary can play a key role in what Lincoln and Guba term ‘progressive subjectivity’. For example, sections of my research diary that deal with emerging patterns and theories (Research Diary, 2012) reflect upon the credibility of these interpretations by questioning themes that appeared to be
emerging from the data. Questions such as ‘how evident are these patterns?’ and ‘Does the theory really help to understand trends?’ have been important to my thinking in maintaining credibility during the analysis of findings.

Keeping a research diary supported a wider process of reflection, and I was continually mindful of my role within the research and of my developing relationship with participants. It was through research diary notes that the development of this relationship could be observed. “Jack seemed careful of how he answered a couple of my college questions, he was keen for me to understand how much he wanted to attend the schools 6th form. That I might somehow doubt his loyalty to it”² (research diary, June 2011). Six months later I commented, following the 3rd set of interviews: “Jack was quite relaxed in this interview, he seemed to have less of a filter [than in previous interviews] affecting what he discussed regarding his ideas” (research diary, December 2011). What I meant by a filter was that participants such as Jack seemed to begin by discussing ideas in ways that they felt was expected of their participation in the research. In later interviews, this changed into them engaging with me much more in what they thought. Some participants used these interviews as a way of considering their ideas.

As I reflected upon interviews, and the development of my relationships with participants, I also noticed that, during later interviews, Carrie experimented with her previous role as informant in responses to my role as interpreter, and took on other roles such as wanting to be counseled or advised. She asked for information and confided in me with regards to tensions in relationships with teachers or family members, and shared anxieties such as exam pressure. Her willingness for me to play a different role in the relationship was probably helped by me explaining the confidentiality of our discussions during the process of obtaining informed consent, the developing trust within our relationship, and me being unconnected to the other people in her social network. When this happened, I tended to move briefly into this role, often responding with empathy. There were occasions, however, where

² Throughout this thesis, quotes from participants contain colloquial language, however, all quotes will be given verbatim.
I repositioned myself as investigator and Carrie as informant by asking for further detail on the topic being discussed. I did this when I felt we were uncovering something important or when Carrie asked for advice, as I was reluctant to position myself as advisor for fear of influencing her choices. When I did this, Carrie instinctively switched into her role as informant and the interview continued. In order for Carrie to enjoy and remain engaged in the interviews I was careful not to push too hard for information or be too rigid in my approach, as these other roles also felt important to our engagement. From this, we can see that my reflection during and following interviews formed an important part of the research process, both in terms of relationship building and management and in terms of potential research bias.

Through reflections I was also able to recognize trends in the data being collected; this is demonstrated in the set of notes from research diary year 3, presented below in figure 14:
The process of decision-making
With this research having taken place over several years, the participants can be seen to have travelled through several phases of decision making and this is noticeable in the interview data; these phases will be briefly outlined below.

Interview 1 (December 2010)
This interview tends to be quite limited; the young people have a number of career ideas but no real understanding as to how to gain the required qualification. College and career ideas show little or no connection and there is limited sense of a career pathway.

Interview 2 and 3 (June and December 2011)
The 2nd and 3rd interviews were where a lot of thinking was going on. Participants were keen to explore their options in relation to jobs and college choices. Young people were at this stage able to make some strong links between them and they were generally better informed.

Interview 4 (January 2012)
Less thinking going on at this stage as most young people were finalising their career ideas and thinking in terms of a pathway through college to paid employment.

4.12 The Research Findings

The findings were analysed by looking across all 33 concept maps produced and verified by participants during interviews, listening to interview recordings through both Nvivo and Livescribe (see research process section), and by reading transcripts and the research diary notes for the three year research period. In doing so, I took time to immerse myself in the data to look for emerging themes. Sometimes this was done systematically, by counting the emphasis and repetition of a particular theme or pattern; sometimes it was done creatively, recognising relationships between
particular concepts as they occurred. This process took time, and required continually moving between the research data by reading around the concepts that made up the conceptual framework and the notes of the preliminary analysis of this data.

In moving between the research data and the conceptual framework, I was continually testing that the concepts selected were appropriate considering the research findings. There was a continual toing and froing, checking that emerging themes represented the concepts selected (e.g. cultural capital) and then using the theoretical concepts to develop further themes. It was with this framework that a deeper level of analysis and an understanding of both structural and agency factors could be explored.

With regards to testing that the conceptual framework fitted the data, an overall conceptual map was drawn up separately, with an emphasis on the data rather than the framework. This map (figure 15) involved a process of looking across and reflecting upon the data with the aid of diagrams and a research diary. It incorporated the major themes influencing participants’ career ideas across all 33 individual conceptual maps.
Figure 15: Overall Concept Map of all Interviews
As can be seen from the ‘overall concept map of all interviews’ (figure 15), this map identified the importance of knowledge (information sources) in influencing career ideas; this knowledge is informed mostly by people and work experience, either formal or informal. Other themes, such as skill and job qualities, could be understood as part of participants constructing an understanding of self and career idea, part of the reflexivity process outlined in the conceptual framework (chapter 3). Returning to the role of people, it was through exploring this map and the data it reflected that their importance and expectations in the forming and consideration of participants’ career ideas were identified, as well as the relationship between the trust contained in these relationships and the extent to which they were heard. Also identified were the type of people therefore listened to, the role of knowledge in shaping and developing participants’ interests in different career ideas, and, later, how these people and the knowledge shared was shaped by the fields these people inhabited. This process of analysis provided evidence that social capital in the form of knowledge was central to the career ideas that people were aware of, and that the content of these networks was affected by trust, meaning that a higher level of bonding than bridging capital could be found within. To reach and test such conclusions, I moved continually between the different forms of interview data, especially the transcripts/recordings of interviews and the concept maps.

An important part of testing the data with the conceptual framework and developing the necessary depth in analysis was looking for certain themes or constructs. The following table provides a summary of the kinds of data sought during this process through the areas that the conceptual framework prompted exploration of.
Figure 16: Operationalizing the Concepts

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Construct</th>
<th>Operationalization</th>
<th>Examples from the text</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Field</td>
<td>The environment that participants inhabit that contains a variety of different types of capital</td>
<td>To gather data around the environment/groups that participants inhabit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Habitus</td>
<td>A set of personal characteristics and capital, developed as a result of spending time in environments. These characteristics and capital have been internalized</td>
<td>To look for evidence of alignment and misalignment with the variety of fields inhabited. To consider the effect of this upon field position</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social capital</td>
<td>A form of capital that exists in participants’ networks</td>
<td>Look at what capital is contained within networks, what young people’s social networks look like</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reflexivity</td>
<td>The ability to reflect on the self and potential actions, to consider possible futures based on constructions</td>
<td>Look for evidence of an awareness of self, an awareness of possible futures and the implication of this on career decision-making in relation to social mobility</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As can be seen, then, I focused upon: identifying the fields participants inhabited that seemed to be important in shaping their career ideas; the extent to which they were aligned with these fields; the social capital held by participants within fields; the sorts of social networks that existed among participants; the extent to which capital and characteristics were internalized into the habitus; and, finally, the extent to which reflexivity was present, and the potential for it to influence change in decision making in relation to achieving social mobility. In addition to this, I used some emerging themes from the concept maps that were in line with the concepts discussed; for example, the importance of trust, location, type of relationship and so on. Keeping some of these factors in mind during interviews enabled me to
develop the detail of this theory. I then wrote up these themes and continued to analyse the data through my writing, looking for evolving narratives.

4.13 Chapter Summary

This chapter has provided an account of the process for gathering and analyzing data that informs the findings for this research. In doing so, it has demonstrated the relationship between my background as a youth and community work practitioner, the questions that this study seeks to address, and the methodological approach used to guide the collection and interpretation of this data. I have argued that a Bourdieusian approach requires a methodology that recognizes that people have multiple constructions of reality, since this approach argues that how one sees the world (habitus) is located in the fields one occupies, and is shaped by the capital that is available and accessible. It is through this understanding that focus is placed on methods that seek to understand these realities. The use of a naturalistic inquiry approach together with the selection of the appropriate methods for maintaining credibility have been embedded within the design for this study. Furthermore, the focus upon effectively interpreting the voices of research participants as honestly as possible has remained a consistent aim across the data gathering and analysis process. Member checks, prolonged engagement, cross checking and the use of a research diary in reflecting upon the interview process and findings have all been important in developing trustworthiness within this study. In doing so, care has been taken to address the challenges of both the interview participants and myself, as the instrument of inquiry, in facilitating the development of these accounts.

Trustworthiness has also been important in the analysis of data, and care has been taken when moving between the raw data, the conceptual maps, and literature on the conceptual framework. During this process, the framework has been tested and the conceptual framework operationalized. It is the role of the next chapter to present the analysis of this data through the
lens of the conceptual framework, and, in doing so, to address the research questions through three findings chapters, each focusing upon elements of the conceptual framework and the presence of them within the data. Through these findings, an account will be presented of why these participants often do not choose in ways that are advantageous.
Chapter 5: Plotting the Fields

The next three chapters will present the research findings through the lens of the conceptual framework. As a reminder, the following research questions were developed to reflect this framework so that the theoretical concepts used can be discussed with the research aims and findings in mind.

How do the fields that young people occupy shape their habitus responsible for career decision making?

and

To what extent is reflexive agency possible in transcending young people’s social position and achieving social mobility?

This question will be answered in three parts within the three empirical chapters. First of all, the structural conditions under which the habitus is shaped will be outlined through presenting the fields relevant to decision making (Chapter 5), then the importance of social networks in how capital is transferred from these field to the habitus will be demonstrated (Chapter 6), and finally the potential for reflexive agency will be considered with this structural understanding in mind (Chapter 7).

This chapter, the first of the three, will therefore present an account of the structural conditions shaping elements of the habitus affecting participants’ career related choices. The fields central to this shaping will be identified, mapped and explored. In doing so, attention will be paid to capital valued within them, and to how each field contributes to producing and reinforcing habituses that are typical for research participants. Exploring each field in turn like this will provide a platform from which all other concepts can be grounded; therefore, the content of capital and reflexivity present within these fields may be anticipated.
Figure 17: Position of Fields

In order to see the micro fields that participants moved between as embedded and shaped by the macro fields, each is located visually within a Venn diagram (figure 17), demonstrating their overlap and influence in relation to each other. The research participants are located in the centre of this diagram, in the space where all fields overlap. As can be seen, the most dominant macro field identified is ‘education’; this encompasses the implications of neo-liberalism upon the education market. The school and, to an extent, the peer fields sit within this; the school overlapping the family and community, and the peer overlapping the school field. In mapping each field, attention will be paid to the capital present and valued within these four fields, and to the effect of this upon shaping elements of the habitus responsible for career decision making and, subsequently, the career trajectories typical for sample participants. Each field will now be mapped in turn, starting with the education field and moving towards micro peer fields.

5.1 The Education Field

The education field is so vast that it is difficult to comprehend; based upon the ideology of neo-liberal marketisation, it incorporates a landscape of educational institutions that are increasingly becoming privatized. A quasi-
market is fundamental to structuring these institutions and their status within the education field, and therefore a school's position in the market is based upon their ability to compete with others like them in a number of different areas. These areas include, but are not limited to: performance in assessments and reviews such as Ofsted reports (http://www.ofsted.gov.uk); and comparisons between other institutions of the same type, such as rankings within league tables. In addition, institutions with high status through such rankings and assessments attract a higher quality student intake, making their status easier to maintain due to positive assessment and results being more likely.

The structuring of institutions within the education field facilitates competition for status that encourages them to be strategic in how they achieve positive assessments. Competition is argued, within a neo-liberal agenda, to enable greater quality and freedom of choice for young people who have become customers in this field. However, often, in reality, provision is structured in such a way that equality of access is limited for particular groups, and young people who live in disadvantaged areas tend to only have access to institutions with limited types and levels of valued capital (Ball et al, 2002).

An important example, and one relevant to the school field explored next, is access to different types of educational capital. Government incentives encourage institutions such as schools in poorer areas to focus upon providing access to vocational rather than academic qualifications. This is through the emphasis placed on test results, whereby these types of subjects are assumed to provide higher results for these types of students. The consequence is that provision is organised geographically, where high status academic qualifications are more readily available in affluent areas; this is the case in the study location, and these programmes are more likely to lead to further opportunities such as university and potentially paid, secure work. Low status vocational qualifications are more likely to be offered in schools in disadvantaged areas in order to meet the demands of customers, and also to ensure best performance (since such qualifications are officially seen as equivalent to academic A-levels). Therefore, good performance in vocational
subjects can mean that the school will look like a high performing school, even though those qualifications don't offer the individual student the same level of capital. It is this macro field of the education 'quasi-market' that structures educational provision such as that offered in secondary schools, colleges and universities, and affects their values, and the capital available within them.

5.2 The School Field

The school where this research took place is an institution that is geographically located in one of the 10% of most deprived wards in the UK (IMD, 2010). As discussed, students from poor backgrounds are perceived as more likely to achieve better grades in vocational rather than academic subjects. As such, this school has chosen to focus upon offering mostly vocational subjects in the hope that students will achieve competitive results when converted directly into GCSE equivalents. The aim is to provide valued capital and status for the school, enabling it to attain a stronger position in its respective league tables and consequently better compete in the educational market. Considering the school's consistently unsatisfactory Ofsted reports at the time of the research, this strategy seemed to be working well, as, despite the disadvantaged profile of the school’s intake in 2011, 47% of students achieved five A* to C grades at GCSE or equivalent level, including English and mathematics. This is comparable to the national state school average of 58.2% (DfE 2012).

As well as there being a shortage of academic GCSE options (see appendix 8: final results of participants, 2012), those that were available tended to be less popular than vocational options, with only 15% of students in the participants’ year group taking the three core GCSE subjects of English, mathematics and science. So both the school's and the students’ prioritisation of vocational over academic subjects has had a limiting effect upon pupils’ transition choices - i.e. without GCSEs in academic subjects, the participants' choice of qualification to study at post 16 is restricted to certain
vocational pathways. This is visible in the school reporting 11% of students going on to study A-levels at college (Ofsted, 2011). This low proportion is likely to be the result of a number of factors, such as: expectations from the school, peers, family and community; continuity, due to having already selected a vocational qualification in their year 9 options; an inability to meet A-level entry requirements; and the availability of colleges offering A-levels locally. The closest college offering A-levels is 10 miles from the school that participants attend.

Most students gained a place at one of three vocational colleges, all located within the estate. It seemed from the data that these narrow predetermined pathways fitted comfortably with developing habituses. The fields of these institutions were not so different to that of the school, with similar students and subjects, and located in the same familiar estate. As one member of staff explained, “They won’t go further than [name of ward on the border of the estate], I don’t want to sound snobby but they go on, you know the Micky Mouse courses. This is such a shame ‘cause there are some great kids here, you know really capable ones!” (English teacher, July 2013).

Both staff and students within the school showed a strong tendency to avoid rather than embrace risk of failure, and that seemed to be amplified by an uneasiness regarding college:

I don’t know, I think it’s seeing like, you know ‘cause it’s dead hard to get into, you know you have got to be dead good and stuff. I think that’s the main reason, I’d be, like, scared if I wasn’t good enough or something (Zara, phase 2).

A tendency to avoid risk was also present throughout senior management, teaching and support staff. During a meeting with the deputy headmaster, he spoke about students struggling to operate outside of their comfort zone by discussing the level of intimidation he observed among students when visiting different schools during football games. He described one occasion where he noticed a significant shift in the students’ confidence during the bus
journey to an away game. He described driving out of the estate, through leafy areas south of the city, then into the school grounds, stating that by the time students were getting off the bus they were already 1-0 down (research diary, January 2014). This example demonstrates how students were often viewed as incapable of effectively operating outside of their comfort zone. The solution to this problem was often to support students in environments where they did feel comfortable; in this case to attend local vocational colleges or the school 6th form.

In a later conversation with the deputy headmaster, we discussed his belief that often other colleges were ill-equipped to offer the level of support many students needed. This belief was communicated to me during a discussion about a student who has been named Christina. Christina was a young person from the sample who had attempted to study A-levels in chemistry and mathematics at a college several miles away from the school. Although this student had been a high achiever at GCSE level, leaving with English (B), mathematics (A) and the pure sciences (B, B, B), she had failed to maintain her place in college, and I was informed that she had dropped out after four months of study. The head argued that this was due to her not being ready to leave, stating that she would have benefited from another two years of nurturing within the school sixth form on a vocational program (Meeting with deputy headmaster in November 2013, research diary 2013).

The way that students were supported reflected this viewpoint, and on one of the first occasions that I visited the school the head discussed with me his intentions to enhance the support offered to students within the 6th form through the appointment of a new family support worker. Although it was explained that the new 6th form had been instrumental in bringing down the NEET figure of the estate, it was felt that more could be done to support retention in the first year of attending (meeting with deputy headmaster in January 2011, research diary 2011). The head also discussed the additional support needed from external agencies to support students in managing their transition to post-compulsory education and careers. He was clearly invested
in providing a nurturing and supportive environment for students to enable them to stay in destinations where they felt safe.

This emphasis on supporting students within safe environments was also evident in comments made by school staff. During a conversation about the possibility of students attending placements that would provide them with experience in occupations that were less common, even if this meant them traveling further afield, a family support worker raised potential problems with this, using a recent incident with a student as an example. The student was too frightened to go to the first day of her new placement at a law firm, and rather than travelling to the organization she came into school. The placement failed, and the family support worker believed this was due to it being too unfamiliar and to her being the only student from the school who had selected to go (Meeting with FSW for year 10 February 2012, research diary 2012).

I did find one member of staff who believed students were capable of achieving more than pursuing the vocational pathways being promoted. The head of year 10 discussed her attempts to veer students away from ‘wisy washy routes’ such as media or art, explaining that she had recently been trying to channel students who she saw as ‘more capable’ onto certain option choices, for example GCSEs rather than BTECs. I got the impression through this conversation that she felt that her attempts were in significant tension with the expectations of both the school and the students. The extent to which these safe, traditional vocational options were commonplace among students was again highlighted during this conversation (Meeting with head for year 10 October 2012, research diary, 2012). Although it was clear that staff had the best interests of the students at heart, the balance between nurturing students and challenging them was firmly tipped towards the nurturing approach. This seemed to be doing little to enable students to travel outside of their comfort zone and pursue less traditional routes. For example, there was likely to have been a lack of preparation and information for transitioning to other colleges beyond the school 6th form.
Ball et al (2002) discuss the role of institutions in supporting the selection of particular pathways and educational choices. They state that schools develop processes that affect the embedded perceptions and expectations of students whereby certain choices become obvious and others unthinkable, according to where the school is positioned in the overall landscape of choice (Ball et al, 2002). This certainly seemed to fit with what I observed through conversations with school staff. I will now consider some of the possible reasons for the school's selection of these particular pathways and educational choices observed.

The school's investment in a vocational 6th form college directly across from the school building contributed to the promotion of this narrow selection of vocational courses. The school were extremely proud of this new facility, which was purpose built with impressive facilities and equipment – I was given a tour of the college's state of the art IT suite, hair and beauty equipment and sports facilities during my induction (Meeting with the deputy headmaster November 2009, research diary 2009). The college taught many of the vocational subjects available as option choices for students in year 9, and, as a result of studying these subjects at levels 1 and 2 (GCSE equivalent), many students naturally progressed onto these same or similar subjects at college (level 3). For example, when I asked Tom what he wanted to study post 16 during a conversation about his BTEC in ICT, he told me ‘I'm doing a diploma’ (Tom, phase 1), assuming I understood that this would be in the same subject. Tom saw no reason why he should not continue to study a subject that he had interest and experience of. Figure 18 shows the courses offered in the school's 6th form; all subjects offered at level 1 were also available at levels 2 and 3.
Figure 18: Courses Offered by the School 6th Form (College data, September 2012)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Course</th>
<th>Qualification details</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hair and Beauty</td>
<td>Vocational related qualification (VRQ)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Construction</td>
<td>BTEC, level 1, 2 or 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Media</td>
<td>BTEC, level 1, 2 or 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public service</td>
<td>BTEC, level 1, 2 or 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Childcare</td>
<td>BTEC, level 1, 2 or 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health and social care</td>
<td>BTEC, level 1, 2 or 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information communication technology</td>
<td>BTEC, level 1, 2 or 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sport</td>
<td>BTEC, level 1, 2 or 3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The financial structure of state schools and colleges across England and Wales is based on attached funding to each student enrolled. In this sense, the school was incentivized to enroll as many students as possible in the 6th form to enhance the budget and ensure its financial viability. A conversation in July 2014 with a member of support staff, following an Ofsted inspection where the school was deemed to still have serious weaknesses, a situation which at that point had been the case for 2 years, indicated the pressure staff had been under to fill places leading up to this point (research diary, 2014). I was told that members of support staff were fearful for their jobs following this inspection, and that the main cause of this insecurity was low enrolment figures in the 6th form due to a lack of interest from pupils outside of the school. It was clear from this conversation that filling college places was something staff from both the 6th form and school had felt responsible for. This pressure to attract students is the product of the marketisation of the education system, where failing to maintain targets can result in institutions losing their position and even their existence in this field.

In addition to this, discussions with research participants during interviews indicated the careers guidance information already provided by the school was considered hugely limited. Participants did not mention information
provided through class or informal conversations with teachers, and when I asked Clare in the final interview how she felt the school had influenced her decision-making regarding college, she told me that other than a Connexions interview she couldn’t think of any other ways the school had supported her. At the start of year 11, several other participants commented on their surprise at not having been spoken to about college options; Carrie compared the lack of information to that which had been received regarding University:

No, I don’t even, like... this school has took us to, like, Universities to look around and they told us everything, like, the loans and all that, we did some day at [the] University and the er... was it student ambassadors, yeah, them, they was telling us everything... Like, the loans, everything that they do to survive and stuff... stuff like that... and how... They took us in the lecture rooms but we’ve not been to, like, the colleges and stuff, to do stuff like that and I think we should really ‘cause college is before Uni and if you don’t know what you’re doing at college then how could you get into Uni anyway? (Carrie, phase 1).

Tom also highlighted the lack of information he had regarding colleges other than the school 6th form, suggesting the importance of this in his decision regarding his college application:

I was thinking about coming [to college A] and studying IT, then I was thinking about all the other colleges and sixth forms and that, but I don’t really, I’ve not really looked at the other ones, this is the only one I know about (Tom, phase 2).

It seemed that external colleges were rarely mentioned, but access to information about the attached sixth form was plentiful. Students discussed being provided with literature and brochures on the facilities and courses, and being invited to open days about studying in 6th form, but repeatedly referred to a silence regarding other college options. This was perceived as a
lack of effort on the part of the school, and there was some disappointment around this. “They will probably just give us a booklet at the end of year 11” (Matt, phase 3).

The 6th form was a popular choice, and the majority of students were keen to consider it as a serious option. Although some frustration at the lack of information regarding external colleges was present, generally this did not seem to be a concern for students. Some students selected the 6th form without hesitation; Jack, for example, only momentarily considered another college. When I asked which college he had thought about attending, he told me:

Don’t have a clue, just gonna go 6th form, once I’ve got good enough grades to go I’m gonna see what course I can do, see what makes me feel happy and what course I want to do (Jack, phase 1).

We can see from figure 19, which presents Jack’s employment and college ideas over the duration of interviews, that he considered two colleges in total: the school’s 6th form and another - one mile from the school. With regards to the first, he knew the location, the building, several courses that were of interest and the teacher who taught them. In terms of the second, he knew its location and that it ran a course in media and games design, information he had acquired from friends. His interest was based on familiarity, the distance of the college from his house, ease of travel and not having to pay bus fare. Jack was fairly typical in relation to his engagement with college choices.
**Figure 19: Jack’s Employment and College Ideas**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Idea type</th>
<th>Interview one</th>
<th>Interview two</th>
<th>Interview three</th>
<th>Interview four</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Employment</td>
<td>Games Designer</td>
<td>Games designer Computer graphics Media</td>
<td>Games designer Computer graphics</td>
<td>Games designer Computer graphics Animation</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Students, like staff, displayed a silence around academic pathways, and when they were referred to it was often only to discount them: ‘you have to be really brainy to go there [when referring to a college that offered A levels]’ (Harriet phase 2).

Those students who considered atypical routes (i.e. not the school sixth form) exhibited a need to justify their choice. For example, unprompted, Carrie spent some time explaining why she was not planning on attending the 6th form, starting with:

Not everyone wants to go to 6th form’ […] ‘Cause you want to meet new people and, like… I know it sounds horrible, but if you don’t like someone you don’t really… like, you’ll leave school and you want to meet new people and stuff. But if you go to 6th form there’s, like, every chance that half of the school is going to be going and you want to get out and like… have a change sort of thing. Go to [a different college] ‘cause other people are going to go to different other colleges and stuff and you want to meet new people and that (Carrie, phase 1).
From this, we can see that Carrie is grappling with a sense of disloyalty not only to the school but also to her peer group. It seemed she was concerned she could be judged as thinking she was better than the people around her, and although she was keen to differentiate herself from others at times, she clearly felt uncomfortable with this perception, and experienced considerable tension between wanting something different and maintaining loyalty. Carrie seemed to recognize her misalignment with the school’s expectations in her decision to attend an alternative college to the school’s 6th form (‘I know it sounds horrible but...’ (Carrie, phase 1), and this example, which will be explored in greater detail in chapter 7, demonstrates the powerful pressure to follow the narrow transition pathways that the school made easy to access in its own sixth form.

In summary, vocational pathways were desirable for the majority of students, and so they demonstrated little resistance to the school’s focus on providing vocational qualifications at GCSE level and guidance towards vocational pathways. It seemed that students were already self-excluding from academic subjects before this point, due to various factors such as a perception of themselves as ‘not the academic type’ (Carrie, phase 3), having a pre-existing interest in a vocational pathway, or the college being too far away. This meant that the process of maintaining expectations considering the school’s position in the education market place was less apparent (Ball et al, 2002). However, recognizing that cause and effect are mutually influencing each other, rather than being one dimensional (Lincoln and Guba, 1985), we may understand that it is the result of a number of factors simultaneously influencing each other that is responsible for the expectations felt by students to study predominantly vocational subjects in local colleges such as the 6th form. The school, students and, as we will see from later sections, the family, community and peer group fields, were all contributing to the reinforcement of these expectations through the shaping of participants’ habituses.

The school's role in shaping participants' habituses to select vocational subject options within its school and college institutions is partly an attempt
to advance the position of these institutions within the education field. In the school, this is in regards to league table results, where vocational qualifications are assumed to result in better outcomes for the school and students, and in the college this is in regards to the number of students being awarded BTEC qualifications. However, by placing value on specific types of capital, in this case vocational education capital, and consequently guiding students’ decision making in this way, students are at risk of becoming marginalised by selecting pathways that limit access to capital that is of value to them individually in higher status fields: academic educational capital. A lack of this capital within participants’ habituses will limit their opportunities to access other fields, such as certain colleges or areas of work. Furthermore, Carrie’s sense of guilt at not following the trajectory expected by the school field illustrates how powerful the structures of this field are in positioning young people on to certain pathways – pathways that serve the interests of the school field, but not necessarily the interests of the participants themselves.

As a consequence of the types of pathways that seemed to be promoted by senior management, staff, and to a certain extent external agencies, as well as the students themselves, we can argue that the structure of the school field positioned students in a way that narrowed down their career pathways.

5.3 The Community and Family Field

5.3.1 The Field and Employment Related Capital

Like the school, the community and family field is structurally positioned based on its location within a disadvantaged area. The community of the estate encompasses several wards that are categorised as economically deprived and, as stated, are ranked within the 10% most deprived in the indices of multiple deprivation (IMD, 2010). The location of the community and families of participants in a disadvantaged area means that, like with the school field, the capital held and valued within these fields lacks
transferability to fields of higher status. The capital I am referring to here is cultural capital; specifically, occupational and college knowledge.

The occupational and college knowledge available to participants through this field is the consequence of the experience of other actors present within. As mentioned in Chapter 4, the local area surrounding the school was originally set up as a garden city in the early part of the 20th century, but now much of the industry and agriculture that originally supported residents is no longer available (Deakin, 1989). As a consequence, the community and family fields have experienced high levels of unemployment, and work is often insecure in nature, and limited in regard to opportunities for progression. This was reflected in the members of participants’ families referred to during interviews, many of whom worked and studied in low-skilled, vocational and gendered occupations. This is represented in Figure 20, below; the table is divided into male and female family members of the participants.

Figure 20: Family Members’ Occupations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Uniformed services</strong></td>
<td><strong>Caring professions</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Army x 3</td>
<td>Nurse x 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prison guard</td>
<td>Teaching assistant x 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Manual trades</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Builder</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Floor fitter</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mechanic</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vehicle paint sprayer</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Unskilled labour</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Driver x 3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baggage handler</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mail distributor</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parts delivery driver</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sports and leisure</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sports physiotherapist</td>
<td>Warehouse manager</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Referee</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Female family members mentioned during interviews included six who were working and two who had gone back to college. As can be seen from figure 20, all those working did so in the caring industry, such as teaching assistants; those who had returned to study had done so at local vocational colleges, one in hair and beauty, the other in health and social care. The occupations of the 17 male family members mentioned were employed in jobs mainly clustered around uniformed services, manual trades, unskilled labour and the sport and leisure industry.

These trends showed similarities with the wider local employment trends of residents; a telephone conversation with a member of staff from a nearby Regeneration Team emphasized the prominence of local residents working in low or semi-skilled occupations. He identified the major employers on the estate as the airport, the hospital and various food outlets that were mostly based in the civic center (conversation with a member of staff from the Regeneration Team May 2013, research diary entry, 2013). Although the occupations of participants’ families were rarely based with these employers, low and semi-skilled occupations were common.

The occupations of people from participants’ family and community fields affected the occupational knowledge available to participants. Although there was variation in the different industries and information participants’ families and community had access to, some offering a much richer network of resources in the form of cultural capital than others, the trends mentioned remained prominent. This was a powerful influence upon the habituses of participants, as will be demonstrated in the next chapter when we explore the role of social networks where family members are dominant. The access these people provided to certain types of cultural capital was fundamental in shaping participants’ career ideas. Therefore, I suggest that habitus shaping took place alongside a developing knowledge of the local labour market, which was acquired through observing and discussing and sometimes gaining work experience through family members in particular areas of occupations.
Although cultural capital in the form of occupational knowledge was valuable to participants in shaping their career ideas, as it provided specialised capital that held value within the family and community fields, it was limited when understood through the lens of the conceptual framework due to its lack of status (or transposability) in other fields (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990). The family/community field provided limited access to knowledge and experience of a wider range of occupations in work – capital that could have offered higher status in other fields. Therefore, as a consequence of participants inhabiting the community and family field, they were again limited by the access they had to cultural capital that was transposable to fields of higher status (and their associative occupations).

5.3.2 College Related Capital

In the same way that capital relating to employment ideas was limited by participants inhabiting the community and family field, so was capital that related to college ideas. However, rather than this resulting in only certain types of generally low status cultural capital being available, in general there was a complete silence around the influence of family or community members with regards to choosing a college to attend. In the interviews, there was only one occasion when a family member was mentioned as supporting decision-making regarding college. This was Claire’s mother, who helped her look at college courses online: “yeah, she was just like helping my sister on the computer and then she was like might as well look for you as well” (Claire, phase 2).

The interview data revealed that a total of 4 members of participants’ families attended 16-18 education, and of these only one family member completed their course; this was Zara’s mother, who took a BTEC level 2 in hair and beauty. However, these experiences, although potentially relevant to students, were not translated into cultural capital in the form of knowledge or advice, and were therefore limited in the extent to which they could play a role in influencing decision-making. The family and community field could
therefore not provide participants with cultural capital in relation to college knowledge or advice that provided them with access to higher status fields. In fact, it is possible that this lack of discussion regarding college, and the poor track record of participants' family members in completing their chosen course, may have contributed to a tendency for participants to select in ways that were relatively risk free in their eyes, contributing to the selection of colleges which offered apparently 'low status' vocational / academic capital as viewed from beyond the school/community/family fields.

5.4 Capital that had the Potential to be Problematic

In considering other forms of capital available and of value in these fields, it is necessary to return briefly to contextualizing this estate in relation to changes to the labour market. I have discussed in Chapter 2 how changes to the structure and security of low skilled work have affected the way transition is experienced by young people and the community in general. The effect of this upon high unemployment and insecure work has been difficult for residents on this estate. I was aware of the significance of the challenges managed by many residents on a daily basis through my work with families in this location prior to beginning my PhD (see chapter 1). These trends have in some cases affected families so severely that pockets of deprivation have been created where some residents experience periods of dependency on social welfare, and higher levels of crime and disorder are present; these residents might be referred to as the ‘recurrently poor’ (Shildrick, MacDonald, Webster and Garthwaite, 2012). Residents who have repeated encounters with poverty across the life course are caught up in a low pay / no pay cycle, where work is precarious. The circumstances of these environments have the potential to affect the priorities, values and access young people who inhabit them have to forms of capital. The presence of and value attributed to certain kinds of capital has the potential to create tension in other fields, potentially contributing to feelings of social exclusion.
An example of the presence of potentially problematic forms of cultural capital within the data can be seen through a conversation with Matt regarding getting into trouble out of school, where he described a recent fight with a younger boy:

Yeah nearly got stabbed. Not by a knife. It was some kid and he was messing about on his bike, and I was like, are you serious, but he was like an eleven year old kid. Asking me about my cousin and I was like oh don’t start that. [...] It was just one of those things that happen on the street, like; I could have gone to the police but just the way my family are, I’m kind of not like that. If you know what I mean? (Matt, phase 4).

From Matt’s description, it appeared the fight was prompted by his cousin’s reputation locally, and that this was not the first time this had caused him problems. It seems the younger boy was looking to increase his status, since relatives of people with a reputation for trouble or gang involvement can provide opportunities for others to achieve valued capital. Winning a fight or being successful at intimidating Matt would have provided such valued capital, suggesting the younger, winning boy has the same status as Matt’s cousin within the local community. ‘[He was] asking me about my cousin and I was like, ‘oh, don’t start that’. The general tone of the conversation and his description of the aftermath following it demonstrates the relative acceptance of these sorts of events as part of life on the estate. When I asked how Matt’s father was about the fight he tells me ‘No, he was like ‘sweet, it’s just one of those things’ (Matt, phase 4). In order to demonstrate how ok his father was, he told me about another fight where someone tried stabbing his father. In this moment he seemed to recognise how this might sound to an outsider and explained ‘Yeah but it’s not like something that happens and then it carries on, it does stop’ (Matt, phase 4).

Where incidents such as this are a concern for participants and their families, protection becomes an important form of social capital. In Matt’s case, his
father was viewed as a resource that provided him with protection, and this role was an important dynamic in their relationship.

My dad looks after me over everything, me and [...] my other brother, ‘cause obviously my brother doesn’t live with us, we are his main priority. Like nothing ever happens to us. Like now my niece has come in like, she doesn’t go out cause she is only two weeks old but he is protective over her as well. But he’s like who I look up to, my dad (Matt, phase 4).

During this conversation regarding the fight, Matt implied his dad’s ability to protect him in situations such as this, and, although he doesn’t say explicitly, he makes suggestions that when his dad was younger he was somebody with a reputation who others might be careful of upsetting. He also implied that he felt powerful when traveling with him in the car, which was suggested by his animated tone of voice:

But nothing happened after that, no one got threatened or anything. Or anything bad like that. It’s like my dad went to see him, it’s not like my dad you know his background when he was younger and all that. Like ‘cause he’s a builder and when he used to go abroad and I’m like... It’s like things... and my dad sticks up for people. Loads. So, it’s just the way it was but they ended up sorting it out anyway. Which I didn’t expect my dad to do ‘cause he has a thing and when I’m in the car with him it’s like… yeah! (Matt, phase 4).

Demonstrating an ability to provide protection to others provided status in the family/community field that Matt described in his interviews, and was therefore a form of cultural capital mediated through the social network. I was aware of the importance of this type of cultural capital during my time working with families on the estate, and attempts to demonstrate this could be seen through language, stance, walk, an ability to present a streetwise persona and to be well connected to others who present similar characteristics to Matt’s dad; all of this dictated position within the field. This
is especially the case in a community where disputes are often dealt with informally. Matt recognised that, as a member of a family who place value on resolving disputes locally, he should not go to the police. Reporting behaviour to authority can be heavily frowned upon, and labeled as ‘snitching’; in extreme cases, even developing relationships with people in authority can be perceived as disloyal.

The effect of these kinds of values, where people who are able to present an ability to offer protection, or even fear, are considered of high status, could have a detrimental effect on a young person’s ability to align with the school field. This is because valuing and holding capital such as this has the potential to create tension with the acquisition of other forms of capital that potentially have transposability to other fields rather than just specialism within the field. For example, placing high value on maintaining cultural capital that provides status in school through a fearsome reputation is likely to conflict with accessing educational capital; it is not possible to be fearsome and clever at the same time, due to the positioning of this type of habitus within the school. A mistrust of people in positions of authority may also hamper the accumulation of academic capital. In this respect, certain career pathways may be ruled out because they contradict with the valued capital in this field; for instance, a mistrust of authority deterring participants from joining the police. Not having capital in one field, such as the school field, can be compensated for by having high status capital within another.

Although there is evidence of this kind of cultural capital within the data, both within the family, community and peer fields, the community/family fields were also diverse, with many other forms of capital holding value. Matt himself recognised that not all families think in the same way; his does, and he seemed to suggest that this way of thinking differed from other areas of the estate: ‘[it’s] just the way my family are, I’m kind of not like that’ (Matt phase 4).

The capital that is available and valued in the family field is highly influential in shaping the habitus that affects participants' positions within the
community field. Matt’s family, and those of several other participants, acknowledged to an extent the capital and values described, defining their position within other fields. For example, in the next section the peer group field will be explored, and here ‘chavs’ and ‘smokers’ will be seen as valuing the kinds of capital Matt described, and therefore we can see that this peer group most strongly aligned with Matt’s family and community field position; ‘nerds’, ‘moshers’ and ‘emos’ were least aligned. The tension between this type of habitus and its alignment with the school field indicates that, although certain forms of capital grant high status within the community and within these smaller groups, it is too specialised to be transferable to the school. It orientates these students’ position in the school field, but not in a way that provides opportunity. This is similar to the ethnography of the ‘likely lads’, where they were learning to labour for work in the factories within the school field. To them, the school was not important to their trajectory (Willis, 1977). Now it is argued that the school is important; although an education does not necessary afford a better job as it has done in the past, it is instead a requirement to access the vast proportion of the labour market (Worth, 2002).

5.5 The Peer Field

The habitus of students, shaped by their position within the family and community fields, informs their positioning within the peer fields. This could be observed through different peer groups where, depending upon the group occupied, certain forms of capital were valued. Furthermore, different peer groups were observed as preferring certain career ideas:

Dani: Do you think the group you are in influences your career ideas?

Harriet: I think it does cause I think in every group you will feel peer pressure by your friends, like peer pressure.

(Harriet, phase 2).
Peer groups with a larger membership tended to value the more popular career trajectories that were also more in line with those promoted in the school field, such as working in hair and beauty or health and social care. These larger peer groups, therefore, tended to align with the values present within the school field.

It was Zara (phase 1) who first painted a picture of the most dominant peer subfields present in the school:

Well, you would probably say there are, like, the nerdy people and then there are the girls who are, like, beautiful, like, they are, like, ahh, you know what I mean, and then there are the moshery types. [...] They are, like, dead, you know and stuff; see, I really like them you know, I always have. And they have, like, different coloured hair, the dark makeup and stuff like that. Then you have the guys that are all skateboard types, do you know what I mean? You know Skins? [...] The guys out of that; and then you have the boys that play football, the boys out of that. And all the girls are like ‘arr!’, do you know what I mean [laughs]? [...] I would say probably chav [laughs] ‘cause they’re more like trackies and like ‘Ey arh!’ with their voice and stuff like that and think they are dead tough and things like that, yeah that’s probably them.

Several follow up descriptions allowed for the identification of three main peer group clusters; these were drawn up into a diagram and presented to participants as a stimulus for conversation at the end of interview 2; see figure 21. Many recognised the groups instantly, and, as the diagram developed, several laughed at how bizarrely accurate the information was, going on to confirm elements of the diagram such as group names, where they would ‘hang out’ and how they would dress. Conversations with other students extended Zara’s initial list to provide a fairly detailed account of these groups. These accounts highlighted the differences between groups, the capital they valued, the typical career pathways and the extent to which they were able to enforce their preference for certain capital upon other
pupils considering their relative dominance, such as certain styles of dress or an aptitude for football. To understand these groups and their influence upon the habitus of participants, they will be mapped, paying attention to the capital present within each field (and any noticeable career idea trends).

Figure 21: Peer Group Clusters

As can be seen from figure 20, the three peer group clusters identified were the ‘mixed group’, the ‘populads’ and the ‘chavs’, or ‘smokers’. Within these, smaller groups existed such as Emos, the Football boys etc. The peer groups themselves had a considerable presence within the school; they were distinct enough to enable all students and staff I spoke with to identify them instantly. During several conversations with staff they confirmed the groups identified by students in interviews, and emphasised the distinction and tensions between them. ‘If any of the groups cross over into each others’ territory there is friction’ (Family support worker, July 2013). ‘You can tell a mile off who is in what group [...] It’s weird, you can tell by the walks as well, by what they wear and the looks, even by the face I think’ (Carrie, phase 2).

I will argue that the habitus of pupils can be seen through their alignment with different peer groups that share access to and value similar capital and
career ideas to each other. Carrie’s quote above resonates with Kuhn (1995: 117) who, when discussing the habitus, states: ‘class is something beneath your clothes, under your skin, in your reflexes, in your psyche, at the very core of your being’. These students are selecting peer groups, or peer groups are selecting them, based on their developing habitus, which is embodied. On one occasion, Nat and Carrie described feeling out of her habitus fit when she was changing peer groups, stating:

The group it was like, I’d kind of class it as emos but two of them weren’t and two of them were just like they would just sit there and just got on with them so I sat with them. But when I think of it, I didn’t fit in with them, like if you was labelling someone you wouldn’t put me with them cause like the eye makeup and that and the way that they done stuff (Nat, phase 2).

The nice girls I still get on with then now but it was just like I didn’t want to… I’m a lot happier now, put it that way (Carrie, phase 2).

Having identified the three groups, each will now be outlined in turn.

5.5.1 The Populars

The ‘populars’ were the most dominant sub-field; this group was made up of the ‘football boys’ and the ‘girls’, two large groups containing several clusters, some of whom were referred to separately with terms like the ‘nice girls’, ‘beautiful girls’, ‘bitchy girls’ and so on. Within this, a core group of populars existed who were well known and spent the majority of time occupying certain spaces. Other peripheral groups ‘came and went’ in that they ‘hung out’ in these spaces, but less frequently, increasing their numbers to total approximately 20 members from both years 10 and 11. These peripheral groups valued the same capital and conformed to the same rules as the more central members - although to a slightly lesser extent - creating a situation where the capital and rules valued by the ‘populars’ were widely

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valued among pupils. With the core group holding much higher levels of this capital, their status was recognized both within and outside the group. A recognition of this capital contributed to the collective dominance of this group within the school. They were able to exert considerable influence over students, and did so in order to reinforce their own values within the school.

First, in relation to the ‘popular girls’, this group valued education; they saw attending college as essential, and members of this group were encouraging and supportive of one another applying for college, reinforcing deadlines and event dates, helping to complete college application forms, and accompanying each other to open days.

On occasions where group members did not follow these expectations, strategies were used to address this thinking or behaviour perceived as deviant. Popular strategies for this were motivational chats or criticism:

Yeah, because the group that I’m in, they’re not stupid like if one of them turned around and was like ‘oh I’m doing this I’m not going there’, the other would be like ‘why are you doing it? You have got the opportunity to go to college why don’t you do it. What are you going to do?’ and then they’ll probably go college cause they don’t want to be shouted at by the others [laughs] (Carrie, phase 2).

In addition to educational capital, other cultural capital promoted as valuable within this group was knowledge and talent in relation to fashion. This group placed significant emphasis on looking attractive, and other students recognised this. For example, Zara stated: ‘they are quite pretty, they know how to look nice and put on make-up and put up their hair’ (Zara, phase 2). The extent to which students were considered to be fashionable and attractive significantly reflected their status within this group, and gave members an incentive to spend time on their appearance.

The powerful pressure this group placed on Zara can be seen below:
The first thing they either say is, ‘Arr she’s fit!’, or ‘Ew!’ - do you know what I mean? It’s not ‘Oh, hi!’, it’s what they think of you, whereas in Spain it’s more like ‘Oh, hi!’ and ‘Are you alright?’; they don’t look you up and down and think ‘Oh no, she’s not nice’. And I think that’s just the way it is over here really. [...] It’s like, gotta look good for the boys and gotta go out for the boys, like that.

She continues to compare this to her experience in Spain:

[...] they didn’t see you as just looking you up and down and, like, so, what’s wrong with you, do you know what I mean? It was just, like, ‘Hi!’, and stuff like that.

Outside of school, members practiced hair and make up at each other’s houses before going into town. Participants told me of their ability to attract boys as a result of the accumulation of this capital, and that this was the ultimate demonstration of their status with the group. The aim - Zara told me - was to ‘hook up’. In discussing this, Zara again compares the culture present in this peer group to those she was part of in Spain.

It was just like really different ‘cause over there it’s dead relaxed and no one worries about anything, but when you come over here you see all these girls that are, like, dead glammed up and everything; and, well, I had to, like, turn into one of them and… Well, I felt like I had to, ‘cause, you know, everyone’s just like… ‘cause, when I was over there [in Spain] I just did horse riding all the time ‘cause I had my own horse and I didn’t bother with any of that so then, when I came over I was just like.. it was just so different.. to Spain, totally different. Like, no one… it would be a one-off if you see people with, like, their hair done up and their makeup, ‘cause over there they are all just dead relaxed and stuff (Zara, phase 1).

The power or dominance of this group within the school field is evident in the extent to which they were able to enforce their values on others. This was
demonstrated in situations where girls either within or outside the group did not hold what were perceived to be adequate levels of this capital. When this was the case, such girls reported being subjected to ‘bitchy’ comments and bullying. For example, Clare experienced significant torment as a result of being perceived as overweight and not presenting herself in the image of what the group deemed to be attractive and fashionable. This took place both in school and through the social networking site Facebook.

Yeah, well, sometimes you go on it and you get bullied ‘cause you dyed your hair a different colour. Yeah I had my hair black and red a few years ago and I went home and there were these random comments about my dress sense so I deleted my profile for about eight months. Yeah, ‘cause I’d had enough of it and I just thought, I don’t even know you and you are, who are you? [strong emotion in voice] (Clare, phase 1).

Following this period, Clare prioritized losing weight and investing in accumulating the kinds of capital valued by the popular girls. Clare’s efforts resulted in her gaining status and building relationships to the point where she now defined herself as being a member of this group.

Zara has a similar experience of undergoing a process of feeling she needed to fit in. In the example below, she describes a shift in her habitus from the time she was living in Spain - ‘I was still in the Spanish row’ - to her acclimatizing to the school and then peer field:

You just don’t want to be name called by them, so you just feel like you have got to please them. Over there, I just didn’t care, at all. ‘Cause when I first came over, I was still in the Spanish row, I just didn’t care at all, but then I think it was all the boys just used to call me names and stuff. That made me, you know, change (Zara, phase 2).
[...] when you come over here you see all these girls that are, like, dead glammed up and everything and, well, I had to like turn into one of them (Zara, phase 2).

The powerful influence of peer group fields, such as that of the beautiful girls, on the habitus can be seen here, and is evident in the statement: ‘I had to turn into one of them’. The value attributed to looking attractive is the result of the field of power positioning women and girls in relation to male desire; therefore, the boys in school can be assumed to value this form of capital, as suggested in Zara recounting being name-called by them.

Achieving status in this group through accumulating this capital was supported by financial capital, a form of capital not always readily available within families, especially considering the socio-economic makeup of the community. Therefore, status within this group was restricted to a few who were from better off families (relative to the low income levels on the estate), and, as such, high status positions within this field were classed as well as gendered. For example, Carrie invested a huge amount of money and time in keeping up to date with fashion trends:

I’ll put bags ‘cause I love shopping, I waste money on it all the time. And then I go in my wardrobe a year later and the tag’s on it [laughs]. I know, my mum’s always going mad at me (Carrie, phase 1).

As with all peer groups, it was possible to identify some trends or preferences in relation to career ideas. This was observed by the head of year 10 when discussing her encouragement to students to select alternative pathways to those that were typical amongst participants. She noticed the ‘girls’ peer group especially were very likely to listen to each other (Research diary, 2012). This was also demonstrated in Zara’s interest in health and beauty, where tension between her habitus and the peer field of the beautiful girls is a source of stress for her during her decision making process. Zara discussed how strongly the occupation of beauty therapist was promoted by
her new friends following her joining the girls. This encouragement was an important factor in her interest in hairdressing:

I don’t really know, I do hair and beauty and stuff and I’m dead good with hair and that, my friends say I should do stuff with that [...] ‘Cause they come to mine and make me do their hair and make-up and stuff, so; and stuff like that.

[...] My friend was like ‘Oh yeah they are all just dead gorgeous and I would love to do something like that!’ but I was just thinking the total opposite [laughs]. I was just, ‘Ohhh, I don’t know, it’s just weird!’, I think if I became one, I don’t think my personality would suit what I do, do you know what I mean? ‘Cause they are all most glamorous and most of them are really pretty, aren’t they, ‘cause they know how to do it and stuff so they are all stuck up and stand up dead straight and stuff like that, whereas I’m, like, totally different. I think that puts me off, ‘cause most of the girls in my hair and beauty, they are all just stood there lookin’ in the mirror and I’m just there, like... weird.

[...] Like, if you walked into a makeup thing you would probably be thinking... they all just look at you and stuff. The first thing they think is, ‘Is she better than me?’ and stuff like that and I think that’s what puts me off so much (Zara, phase 2).

Participants such as Anna (phase 2) commented that ‘they all want to do hair and beauty’, and there did appear to be some truth in these statements. Figure 22 demonstrates the career ideas (and final destinations) for Harriet and Zara, who were central members of the ‘popular’ girls in that they ‘hung out’ in certain locations and with other group members the majority of the time. Figure 22 also includes the career ideas of Clare and Carrie, who occupied slightly more peripheral positions on the outskirts of this group. Carrie chose not to strongly align with the core group, in spite of having the financial capital to gain significant status. Members positioned in the centre
of this field appeared to be interested in careers that involved making others look attractive, and those on the periphery referred to careers involving caring for others. With this in mind, participants who identified more strongly with this peer group felt encouraged to select related vocational, classed and gendered qualifications such as hair and beauty, childcare or health and social care.

Figure 22: Employment Ideas

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Employment ideas</th>
<th>Final Destination</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Harriet</td>
<td>Fashion, Law, Fashion design</td>
<td>Fashion, (BTEC level 3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zara</td>
<td>Health and beauty, Air hostess, Fashion, Vet</td>
<td>Health &amp; Social Care, (BTEC Level 3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clare</td>
<td>Social care, Elderly support worker, Social worker, Psychiatrist/counselor</td>
<td>Health &amp; Social Care, (BTEC level 3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carrie</td>
<td>Nurse, Teacher</td>
<td>Childcare, (BTEC level 3)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The other main sub-field within the ‘populars’ were the ‘football boys’. This group were similarly positioned to the ‘girls’ in terms of their relative dominance in the school. Like the girls, the capital valued by this group was also valued by peripheral groups, giving members wider status (beyond the populars’ field) due to their accumulation of capital that is transposable (i.e. capital which had value both within and beyond the peer group, including the school). There was an expectation among this group that everybody would go to college, and, although some of the boys had a reputation for playing up in class, they were perceived to know where the line was in terms of unacceptable behaviour. This was observed by Harriet (phase 2), who stated that they ‘actually want a career, they are not ruining their lives and stuff.’ Harriet was excusing their behavior in class by contrasting their
aspirations to the ‘chav’/ ‘smokers’ group, who will be discussed later. This
group, like the girls, valued educational cultural capital.

Other capital valued by the popular boys was knowledge and skill in relation
to sport, specifically football, although members gained credibility for most
sports. As with the girls, developing valued capital was supported by having
resources such as money or access to a car. For example, Chris was a
regular football player and also had a keen interest in cricket. He was a
member of a local cricket club, an activity supported by his family. His
membership in this club required him to travel for away games, which was
not possible without access to a car and someone willing to drive him.
Chris’s active interest and investment in sport seemed to provide him with a
strong position within the group and school, noticeable in his manner and the
way he discussed other students: “yeah a lot of them though, they need to
work on their ball skills” (Chris, phase 2). He came across as confident and
self-assured within interviews.

In terms of career trends prominent within this group, they, like the girls, were
generally seen as interested and invested in their future. They were assumed
to want to work in a job that involved sport; ‘they probably just want to be
footballers’ (Harriet, phase 2). It was difficult, however, to ascertain trends in
their career ideas due to the lack of self-identified members within the
sample. Chris was the only participant who identified as a member of this
group, but he told me he also aligned with the moshers (mixed group) on
occasions, due to his taste in music. The significant influence of the military
background of his family was also a prominent theme in his interviews, which
made Chris a difficult example of the potential influence of this group in
shaping career ideas.

5.5.2 Mixed Peer Group

The ‘mixed group’ were a small cluster of 15-20 pupils comprised of
‘moshers’, ‘emos’ and ‘nerds’. Although not a dominant group like the
populars, conversations with young people indicated that they are well thought of by others. They shared members both within and outside of these groups, and were perceived as inclusive, being happy to talk to outsiders - ‘they’re not actually that bad cause you always get them talking to different people as well. They don’t actually just cluster in their group’ (Nat, phase 2); ‘They are alright, like they will talk to you’ (Christina, phase 2); ‘Yeah, I like them, always have’ (Zara, phase 2).

This group was not as dominantly positioned within the school as the populars due to the group’s lack of transposable capital. Other students did not share music tastes, and although getting good grades was understood as important by many students, it was important to not be ‘nerdy’ about this. Like the populars, these groups were fully committed to attending college, but unlike them, they did not balance this with other traits and characteristics. Displaying too much commitment to learning was frowned upon by other groups such as the populars.

Moshers and emos, and to a lesser degree nerds, were easily identified by their bright hair colours, dark make up, clothes and accessories such as band jackets that demonstrated their relationship with music.

Harriet: Just band jackets and that. They normally wear a bandana, but they’re usually dead hardcore and stuff like that.

Dani: In what way hard core?

Harriet: I know some of them smoke weed, I’m not grassing on them but I know they do, and just like, one of them he put a facebook status every 5 minutes about killing himself and stuff and you will see him in school he is just so happy. It’s like is there really any problems, it’s just so weird. They’re sort of like emo to be honest the moshers in this school. They all go on as if they are so badly done to.

(Harriet, phase 2)
In addition to education, the cultural capital valued by these groups, moshers and emos especially, was knowledge of music. The school supported them and other pupils in developing this capital through access to an allocated music room.

Oh yeah, we have got two music rooms in one it’s, like, all mosh, do you know what I mean by that? Like rock, kind of thing, like screaming and stuff [laughs]. And then got our class that’s full of boys that just like MC-ing and stuff, like, most of them do, well I think all of them do (Matt, phase 1).

The nerds place high value on education as a form of cultural capital, particularly good grades achieved through study. Being a member of this peer group may have protected individuals from being victimised by other students for their shameless pursuit of this capital. They were seen as intelligent, attentive and compliant in class, traits viewed as best avoided by others, especially by the smokers and chav peer groups. Moshers and emos also valued this capital, though perhaps not to the same extent. Discussions with my participants indicated that some members of this group complemented their studies by reading and poetry, sharing books, poems and knowledge around both. These were unusual activities amongst the wider student cohort, though Nat assured me that these are not untypical hobbies among members of these groups.

In the extract below she shares her own engagement with poetry, going on to say:

I like writing poems about things and how I feel so hurm, that’s started getting me more interested in English.

[…] Urm, I like to write poems about… if I feel depressed or things like that I do poems and it makes me feel better so I put my emotions down in the poems (Nat, phase 2).
When asked what sorts of jobs members of this group were likely to pursue, participants referred to highly skilled non-gendered roles:

I think the nerds would probably want to be scientists of something or some sort of clever person. [...] Mosher[s] - they all want to be in a band, I’m not stereotyping I think they actually all do want to be in a band (Harriet, phase 2).

As can be seen from figure 23, the 2 participants who identified as part of this mixed group did have an interest in working in highly skilled, non-gendered roles. Themes included careers that tended to be scientific in nature - helping others still featured, but occupations were at a more professional level, such as teacher or doctor, than those identified by the populars. Although members of these groups had much higher and more diverse aspirations than those common in any other groups, they were limited by the colleges and courses they were prepared to take up.

The value placed by this group upon education bought the potential for social mobility through good results, and they were interested in occupations that were not typically as low-skilled and gendered as was the case in the other peer groups. However, this potential for social mobility seems to have been restricted by the colleges available locally or the colleges participants were prepared to consider, as these did not offer qualifications that would facilitate training in these occupations. For instance, Nat attended the school’s 6th form to study for a BTEC extended diploma at level 3, a qualification that did not appear to be linked to any of her more diverse career ideas. Christina, on the other hand, attended A-levels in maths and chemistry. However, as explained to me by the deputy head, she dropped out after 2 months of study due to her supposed inability to handle this kind of environment.
Figure 23: Christina & Nat’s Employment Ideas

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Employment ideas</th>
<th>Final destination</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Christina</td>
<td>Astronomy, Astrophysics, Doctor, Pilot</td>
<td>Maths and Chemistry, (A-Levels)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nat</td>
<td>Working with children, Foster career, Teacher, Dog groomer, Police dog trainer, Scientist, Conservationist</td>
<td>Extended Diploma, (BTEC Level 3)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

5.5.3 The Chav Peer Group

The final group identified were referred to as the ‘chavs’, or ‘smokers’. This group were perceived negatively by all participants and staff I spoke to, and the capital valued seemed to demonstrate alignment with the values and capital inferred by Matt in the fight example. The group were described as having broad accents, distinct walks, and wearing hoodies and trainers.

It’s just people think oh, he’s got baggy jeans or trainers and a hoodie he’s a chav, but he don’t act like a chav, so (Carrie, phase 2).

Their name was used as both an insult and a label, for example to discourage undesirable behavior such as an apparent disinterest in applying for college or a lack of investment in a career. In females, girls were referred to as chavs if they were identified as acting in ways deemed ‘un-lady like’, and therefore perhaps undesirable.

My introduction to them was during Zara’s description of all peer groups:

I would say probably chav [laughs] ‘cause they’re more like trackies and like ‘Ey arh!’ with their voice and stuff like that and think they are
dead tough and things like that, yeah that’s probably them (Zara, phase 1).

This group were assumed to come from difficult backgrounds.

The chavs and smokers crowd, I can tell you exactly who they are, they are the ones that come up here [the FSW room]. You know they all tend to have something going on. Care order or something, they are quite damaged’ (Family support worker, July 2013).

From participants’ accounts they had a tendency to cause trouble, had a resistance to authority, a disinterest in education and a lack of interest or motivation for their future career pathways. We might assume, then, that this group held low levels of educational cultural capital, as it was not valued, contributing to low status within the school field.

All this is reminiscent of the likely lads from Paul Willis’s school ethnography (1977), where he recognised a disadvantaged group of males living on post-industrial working class estates as proud of their deliberate misalignment with the school field. These young people appeared to be the least aligned of the peer groups, and they experienced varying degrees of marginalisation in the school. Reference to this group by outsiders was only ever negative or judgmental in tone:

Oh god… just so horrible I don’t see myself with them. They just go over the other side and smoke and stuff. And they say you are just so posh ‘cause you talk like you’re unemployed or something, so annoying. They’re not very nice people, they are funny sometimes but I would never be like friends with them (Harriet, phase 2).

Staff members also recognised their marginalization within the school:

Dani:  How are the other kinds of kids with them?
The capital valued by this group appeared to be heavily influenced by their position within the community field. As established through Matt’s example, an ability to demonstrate a streetwise persona and social networks that provided protection can be important to acquiring status in certain fields. MacDonald et al (2005) recognizes alternative forms of capital to be favoured in disadvantaged communities due to them supporting navigation within the community field; networks that offer ‘protection’ are likely to be more advantageous in disadvantaged communities due to the presence of poverty, inequality and social exclusion (MacDonald et al, 2005). To carry this kind of social capital can be very helpful in navigating an environment where violence is present but is of limited value in the school field.

The chav group was well known for causing fights and being disruptive in class; Nat, Harriet and Kirsty all commented on the group’s ability to disrupt lessons. They were described as not knowing where the line of appropriate behaviour should be drawn, frustrating both staff and students. Although capital demonstrated by this group carried high status in some areas of the community, such as an ability to fight and be quick witted, maintaining this when operating in the school field caused tensions due to the lack of transferability of the capital they valued to the school field, and the potential for it to hamper the accumulation of educational cultural capital. Causing fights with other students and disrupting lessons was not conducive to learning. The ‘chavs’ were assumed to not have the same support from their friends regarding applying for college, and were identified as having a lack of interest in their future.

There are certain groups where it’s like in the corner in school and it’s like they are having their cig and you know what I mean and they are
coming out F-ing this F-ing that. You know! Throwing swear words. I don’t have a problem with people swearing but when it’s not needed I think it’s a bit pathetic, like every word. Every other word, I don’t like that I think it’s horrible and I don’t think it’s lady like, but like, you can tell. If like their friends are not applying for college they won’t because of the way they are, it’s like “oh no neither am I, let’s do this”. It’s like that (Zara, phase 2).

Their minds are just on cloud nine or something. ‘oh, I’ll just get money from somewhere’ and where’s it gonna come from, they’re not gonna get a job (Carrie, phase 2).

It was not possible to identify any career idea trends for this group as, like with the popular boys, no one in the study self identified as a chav. But it was clear that other students assumed they would be likely to spend periods of time unemployed and were unlikely to build a profession.

My summary of each peer group here has demonstrated their uniqueness i.e. differences between the kinds of cultural capital valued within each group and the relationship between this and the career ideas they discussed within interviews. In this way, I argue that the peer groups that made up the peer field were each responsible for shaping the habitus of participants in different ways. A fit between habitus and peer group was central to the selection of a peer group by the young people and the peer group’s selection of its members.

5.6 Positioning Peer Groups within the School Field

The position of these peer groups in relation to the wider peer field has been mapped in figure 24. As can be seen, those groups who held capital that had transferability to other peer groups had greater dominance. These groups included the populars and the capital they held, which had transposability (rather than specialism) relating to knowledge and skill in hair and beauty
and sport. The career interests of the populars were in highly gendered, vocational subject choices that were often provided for by the school's 6th form. Therefore, the alignment of this group with the school field was the result of reasonable levels of educational capital and their interest in subjects provided by the school's 6th form.

Figure 24: Peer Groups and the School Field

The position of the mixed group was seen as slightly offset from the position of the most dominant group, the populars, due to music and educational capital having limited value among other peer groups. The capital they valued and their alignment with the school field was mixed, valuing and carrying educational capital but having career ideas that were not as vocational as the populars, and tended to be in subjects not offered by the school's 6th form. In this sense, they were positioned in between the populars and the chavs in relation to their alignment with both the wider peer group and the school field. The chav peer group can be seen as located on the periphery of the peer field; the capital valued by this group appeared to have almost no transferability, and a lack of interest or willingness to accumulate forms of capital that are valued by either the wider peer group or school showed limited potential for their low field position to change.
5.7 The Embodiment of Space

The position of these peer groups in relation to the wider peer field and the school was also reflected in how these groups embodied the physical space of the school and grounds. This can be demonstrated by plotting where they congregated at break and dinner times (see figure 25). The ‘populars’, consisting of the ‘football boys’ and ‘the girls’, were mostly found on the near side of the astro turf - closest to the school. The ‘chavs’ and ‘smokers’ located themselves on the far side of the astro turf, furthest away from the school; and the ‘mixed group’, made up of ‘moshers’, ‘emos’ and ‘nerds’, stood mostly in covered areas, which were between the school buildings. The near side of the astro turf is a central and open position; as such, the occupation of this area by the ‘populars’ seemed to reflect their spatial and cultural presence within the school. A member of staff, who was patrolling the astro turf at the time of this conversation, commented that ‘when the old group of year 11s leave, the new group move in. It's like they are putting their stamp on the area’ (Family support worker, July 2013). During the course of the research, I was told that the male members of this group first commandeered the space, chosen for its practical function as a football pitch, enabling them to practice their skill in this game. The girls then joined them to sit on the astro turf and watch football games, supposedly so they can be close to the boys. In contrast, the ‘chavs’ and ‘smokers’ positioned themselves on the far side of the astro turf, away from staff and other students. Their location was perhaps to enable them to smoke; occupying space that is some distance from the school building would have the advantage of avoiding regular patrols, and therefore was convenient for smoking or wanting to engage in other activities or conversations frowned upon by authority. The embodiment of space in this way is similar to the Kabyle house (Bourdieu, 1977); this example also displays how space can reflect hierarchy and gender relations.
5.8 Personal Tension: Recognising Inequality Versus Passing Judgement

Before summarizing this chapter, I would like to reflect briefly on a tension that has been present with me during the writing of this and the other two findings chapters - that which exists between the positions and approach I have adopted and negotiated in my role as youth worker using a naturalistic inquiry research methodology, and what I understand through a Bourdieusian conceptual framework. The former recognizes young people as
having perspectives and ways of understanding the world that are valuable. Fundamentally, judgments should not be made regarding these perspectives based on dominant ways of thinking; the actions of young people should instead be understood as differences based on alternative constructions of reality. With this in mind, it is my role as a researcher to understand participants' constructions by listening openly without judgment through the development of trusting relationships.

However, as has been identified, often young people who live in disadvantaged locations choose in ways that are not advantageous to enabling social mobility. Trends identified here in young people's decision making are understood through the concept of field, habitus and capital, and in doing so these 'choices' are recognised to be the consequence of participants' structured position within the fields they occupy. It is their presence here that shapes their habitus, and consequently decision-making, in ways that are leading to the types of decisions typical for these young people, and therefore their version of the 'right' choice is the consequence of their own disadvantage. With this in mind, a purely relativist perspective does not help young people, as it does not challenge these choices, and in this sense is continuing this process.

Throughout this research, I felt tension in wanting outcomes for young people that enabled opportunities for social mobility, and in wanting to promote actions that are more beneficial than others in achieving this. As certain forms of capital carry status in fields that can affect the position of actors who absorb them into their habitus, acquiring such capital provides opportunities for achieving outcomes that are advantageous and can result in social mobility; in this sense, there is a better or worse choice or pathway. Correct choices are those that facilitate the acquisition of capital with transference to higher status fields, so that actors are able to access and position themselves effectively within these fields to support the further acquiring of capital with transference and status.
During interviews, I sometimes supported participants in reflecting, and gave information where it was requested or appropriate. In this way, I listened or helped them have their voice, but also supported the possibility of social mobility when the opportunity arose.

5.9 Answering the First Research Question

In addressing the first part of the findings question, ‘how do the fields that young people occupy shape their habitus responsible for decision making?’ the fields that shape this element of the habitus have been identified as: education, family and community, and peer fields. In mapping these fields, it has been argued that they are responsible for shaping the habitus in such a way that strong trends are present among participants’ favoured career pathways. This is the consequence of the capital available and values associated to this capital within fields. Due to the location of these fields in a disadvantaged area, they are limited in the capital that offers transference to fields of higher status (e.g. university). The habitus of participants reflects these limitations, which can be seen through the type of decision making being engaged in, which are typically low-skilled, gendered vocations that have much in common with the occupations taken up by others in the community/family fields, and which are developed through practice within the school field.

Furthermore, the positions of participants within these fields are inter-related. For instance, the position of an actor in the family field will orientate them in the school field, as with the example of Matt, who spoke of the value of fighting in certain community and family fields, which was mirrored in the ‘chav’ peer group within the school field. Similarly, I have noted how the position in the peer field affects alignment (or disalignment) with the school field. Therefore, we can see how position in each field serves to reinforce the habitus so that career decision making is not the result of influence by one field on its own but the collective, inter-dynamic relations between fields. For some students, the relations between the fields they occupy are collaborative
and mutually supportive, but for others there are tensions that are experienced within the habitus. For instance, some participants spoke of tension between certain families and the school. These tensions have the potential to affect the accumulation of capital available within fields that participants least aligned with; in this case this has been shown to be the school. In extreme cases, actors appeared to be self-excluding from fields to avoid feelings of marginalisation, thus further damaging their position within the field to which they were least aligned (the school and peer fields).

5.10 Chapter Summary

In this chapter, attention has been paid to the capital valued within the fields outlined and the micro-fields that sit within them, and consideration has been given to how each contributes to producing and reinforcing elements of the habitus that have led participants to reporting certain pathways that appear typical for these young people. The influence of these fields upon the habitus of participants responsible is affected by their location in a socially disadvantaged area. All of the fields described (with the exception of the field of education) are located in a disadvantaged area, and subsequently sit in a low position in relation to the field of power. Even the school field, with its low position in the educational quasi-market, focused on serving the 'needs' of the community through offering BTEC vocational qualifications only. This meant that, although the school might appear as a dominant social institution, producing highly valued forms of cultural and academic capital, this particular school field was limited in what it could offer, and as such there was very little space for social mobility. As a result of being more distant from the field of power, the fields these participants experienced held limited levels of valuable capital, capital that might be transferable to other fields closer to the field of power. As a result, participants were not making choices that were advantageous in the long run, and the occupations being considered by participants were limited to those in heavily vocational, low-skills work, in highly gendered occupations.
Chapter 6: Plotting the Networks

The previous chapter has begun to explore the structural conditions that shape career choices typical for my participants by looking at the structure of the environment in which these participants are located. This has involved introducing and mapping the fields central to shaping the habitus of participants, and exploring the commonality in career decision-making to establish a typical pattern that is both produced and maintained by the capital available within the fields I have outlined. Findings indicate that knowledge of employment and college ideas almost entirely provided information around vocational, gendered, low-skilled occupations. There was a silence around other pathways; this was powerful in narrowing participants’ options, as young people’s choices are only as broad as the practical knowledge and understanding they have of what is possible (McDonald & Marsh, 2001). The location of these fields and the capital within them has been summarized, and its status noted regarding the level of transferability such capital has to fields of higher status. Consideration has also been given to the effect of this capital upon these participants’ alignment in other fields and upon their career ideas.

This chapter will continue to address the first research question: ‘How do the fields that young people occupy shape their habitus responsible for career decision making?’ but rather than focusing upon the fields themselves, it will outline how capital is transferred to the habitus. I will argue that, in this study, the transference of capital mostly occurred through participants’ social networks; because of this it will be referred to as social capital. Cultural capital was also found to be influential, especially career related knowledge. This type of cultural capital was reliant on social capital; participants’ drew on their access to cultural capital through their networks when making career related choices, so it will be this form of capital that will be focused upon. In addition, the implications that the content and structure of networks have on young people’s decision making will be considered.
6.1 The Case Study of Matt

Matt will be our lead character in this chapter; he will be used to connect the lived experience of transition to the theoretical concepts selected. Although individual and unique, Matt is a useful example of a fairly typical participant in many respects. The commonalities that enabled this case to move beyond the individual and connect to what is typical were many, but two themes are worth highlighting to demonstrate Matt's typicality. Firstly, Matt was sufficiently embedded within the community where the study took place (as I will explain shortly). Secondly, the people with whom he engaged regarding his career ideas were selected from his family, community and peer fields. The utilisation of these people and the structure of this 'social network' was typical of the sample, and central to the kinds of career ideas promoted. As a result, understanding Matt’s social network - its structure, the knowledge contained within it and the effect of this on shaping his career ideas - will enable an understanding of how capital is transferred through these types of networks.

Before looking at Matt’s network, the factors that make him typical will be considered. In terms of him being embedded within the community, he has never lived anywhere other than the estate and neither have at least three generations of his family. This is in spite of him moving house several times since his mother left the family home when he was four. Rather than living with his father at this time, he went to live with his grandma and granddad. After 2 years, his mother returned with her boyfriend and he lived with both them and his little brother for a year. When he was seven he fell out with his mother’s boyfriend, and went to live with his dad, his dad’s girlfriend and his other brother. Matt has been living in his present house for seven years when we met. He had a poor relationship with his dad’s girlfriend, as she ‘nagged’ him. Towards the end of the research, he was trying to facilitate a move back to his mother’s house. During this time he had a positive relationship with her and came out of school every dinnertime in order for them to spend time together. All of the relatives Matt lived with grew up, and continued to live, on the estate. The one exception to this was Matt’s
maternal grandma, who divorced her husband and moved 20 miles away to live with her new partner.

As well as being embedded within the community, the people with whom Matt engaged regarding his career ideas were people with whom he had a very close relationship, selected from his family, community and peer fields. Although some friction did exist with these people, especially his family, the development of these relationships is a significant achievement given the dynamics involved resulting from the divorce of his parents and grandparents and his mother leaving home. This must have been particularly difficult to reconcile, as he had assumed for 2 years that his mother had passed away due to her leaving without saying goodbye or with any word as to where she was going. In spite of this, Matt and his family were, with considerable investment, able to rebuild and maintain good quality relationships - relationships that were important to his engagement in career related decision-making.

The maintenance of relationships that are internal and interconnected in nature was sometimes to the detriment of developing a more external, extended network. Either consciously or unconsciously, Matt chose not to prioritize people outside of his core group, and even family members were sometimes excluded. For example, Matt’s dad facilitated a relationship with his uncle due to a job opportunity in a local restaurant; Matt told me he enjoyed his time working for his uncle during the school holidays, but fell out of contact with him following this; this meant he did not continue working for him during any subsequent holidays. It seemed strange that Matt had not kept in touch, considering how much he had discussed enjoying and learning about cooking through working as a chef in the restaurant. When I quizzed him about this, he could not tell me why he had not maintained contact.

Dani: How often do you see your uncle roughly?
Matt: Never [low tone]
Dani: Never?
Matt: No not really any cause… obviously he works right through the night so I don’t speak to him much. Don’t speak to anyone apart from me mates.

Dani: Have you fallen out with him?

Matt: Not fallen out really but it’s just like I just haven’t seen him for ages, so, I don’t bother.

Dani: Was he in hospital for a bit? Was it anything to do with that and then you didn’t see him for a while after?

Matt: I don’t know really, didn’t speak to him.

Dani: Just lost touch, was it anything to do with when you were working there? Did you like the way that he was as a manager or anything like that?

Matt: He was sweet I get on with him I just don’t speak to him really. I still speak to him but not loads to be honest with you (Matt, phase 4).

His relationship with his uncle was peripheral, and Matt was unable or unwilling to maintain it regardless of the potential it offered for employment in his chosen profession. Members of Matt’s social network were almost exclusively close family, embedded within the community field. It was these people who he was most open to engaging with regarding his career ideas. A focus on internal relationships with family or peers rather than developing external, extended networks was common amongst the participants I interviewed, which resulted in the popularity of insular, interconnected networks built on trust and shared experiences.

Having demonstrated Matt’s embedded position within the family and community field, and his keenness to develop internal rather than external networks, we can recognize him as being relatively typical of the majority of participants involved in the research. Before considering the structure and role of his social networks in shaping his career ideas, I will present the range of ideas that he was considering throughout the course of the research.
The development of Matt’s employment ideas can be seen in figure 26. Looking across them, all tend to be gendered (masculine) and vocational in nature. Matt’s most prominent idea is to become a chef; other jobs included working in ICT, the police, the army and as a chauffeur. With regards to college options, Matt admitted he was confused. He contradicted himself on several occasions, and clearly found the process of choosing a pathway stressful. Like a number of participants, he had limited knowledge regarding the different local colleges in the area, and often got their name or location wrong. This may have been partly the result of the recent merging of

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Employment ideas</th>
<th>Interview one</th>
<th>Interview two</th>
<th>Interview three</th>
<th>Interview four</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Chef Police officer ICT</td>
<td>Chef Police officer ICT Army Chef Soldier</td>
<td>Chef in a restaurant Self employed chef</td>
<td>Chef in a restaurant Self employed chef Chauffer</td>
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<tr>
<td>College ideas</td>
<td>No college ideas</td>
<td>Might attend: 1. College in CP (unidentifiable), 2. BG college (M college, BG campus) Might study: Cooking</td>
<td>Wishes to attend: 1. D Academy to study Apprenticeship in professional cooking, level 2 or 2. T College to study professional cooking, level 2. No longer wishes to attend: College in CP (unidentifiable), BG college (M college, BG campus), unconfirmed college, MS</td>
<td>Wishes to attend: T College to study professional cooking, level 2 – Application submitted. No longer wishes to attend: D Academy to study Apprenticeship in professional cooking, level 2</td>
</tr>
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Figure 26: Matt’s employment and college ideas
colleges in the city under one umbrella, resulting in many colleges having had name changes. Three had changed to '[name of city] College, [name of ward] Campus'.

I don’t know which one the open day is ‘cause there are three different ones, there’s a music based one there, I think it’s [name of ward], there’s [name of ward] and [name of ward]. It the one in [name of area of city] and the other one is in [name of area of city] I think. Near the [football stadium]. But I’m sure I missed the open day ‘cause I weren’t well, and I was in hospital so I think I missed [it] and I’m sure... There’s one in March but I don’t know if it’s for there or if it’s for [name of ward] college (Matt phase 4).

Getting confused between colleges was common, and participants misnamed many; for example, one college had five different names, referring to its former name, new name, the road it is on, its colloquial name and simply ‘the new college’. As a result, it was often necessary to confirm which colleges participants were referring to several times during interviews.

Partly as a result of this confusion, Matt did not attend any open days other than the school’s 6th form. He was interested in two vocational colleges, but dismissed them both over the course of the interviews, the first for not responding to his online request for information, and he did not give a reason for the second. I was recently informed by the headmaster that Matt was studying ICT (level 3) at the local 6th form (information received from head following conversations with various members of staff, 2014).

6.2 Networks of Intimacy

To return to the theoretical framework, the way Matt’s and other participants’ career ideas were formed and shaped was primarily through access to and acquisition of relevant forms of cultural capital (Health, Fuller, and Paton, 2008). Cultural capital was mostly in the form of employment and college
knowledge. This knowledge, and the expectations that came with it, were central to forming the parameters within which career decisions were made. It facilitated the opening up of certain ideas and the closing down of others, depending upon the perceived level of enjoyment or risk of these ideas. As discussed in chapter 5, the avoidance of risk was an important priority often advocated within the school field, and it tended to be responsible for closing down ideas; possible enjoyment tended to open them up.

The most significant way that cultural capital was transferred from the fields occupied to the habitus was through the social networks that participants had access to. What was found to be central when looking at the extent to which cultural capital available to participants was utilised was the strength and nature of the relationship with the network member; this significantly affected the credibility the cultural capital was given.

Clare provides an example of the importance of trust as a prerequisite for talking openly to professionals through her contact with social services, an area she had a strong interest in working within. As a young person living in foster care, Clare had spent years observing various professionals, mostly social workers, her preferred role. But when I asked if she had ever spoken to any of them about their work, she told me she had not due to her not feeling she had ‘that kind of a relationship with them’ (Clare, phase 2). She discusses the importance of trust in order for ‘a young vulnerable child’ to talk openly to a professional:

I don’t like the way some people are treated in care by like social workers and that, like obviously if you want a child like a young vulnerable child to open up to you then you need to show them that you care and that you are going to be there and not just move on you know like. I don’t want to go into social work and be like ‘oh I’m going to be a social worker for a week and then move on’... I just think they need to really think about how it affects the children more cause it doesn’t really help being sent from pillar to post. […]
They just throw questions at you, especially if you are really young and like throwing questions at you like left right and centre and they just tell you their name and then are just like ‘I am going to write down your whole life now and I am going to share it with the whole world’. ‘Oh I know your name’... wow. If they shared a bit more you might feel a bit more comfortable, you know. So if they give something of themselves...

Clare continues...

You feel like you can trust people who you know something about. Or even if you just connect with a person, you don't just come into their home and just start like firing questions at them and inspecting their rooms and going into their personal space, I understand sometimes they have got to do that but there are ways around how they do it. Like now they check my room and I am like ha, I get angry when people are in my room, it's mine! (Clare, phase 2).

Clare did choose to speak to her family placement officer, and she gives some indication below as to the importance of feeling understood and respected in the development of this relationship, and ultimately her decision to discuss possible career ideas with her:

She seems nice, she doesn't... she’s a bit hard to understand cause she’s foreign but she is nice she’s probably one of the best ones. I quite like her ’cause she understands how me and my little brother feel like she won't call my mum and dad carers, she goes you know ‘your mum and your dad’, ’cause she’s read and understands that we call them mum and dad. And does the same with my brothers, it's not like you’re foster brothers, you know? (Clare, phase 2).

Clare’s example shows the emphasis that can be placed upon relationships held with professionals, and the implications of a lack of trust on whether the capital they hold is utilized in making career related choices. Clare observed
but did not speak to any of her social workers, only the family placement officer she describes above. The importance of trust in networks that were most influential in providing the cultural capital responsible for shaping these areas of participants' habitus was noticeable across the sample; as a consequence, participants’ networks were insular, connected and often embedded within the family/ community field. The concept of ‘networks of intimacy’ (Raffo and Reeves, 2000) is helpful in considering the implication for their structure. As discussed in Chapter 3, networks of intimacy contain an abundance of bonding rather than bridging capital. Literature does not explicitly define the inclusion criteria, but suggests trust to be vital in developing and maintaining these internal, interconnected relationships. (Greenbank, 2011). Trust, in this case, is embedded and highly emotional, sharing values, moments in time, similar experiences, expectations, and being in tune with what it is to live in the environment that participants are navigating. Sharing events and characteristics allowed for participants to identify with these people, develop empathy for their experiences and trust their opinions.

The implications and potential for such networks will be considered through Matt by outlining what these networks look like to him. The relationships contained within them will be explored separately and collectively in order to understand in greater detail how employment and college ideas are shaped.

Let us begin an understanding of Matt's network by looking at what it is not. Those excluded from participants’ networks were often referred to as the other. The following quote shows how Matt positioned his cooking teacher in this way, describing her as ‘one of those people’:

Dani: What about the cooking teacher? Has he or she got any experience or knowledge?
Matt: [voice drops] she is a cooking teacher but… I'm not too sure with her…she is just one of those people [laughs].
Dani: So you wouldn't think about asking her anything?
Matt: No! [laughs]
Later Matt elaborates:

I know, but I really can’t take her serious. Trust me you could not sit in a room with her with more than like three hours and not laugh at her. We have her for three and a half hours on Thursday. She is just... you can’t take her seriously. You do something, she will try an’ shout at you and it is just like... I don’t know (Matt, phase 4).

These quotes demonstrate that, regardless of Matt’s keen interest in cooking and the potential cultural capital he might have accessed through his cooking teacher, he was unwilling to engage in any meaningful dialogue with her; he saw her as different from himself. This example suggests the presence of conflict between Matt’s habitus and the school field, which was a consequence of him being embedded in a certain position within the family and community field (Bourdieu, 1977). This position provides him with a habitus that values a streetwise persona, and consequently puts him at odds with the school field to a certain extent. Like all teachers, his cookery teacher belongs to the school field and is therefore likely to be presenting a habitus very different to those displayed by members of Matt’s family and community fields.

The people who participants chose to speak to, and who therefore formed part of their network, correlated with who they identified as feeling close to. During the final 2 interview phases, participants constructed mind maps with myself, detailing who these people were. The people identified were mostly family, the majority of whom were embedded within the community. Those within the mind map tended to form the core of participants’ network of intimacy, and this demonstrated the importance of the relationship held with those people with whom participants spoke to about their career ideas. While constructing the mind map, the embeddedness of Matt’s family within the community became evident as each person was located. By gaining clarification of this in the final interview, I was able to organise those
discussed into 5 houses, 4 of which were within the estate, and the fifth was less than 20 miles away. As already mentioned, Matt had moved between his mother’s, grandparents’ and father’s houses. Having lived with so many of his relatives, Matt had the opportunity to develop strong bonds with these people.

Figure 27: Mind Map of Matt’s family

The selection of mostly family, family friends and peers to form networks of intimacy meant that these people tended to know and have relationships with each other. This is demonstrated in figure 28, which is a visual interpretation of Matt’s network of intimacy based on discussions during interviews. Within this diagram, there are many connections between actors, represented by connecting lines. These relationships are structured in such a way that Matt’s network was interconnected, like a spider’s web, rather than like a mind map. The interconnected nature of this network added an additional dynamic to its influence on Matt’s career decision making. Rather than individuals having
only a direct influence, such as his father acting as a role model, they also had an indirect influence on Matt through other network members. For example, it was possible for peripheral members, who were less connected to the central network (and to Matt), to have considerable influence through more established members, with stronger relationships acting as bridges. In figure 28, a good relationship between Matt’s dad and his dad’s brother compensated for the limited relationship Matt held with his uncle. His dad acted as a bridge between his brother and son by using his own relationship to facilitate access to a summer job in a city centre restaurant. Matt’s uncle is in the top right of figure 28; he offered the cooking job, and is connected to Matt through his dad.

Figure 28: Conceptual Interpretation of Matt’s Network of Intimacy

This experience was central to Matt’s interest in cooking, but the opportunity would not have been open to him without a network where interconnections were present. Matt describes how this job came about:
He come down to see me dad and we were just sat there and then me dad just went, he wants to be a chef, and then he just said oh you could work with me. But thing is I thought he was joking and then he rang me and... just talking really.

You know ’cause I was off school and so I had nowt to do and so he just rang me and he was just like what you doing and I was like nowt, bored, and he was like same, why don’t you come round and just chill here for a bit so I just did that and then next week he was like thingy, do you want to come work for me for a bit. So I said yeah (Matt, phase 4).

The interconnected nature of Matt’s network creating opportunities, such as access to work experience, was valuable to the construction of his career ideas. However, only prioritising the maintenance of an insular closed network meant that he struggled to maintain these opportunities; as we saw in the example of him losing contact with his uncle and the potential this offered for his continued work in the restaurant.

Furthermore, it was extremely uncommon for individuals located and aligned with the school field to be included within participants’ social network; for example, teachers, Connexions workers and so on. As we saw from the example of Matt’s cooking teacher, in extreme cases these people could be identified as outsiders and positioned as the other. Limitations in the relationships that research participants held with professionals based in school seemed to be affecting the way decision-making was carried out. A lack of communication with those in the school field often resulted in the loss of potential opportunities for widening career ideas amongst participants. As such, a reliance on networks of intimacy was a critical part of the wider process of reproduction outlined in Chapter 5, where students were falling into a narrow selection of career pathways that could be accommodated for by the school’s sixth form.
In summary, the inclusion of family and community members and the exclusion of professionals was common in participants’ networks, and is evident in Matt’s mind map and network diagram (see figures 27 and 28). Both show high numbers of family members who are mostly embedded in the community; this created insular networks with high levels of trust and interconnectivity. Furthermore, whilst the structure of these networks supported the utilisation of resources, the content was restrictive in the sense that the cultural capital available and accessible through the network mirrored that within the fields in which the participants were embedded. This cultural capital also acted as a mechanism that enabled the reproduction of the field, and the relations between those who were embedded within it. As we know from mapping these fields within the previous chapter, they tended to hold certain types and levels of capital that were valued and that promoted particular types of career ideas. Participants’ career pathways were therefore shaped by their experience and access to a network embedded within the family / community, and to a lesser extent the peer field, which provided a specific kind of cultural capital or career related knowledge.

Furthermore, although actors (e.g. teachers, careers advisors) from the school field struggled to develop the relationships necessary to be central to participants’ career related decision-making, the capital available within participants’ social networks of intimacy did seem to promote similar trajectories to those promoted within the school field. Family and community occupations were in specific areas of work that aligned with the provision of the school field (e.g. BTEC qualifications offered in the school 6th form). Therefore, the networks of intimacy that participants’ had access to were able to transfer cultural capital drawing from their own shared experience, such as experience in certain types of work, which could then be legitimised by the school field, in the sense that qualifications enabling access to these pathways could be provided. However, the consequence of this alignment was limiting since the information passed on was almost exclusively related to vocational, gendered and low skilled pathways; the message being conveyed was that these jobs are appropriate for ‘people like us’. This narrative communicated from trusted sources allowed the young people I
worked with to be invested in the school, which conveyed and reproduced this same message through its provision. The family and community field members were in this sense acting as mediators who bridged the relationship between the students and the school field.

This mediating role also supported the school's agenda in creating a demand for the qualifications offered in the sixth form. Furthermore, as I have argued in chapter 5, the availability and promotion of these qualifications were a consequence of the position the school had chosen to (or been forced to) occupy in the educational marketplace (Bourdieu, 1977). The way in which networks supported the school’s agenda in shaping participants’ career ideas will be the focus of the next section.

6.3 How do Networks of Intimacy Impact on Employment and College Choices?

To understand the effect of social networks on transferring cultural capital relating to career decision-making, the role of actors within this process will be explored. In terms of cultural capital - in this case I am referring more specifically to information that is shared through observation, dialogue, interests and access to work experience. As already mentioned, the way in which information and the advice sometimes associated with it was utilised and considered by participants was affected by the relationship between the actors concerned. In this sense, I argue that the strength and trust contained within such relationships was crucial, as well as whether the career idea itself might be seen as enjoyable or risky. Depending on conclusions drawn, ideas were either opened up or closed down. As will be seen, this was a highly emotional process, linked to feelings of hope, inadequacy and fear.
6.3.1 The Role of Members from the Family and Community Field

As already mentioned, members of participants’ networks who were embedded within the family and community field tended to have the strongest relationship with participants, and were in a strong position to influence their career ideas. The ways in which cultural capital was transferred through these types of relationships to the habitus was mainly through observations and opportunities for informal work experience, although conversations and sharing interests were also important.

Observing these people’s experience of work was the most influential way of opening up or closing down new career pathways; siblings and parents were the most observed members, although uncles, aunts, grandparents and friends of the family also featured. These observations tended to be where career ideas started; for example, Zara’s interest in working as a hairdresser was instigated by observation of her sister, whom she recognised as enjoying her job:

‘cause when she was young she used to work in, like, a hairdressers and Saks. And then she started going to college and getting more, you know, like, spray tans and doing acrylic nails and stuff and ended up, like, setting up her own thing. [...] ‘cause she proper enjoys it, she’s got two jobs, whereas she can do that in her own time, but it doesn’t take up too much time, you know, ‘cause it’s quick (Zara, phase 1).

Once such initial observations had sparked a career idea, further observation and discussion with family and community members was a popular way of further considering the potential area of work. This consideration was often driven by a strong wish to avoid risk. Risk avoidance was an important consideration for participants as they observed and engaged with family and community around their career ideas. It not only referred to participants avoiding the risk of failure, but it was also about avoiding the risk of poverty and hardship - which were key factors driving decision-making. These were the main two types of risk identified in interviews, and the extent to which
participants were concerned by them varied; some participants considered long term strategies to avoid poverty and hardship, and battled with a fear of failure in order to achieve this outcome. These participants often experienced tension between a risk of failure or disappointment with a career idea and its potential to provide them with a route out of poverty. Other participants focused only upon avoiding failure, preferring to make choices that fitted as comfortably as possible with their evolving habitus.

Returning again to Zara’s interest in hairdressing, her perception of her sister’s ability to ‘handle’ the requirements of the job maintained her interest, but her anxiety about working as a hairdresser and beautician following her work experience placement demonstrates the importance for her of avoiding risk:

Well, I did my work experience at like a makeup place, and they do your hair and stuff and they take photos and stuff like that and I heard that the main girl shout one of them over and tell the girl that she wasn’t good enough. And the girl just looked you know dead upset and I heard her in the staff room saying that she just wants to give up, cause she feels like she is not really getting anywhere. That kind of put me off it, cause they have to be truthful don’t they but, I don’t know that’s. ‘cause when people say stuff to me I proper take it in. I don’t know why (Zara, phase 1).

Following these initial observations, Zara later reflected on a number of other opportunities to understand how enjoyable and how risky a job in hairdressing would be. This led to an opening, closing down and then re-opening of this idea at different points in time. As a result of this, and anxieties around being bullied at work, Zara discounted working as a hairdresser for a time.

Dani: What’s made you not be sure about it?
Zara: I don’t know, I think it’s seeing, like, you know, ‘cause it’s dead hard to get into, you know, you have got to be dead good and
stuff. I think that’s the main reason, I’d be, like, scared if I wasn’t good enough or something (Zara, phase 2).

Many participants’ career and college ideas were mediated by risk of failure, and an important example that all students were affected by was leaving their geographical comfort zone. From the colleges that were attended, location was key. Participants were not confident travelers, and displayed a considerable lack of experience with regards to traveling outside of their community. Thought was given to bus routes, times, cost, journey length and which areas the bus would pass through. Many found travelling even short distances on unfamiliar routes stressful, and anxiety regarding affording travel fare added to this. Participants worried that problematic locations would lead to being late, having poor attendance and eventually dropping out. It was for these reasons that location was the most important factor for participants when selecting a college (see figure 15, p100, overall concept map of all interviews). Matt, for example, selected his college based on its distance to his house.

Dani: What do you know about it then? Does it do food?
Matt: I don’t know if they do, but I got told, you know on my work experience of college around the area and they said that one and I live like two minutes from there. Literally like round the corner (Matt, phase 1).

The relationship between a college location and risk of failing the course through non-attendance was ever present in participants’ reflections.

[Area T’s] quite far from where I live so after a few months, I would probably get quite annoyed by the journey there, I think that would really annoy me. But with [Area S] it’s quite easy and my dad can pick me up or I can just get a bus from the college to my house so the journey’s quicker and so I’d stick. I’d probably [not] stick in college if I was at [college T] (Clare phase 2).
Anxieties surrounding the anticipated rejection from college also had the potential to close down options. This was the case for Matt’s interest in a catering academy. During the third interview, Matt was certain he wished to attend, but when I met him again in the middle of year 11 he told me he had applied to study professional cooking at another college. When I asked his reasoning, he explained:

I signed off, they haven’t sent me anything back so I’m just kind of knocking that on the head but... I was late sending it cause I sent it off about six weeks ago, no wait it was two weeks ago, not Friday gone, Friday before (Matt, phase 3).

Matt later concluded:

Nahh that went off before Christmas that, before October. and they haven’t said nothing (Matt, phase 4).

The online form Matt completed was to register interest rather than being part of a preliminary application process. Matt receiving no further correspondence is likely to be the result of a website or administrative issue. However, Matt did not chase the college, and took their lack of response as them rejecting his enquiry. As a result, in order to avoid further rejection, he dismissed the college.

Having considered the importance of risk in participants’ decision-making process we will return to how members of participants’ family and community contributed to informing this process. As well as observation and conversation, cultural capital was also transferred from the family and community through the facilitation of work experience. Work experience was powerful in enabling participants to experience a career idea first hand. It did more than just open up ideas; it enabled them to really explore their interest, and often resulted in a decision to pursue an idea or discount it. Out of the 11 participants who gained work experience facilitated by a family or community
member, nine had final destinations that matched the area of work they had been exposed to.

Chris and Mark also did formal unpaid work; Chris in floor fitting - manual work gained through a family friend - and Mark as a trainee mechanic. Manual work experience was typical for male participants, and was facilitated through local connections. For example, Mark’s cousin used his professional network to arrange for him to work in a garage over a weekend; this led to a regular unpaid job as a trainee mechanic. Mark was able to use this to gain additional practical experience alongside his apprenticeship in mechanics, giving him significant confidence through the development of skills in car maintenance. He proudly explained how he now had the experience to work on “[...] every car that comes in from five and half ton lorries down to something like that, smart cars” (Mark phase 2). When talking about gaining experience in a garage, he stated: “That’s what made me go for the mechanics’ course in the first place.”

As well as gaining formal paid or unpaid work experience, the facilitation of experience through shared interests was also very common, especially for female participants. It tended to revolve around helping others, and included caring for children, the elderly or animals. Babysitting was very popular for female participants, with three out of four female participants babysitting regularly, and prompting a sustained interest in childcare for all three. There was sometimes an expectation from family that participants would help with childcare when necessary. There were occasions where participants resented this, but it was mostly seen as an opportunity to gain experience and a level of responsibility that tended to be enjoyed.

Yeah quite a lot, I’ve got my sister who has got my niece, she is a nurse now so she’s on hours that are quite difficult. Late nights and stuff so she tends to stay with us my niece and then I’ll look after her and… my other two nieces I’m always at my brothers house, his two kids so If I’ve got now’t to do at the weekend I’ll go stay with him. Cause I like looking after them and my nephew I just take him on like
days out to the park and actually go there so yeah… there’s not much you can do with him though cause he’s only like a couple of months old. It’s a bit difficult (Nat, phase 2).

In contrast, none of the five males mentioned looking after anyone, and none discussed an interest in pursuing careers involving helping others.

The capital transferred through relationships with prominent family and community members mostly focused on their own experience of employment or the facilitation of formal or informal work experience. On the few occasions where college did arise within participants’ interviews, no examples of information or advice were provided by parents - only cousins and siblings featured. Family members had limited experience of attending college (further education) within participants’ social networks, with only 4 of the 50 family members identified having direct experience of attending. In conceptual terms, there was a lack of cultural capital in relation to college information within these networks. However, the effect of this exposure was significant, and recommendations, often with little or no justification, were treated as fact. The consideration of a college could stand or fall on a family recommendation. The same was true of information provided by peers - this too was considered highly credible. The influence of information provided by peers on college options will be explored later.

Matt: Like my other cousin, like that cousin that went to XXX, his cousin, she goes XXX. And she said it was alright so…

Dani: Did you speak to her for very long about it?

Matt: Yeah, we’re always together really. And ‘cause I been looking at colleges recently she’s been telling me about it.

Dani: Yeah? What’s she been saying?

Matt: Just like it’s decent… good opportunities and everything (conversation with Matt, phase 3).

High unemployment also affected the number of observable occupations, and therefore the employment related cultural capital available within
participants' social networks. Therefore, as with college recommendations, the cultural capital that was present was really listened to by participants; however, it was also very limited in that occupations again tended to be in work which was gendered, vocational and low-skilled. For example, male family members were mostly in manual roles and female family members in social care related jobs. This is demonstrated in chapter 5 (p119), diagram 20: Family members’ occupations.

To summarise, the cultural capital transferred through family and community members mostly involved observation of members' occupations and lifestyle, conversations, and the facilitation of formal and informal work experience. The influence upon participants’ career ideas was considerable, perhaps due to the position of these people in the network of intimacy due to the relationship they held with participants. It seemed that a strong relationship, such as that between Zara and her sister, provided information combined with a credibility that enabled her constructed experience of the industry to be trusted. People who had a strong relationship with participants could be relied upon to be honest - minimising the risk that a choice could turn out to be somehow disastrous for the participant.

6.3.2 The Role of Members from the Peer Field

The second group, peers, comprised of friends from school; they mostly influenced career ideas through storytelling and sharing interests. Although their experience of employment and college was limited, their influence upon the career ideas of participants was significant; credibility given to information provided by peers was generally so high that it was essentially unquestioned. In terms of college, discussions with peers around which colleges were approved, the likelihood of gaining a place and how students might be selected by the college informed participants' decisions. Some peer groups seemed particularly good at tapping into participants' fears of inadequacy and their perception of risk through failure. This was a common theme that resulted in shutting down college options. In addition to fear and
inadequacy, hope was also touched on in relation to the peer group influence. This seemed to correlate with a fear of poverty and hardship, just as hope related to achieving a better life than that which participants saw around them. Conversations tended to take the form of storytelling, and ‘tellable’ stories were ones that tapped into these emotions; this made them highly influential. In addition to storytelling, sharing interests also featured.

Storytelling was a popular method of transferring cultural capital to the participants’ habitus. Its strength seemed to come from the ability of participants to empathise with significant events experienced by other people they cared about, and to connect these events to their own hopes and fears. The extent to which these stories had the potential to be influential was strongly connected to the relationship held with people concerned and, as such, their position within the network of intimacy. The connected nature of such networks enabled the people discussed in stories to often be both known and understood by participants. The ‘bonded’ nature of these relationships enhanced the levels of empathy felt by participants, strengthening these stories and allowing them to be powerful in opening up and closing down employment ideas. An example of one such story closed down Matt’s interest in joining the police. This happened in the second interview following a conversation with his friend whose dad died on duty while working as a police officer. The bond Matt had with both his friend and his own father enabled him to empathise with this event. The result was that he felt moved by what happened; Matt found expressing emotion difficult, but the effect of this event on him was evident in his body language and eye contact as he explained:

Matt: I don’t want to be one of them now.
Dani: Do you not?
Matt: Like the other week, like one of my best mates’ dads, he got shot… It was all to do with, he wouldn’t have know. It was down there in [ward within estate], someone got shot and it was my mate’s, like other mate and his dad’s a police officer and he was investigating it and one day, he got shot. And he like died.
so. That kind of made me not want to do it. So…yeah [nervous laugh] (Matt, phase 2).

When I asked Matt to expand on his decision, he compared this idea with his new interest in the army, an occupation his grandfather held. Rather than being worried about the risks involved in working in the infantry, Matt was excited by it. He described a channel 4 documentary, ‘Fighting on the front lines’ (http://www.channel4.com/programmes/fighting-on-the-frontline accessed: 9/11/12 fighting on the front line):

Then it shows you people, like it’s like, they do literally have fun there and it drops it in at the middle when someone dies or gets hit. And on all of them it’s like if you die it’s like for some weird reason it’s like if a kid dies it makes you not want to do it but it’s like a boy dying, he’s only 18 but he joined the army and it was his first patrol out and he bin shot in the neck and… don’t know, it just made me feel like… I want to be there. I don’t know. […] It is TV a bit but I don’t know, it seemed good. Like they say it and its like people are like oh well you die and this, why’d you wanna go in the army you get shot. It doesn’t really bother me, it’s like I want to go in it cause, I want to really (Matt, Phase 2).

This extract further demonstrates the importance of the emotional connection Matt felt to his friend and father. Without this, the death of a police officer would not have had this level of impact. When I questioned Matt as to why he perceived so much danger in becoming a police officer but not in joining the army, he recognised the contradiction but could not explain why he felt so differently. On reflection, he recognised that the television presented a superficial representation when he said ‘it’s TV a bit but I don’t know, it seemed good’. As Matt further reflected, he discussed the difference in how the two occupations are perceived by the community:

Most people hate the police, you know what I mean. It’s like armed police are quite similar, they are different as well but you are
respected if you are in the army and if you are a police officer, you are not. You are not respected by people. Cause in the army if someone has done something wrong it generally means it’s someone on the opposite side, like against ya, like if someone you know on your team they know and they like, I don’t know, probably get sent home or something or whatever (Matt, phase 2).

As can be seen here, Matt adds another dimension in suggesting that respect awarded to those serving in the army provides capital within the position he holds in the community field. Perhaps he recognised a lack of empathy from others for the death of his friend’s father, but knows this would not be the case if he had died in the forces. This suggests that cultural values (capital) from the community impacted upon Matt's career decision-making and values. From discussions within Matt's interviews (such as the fight described in chapter 5), the area of the estate where Matt lived is likely to experience high levels of illegal activity. His comments suggest that people engaged in this activity saw the police as the enemy, and therefore an occupation outside what is accepted or valued within the community field. Although both his father's suggestion to train to be a police officer and the influence of his friend's father's position had tempered this belief, Matt was still very aware of the community’s lack of respect for this occupation. Therefore, we can say that becoming a police officer lacked symbolic value within this particular community field, and could potentially act as a negative form of capital that significantly lowered a participant's status within the field. From this example, we can see the influence of the story his friend told him regarding his dad; this story is responsible for changing his mind regarding this career idea.

Moving on from storytelling, another popular way in which cultural capital was created and transferred to the habitus through interactions with peers was through interest sharing. This medium tended to open up new ideas through a realised enjoyment and skill of an activity, and connections were then made to areas of work. There were correlations between interests shared and the peer groups outlined in Chapter 5. For example, fashion and
beauty were mostly popular with those who most identified with the ‘beautiful girls’ (all female). Zara (one of the beautiful girls) developed confidence in her abilities in hair and make-up from a shared interest in helping friends with their appearance. Harriet shared a love of fashion with her peers, discussing fashion tips and going shopping together. A popular interest for male peer groups was gaming and ICT; this was especially so for the Nerds. Jack and Tom (both nerds) shared a love of gaming with another friend, and talked about their interest at length throughout interviews. Each of them developed a range of ICT and gaming related knowledge through this, and then later through their own research, enabling them to navigate career options in this area:

When I play a game I can play it for like half an hour and I could learn the track like that. Like my mate he’s just got the game that I’ve had for a year but haven’t played on it. I pick up the pack, put it in my new X box and I can play it like that, straight the way, learnt every single road, it’s in my head. I will never lose, not forgetting the roads I know the shortcuts, he’s like ‘help me out’, I help them because they forget everything but me I just remember it straight the way never lose it but say I can play a game that has different controls I will lose to other people in them controls but give me half an hour and I pick the controls up dead quickly and learn everything again (Jack, phase 2).

The relationship between capital and peer group through shared interests and related conversations was prominent enough to be noticeable within participant’s career ideas. Furthermore, it was noticeable that for the peer groups most aligned with the school field, the types of conversations and shared interests were often in areas that complemented the most popular vocational subjects offered by the school sixth form i.e. hair and beauty, sport and ICT.

With regards to participants’ decision-making concerning college, cultural capital from peers was mostly transferred through conversations; these were significant sources of information and advice. Often, colleges were prioritised
purely on a friend’s recommendation, and justification was not required. In these instances, the language was vague and the tone was factual. Common terms included: ‘I hear that…’; apparently […]’; describing colleges as ‘alright’ (this is a recommendation); ‘really good’; and ‘it was the best’; but, even when prompted, participants were often unable to expand. In Carrie’s case, one attempt to prompt further insight from her regarding a recommendation from her peers about which college to attend drew the following response:

Erm, just general people like, I know quite a few people who have just left school and when they’ve been to it they are like it’s really good (Carrie, phase 2).

Often, a recommendation and the knowledge that the college ran a course of interest was enough to prompt an application. Harriet, for example, based her consideration of a local college purely on recommendations from peers; she had no other information, including whether they ran the course that supported her employment idea, which was to study fashion. Another college was discounted for not having a recommendation, stating ‘I don’t know what that one’s like’ (Harriet, phase 1). Conversations that provided more than a simple, unjustified recommendation tended to indicate which colleges were approved, the likelihood of gaining a place and how students were selected. These conversations were generally treated as fact, and were used to support students in avoiding risk through failing to gain a place or failing to maintain a place through poor or non-attendance. These recommendations were limited in that peers tended to make statements about the same local, vocational colleges. There was a sense in which everybody was going to the same college, creating safety and a sense of community that was not so dissimilar to the train journey metaphor I mentioned in chapter 2 (Furlong and Cartmel, 1997).

Matt’s experience of not hearing back from the hospitality college following an online request for information led him to suggest to a friend it wasn’t worth enquiring.
Dani: What about your mate who is interested in going to XXX?
Matt: Ow I don’t even know what he is doing now, he told me to give me a thing but I went XXX to be honest with you there is no point.
Dani: What do you mean? Give him what?
Matt: The number, the website for him. And he went on it and I don’t know if he has sent it off or not.
(Matt, phase 4)

This kind of informal suggestion was often powerful in the consideration of colleges.

6.3.3 The Role of Members Mostly from the School Field

The final group of actors who could potentially be involved in participants' decision making were professionals, who consisted of teaching staff, pastoral support, external professionals and Connexions workers. Out of those identified as influential, professionals generally had the weakest relationship with participants, and few made it into the network of intimacy. This had a significant impact upon their ability to inform and advise students. As I have already argued, the relationship shared between actor and participant was central to whether knowledge (capital) offered was valued and transferred to the habitus. This was especially the case during attempts to share cultural capital via engagement in honest and reflective dialogue. To better understand the importance of this relationship, it is worth exploring some of these attempts.

Due to the remit of professionals, attempts were made to share knowledge through lessons, interviews and one-to-one discussions, but reference to these interventions were minimal in the participants' interviews. Career guidance lessons held during their PSHE (personal, social and health education) lesson aimed to support decision-making through self-reflection in relation to their career ideas (Research diary 2012, meeting with school
based careers co-ordinator). None of the participants mentioned these lessons, and, when prompted to do so, students were dismissive: ‘you don’t really do anything so you just go down the library and there’s books and leaflets’ (Carrie, phase 3).

Another attempt made by actors in the school field to engage with participants' decision-making was through the employment of the Connexions service, which provided one-to-one career guidance. Again, this required the engagement of pupils in open conversation regarding their career ideas, since the Connexions approach (as outlined in chapter 1) adopted a client-centred model of career guidance. This approach required that information and advice should be based on the young person’s understanding of their career ideas, rather than the advisor informing them of opportunities available within the labour market. Therefore, without open dialogue, these meetings were unlikely to be fruitful. However, regardless of whether such dialogue occurred or not, one interview of between 10-20 minutes was allocated per pupil twice during their time in school; these meetings were then complemented by a drop-in service once a week (Research diary, meeting with the school careers personal adviser 2012). Again, participants hardly mentioned these interviews, and, even with prompting, many were dismissive; Zara didn’t even think it was worth telling me that she’d had her Connexions interview:

Dani: Have you met up with Connexions?
Zara: No, not really

(Zara, interview phase 2)

Having considered two examples of relatively unsuccessful attempts to inform and influence career decision-making by members of the school field (ie. from Carrie and Zara above), we will consider ways that professionals were able to provide information and advice, despite their absence from networks of intimacy. Although these forms of influence were limited, due to participants being unlikely to engage further with these professionals, they were successful in the sense that they did make some contribution towards
career ideas being considered. This contribution took place through participants’ observation of professionals, the facilitation of work experience, and providing information at open day events. Observation was an important influence for female participants, who seemed to pay greater attention to the experiences of professionals in their roles; examples included observation of teachers, support workers, social workers and family placement workers. For this method to be influential, a relationship with the person being observed did not appear to be central; however, a lack of relationship prevented anything other than a fairly superficial understanding due to an unwillingness to engage in dialogue. This is similar to Clare’s example, where she did not discuss her interest in being a social worker with any of the social workers who worked with her.

Professionals were able to provide opportunities for more detailed information on career ideas through the facilitation of either 1 or 2 week work experience placements; these placements were powerful, and often either confirmed or discounted a career path. Work experience placements were one of very few opportunities for participants to gain exposure to work, and reactions to them often revolved around emotional states such as enjoyment, comfort, fear, humiliation or intimidation. This again related to the avoidance of risk of failure mentioned previously. Risk of poverty and hardship was not as directly present, but ran through certain participants’ narratives generally. It was not uncommon for a powerful emotional reaction to be over-generalised, leading to discounting or confirming whole industries. This was even the case for Harriet, who was able to gain work experience in a solicitor’s office. Although her responsibilities during the placement were in a different role to her occupational interest, and the people she encountered there were only one example of a staff team she might eventually work with, her experience of being patronized and looked down on was powerful in closing down her career ideas in this pathway. She attempted to avoid the risk of rejection in the workplace and perceived her work experience to be representative of all work environments in her chosen industry:
I don’t know, I was going to go into Law but I did my work experience at a solicitor’s office and I didn’t really enjoy it… [...] I didn’t really think it was that good, it didn’t look like I’d really enjoy it; it just looked like I’d be waiting all the time to go home. Probably find it a bit boring. [...] Yeah, the people I worked with were really nice but all the other people weren’t that nice (Harriet, phase 1).

It was not uncommon for opportunities to be abandoned if a risk of rejection was felt. For example, Matt’s interest in joining the army was dismissed following a letter he received stating that if he wished to join the army he would need to initially go under a caution due to his asthma. When I first asked about this, Matt told me the army had refused him on the grounds of him having asthma; it was only later that he told me what the letter actually said. He did not follow up on this opportunity, or an army residential with the school that followed.

I could find only one example of a participant who was able to be more objective regarding a bad work experience placement; this was Carrie, who persisted with teaching regardless: ‘I think it was just the primary school, I think if I went to another one I would just be in one class or something; I don’t know’ (Carrie phase 1). More details on Carrie’s case will be discussed in chapter 7.

Work placements also offered an opportunity to develop significant depth of understanding regarding an area of work. Matt’s interest and understanding of becoming a chef was strengthened following his work placement at a catering unit of a local University. This placement gave Matt the opportunity to understand important aspects of the job. The level of autonomy this role provided was an important influence in confirming his interest. His enthusiasm for the role was evident as he described his experience:

I was doin’, like, desserts, like, I made 4 desserts and I packed them and everything, and I got more things ready…. and made, like, salads
and stuff. Preparing all the food and everything, then the last few days I went delivering it all (Matt, phase 1).

This placement resulted in his continued interest in working as a chef, and following this he went on to work at his uncle’s restaurant, which was an experience he also enjoyed.

Finally, professionals provided students with information on college open days. These events had the potential to be hugely influential, as they often formed the basis for whether interest in a college or course was sustained or closed down, and students would generally only consider colleges they had visited. These open days provided the opportunity to learn about and experience the college first hand, and often included a tour of facilities and grounds, presentations by tutors and sometimes taster sessions on courses taught. Their purpose was to recruit students onto available courses. These events were crucial, as many colleges were regularly disregarded if they were unfamiliar, and proactive research was unusual.

Nevertheless, although these events could be highly influential, their potential went largely unfulfilled. This was due to a number of reasons: first, participants were unwilling to visit a college unless they were almost certain that they would apply; then they were often only informed of the dates for open days at very local, vocational colleges. As has been discussed in chapter 5, conversations with the headmaster and various members of school staff demonstrated a general reluctance to encourage students to take what were perceived as risks in relation to college choices. This was due to students being seen as uncomfortable travelling outside of their geographical comfort zone, and to a belief that they would struggle to cope in challenging environments, such as 'other' colleges where less support was available or qualifications were academic in nature.

Another important factor was missing, or a fear of missing, open days, due to confusion over dates, colleges or locations. As discussed, many participants' limited awareness and knowledge of different colleges, even those local to
the school, was a barrier to their interest. Although visiting a college had the potential to mediate this confusion, the location of colleges and a reluctance to travel outside of their geographical comfort zone limited their attendance at these events. When unfamiliar colleges were considered, this sometimes resulted in open days being missed, and stories served as a warning to keep with what is safe and known:

Quite a few people did apply for other interviews but when they got their place they didn’t know where it was so they kind of went but didn’t get there... because they couldn’t find it [laughs] so I’m glad I applied and got in that one ‘cause I knew where that one [was] (Carrie, phase 4).

Confusion often resulted in students just not attending a particular college. With the exception of the school sixth form, when open days were missed, participants made no attempt to arrange independent visits, even when the college was their first choice and visiting perceived as fundamental to their decision making process. This resulted in participants mostly only visiting one or two open days, with the school sixth form being the most prominent. Colleges were subsequently discounted if open days were missed, further reinforcing their decisions to select colleges that were familiar, close, recommended and on a known bus route.

Once again, the difficulties participants had with attending college open days relates to their avoidance of risk of failure and how this opened up or closed down career ideas depending on participants' perceived ability to complete the course. This fear applied to the selection of courses as well as the college itself; for example, Jack decided against studying Media at the school 6th form following an open day taster session. “They showed you like they had the radio on and the TV on and they had blue screens and everything. […] I just looked at it and I thought it’s just too much for me, I wouldn’t be able to do it” (Jack, phase 3).

As can be seen, then, the potential for professionals, especially those in the school field, to widen the employment and college ideas of students, and
consequently offer cultural capital that could transfer to their habitus, was evident 'on the surface' at least. However, these opportunities were not utilised in such a way that participants’ career options were widened beyond the typical occupations of the community field and the qualifications offered in the school sixth form. The dissemination of open day dates for local colleges, the facilitation of work experience, plus simply being around other students with shared interests so that they may be observed, were all part of the process by which career ideas were shaped and formed; but this tended again to reconfirm a small number of typical career ideas. The position of professionals outside of participants’ network of intimacy restricted their potential to influence career decision making in a way that might promote social mobility. Furthermore, considering the position of the school within the education market (Bourdieu, 1977), there was evidence to suggest that staff within the school would not be in a position to facilitate the opening up of career ideas had they been included in these networks of intimacy anyway.

6.4 Chapter Summary

This chapter has considered how cultural capital is transferred from participants’ social networks (including their networks of intimacy) to their habitus, thus shaping their decision making. As such, the role of social networks was found to be central in shaping the career ideas of participants through the transference of cultural capital in the form of career related knowledge. The way these networks were organized, the people present within them and the level of credibility given to the information and advice of different types of actors was therefore a key component of the process through which career decisions were made. It was this process that dictated the typical career pathways for young people like these - an ongoing process of opening up and closing down different career ideas.

As we have seen, decisions around how careers information was utilised revolved mostly around the avoidance of risk, where rejection or perceived rejection closed down ideas; this was seen in Matt’s initial interest in joining
the Army, Zara’s reluctance to become a hairdresser and in some of the college examples. This risk can be understood as embedded within the structural conditions outlined in the previous chapter (chapter 5), the consequence of occupying fields located in a socially disadvantaged context. The transference of cultural capital through the social network is a strategy that participants have adopted in managing their vulnerability to risk.

The value of these networks in transferring cultural capital was evident, but because of the types of jobs occupied by network members, and of the vocational nature of the qualifications offered by the school, the members of these networks could only access and acquire certain types of cultural capital, which then informed the habitus to shape decision making in a specific way. Within this, the potential to acquire cultural capital valued in occupied fields opened up ideas; for example, again joining the Army or working within hair and beauty or fashion, in contrast to working within the police force, for example. The consequence was that participants were not selecting career pathways that carried value in relation to the field of power, but typically selected gendered, vocational, low-skilled areas of work.
Chapter 7: Reflexivity

This, the final of three empirical chapters, will build upon the account rooted in Bourdieu that is presented in the previous two chapters. This account has argued that the young people involved in this research display certain similarities in their career decision making, and that this 'typicality' can be explained in terms of the similar fields that they encounter and occupy. These fields (community, family, peer group and school) provide access to specific forms of cultural capital, which are then transferred to the habitus via social networks to shape and inform decision making. Cultural capital is, therefore, the most relevant form of capital in this process, and I have argued that its transference through the social networks of these young people requires that such networks take a specific form - i.e. networks of intimacy. These are networks that are heavily built on trust, are highly inter-connected and make cultural capital available either directly (from actor to participant) or indirectly (from actor to actor to participant). Finally, I argue that reliance on such networks of intimacy is partly motivated by risk avoidance, either risk of failure or risk of financial hardship, and that this shapes the value of specific career/college options for participants (i.e. the value of cultural capital for these young people negotiating transition out of the school field).

These participants therefore display a heightened awareness of the risks that are identified by Beck (1992, 1998) as being more prominent for people who live in disadvantaged locations. The message from the fields occupied is that these young people are vulnerable and are incapable of handling certain pathways; this has been heard by participants, and feelings of anxiety and guilt are common, often guiding decisions that are within their perceived capabilities. Beck and Beck-Gernsheim recognise that 'psychological dispositions' (2002: 24), such as feelings of guilt and anxiety, can be the consequence of social problems rather than personal failings. It seems the anticipation of failure is powerful in restricting career pathways, arguably
more powerful than the risks themselves, especially if young people are properly supported in the management of these risks. Risks avoided by the participants included traveling further to attend a preferred college, attempting to find a college situated in an unfamiliar location, and applying for an academic rather than a non-academic course.

This chapter will address the second research question: ‘to what extent is reflexive agency possible in transcending their social location and achieving social mobility.’ The possibility of and potential for reflexivity will be considered through the presentation of one main case study: Carrie. Carrie is a useful example of a participant who appeared to utilise reflexive thinking in her decision-making, and displayed a desire for a future different to that which she recognised as typical for her peers. With these two characteristics evident within her interview data (and arguably her habitus), we might assume, under the neo-liberal ideology of free choice, that Carrie would be in a strong position to achieve social mobility.

This hypothesis will be explored here by looking at the tension between her desire for social mobility and her lived experience. In doing so, I will consider the extent to which reflexivity really is present, and if it is helpful in supporting choices in line with a more transformative future. I will look at how a sense of objectivity can help to support a recognition of limitations of the local fields inhabited and create a desire for something different to more common pathways, and how this can be supported. Finally, I will consider how the structure outlined in chapter 5 (i.e. the fields occupied) may shape the limitations and affordances of reflexive thinking, highlighting that this concept needs to be situated in an understanding of the social structure in which young people are located.

Carrie was different to the majority of participants involved in this research in that, with some encouragement, she displayed investment and engagement through her reflexive thinking in line with a desire for social mobility. For most participants, instances of reflexivity were less common; they did not become a central process through which decisions were being made. Decisions
seemed to be quite spontaneous, in the moment, fluid or lacking consistency, through a process where the opening and closing of ideas took place in response to the factors mentioned in chapters 5 and 6 (i.e. observation, dialogue and work experience). The typicality of this kind of decision-making has been demonstrated through Matt's example in the previous chapter, where his interest in joining the army, applying for catering college, and, in the final interview, his interest in working as a chauffeur, showed a spontaneous reactive spirit. Although the interview process actively encouraged participants to explore their options through reflexive thinking, only three participants (Carrie, Zara and Clare) displayed a desire for a future different to that which they recognised as typical for their peers in this particular context, and used reflexivity as a tool to describe this.

The three participants who were starting to develop a reflexive disposition of this kind were able to display some level of awareness regarding where they and their community/family were positioned in society, and had a strong desire to improve this, to live a life different to the norm. This desire fuelled their use of reflection to explore what they perceived to be alternative pathways, using their social network to inform this knowledge to ensure the best possible fit between their preferences and available options. Therefore, these participants did not display isolated moments of reflection; instead, they were increasingly engaged in a reflexive process as they considered their career ideas, and they used the interview sessions with myself to discuss their reasoning for career ideas, weighing up the pros and cons of different pathways and making deliberate decisions based on information available. I will argue here that their engagement in a reflexive process enabled the forming of their reflexive habitus, whereby reflexivity became instinctive in their decision making process during the course of the research. By the third and fourth interviews, these participants deliberated upon their career ideas without prompting, exploring their own awareness of self and the extent to which they felt this fitted with potential career ideas. They discussed their anxieties, excitement and indifference regarding these options as they evaluated their preferences.
Carrie is an example of an atypical case, not just in the sense that she displays this kind of reflexive disposition, but also in that there is a noticeable shift in her habitus from that of other participants. To understand this shift, elements of the habitus for Carrie's case will be explored by outlining the fields she inhabited and the types and levels of social capital she accessed; thus, I will explore her positioning within relevant fields. Presenting our case study in this way will serve to introduce Carrie as our main character, provide an understanding of how she differs from the more typical cases (outlined in chapters 5 and 6), and, more significantly, will allow me to present a more structural understanding of reflexivity in order that the complexities and tensions of Carrie's decision making can be unpacked.

7.1 The Family and Community Field

The influence of a community culture was less evident in Carrie’s interviews, although, like other participants, she lived on the estate; however, she seemed to position herself away from it, and it was the influence of family members that became the focus of our conversations. Carrie’s family, especially her mother, encouraged her to see beyond the typical jobs promoted locally to those that required a greater level of experience and qualifications. Her family instilled in Carrie a desire to not only survive the complex and turbulent environment of the community field inhabited, but to transcend it, to move beyond the limitations of the estate. This was less usual of participants; the family fields of others tended to be far more embedded in the estate, holding a more insular perspective and concentrating their energy upon managing this environment.

Having grown up in a single parent family, it was her mother with whom Carrie had the strongest emotional bond, and, like all participants, she was influenced most by people with whom she was closest. Similar to others, Carrie relies on a network where bonding capital is valued – however, this capital promotes the potential for a different future to that of the more typical network of intimacy. Carrie’s close relationship with her mother heightened
the influence of conversations and observations shared with her; the encouragement to do better, as well as the hardship she observed, deeply affected her determination for a different life. Carrie referred several times to the hardship her mother experienced, discussing how difficult it was for her just to pay the household bills. The moment when they were unable to afford a washing machine was firmly lodged in Carrie’s mind.

I have seen what it’s doing, like there are times where you just want better don’t you, [...] with the washing machine, it broke and because all the bills had gone out that week we had to wait three weeks before we could… but then grandad ended up buying our washing machine and I think to myself like, when I am older, I will be able to get that (Carrie, phase 4).

At the time of the research, Carrie’s family no longer struggled with this level of financial difficulty, and the message that was clearly communicated to her by family members was that transcending such hardship could only be achieved with determination, a consistent approach to work, and prioritising education. Carrie was proud of her mother, as she recognised how hard she had worked to lift herself and her family out of financial hardship, working consistently even during late pregnancy, and during times when it would have been easier and sometimes cheaper not to. She complimented her on this: ‘But like I say “you’re moving up in life you mum” because she’s got a really good job and that, and she enjoys it like’ (Carrie, phase 2).

Likewise, Carrie reported that her mother was proud of her gaining a full time college place:

She is dead happy, she has just been telling everyone. She walked past her mate in the street and she just introduces me to her and it’s like, “Mum what are you doing, I don’t want to like talk to your friends”, but she is funny (Carrie, phase 4).
Carrie’s family expanded following her mother’s second marriage to her now stepfather, a self-employed plumber; and through this marriage she had acquired two stepsisters. Unlike her biological family, both step siblings had attended University and, by the end of the research, had gone on to work in skilled professions, namely nursing. Carrie often reflected upon observations and conversations with them, looking up to what they had achieved. It was through these observations that she saw the potential for education to offer stability and social mobility.

One’s just qualified and got a job as a nurse and one’s training to be a nurse and like just a couple of my family members are like… not to follow in [their] footsteps and like… [I] think it’s a good thing to do… like… it seems stable… whereas if you just went to work in a shop or whatever, if the shop closed down you’re not going to have your job are you? And stuff like that (Carrie, phase 1).

Additionally, Carrie spoke of the relationship between self determination and ‘getting on in life’. She believed that focusing energy towards education was the most efficient strategy in achieving financial comfort and a job that would meet her expectations without too many challenges:

I obviously just want a nice house and stuff…. but I think the only way I’m going to get a nice house and nice things and stuff is if like… I go to Uni and stuff like that, and I get a degree and stuff and like that and I get a degree or whatever’ (Carrie, phase 1).

The hesitation in her comments above and the uneasiness displayed during conversations relating to University suggested feelings of intimidation regarding the prospect of studying at this level; however, she presented a commitment to manage this fear of failure, recognizing it as a barrier to achieving what she desired; for Carrie, a much more powerful fear was that of financial hardship:

[…] ‘Because, if there was me who didn’t have the qualifications and
then someone who did have the qualifications going for a good job then they are obviously going to get it, I'm not… Then they are going to get the nice things and I'm not. Just gotta wait… I just think it's better, you have got better opportunities to do it, yeah (Carrie, phase 1).

Throughout interviews, Carrie displayed objectivity in relation to her position within the community she lived, identifying it as a rough area and relating this to employment problems and crime. She was very aware of the risk of falling into poverty, and looked across her peers, especially those in excluded cliques like the chavs, noting that their behaviour and attitude was likely to lead to this type of lifestyle. Fearful of this, she worked hard to give herself the best start; Carrie (phase 2) set herself apart from others in these peer fields, who she saw as 'at risk' through lack of effort: ‘their minds are just on cloud nine or something’, as quoted in chapter 5. These groups appeared to be a source of frustration for Carrie, and setting herself apart in this way seemed to enable her to benefit from an imagined distance between herself and those whose choices she did not agree with; this idea of objectivity, or ‘otherness’, will be touched on again in the next section.

The family members Carrie identified as central to informing her career ideas are presented below in figure 29. In addition to her mother, step father and step sisters, her family also included her brother, who worked in finance, his wife, who worked in a nursery following the completion of a BTEC in childcare, and an extended family, which included five brothers and several nieces and nephews. Descriptions of family members, and relationships between them, herself and each other, give the impression of a stable family environment; this was likely to have been important in providing a strong foundation from which to develop. Unlike Matt, Carrie had not needed to manage difficult relationships or transient housing situations. This stability, and not needing to maintain this network to the same degree as other participants, may have supported her ability and desire to look outside of it, providing the foundation from which she was able to explore additional
opportunities to develop a more extended social network, which will be explored later in this chapter.

Figure 29: Carrie’s Family

I suggest, then, that Carrie’s family had supported the development of a more objective habitus, one that recognized that certain types of decisions lead to certain types of pathways. In this sense, Carrie had acquired the necessary cultural capital that had enabled her also to recognise this. As a result of this knowledge, Carrie consistently desired to position herself against this norm. Although she did not demonstrate direct awareness of structural limitations, (i.e. how social location relates to other more advantaged positions, and how this affords or constrains career trajectories), she did differentiate between the type of person she believed would do well and those she believed would not, and such perceptions did connect to an individual's social location in relation to school, community and peer fields. For example, as mentioned when discussing the chav peer group, she asks: ‘[…] where’s [money] gonna come from, they’re not gonna get a job’ (Carrie, phase 2). However, without a greater awareness of the impact of structural limitations upon her life (Simmons, Russell & Thompson, 2014), Carrie
believed that she alone was responsible for her own future, and she was committed to developing one that would move her beyond the fields she was currently located within: 'I want to get out in the world' (Carrie, phase 2).

7.2 The Peer Field

Within the school, like all participants, Carrie was drawn to people who shared a similar habitus to her in relation to education and a desire to better themselves through a considered approach to their future. As stated, she created an imagined distance from those whom she believed did not share this drive: ‘Yeah and they’re gonna regret it because the other person won’t be there when they leave, cause not everyone’s gonna be there are they?’ (Carrie, phase 2). She made several comments regarding the chav peer group relating to their lack of manners, educational commitment, and lack of investment in their future. This view was shared by the other two students who displayed a reflexive disposition and shared a similar habitus to Carrie. For example, Harriet says “I don’t think the chavs give any real thought to a career or anything. They are just like people [who] just cruise through life really. And I think they all just do what their friends do” (Harriet, phase 2). There was a strong sense of otherness between these three participants and the chav peer group that is noticeable in quotes present within ‘the peer field’ section of chapter 5.

The friendship group that Carrie did choose to identify and spend time with was the ‘beautiful girl’ peer group. Carrie joined this group in between the first and second interview phase. During a conversation about students' alignment with different groups, she commented:

Yeah it’s like what you prefer, like the group that I was in, it wasn’t boring but it was quite bitchy, it was quite like ‘oh the girl’s this’ … but I got on with quite a lot of the girls. So when I was in lesson, say sitting with them and they seen me laughing they weren’t really happy because they was like “oh well” you know what I mean? And then I got
invited out cause I didn’t want to stay in and none of them was doing anything. And that was it really, they just didn’t like it and they was like “well we could see it coming anyway” but I didn’t mean to be horrible! I’d just be like, I’m going to hang around with these but I’m a lot happier now I fit in. So, if I’ve got an opportunity not to listen to bitchy comments I’m going to do it. You know what I mean? (Carrie, phase 2).

This group shared similar values in relation to educational cultural capital, and, as discussed in chapter 5, were supportive of each other doing well in exams and applying for college. Carrie was aligned with the beautiful girls in this sense, but demonstrated some misalignment in relation to her career ideas. As, again, discussed in chapter 5, this peer group valued cultural capital that related to gaining knowledge regarding looking attractive, and consequently tended to gravitate towards occupations in hair, beauty and fashion, among others. Therefore, the influence of these relationships had the potential to be transformative in the value placed upon education, but limiting in their influence upon the narrowing of members’ career ideas. Carrie’s engagement in reflexivity enabled her to mediate this influence by constructing an understanding of her career ideas in relation to an awareness of self, rather than to the collective values of her new peer group. This was likely to have been supported by a pride in her autonomy: ‘I don’t like other people doing things for me, it annoys me, I’ve got my own mind as far as I am concerned’ (phase 3). As a consequence, she was not interested in ‘just’ doing hair and beauty at the school’s 6th form, a common choice among this group. Clare was similar:

I don’t really talk to [my peer group] about what I want to do cause they don’t really understand why I want to do it, like most of friends have gone off to do child care and I’ve kind of gone off on my own to do what I want to do cause I’m not worried about going off to a college where I don’t know anyone, I’m not going to worry about that cause although they are my friends, they may not be my friends forever and
it is what I want to do and it’s what I have wanted to do for ages. So I will do it even if it means I will end up being lonely (Clare, phase 3).

This misalignment with a selected peer group was a difficult tension for these participants, and, as will be discussed, Carrie managed feelings of guilt about deserting her friends following school. What set these three young people apart was a determination for something better.

7.3 The School Field

Carrie’s position in relation to the school field was mixed; she experienced both alignment and tension in her habitus and subsequent career ideas. She recognised the importance of education and the need to work hard at school in order to acquire qualifications that would support progress in life, and, as such, she aligned with the school field by expending cultural capital (i.e. value towards education), which should theoretically have given her a strong position within this field. Additionally, as previously discussed, the school field, through its own position within the broader education quasi-market, promoted the pursuit of pathways that were limited in many respects. As I have outlined in chapters 4 and 5, the school’s location in a disadvantaged area affected its intake, therefore making achieving competitive GCSE A-C grades difficult. For this reason, this particular school focused its energy on supporting students to gain vocational rather than academic qualifications, and the pursuit and achievement of such qualifications therefore held capital within this school field. In relation to this, Carrie was aligned with the school field again in her pursuit of vocational qualifications (a BTEC in Health and Social Care, level 2). She chose to apply for a BTEC in childcare level 3 at college, rather than A-levels, as her route into teaching; this was in spite of her strong grades in the subjects she had taken (5 GCSEs A-C, including a B in English language). In addition, Carrie chose not to pursue higher grades in her subjects through re-examination:
I’ve already got a B in English and a C in maths so I have done better in that, I’m happy with a B, don’t really expect anything more of myself but my sciences I hope I at least get a C just so it’s easier for yr 11 then isn’t it? (Carrie, phase 2).

In another school, Carrie might have been encouraged to pursue higher grades and apply for A-levels rather than a BTEC, especially considering her occupational interest. Here, she did not consider an academic route into teaching, explaining that she was not the academic sort. Such beliefs were extremely common amongst the participants, and clearly connect to the patterns of risk avoidance mentioned in Chapter 6. In fact, from the whole sample, only Christina went on to study A-levels. In Carrie’s case this was due to a lack of confidence in passing exams.

I really struggle with exams, I do so well in my course work and then when I get to the exam it really lets me down. So be better like doing that, and there are not really any A levels that I want to do, so. […] I just struggle, cause I revise so much but then I get in there and my mind just goes blank and I’m there thinking. Why did I even bother doing all that [laughs]. But I’m doing well in my others, I passed all my English and my Maths (Carrie, phase 2).

However, where Carrie appeared to misalign with the school field was in relation to her lack of interest in attending the school’s 6th form. This was uncommon for students, as the majority (82% from the 2012 Year 11 cohort) did progress here (data collected from 6th form). As such, her position within the school field was likely to have made maintaining decisions around transition difficult. She wanted to expand her horizons by applying to colleges outside of the immediate vicinity, but indicated feelings of guilt around deserting her friends and perhaps the school. Rather than questioning the school for not promoting a range of alternative colleges, she questioned her own motives, feeling both disloyal for not wishing to study there and a need to justify her reasoning for not applying for this college. The tension Carrie felt was apparent in the things she said and the tone of her voice,
questioning herself and her loyalty to the school and friends for not wanting to attend this college:

‘Cause you want to meet new people and, like… I know it sounds horrible, but if you don't like someone you don't really...like, you’ll leave school and you want to meet new people and stuff. But if you go to sixth form there’s, like, every chance that half of your school year is going to be going and you want to get out and like… have a change sort of thing. Go to…’cause other people are going to be going to different other colleges and stuff and you want to meet new people and that (Carrie, phase 1).

Carrie did not change her mind about this throughout the research, although it was clear she felt very conflicted; during the penultimate interview, when her place at a different college was confirmed, she discussed how much she would miss her friends as a result of not going to this college:

‘Cause I’m gonna miss everyone [strong emotion in voice] ‘cause everyone’s always like, ‘oh I'll stay in touch’, but no one ever does. It's like, all the old year 11s went on exactly the same (Carrie, phase 3).

Concerns about deserting her friends were justified by Carrie, to some extent, in a discussion we had around the fluidity of friendship and the possibility of her friends also moving on in the future. In this respect, Carrie admitted to feeling selfish about this, but she justified it to me and herself by assuring me that it was important to consider all of her options in order to stand the best chance of leading a different life to her family. In this way, she created a distinction between following the majority and wanting something different. She felt that aligning with the school field completely, and its pre-ordained trajectory of attending the school sixth form, although it would be the 'safest' option, would limit her future.

Carrie presented a different habitus in this regard - unlike Matt in chapter 6, she was less concerned by the avoidance of risk of failure. For him, and,
typically, for other participants, this kind of risk avoidance provided a mechanism that drove the process of cultural capital transference through the social network, and therefore shaped the cultural capital valued by the habitus. Risk avoidance was a significant part of Matt’s habitus, and, although this was present in Carrie’s habitus, it was balanced in other ways - for example, the avoidance of risk of poverty - therefore it did not dominate her utilization of the cultural capital available to her. Carrie recognised that risk was necessary to achieving social mobility. In this sense, her habitus was not completely informed by the school; she was disposed to want something more than what the school offers, and she was willing to take the risk of not going with the safest option.

‘Cause we know what the 6th form is ‘cause it’s here, but, I don’t think everyone wants to go to 6th form really (Carrie, phase 1).
I don’t want to get the same bus in the morning, get up at the same time. It would just feel like coming to school. […] I’d feel like I weren’t moving forward (Carrie, phase 3).

The position of Carrie within the fields outlined demonstrates a habitus that differs slightly from that of other participants: she had the opportunity to observe her stepsisters in skilled professions; she demonstrated objectivity in observing and positioning herself against the typical trajectory for young people like her; and she showed a desire to achieve more than what she had observed (or what was valued) in the community and school fields. This, combined with a relative amount of stability in her home environment, and her family’s encouragement to work hard and value education in order to be successful in life, had led to Carrie beginning to develop a network and reflexive habitus that differed from other participants. The structure and content of Carrie’s network is central to her atypical habitus, and this will now be discussed.
7.4 Social Networks

As outlined in chapter 6, social networks were found to be central to the transference of cultural capital, and were therefore important to the shaping and continued re-shaping of participants' habitus. A typical social network among the sample resembled a 'network of intimacy', and was made up of family, family friends and peers, embedded within the family and community fields. As a result of their interconnected, bounded structure, networks contained almost entirely bonding social capital; this meant that participants were rarely exposed to alternative types and levels of capital, and so the values and cultural norms promoted were in line with the fields in which members were located. Although the centre of Carrie’s network resembled those described in chapter 6 - i.e. those that were typical for many of the participants - over the course of interviews I was able to discover that the outer rim did not.

Figure 30: Carrie’s Network

Figure 30 is a visual representation of Carrie’s network. As can be seen, the centre of it shares similarities with what has been described and presented
using the example of Matt. Relationships represent bonding capital, and actors are located in the family or community fields, meaning the values, culture and capital accessed through these links would be consistent with such fields. These people share relationships with each other as well as Carrie, and this structure means that members can influence the shaping of the habitus both directly through Carrie or via others. However, as interviews progressed, Carrie discussed conversations with others who can be seen located on the outer rim. These people had fewer interconnections, and some were located in the school field, such as her form tutor and RE teacher. People from outside the family or community fields forming parts of a participant’s network was unusual, and potentially could have contributed again to differences in Carrie’s habitus. These relationships can be referred to as bridging networks, and therefore have the potential to offer capital that is transformative.

The presence of relationships that are external to Carrie’s family, peer or community field seemed to be partly fuelled by a desire for information around something different, and to understand what life could be like; she saw the expansion of her network to include people from her wider family and the school field, who had knowledge of the specific areas of work that she was interested in, as providing an opportunity for her to enhance the information and opportunities available to her.

What seemed to support these relationships was a frustration with the information provided through her school and core network. Firstly, in relation to the school, like most participants Carrie reported receiving limited information about any college other than the school’s 6th form, and she contrasted this to the arrangement of several University visits, as stated. Carrie questioned: “If you can’t go college, how can you expect to go to University anyway!” (Carrie, phase 2), observing the contradiction in the school’s actions - promoting university but not colleges that do the A-levels required to get them there. Secondly, in relation to her core network, when discussing knowledge acquired through her family she stated:
People are just like, what do you want to do, and then they are like ow just do well. They haven't got a clue really to be honest but half of my family are like males so like yeah don't pretend you are bothered, they are more bothered about the telly or something (Carrie, phase 3).

This lack of information became further evident to her during the research, when she was unable to answer many of my interview questions as thoroughly as she would have liked, and seemed embarrassed by this:

I know there’s urm… MC and… is it SC? Is it… what is it now… I don’t know the other colleges, really (Carrie, phase 1).

A desire for such information contributed towards Carrie having fewer requirements, such as network members coming from within her community, for the development of trust - her habitus did not seem to require this in the same way that Matt’s did. She recognized risk as necessary to achieving social mobility, and although she undoubtedly would have found talking to people outside of the fields she inhabited difficult, to Carrie it was worth the short-term discomfort. When discussing her recent open day visit to the college she had chosen to attend (MC, WC), she made a point of speaking to a number of professionals, including her prospective course tutor. On another occasion, she discussed how she regularly asked teachers in school questions about their jobs; when I asked if many students did this, she explained:

Not really, like half the… I am probably one of the loudest and talkative people, like my RE teacher always says like just when you think things can’t get any worse look who walks in. But he pretends that I don’t really make him laugh but I know he gets on with me, I know he doesn’t hate me like he thinks he does! (Carrie, phase 4).

Furthermore, Carrie seemed to be either consciously or subconsciously drawn to people who were also willing to push themselves to achieve the best they could; for example, her relationship with her two stepsisters
seemed far stronger than that with her biological brothers. She referred to them regularly during interviews and observation; conversations with them played an important role in shaping her career ideas:

‘Cause like my two sisters, one’s a nurse and one’s training to be a nurse but my brothers kind of just like, one don’t work and the others are just like in like dead end jobs, didn’t go college (Carrie, phase 4).

When discussing her other brother, Carrie explains:

My uncle got him the job ‘cause he was being a bit of an idiot you know when he was about 18 so that’s like 10, 11 years it’s took him like that [long], and now he’s got a proper house and married and stuff like that but it has took him a while, I’m proud of him (phase 4).

My brother’s girlfriend actually, she works in a nursery she done like a course like what I have done but it’s a bit different and she is like a qualified nurse and so she has like been helping me and stuff and just giving me advice and saying that is what is expected of me and stuff, so yeah. And I get on with her and stuff (Phase 3).

The type of people Carrie displayed admiration for were motivated, and understood what was required to be resilient enough to manage difficulties and rise above them.

7.5 Reflexivity

An account of the fields Carrie occupies, her positioning within them, the cultural capital acquired as a result, and the social network built, contributes towards our understanding of how she came to display signs of an atypical habitus in relation to her peers. Due to the complexity of the habitus, it is difficult to reduce its contents down to the specifics that differentiate between what is typical and atypical. However, Carrie held, and was continuing to
acquire, cultural capital that valued education - whilst she felt comfortable working towards vocational qualifications, she also desired to move forward, beyond the limitations of the estate. Her aim was to acquire a more professional job that offered a diverse range of tasks and that appealed to her interests and ethics, rather than a low-skilled routine or repetitive job. Climbing the social ladder was not a priority for all young people. Carrie was unusual in the emphasis and determination she placed upon moving beyond that which she observed around her.

Although Carrie was unsure of exactly what it is that she wished to move towards, she seemed to recognize that it was beyond the typical trajectory of others who lived on the estate, and she also recognized, perhaps partly through engagement in interviews, that she must look beyond her network of intimacy for information and reassurance regarding the types of pathways that she might be interested in. This desire to understand what her pathway might look like and how best to inform it contributed to Carrie’s willingness to engage in opportunities for reflection, some of which took place during the research.

In order to establish the extent to which Carrie engaged with elements of the reflexive process outlined in chapter 3, their presence in interviews with Carrie will be considered. These elements can be summarised as: constructing detail around possible decisions; awareness of self in relation to these decisions; and, with these elements in mind, a process of self-talk in order to finalise the selection of a decision. Objectivity was also suggested to be important to this process, and is supported through the self-construction element of it. As stated, these elements mirror those outlined in the conceptual framework chapter as being central to effective reflexivity. I argue that reflexivity transcends structural effects of disadvantage on young people’s decision making, and can, therefore, support action that is transformative.

These elements will be understood as synchronous within the data - there was no sense in which Carrie followed a step by step process in developing
her reflexivity, but rather displayed evidence of each of the elements outlined above at different points in time and sometimes simultaneously. These elements will now be outlined in relation to the deliberation of Carrie’s major career ideas. Figure 31 shows those ideas considered over the duration of the two-year research period. From this we can see that Carrie considered approximately six employment ideas and five college ideas. This was the highest number in the sample, and she ultimately chose to attend a local FE college (MC) and enrol on a Level 3 BTEC in Childcare. Carrie’s employment ideas predominantly related to school and hospital based work: nursing (specifically paediatric and accident and emergency), teaching and support work. Before presenting a narrative of examples of reflexive thinking as she contemplated her interest in these occupations, the important process of constructing her career ideas and herself will be highlighted so that this process can be easily recognized.

Construction took place in relation to the career ideas Carrie was considering, and awareness of herself in relation to these ideas. Carrie felt frustrated with information received from both the school and her core network; recognizing the value of acquiring knowledge in realising her options, this frustration led to the expansion of her network. She utilised cultural capital in ‘constructing’ (Archer, 2007) her career ideas by actively engaging with individuals who were able to pass on knowledge:

I’m always asking the different teachers. They know what I’m like, they must think I’m dead rude but I just ask like, how much does that person get paid, what do you have to do for that, I just waffle on with myself (Carrie, phase 3).

Carrie’s utilisation of teachers for information provided her with cultural capital that was distinct from that which her peers were commonly accessing, and this enabled her to see the support she received in the school differently to those who were not taking advantage of professionals in this way (i.e. her habitus was forming in a way that recognised the value of this kind of capital). She told me that she relied on people in school to provide career
related information, as she found it easier to ask someone than ‘googling’ for information, indicating that she would be prepared to research information online if necessary. By the end of the interview period, she felt that the school supported her decision making, telling me that teachers and other staff were willing to help if approached, and giving them 9 out of a possible 10 for career related support.

These looser and less connected relationship can be referred to as bridging ties, and, as identified in the conceptual framework chapter (chapter 3), a willingness to become aware of resources within the social network is useful in constructing an awareness of career ideas. Carrie recognises the value in information contained within her network in enabling her to construct an understanding of her options so that her decisions could be better informed.

As well as gathering information around career ideas, Carrie recognised the importance of reflecting upon herself in relation to these ideas. As stated in chapter 3, reflecting upon the self in a process of self construction is an important part of the reflexive process. Carrie’s understanding of self seemed to be constructed through her critical questioning of her career ideas. As we moved through the interview, she shifted from making a consistent effort to consider questions for the purpose of the research to her doing this for herself: questions such as 'Will I be able to handle that?' 'Will I find it enjoyable?' 'Am I good enough at maths?' 'Am I academic enough?' were frequently asked of herself during interviews. In this sense, she was observing herself objectively, being critical of what she understood with regards to her construction of herself in relation to her construction of her career ideas.

Having highlighted Carrie’s engagement in ‘construction’, and her willingness to expand her social network in order to facilitate this process, the presence of construction during the contemplation of her career ideas may be recognized.
Carrie’s first employment idea was to become a nurse, and during interviews she discussed the knowledge she had acquired regarding the entry requirements, the type of work involved, and the personal characteristics she would need to handle the challenges of this kind of work. Carrie reported that she had acquired this information through listening to stories and engaging in conversations with her two stepsisters and their friends. One of her stepsisters worked in paediatric nursing and the other as an accident and emergency nurse. As a result of self constructions, when considering working in paediatric care Carrie was aware she might be too sensitive to handle the emotional strain of situations she was likely to encounter. As she continued to develop a more detailed understanding of this specialism, her concern about this grew. Below, she recounts a phone conversation with her
stepsister’s friend - Carrie’s voice was highly charged as she recounted the phone call:

She rang me and she was crying and crying and she was like ‘I’ve had my first death’ and I was like ‘oh my god’, I felt like crying myself and was like it was awful and she was trying to like… and I said ‘don’t, don’t talk to me, I don’t want to know the detail’ that was just… it’s not right really (Carrie, phase 2).

Carrie went on to imagine herself in this role, considering whether or not she could handle a situation like this:

I couldn’t do it! Just… she’d only just gone into the job as well, so it’s… I know you’d have the good perks when you[re] like helping kids and you get out of hospital and they are all fit and healthy but the ones that aren’t obviously…” (Carrie, phase 2).

The empathy Carrie felt for her friend, and her awareness of self in order to imagine how she might feel in this situation, resulted in her believing she could not handle an event such as this. She gave this as the sole reason for dismissing paediatric nursing, recognising through constructing this role that supporting very sick children would be a major requirement. Later, she justified this choice by describing her awareness of her own sensitivity (using an example of spending time waiting for her blood tests to be taken in a local hospital):

It’s not really that major but when I have to wait in the waiting room there’s other children that are really bad, like my mum will be like… do you know what I mean, thank god we are not here because of that and I just don’t think I could handle it. I can’t even sit there for an hour, waiting, I just have to put my head down, it’s not being rude it’s just like saying that I don’t want to… like if I had a child like that’s fair enough, I wouldn’t turn my back on it ‘cause I think that disgusting but I don’t want to be subjected to that every day if I can help it. Some
people, they've got strong stomachs and they've got strong… like, they are hard as nails aren't they really but I'm not like… I'm dead sensitive and I can’t even watch Marley and Me without crying [laughs] (Carrie, phase 2).

An important requirement for Carrie when deliberating ideas was being able to help others. For example, when discussing work with her sister she placed herself in her shoes to consider how rewarding and enjoyable she might find working as an accident and emergency nurse.

She works in like, I don’t know what it’s called but she has all the drunks and then you know if you get like someone’s been stabbed and they come in or someone’s just fell down stairs and it’s like, she doesn’t seem to enjoy it, it’s like I mean who would enjoy seeing sick people but it’s like the ones that she sees they can help it and she gets quite annoyed because she thinks over in that building there’s people who are dying and they don’t want to, and you’re kind of killing yourself and she don’t like it. There’s been a few occasions when they have come back to see her and been like, cheers because she’ll tell it how it is but it’s like sometimes you shouldn’t do that because you’ll get yourself in trouble but she’ll tell it how it is. There has been one or two times when they come back and been like ‘I am alive because of you’ so partly it’s rewarding but I don’t think it’s something I would want to do (Carrie, phase 2).

There is a real sense here that Carrie is imagining what this role would be like in order to predict how she might enjoy working in this environment, and how she might find these sorts of interactions with patients and these opportunities to improve their lives. Upon reflection, Carrie concluded that the fit between her construction of self and her construction of the different variations of this career idea was insufficient, and that this role did not adequately meet her expectations. Consequently she dis-identified with it. ‘I don’t think this is something I would want to do’ is a clear dismissal of this role.
Being able to effectively support others was a consideration Carrie recognised as important to her construction of self, and she compared ideas against this requirement. Becoming a support worker was another role she was drawn briefly to for its potential to enable her to help young people, whom she recognised as being in need of emotional support. She observed students in school, friends on Facebook, family members and people on the television, alongside the roles of various support workers in school, considering the potential of this role to really help those in need of support:

We have got [support workers] and that, she is really good but you watch programs on the telly and stuff where they have had nowhere to turn to ‘cause at home has been so bad and they still don’t really care about certain ones do they, so they have obviously taken other ways out and that. And I think it’s quite sad, like in, when I was in primary school I went through a bit of a rough time with my health and that and that primary school didn’t have any so they sent me to a like a centre thing and that was quite good but if the primary school would have had it then it would have been easier but yeah, we are lucky if we have any problems we can go to nearly every single teacher in the school but there’s certain schools that don’t do they?

When I asked if this is what had made her want to become a support worker, she told me that it is not so much about her struggling as about seeing this in others. She spoke at length about others who had either been supported or who had struggled as a result of not having support available. At the end of this conversation, she referred back to her mother’s experience in why helping others was so important to her:

I want to do something that would make a difference not just sit at a desk all day cause like mum used to work in an office and she just used to come home and just make the tea and she weren’t getting anything out of it, I don’t want to be like that, I don’t want to be in a dead end job with nothing to do, so… (Carrie phase 2).
The third and final area of work Carrie considered was becoming a teacher. This was again opened up through observations of those she encountered in school and while dropping younger members of her family, particularly her niece, at primary school. Through reflecting on herself, Carrie recognised she appreciated a range of tasks/activities in a job, and considered the extent to which different types of teaching could offer variety by comparing working in a primary school to a secondary school:

Like in the secondary school there is a set teacher for every lesson whereas, in primary school you are teaching the Maths, English, bit of Art and that so you are not just stuck to one subject every day, all day? All day everyday you are doing a mix aren't you? [...] It's a mixture whereas if I think of the English teacher they are teaching English every day, the same kids, whereas like I'd be teaching the same kids, more or less but it's a variety isn't it, you are doing different things in the day (Carrie, phase 2).

[...] I did think about teaching art in a high school, like my brother had his kids and I spend a lot of time with them and I do a lot with them and I thought I could get the grades to do it, so why not, choose… I could get into art and be totally like; I could just totally dislike it completely whereas with teaching if I did childcare at college I can get a lot of jobs with that can't I? (Carrie, phase 2).

Based on this comparing and contrasting, she favoured working in a primary school due to the variety involved in teaching different subjects. As well as perceiving value in jobs that had variety, she also reflected upon her skills, commitment, and ability to handle different jobs by comparing herself to others already employed in these roles. In teaching, she recognised politeness as essential and a quality she could easily offer:

I took [her niece] to school and that and got her ready and the teacher was quite rude and I was thinking like why do they employ rude people to work with children so I think I'd be like a good teacher, do
you know what I mean? I wouldn’t be rude to parents, even the kids she was pretty rude to my niece and I just think it’s quite wrong to employ someone who obviously don’t want to do the job (Carrie, phase 2).

She also considered her ability to handle badly behaved students; not being rude is clearly important:

I think I could handle a high school cause I know what goes on so I wouldn’t be stupid cause I know what goes on but I wouldn’t want kids to be rude to me, like some of the kids in this school (Carrie, phase 2).

Carrie’s interest in teaching remained beyond the research, and she persisted with this idea, even following the completion of a difficult placement in a school. As noted in chapter 5, negative experiences of work placements often deterred students from specific career ideas, but this was not the case for Carrie. For her, teaching became the main area of work that she went on to pursue.

Exploring discussions around Carrie’s major career ideas has demonstrated how her construction of self involved a belief in the importance of helping others, her need for a job which held variety in tasks/responsibilities, and her perception that she had the right skills/characteristics for a particular area of employment. In this way, the decision she made regarding her chosen career option was drawn from a match between this construction of self and her construction of the career idea, which was created utilising the capital she had accessed through her more expanded network. Therefore, I argue that Carrie engaged in a kind of self-talk that supported conclusions regarding courses of action.
Developing a Reflexive Habitus

I suggested above that Carrie appeared to show signs of reflexivity through her engagement with the research process. Therefore, I argue that her development of a reflexive habitus relating to career decisions was supported by the construction of what might be referred to as another field, i.e. that associated with the research itself. This research field was co-constructed by Carrie and myself during the interview sessions. Carrie’s desire for social mobility, together with her willingness to develop her understanding of and reflect upon both the options she identified and her awareness of the position of herself and those around her in society, created a habitus that was ready for and willing to take advantage of the space for reflection made available through the interview. This was complemented by me supporting Carrie to recognise the opportunities of the interview space through the process explained in the methodology chapter (chapter 3).

The research field was the consequence of large institutions, such as my University, defining the constructs for how doctoral research is conducted, what classes as quality, and how school and young people should be engaged with. The research field held me in high status as the facilitator of the research process and as a researcher from a local university. However, Carrie was essential to the success of the interviews, and so her position was arguably of greater status as a participant whose voice was central to the constructing and understanding of career choice. The capital present within this field, then, was the data that Carrie could give, but also the knowledge I held in facilitating how this data was communicated to me as a researcher, as well as my own identity as a researcher in interpreting this data.

In this field, Carrie was positioned, and subsequently positioned herself, as expert in her own career decision making, and I as interpreter of this. I did not belong to any of the fields she occupied (i.e. peer, family, school), and so my perspective was not affected by the cultural capital contained within these fields. Where others in her network were moving in the same direction (e.g.
like on the train journey outlined in chapter 2), towards safety and not risk, I saw no reason why Carrie could not pursue any interest she wished. In this way, I was relatively impartial, and brought little with me in the way of a pre-determined agenda that might have influenced her towards or away from a particular decision. My agenda was to collect data that was authentic to Carrie’s experience, and, therefore, I simply wished to understand Carrie’s world as she painted it.

This created an experimental space where Carrie could consider possible futures; she opened up her thought processes to explore with me the tensions she experienced. I was able to ask questions of clarity to support the gathering of authentic data. I argue, therefore, that this process supported Carrie in developing a reflexive disposition; exploring ideas in this way with me during interviews became a default for Carrie. This is supported by the following excerpt from one of the later interviews during the research process - here, she implied that she felt her thinking was relatively superficial prior to interviews:

Yeah, like at first when I was first thinking about everything that I wanted to do, kind of thought well... looked at my options and thought what I was good at and then I realised I’m only doing that cause of the money, I’m only doing that ‘cause of that. so then, yeah.

[...]

Dani: So [the interviews] made you question some of your motives for thinking about different ideas?
Carrie: Yeah, like why did I want to be one of them when I can’t pass science or why I wanted to… stuff like that (Carrie, Phase 4).

Reflecting on the interview process, Carrie felt her engagement with me had helped her to think through opportunities in order to explore and negotiate some of the tensions and contradictions discussed in the previous section:
Urm yeah, it actually helped me quite a bit cause it’s made me realise like how I’ve improved and stuff. And like my career options and stuff like that. It's just made me think. I never really used to think about owt like that and then for the first time I thought oh my god I’ve not really thought about anything but then... Yeah (Carrie, phase 4).

This emphasis on the word ‘think’ implies she was aware of development in the way she engaged in decision-making, and that she was becoming aware of her own reflexivity. She was becoming thoughtful in her decisions, rather than acting without engaging in reflection; this was apparent in the way Carrie spoke within her interviews, and led to her wanting to develop a more detailed construction of both her ideas and herself in relation to them. It is this process of reflexivity which led her to a) expand her social network beyond her network of intimacy to include teachers etc., and b) led her to seek and acquire cultural capital that could be used to make the 'right' decision. The interview space became part of Carrie’s social network, and a space where she negotiated her decision-making.

A habitus that prioritises the facilitation of a social network structure containing bridging capital in this way can be assumed to provide the potential to continue the development of this kind of network, enabling the network to continually develop and grow. In Carrie’s case, this should allow her to increasingly access the additional capital that she requires when constructing future career pathways. As such, the act of engaging with people from wider fields and listening to different perspectives and outlooks is self-propelling, and is likely to continue to support Carrie in starting to think differently about her career ideas and future. The act of building and maintaining a social network with bridging capital has the potential to be transformative through the shaping of the habitus over time, and through providing and opening up opportunities that would not be available with bonding social capital alone.

By contrast, participants who made more instinctive rather than reflexive career related decisions tended not to focus their exploration of ideas within
a pre-selected area of work. If a potential idea was closed down, they would go wide again, considering what they knew of another area, such as police officer or chef (see ‘Matt’s employment and college ideas, diagram 25).

Carrie, however, was able to differentiate between a few different roles within a profession of interest, carefully considering all the potential options available, and exploring each in some depth. She was also able to objectify her negative experience of a work experience placement, locating the problem as one of organisation rather than her own personal failings or alienation from the role; she was the only person in the sample who did not discount a whole area of work based on the experience of an unsuccessful placement:

I rang them up and I went in and stuff like that and I went, oh yeah, you know, it’s going to give me an insight of working with children and I went in and they said… oh yeah, we’ve got your timetable already and I’m looking at the timetable and I’ve got all these different classes and I was only in one class less than two hours so, like, I have never seen them again, like, I’d be in a different class then and it weren’t even a full day in one class, it was just all different and I went in and obviously I went out for my dinner and come in and some of the teachers and one in particular, she was a student, and she was obviously teaching and I went in and I was, like, dead polite and saying that I’m on my work experience and she was, like, alright, grab a seat and then she never spoke to me again, ever. So I had to find my own thing to do and I was like, you should know what it’s like to come into a place and um… just wasn’t good at all (Carrie, phase 3).

As well as how she interpreted this work experience placement, this example also shows how she distinguishes herself from the context here in supporting her ability to overcome obstacles. This suggests a durable self that is able to work through difficult situations.
7.7 The Potential for Reflection

Having explored the process by which Carrie developed a more reflexive habitus through her engagement in the research, and, prior to this, some of the ways she was engaging in reflexive thinking when exploring her career ideas, we can see that, unlike her peers, she was consistently using reflexivity as a tool for decision-making. Given her desire for social mobility and her active engagement in elements identified as central to the reflexive process, we might assume, under the neo-liberal position on free choice outlined in the literature review, that she would benefit from a relatively unrestricted future. However, the reality was that Carrie experienced significant tensions between her desire for social mobility and the lived reality of factors that conflicted with this goal.

Some of these tensions have already been explored. For example, when mapping the fields in chapter 5 and when exploring Carrie’s position within these fields, there was a silence around a great many career ideas, such as those in medicine, law or pharmacy, that could be related to limited availability of relevant information and expectations of what these young people could achieve. Carrie was only aware of the labour market possibilities as informed by her social network, and although it exposed her to more than many participants, in that she considered a selection of more professional roles, it was still restricted in that these occupations were in the caring sector and highly gendered. As will be discussed, choice was further constrained by a fear that she might fail at future pursuits; although, again, she was less affected by this than other participants.

This fear of failure was evident when Carrie discussed her ability to ‘handle’ certain types of employment, but it was best observed when she discussed her choice of college over an employment placement. Despite Carrie’s family strongly encouraging her to pursue further education, during later interviews, as transition to college started to become more ‘real’, she discussed her surprise at having a place, especially considering her biological family’s lack of exposure to college (including her mother):
So like out of my mum’s family no one’s like done anything, so they are all like, ow she got a dodgy gene cause [laughs] you know what I mean like... are you sure she’s yours and all that kind of thing. But I’m not even all that like brainy like, I’ve just got average results it’s just a shock that I am going college for everyone, so (Carrie phase 4).

She homed in on examples of people failing to gain places on college courses, or examples where college options were closed down because individuals failed to find a college to attend an open day events (as described in chapter 5):

Only one got in, but the one that got in is like really really brainy like, wow! [laughs] really good at exams and everything but like... yeah. Quite a few people did apply for other interviews but when they got their place they didn’t know where it was so they kind of went but didn’t get there. Because they couldn’t find it [laughs] so I’m glad I applied and got in that one ‘cause I knew where that one was anyway. Well my big sister went there but they took her to a different one but I knew kind of, ‘cause when I went to look around they have them open days don’t they, and I went I to look around, so I knew where everything was so then when I went in I just said my name and signed in and find out where I had to go so it was good (Carrie, phase 4).

Stories of people failing to gain a place or failing to finding a college during its open day served as a warning to keep to options that were familiar and achievable. Carrie dealt with her anxieties around the possibility of failure by adopting a considered approach when deliberating college options; she placed emphasis upon location and having recommendations from trusted sources. This enabled Carrie to feel secure regarding the level of risk she was taking, but had the effect of significantly reducing her options; for example, with regards to location: she was uncomfortable travelling to unfamiliar places, and, like many participants, had a very small geographical comfort zone. Although Carrie considered a relatively wide group of colleges, they all sat within a small area; she believed location to be crucial to her
ability to attend college, and, in order to reduce the possibility of location contributing to her failing a course, Carrie restricted the distance that she was prepared to travel. This was communicated throughout interviews, where she talked about the journey length to different colleges, the possibility of the journey being stressful, and the likelihood of a lift, often linking this directly to her maintaining a college place:

I like where that is, that NC because it’s easy to get to and there’s a lot like, it’s just easy because from mine if you were going town afterwards you can go town, if you was going home you could just walk a few streets. […] I wouldn’t want to like get two buses and some people get a train to college and it’s like how can you do that, get a train to college. […] Like I would probably end up giving up on college if I had to get a train. […] I’d be like I can’t handle it no more and just leave (Carrie, phase 2).

Due to Carrie’s location in a disadvantaged area, her unwillingness to travel to college meant that, even had she wanted to, it would not have been possible to apply for an academic course, as no college within an 8 mile radius of the school offered A levels. They focused instead on a narrow selection of BTEC and AS level qualifications. This again was due to the estate’s location in a disadvantaged area and its subsequent position in relation to the field of power.

This unwillingness to travel was very typical of students in the school, and during an informal conversation with the school’s head of English she told me without hesitation, ‘they won’t go further than [ward on the outside of the estate]’ (English teacher July 2013), referring to all pupils in the school.

As well as an unwillingness to travel, a reliance on recommendations was also important, and Carrie prioritized recommendations from people she knew who had attended the college of interest, spending some time talking about who had attended and what she had observed about their experience, particularly how supportive the college had been. When discussing reasons
for her choice of college, Carrie explained ‘Just ’cause I have been to the open day, I have known people that have gone there and done some of the courses and stuff’ (Carrie, phase 3). Prior to this, Carrie had explained about the experience of her sister attending this college, and how supportive staff had been:

You get your tutor and that and she got on with the tutor and everything so she said they offer you quite a lot to do and that, she had a lot of help there as well, like when she fell behind because she was in hospital for two weeks something to do with her leg, a muscle in her leg and she fell behind and the teacher, the tutor came and was trying to help her so that was good as well (Carrie, phase 2).

Therefore, whilst I have suggested that Carrie saw some risk as necessary for social mobility (i.e. going beyond the school sixth form), she did attempt to minimise this where feasible. In Carrie's eyes, risk could be minimised through an emphasis upon location and recommendation.

As can be seen, then, despite active engagement in reflexivity, Carrie’s career ideas are still restricted, even with determination, ability, objectivity, a desire for social mobility and a habitus that is reflexive. The effects of the structures at play are powerful in maintaining disadvantage. Changing these structures should not be underestimated; mediating the effects of the environment that participants occupy, and their effect upon decision-making, is slow and extremely difficult.

However, although Carrie's case study demonstrates the powerful limitations that even the most supported students are subjected to, it also demonstrates the potential for reflective work to support engagement in a reflexive process that enabled her to begin to develop skills in mediating some of the structural factors shaping career decision making. The potential for this will be explored further in the final chapter, with a consideration of what needs to be in place as a result of the findings from this research.
7.8 Chapter Summary

This chapter has summarised the position of Carrie within the fields she inhabited in order to understand her habitus in relation to other participants, so that the extent to which it differed can be considered. Then, her social network was mapped in order to, again, consider how it differs, and how she utilised bridging social capital to inform her decision making process. Following this, her engagement in constructing her career ideas and herself was highlighted, before moving on demonstrate this as a process central to engagement in reflexivity. Carrie’s engagement in this process, and the benefits of it, were explored as a narrative summary of her career decision-making over the two year interview period.

The level of reflection she engaged in is explored using the elements of the reflexive process. Then, recognising that her habitus and level of reflection was ideal, the potential for reflection to enable social mobility was considered; limitations in cultural capital in the form of career knowledge and a fear of failure are central to limiting the potential for social mobility. The importance of the research field in supporting the development of Carrie’s reflexive habitus was presented, and, in doing so, suggestions were made regarding what is required in order for such a space to be effective in supporting this process. Carrie’s utilization of an expanded network was argued to have been supported by the research field, and the habitus developed as a result has the potential to continue this process, supporting future decision making. Over time, this process of engaging in a reflexive process through a network that contains bridging capital was argued to facilitate transformative action where, over time, social mobility is possible.

I argue that, although Carrie’s ultimate decision to study a level 3 BTEC in childcare at a local FE college might seem not too dissimilar from other participants in the sample, who were making their decisions far more instinctively, for Carrie this decision meant something quite different, and there was a clear sense that this transition was not the end of her journey. Her interviews highlighted that she was exploring and thinking about her
future in a different way - utilising and developing her more expanded social network. We know that shifts in the habitus that affect decision-making take place very slowly. Therefore, I suggest that the reflexivity Carrie was displaying showed the potential to continue to develop, which will enable her to further think objectively about her situation, and to work out how she can achieve the goals she identified. This process has already begun to shape her habitus, and has the potential to continue to support this kind of shift.
Chapter 8: Thesis Conclusion

The conclusion to this thesis is separated into two chapters: the first locates the findings in the research literature and subsequently develops the argument arising from the analysis presented in chapter 5 to 7. The second part summarizes the key contributions to knowledge and raises a number of questions for policy makers and practitioners. These questions are intended to stimulate thought regarding the development of recommendations to policy and practice for career related support in schools, and for the education system more generally.

In this first part of the chapter, I will present suggestions regarding the empirical and methodological findings in three sections, each evidencing the need for a particular type of approach to researching how young people’s career decision-making is shaped by the social world. First, I will argue for an approach that is both critically aware of the process through which structural influences shape career decision making, and that understands agency as embedded within this process. In highlighting the limited presence of this approach within recent literature, I will recap briefly on how youth transition research has changed historically, and the implications of this upon the popularity of a critical approach such as that adopted in this thesis. I will also suggest limitations in research that discusses reflexivity, a popular concept used to explore agency in recent literature. I will argue that this term is often not discussed as sufficiently embedded within the social structure, which, as I have shown in chapter 7, shapes the habitus, and thus one's disposition to reflect. This section will argue that the extent to which reflexivity is being utilised by the sample is limited, but that it has some potential in supporting social mobility.

Second, I will argue that the research space itself contributed to the development of reflexive decision making among some students. The circumstances under which this was possible, and the potential and
restrictions resulting from structural factors outlined in relation to their effect upon the reflexive decision making process, will be highlighted; in doing so I will return to Carrie’s case, where many of the circumstances required for the development of reflexivity are present.

Third, I will highlight the limited use of a young person focused approach within the current youth transition literature, an approach that genuinely gives voice to those from disadvantaged backgrounds. I will outline the advantages of using such an approach when seeking to understand transition trends, especially when formulating solutions to problems of inequality. I will discuss the ability of this research to meet this agenda, outlining the methodology and methods selected to support the facilitation of this approach.

8.1 Structures and Agency Combined

Firstly, in order to present the approach adopted in this thesis as a critically structural account, I will recap upon the research findings from chapters 5 and 6. This analysis relates directly to the presence of structural disadvantage in young people's decision making, and, therefore, the role of such decision making in the reproduction of social inequality.

The first findings chapter (chapter 5) operationalized the concept of ‘field’ (Bourdieu, 1977), a versatile term, in this case used to refer to the environments participants inhabited. Bourdieu recognises the hierarchically structured nature of different fields, and identified the field of power as a benchmark when considering a field’s relative status among those like it. The concept was used to support the mapping of each field in contextualising the research environment. The fields mapped were those recognised as influencing career ideas, and were identified as the Community / Family, School and Peer fields. The status of each was understood through the capital present within, specifically cultural capital. Different types of cultural capital held different levels of value within each field. It was found that, although much of the capital available within the identified fields had
specialism, in that it held high value within its located field, it was often not valued in a range of other fields, due to the capital itself not having transposability. Mapping the participants' environment in this way revealed the low status of the fields occupied in relation to the field of power. For example, the school field sat in a low position within the education marketplace, and the family and community field sat in a low position in relation to other communities in more affluent locations. These field positions were the consequence of their location in a disadvantaged area. Furthermore, the lack of transposable cultural capital within these fields (specifically that relating to knowledge of careers) limited the career ideas and opportunities of participants.

The second findings chapter (chapter 6) outlined the process through which capital was transferred from the field to participants' habitus through their social network. This chapter builds on the previous by continuing to consider the concepts of social capital, cultural capital and habitus in understanding why young people from disadvantaged backgrounds often choose in ways that are not advantageous to them. In doing so, it outlines the environments within which capital is held by exploring the capital itself, and the process through which it is transferred to the habitus. The type of capital found to be most influential in shaping participants' career ideas was cultural capital, mostly in the form of career related knowledge, although there were suggestions that other forms were influential. This particular type was responsible for informing an interpretation of the local labour market, and therefore setting boundaries regarding which career ideas participants choose between. Utilization of this capital was a major factor responsible for creating and maintaining interest in the career ideas typical for these participants.

The social networks utilized by participants shared common themes: they were mostly insular and interconnected in structure, they contained high levels of trust, and were made up mostly of family members. Participants seemed to feel most comfortable accessing information and advice regarding their career ideas from people with whom they had high levels of trust and
who were embedded within their family and community field; this was often in an attempt to mediate risk. These types of networks can be understood as based on bonding - rather than bridging - social capital in that they were referred to as strong, trusting relationships, developed over time with people who shared similar types and levels of capital, and who may share similar experience and values (Coleman, 1990). These networks tended to also be of a very particular structure: a tight web of selected people who the participant knew well; an insular network of highly developed relationships consisting primarily of family members, friends and peers. This definition refers to what has been described as a network of intimacy; like bonding capital, this type of network is argued to maintain social disadvantage (Raffo and Reaves, 2000, Health, Fuller and Paton, 2008). A predisposition towards the development of social networks like this, and a reluctance to develop alternative networks, ie. those that offer bridging social capital, results in limited potential for social mobility. This argument is supported by literature that analyses the effect of networks of intimacy on youth transitions. This suggests that such networks create clear norms regarding what is and is not a potential career idea, and subsequently promote a very narrow set of pathways that reflect the capital embedded within the family and community field (Raffo and Reaves, 2000). Therefore, these types of networks generate outcomes that are typical (or common) for participants who occupy such fields. However, although these career ideas are valued in the family and community fields (and the school), they are less so in other fields, especially those that sit closer to the field of power. As such, the occupations referred to by participants when discussing their decision making could be defined by those who sit closer to the field of power as low-skilled (low status), resulting in low pay - the types of jobs that might be defined as ‘poor work’ i.e. work that is low paid, low-skilled and insecure in nature (Shildrick, MacDonald, Webster and Garthwaite, 2012).

As can be seen, then, chapters 5 and 6 have demonstrated the consequence of occupying fields located in disadvantaged areas on career decision making. The access participants have to cultural capital through their network of intimacy is mostly limiting their career pathways to a certain range
of occupations. This is further restricted by an over-reliance on trust when selecting who to listen to and what capital is valued in an attempt to mediate risk avoidance (avoiding failure and future poverty). Many of the participants rarely accessed cultural capital from people with whom trust had not been developed, and this was an important factor in creating destinations typical for young people. This process, therefore, served to facilitate the reproduction of social inequality and disadvantage that Bourdieu outlines in his theory. The low-skilled, low paid occupations typical among participants resembled those of their family, their community and their peers, and were also encouraged by their school. This was not only with regards to the position of these jobs in relation to the field of power, but often the particular types of occupation too. By interpreting these pathways using Bourdieu, we can see the powerful effect of participants' positions in the social structure affecting their opportunities in life through the shaping of their habitus. Structures are maintaining their position in society, demonstrating how inequality becomes endemic.

School based studies that consider this period of career decision making presently tend not to be built on this kind of structurally embedded understanding (Haynes, McCrone and Wade, 2013). Although popular in other contexts, such as transition to university (Health, Fuller and Johnson, 2010, Ball, Davies, David, Reay, 2002), these approaches appear less so in research that explores this period, especially in relation to disadvantaged locations like that involved in the research, and especially where such young people are involved in the co-construction of data.

Much of the youth transition literature of this period is based instead upon an interpretation of changes to the structure of the national labour market, and, as such, aims to critically theorise transition as shaped by neo-liberal ideals of autonomy and self reliance. Such social changes and the effect of them are considered to account for new types of transition that are now experienced by young people (Furlong and Cartmel, 1997, Nayak, 2006, Beck, 2000, 2003). As outlined in chapter 2, this change or shift in our understanding of youth transition has been summarized through Furlong and
Cartmel's (1997) metaphors of the train versus the car journey. The train journey, a metaphor used to describe popular ways of understanding young people’s experience of transition during the 1970s and 1980s (Furlong & Cartmel, 1997; White, 2007), views the social structure (hierarchically organised by social class positions) as a determinant of young people's labour market futures. Furlong & Cartmel (2007) argue that much of the transition literature has now moved on to the 'car journey', which focuses upon the role of the individual navigating their transition environment.

However, this thesis has shown that the types of transitions represented by the train journey metaphor are still very much alive, and, to some extent, still reflect the experience of young people today (especially those from disadvantaged backgrounds). My analysis of the research participant’s accounts of their career decision making demonstrates the mechanisms through which their position in the social structure is maintained. Like the train journey, typical transitions for many participants may still be likened to predictable, highly structured pathways with limited opportunity for deviation, where groups of people travel along similar, common pathways (Evans & Furlong, 1997).

With this said, there are differences in the experiences of these young people to those of, for example, the likely lads in Paul Willis’s ‘Learning to Labour’ (1977). The effect of labour market change has meant pathways are not as obvious – low-skilled, gendered work is still available, but now post-16 qualifications have become increasingly important to securing work (Haynes McCrone and Wade, 2013), and the employment opportunities followed by previous generations, such as working in factories, are not as dependable (Deakin, 1989). Like their parents before them, participants are already starting to anticipate that uncertainty, fragility and risk will need to be negotiated throughout their ‘extended transitions’ (White, 2007). This is felt in the stories told by participants, where insecure ‘poor work’ (Shildrick, MacDonald, Webster & Garthwaite, 2012), often resulting in financial hardship, was a very real risk that concerned them. These young people are now ‘choosing’ to travel, as far as possible with others like them, along ‘safer’
pathways to similar colleges to acquire similar qualifications. In this way, the train metaphor is still relevant, although the experience is arguably quite different.

Another key focus in the literature on youth transitions is the extent to which agency is possible and can be used to achieve social mobility. White (2007) and Furlong and Cartmel (1997) argue that, once again, changes resulting from globalisation and shifts in the labour market have led to an increased use of such theories to understand the relationship between disadvantage and outcomes. The new transition environment should, according to popular theories, be handled with a more flexible and higher qualified workforce, who exhibit reflexivity when making career related choices. These new theories, such as Beck's (1992, 1998) theory of risk, suggest that transition must be actively navigated alone. Therefore, although turbulent and difficult environments are recognized as influential within the literature, there is a tendency to focus upon individual young people in considering what can be done to navigate these difficult environments, rather than address the structural environment that, to some extent, produces them.

Therefore, I argue that more recent research on youth transition is limited in terms of explaining the process by which inequality is produced and structured by class. Structural explanatory factors such as family background are not seen to affect young people to the same extent. However, my findings indicate that these factors do indeed continue to affect young people’s transition opportunities; that, in these new transition environments, structure is still very present through the geographical distribution of valued cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1977). Therefore, focusing upon an individualized approach within the context of ‘choice biographies’ seems to be masking these powerful structures of disadvantage in their conceptualisation of transition (Furlong and Cartmel, 2007). This thesis adds to the youth transition literature, as it has not followed this trend (i.e. from structural to individual explanation); it has also not presented a purely structural account of transition. It has sought to understand career decision making as both an individual pursuit (e.g. negotiating risk through social networks) and also one
that is shaped by and located in the structure of social relations in the fields these young people occupied.

Connected to these accounts that focus on agency is the concept of reflexivity, which has been a popular term within the more recent youth transition literature of the 1980s onwards. Some of this research has presented young people’s active engagement in reflexivity as a solution to engaging with a more turbulent labour market. Here, I argue that promoting this concept without embedding it within a structural account is a powerful way of placing responsibility on the individual and away from the fields that produce them. As stated, literature such as that which supports the Connexions strategy (SEU, 1999, DfEE, 1999, 2000) is underpinned by this kind of theoretical or ideological thinking, and is often limited in its understanding of the wider structural mechanisms (such as social networks) that shape trends in transition outcomes. In seeking to understand the potential for agency, there is a need to situate research findings within theory that still recognises structural inequality (and its persistence) within decision making. Without this, we cannot know why inequality remains endemic. In the case of Carrie (discussed in chapter 7), we can see that whilst she may show signs of reflexive agency - considering her options and expanding her network to achieve an end goal of social mobility - we can also see that this 'habitus' is framed by the social fields in which she is located. I have highlighted how Carrie's more reflexive disposition is produced partly through her relations with her family and peers, who have encouraged and motivated her to 'get out'. Therefore, I have shown how sometimes these fields and the capital valued within them are resisted by Carrie, but on other occasions she succumbs to the culturally shared habitus of those fields - wanting to stay near home rather than risk the possibility of failure or dropout in colleges further afield.

As can be seen, then, even participants who identified as atypical in that they demonstrated consistent engagement in reflexive thinking and a resistance to developing career pathways common amongst their peers, the school and their community - even these participants' transitions appeared to be heavily
shaped by the fields they occupied and their position within these fields. In this sense, their experience of transition can also be likened to the train journey in that they traveled along relatively predictable, structured pathways common for others like them (Furlong & Cartmel, 1997). However, this way of understanding these transitions does not entirely fit either, as there did appear to be some flexibility that could potentially lead to social mobility. Although Carrie was informed by a social network located within the fields she occupied, and so her cultural capital was limited to that available within these fields, her network was not as insular as those that were described by more typical participants in that it did not require trust to the same extent. There was a willingness to expand the network, incorporating people from a range of inhabited fields in order to think reflexively about career ideas. As such, decisions that were the result of engagement in dialogue with members of these networks were based on a broader range of possibilities.

In summary, Carrie’s case challenges the metaphor of the car journey, where choice is assumed to be possible so long as one engages reflexively with options. It challenges the assumption that reflexivity supports young people to manage the turbulent environment of postmodernity, and that it is an essential tool in transcending the structural effects of disadvantage (Archer, 2007, 2008, 2010, Dyke, Johnson & Fuller, 2012). However, the problem here is not with the concept of reflexivity per se, but with the assumption that it can achieve such transcending outcomes for individuals without sufficiently locating it in relation to the process that produces and reproduces structural inequality and disadvantage. Furthermore, one might argue that the actual presence of reflexivity within young people’s career related decision-making is rarely evidenced or discussed in the literature, only recognizing that it ‘should’ be developed and utilised (Beck and Beck-Gernshaim, 2002, Furlong and Cartmel, 1997, Archer, 2012).

This research has highlighted how certain conditions and mechanisms need to be in place in order for young people to engage in reflexivity. In the case of Carrie, this includes both a specific form of habitus originating in positions in the field(s) she occupied, but also the research space that both she and I
constructed between us. This space enabled Carrie to further develop her ability to think reflexively in relation to her career ideas, and to consider more carefully the tensions she experienced between different decisions. For Carrie, reflexivity was used as a way of opening up her career ideas, and, where necessary, minimizing risk. Carrie’s example illustrates Beck’s (1992, 1998) claim that risk is not evenly distributed among the population; and so this is also the case for reflexivity. Carrie was unusual in her consistent engagement in reflexivity as a decision making tool; she recognized the value in this approach, and was keen to develop her ability to engage in this kind of thinking. As highlighted, she observed the development in her ability to ‘think’, to engage in reflexivity on a deeper level, and, in the final interview, she believed this development was a direct consequence of the interview process. In this case, the conditions required to best facilitate reflexivity were present, and for Carrie this seemed to provide her with a greater sense of autonomy over her decision making; a greater feeling of agency.

Considering the type of agency and structures present within transitions such as Carrie’s, neither the train nor the car journey metaphor of transition are ideal in explaining the findings of this thesis. Perhaps a more appropriate metaphor might be a tram, one where passengers are free to exit and use any form of transport they wish, but where the neighbourhood being navigated through is perceived as dangerous by all those traveling, and although the route is limited, the tram is popular, and passengers often choose to remain on board as long as possible. Carrie is also on this tram, but positions herself away from the majority of the passengers, recognizing that the route will only take her so far.

To summarise, it has only been possible to understand these participants’ career decision making in the way presented through an approach/conceptual framework that is sensitive to both social structure and individual action and agency. Reflexive thinking was shown to be evident in Carrie’s case in her attempts to resist the status quo by maintaining objectivity and recognizing certain resources as important in supporting the construction of and planning of possible futures. My analysis of her case,
therefore, was individually focused in that it demonstrated evidence of her reflexive agency in negotiating the risks and structural constraints that she observed. However, in order to understand the potential for reflexive agency, I needed to map the structural conditions and environment that produced the typical process of decision making from which Carrie was departing.

8.2 Reflexive Agency Through the Research Process

As I have illustrated, active engagement in reflexivity amongst the sample was uncommon; participants tended to mostly engage in automatic decision-making that was reactive rather than proactive. For participants to engage in reflexive decision-making, they needed support. I believe that for some participants the interview space itself became an environment that supported and encouraged reflexive thinking. This was partly due to my role in the interviews, which, as discussed in the methodology chapter, was informed by my experience as a youth and community worker, where I adopted an approach that encouraged open dialogue and really listened and responded to young people. I also suggest that evidence of reflexivity amongst some participants emerged in response to particular kinds of questions that I used to probe their thinking behind the decisions they had made: what was known about particular career ideas, who had informed this knowledge, which ideas were of most interest and why and where might new information regarding a particular idea be found. In this sense, the interview space became another field in itself, ‘the research field’, where the development of reflexivity within the sample was supported. However, only certain participants displayed this kind of habitus. So, whilst most of the participants were able to answer the question appropriately within the interviews, I only know of three participants who started to ask these questions of themselves independently (i.e. they reported having done so in the interviews). This included considering for themselves how they could better inform their decision making, which career idea they preferred and the reason for this, and what additional information would be helpful before making a final decision.
As I have highlighted in chapter 7, this can be seen in Carrie's case - she opened up her thinking to me and explored the tensions in her career related choices. I supported the development of a reflexive space where Carrie could consider the potential for possible futures by positioning her as an expert in her own life and decision making process and me as the interpreter of this. Since I did not occupy a position in any of the fields Carrie inhabited (outside of the research), I was distant from the ways of thinking, typical cultural capital and expectations common amongst other members of her network. This created a space for her to exert agency in that, potentially, she perceived some degree of freedom from the fields, capital and social network that usually shaped her experience. Furthermore, this appeared to impact her experience 'in practice' outside of the research process in that she expanded her social network to include more peripheral members who could provide transposable cultural capital (information). So, whilst I have shown her network to be different from that of more typical participants, resulting from her unique position in both family and peer fields, I also argue that her involvement in this research was partly responsible for creating this atypical expansion of networking practice. As a result of inhabiting this field, she developed an ability to ask questions of her career ideas and of herself as she carefully considered each idea with me during interviews. Through the research process, her reflexivity continued to become an important part of her habitus, an automatic part of decision-making, and this way of thinking became her default.

I suggest, therefore, that Carrie’s engagement in reflexivity through the research continued the development of her habitus in a way that differed to that of other research participants. In Chapter 7, I suggested that this habitus differed in three ways: 1) she was increasingly able to think objectively about herself in relation to her surroundings; 2) she had a strong desire for social mobility; 3) she was increasingly able and willing to build a social network that contained bridging as well as bonding social capital. These were found to be important factors contributing to Carrie’s reflexive thinking when engaging with her career ideas (as outlined in chapter 7).
But, again, it’s worth noting that Carrie’s career ideas were still shaped by the structural factors discussed. In spite of her display of a more reflexive habitus and her determination for social mobility, her chosen career pathway was still in line with those that held capital in the fields occupied within her environment (ie. BTEC childcare). As such, there appeared to be some tension within this atypical habitus in that Carrie desired social mobility but showed signs that she felt compelled to align with the low status field she occupied.

Carrie’s case, then, demonstrates that even when young people show evidence of reflexivity, and when many supporting factors are present to enable this to happen (the research process), there are still limits regarding the range of career ideas considered. We might note that, although Carrie expressed an interest in teaching, her route into the profession was through a particular kind of academic capital (vocational qualifications) that holds lower transposable value within the wider education field (e.g. in terms of accessing university degree programmes).

Furthermore, the evidence I have presented highlights the role of the school field in encouraging students to make relatively safe decisions regarding career and college pathways. Their position in the educational quasi-market encouraged a policy aimed at maximising enrolment numbers in their 6th form college, and, as a result, they did not provide information on other colleges and their associated qualifications. For instance, in the case of Carrie they did not provide information on the range of colleges that offered alternative routes into teaching. They also did not appear to support the development of reflexivity through providing opportunities for participants to reflect on their career ideas in the way Carrie did within interviews. Informal conversations often took place, but had to be initiated by participants. So, in this sense, the school did offer actors that could expand a participant's social network, but only where this was sought by students.

The school’s reluctance to support a broader range of possibilities in relation to college and careers was motivated by two factors. The first revolved
around the expectations it had of its students; the second around its position within the educational quasi-market. With regards to the school expectations regarding its students, like the peer, family and community fields, it subscribed to the risk avoidance habitus. This habitus was further developed by the school, and low expectations regarding student outcomes were made apparent during a conversation with the deputy head where it was strongly implied that his students were incapable of coping with anything more demanding than studying vocational subjects at a local college. In this sense, the school played a role in ensuring that Carrie’s reflexivity was in the minority and limited. With regards to the school's position in the education field, its location in a disadvantaged area put staff under significant pressure to fill places and produce results that were competitive. In this sense, the school was demand led in that it was responding to the needs of local students. As has been suggested in chapter 5, where the contribution of the family and community fields in supporting typical career ideas were explored, students were much more likely to choose occupations that required BTECs than A-levels. In meeting these demands, the school and college offered a small range of vocational subjects at GCSE and college level.

8.3 Towards a Methodological Account that is Young Person Focused

This third section relates to my methodological contribution to knowledge. Here, I will argue that the approach taken through this research enabled me to understand young people's career decision making in a way that was authentic to the participants’ voices. This approach was able to not only engage with young people about a subject that concerned them, but did this in such a way that an understanding of how these people view and engage with their transition could be co-constructed with them. I was, therefore, able to obtain rich, in-depth data, and, as I have already suggested, in some cases the interview space further supported the development of a reflexive habitus that continued to explore career opportunities in a thoughtful and considered way.
In considering the co-construction of such rich data, the methodological approach of naturalistic inquiry was central to giving voice to the participants. This approach recognises that there are multiple constructions of reality, as different people see and understand the world depending upon their own experiences. For example, it was through this approach that I was able to develop an understanding of participants’ perception of their career ideas, where certain possible decisions were seen as safe and others risky. Bourdieu’s (1977) theory allowed me to recognise that how people view the world (through their habitus) differs according to the fields occupied and the capital available within them. However, we must recognise (as does Bourdieu) that some constructions of reality are more powerful than others (i.e. that the forms of habitus that are dominant in relation to the field of power enable the use of more valued capital that can be exchanged for status). So, whilst I have adopted naturalistic inquiry in order to co-construct an understanding of the appropriate reality of the young people involved in the research, I have also used the theoretical framework to establish how this perceived reality may be shaped by their own location in a socially disadvantaged community and how it then further reproduces inequality.

Connecting this back to the literature on young people’s transitions at 16, very few studies emphasise young peoples’ voices when exploring how career decision making is shaped during this period. This is particularly the case for literature that explores decision making among young people in areas of social disadvantage. A concern in the research literature, then, is that young peoples’ voices are missing from this important conversation. This is highlighted strongly by Miles (2000:10), who states that ‘[t]he most damaging problem with the ‘transition debate’ is that it has tended to take young people out of the youth equation’; so that, whilst several authors have theorised the nature of transition post-modernity, very little research actually presents practical evidence. As Payne (2003) notes, ‘the evidence base underpinning our understanding of how young people make their choices at 16 is fairly thin’ (2003: 59). Worth (2010), too, recognises this lack of empirical research in exploring how labour market change has affected the employment and educational related expectations and aspirations of young
people, stating that this presents a lack of academic and political consideration regarding young people’s attitudes towards their perceptions in the modern labour market. Some, who recognize and are concerned with limitations in empirically grounded and theoretically informed discussions regarding youth transition in relation to social class or place in the current period, have made encouraging contributions through holding seminars in these areas (Shildrick, Blackman, & MacDonald, 2009).

White (2007), too, draws attention to the lack of research studies that engage with young people’s accounts over prolonged periods of time, stating that these are increasingly becoming marginalised. School and estate based ethnographic studies that illustrated processes by which disadvantage is reproduced are now relatively rare. Examples of this approach include Paul Willis’ (1977) ‘Learning to Labour’, who spent three years studying a small male, working class peer group called the likely lads, and found the cultural capital embedded within this group was central to directing them into certain types of work. Another example is that of MacLeod’s (1987) ‘Ain’t no makin’ it, which concerned aspiration and attainment in a low-income neighborhood, and which looked at two peer groups: 'the hallway hangers' and 'the brothers'. Macleod highlighted how one group showed an understanding of the structural factors shaping their future and consequently chose to opt out of what they saw as ‘playing the game’. The other group believed that they alone were responsible for their opportunities in life, and engaged enthusiastically with education and work, despite limited success. This study spanned a period of twelve years, following the two groups into adulthood; through long term immersion and sensitivity to the peer group culture, the researcher was able to demonstrate the powerful effects of structural disadvantage. Given that my research has spanned a period of 5 years, and involved meeting with participants on a regular basis for two years, I argue that I was able to develop relationships that enabled an insight into their cultural world that would not have been possible had I adopted another methodology or research design.
White (2007) argues that longitudinal studies, such as those outlined above, have been replaced by the prominence of large-scale, survey-based, cross-sectional studies or small-scale interview-based studies that have combined questionnaire – based surveys with individual interviews (for example Taylor, 1992 – cited in White, 2007). An example of the inadequacies of such an approach can be found within the policy literature that informed the Connexions strategy outlined in chapter 2. This strategy was based upon statistics such as unemployment trends, and theories regarding ‘risk’ (Beck, 1992, 1998). As a consequence, rather than responding to young peoples' experiences, it problematized huge numbers of young people as ‘at risk’ and created solutions that emphasised the role of individuals in failing to meet the expectations of a market economy. Without investment in accessing the voices of young people, this policy was unlikely to result in a truly appropriate and effective response to the transition trends identified. Through this thesis, I have argued that the inclusion of young people in discussing subjects that directly regard and affect them is vital to achieving a real understanding of the implications and possible solutions regarding the trends discussed.

An example that supports the strength of the methodological approach taken in this research is Matt, whose case I discussed in depth in chapter 6. Although he generally required high levels of trust before discussing his career ideas with me, as the research progressed he became increasingly open in discussing problems that concerned him rather than career ideas per se. For example, he spoke about his father’s lack of presence in conversations about his future, which was difficult because his father was the person he felt closest to:

\[\text{Matt: } \text{Urm... sometimes it’s like it’s hard because my dad you can tell if he’s listening sometimes and sometime he doesn’t. Sometime he just fools about, depends what mood he’s in. I should just really like tell him to do one. Going on with him and go out.}\]

\[\text{Dani: } \text{So you gotta pick him in the right frame of mind?}\]

\[\text{Matt: } \text{Yeah}\]

(Matt, phase 4)
In the final interview, Matt indirectly compared me to his family when he stated “I don’t know it’s just been good to speak to someone about it. Like good family as well, someone I can trust. Sweet [laughs]” (Matt, phase 4). I felt the connection he had made with me in this moment through his shyness; Matt acted this way in moments where he felt emotion; he attempted to brush this off at the end of this sentence by finalizing the conversation: ‘sweet’. I believe he had at this point included me within his network of intimacy; I was one of his people, ‘like family’. My presence in his network was unusual, as otherwise he reported only discussing his career ideas with family members who were embedded within the community. This was an important dynamic, affecting the trustworthiness of data gathered and demonstrating the importance of trust and prolonged engagement. He talked to me about his career ideas and his concerns regarding possible choices and pathways; for example, on his college application form he had entered only one college and one subject option.

Matt: Yeah professional chef I put in, but they said put... I couldn’t think of anything else to put down so I just didn’t. [seemed stressed]

Dani: So you just put that?

Matt: So I just put that, on its own. [Laughs, embarrassed] Couldn’t think of anything!

Matt's openness to developing a relationship with me over the course of the research was noticeable in his level of engagement, his relaxed manner, and his willingness to really consider his response to questions. He frequently discussed his anxieties about his future, and even asked my opinion on a couple of occasions. Additionally, it seemed that the interview provided Matt with space in which to negotiate some of these tensions in the school and employment fields that appeared to be the consequence of a misalignment between his habitus and those common within these fields (Bourdieu, 1977). This related to his position in the family and community field, as outlined in chapter 5. For instance, Matt felt that he could discuss his misalignment with the school field, speaking of his susceptibility to getting into trouble:
I think that’s one of the reasons why I don’t like it in school cause they’re constantly like looking at everything that you do. […] ‘Cause I was telling like the head of year the other day it’s not, not listening when people are telling me what to do, it’s just I don’t know, just prefer to do it on my own. So… (Matt, phase 3).

More recent research that does try to incorporate young people's voices has tended to do so in ways that emphasise the implications of culture and identity upon transition outcomes in particular types of disadvantaged locations. This research is insightful in providing rich accounts of the transition experiences of marginalized communities, and in this sense it builds on literature such as Evans (2006) and MacDonald & Marsh (2005). In a similar way, this study has sought to develop rich and authentic accounts of the transition experiences of the participants. This has been sought by actively engaging with young people in a way that has enabled the co- construction of their realities through the use of specific research tools, such as mind maps and conceptual diagrams, which had the advantage of objectifying participants' career ideas and social networks and then offering these 'objects' to participants for verification and, in some cases, reflection. Such research tools (which have been developed during my experience as a youth worker), in addition to member checking and prolonged engagement, enabled me to gain rich data with young people who might otherwise be identified as a 'hard to reach' group.

For instance, in one conversation with Matt, he implied his time with his dad had been compromised by his dad's girlfriend, who he has a poor relationship with. Here, the use of picture drawing was instrumental in eliciting his perceived problem, since he drew a speech bubble with 'nag nag nag' inside. This then provoked the following conversation:

Dani: What about your dad’s girlfriend
Matt: In what way? [voice drops]
Dani: She still working in the same job, Aldi? Does she live in the same house?
Matt: Yeah, case they been together for like thirteen years, and she always been there when I could have been with my dad, so...

(Matt, phase 3)

During the first interview, I left a pen and paper in front of Matt, as I did all participants; this was for a couple of ice breaking exercises. He started by writing, “My life is boring”. I talked to him for a bit about this and he explained, “There’s nothing to do round here”, and “[The estate], it’s crap”. Matt told me he spent the majority of his time on the estate, and occasionally travelled into the city centre to ‘hang out with mates’. On other occasions he discussed his problematic relationships with his dad’s girlfriend, his cooking teacher, his ICT teacher and his exams. Therefore, I argue that it was partly through conversations around the things he had written/pictures drawn that we were able to develop the relationship we did. Furthermore, as I have already suggested, the objectification of participants’ career ideas and networks in this way supported some participant’s active engagement with their career ideas, which I was then able to support and encourage during interviews. As a result, the research field became potentially a developmental space for some participants that was built on the ‘voice’ of participants. For Carrie, this took place through her engagement in her career concept maps (see figure 32 as well as appendices 9 - 12). As outlined in the methodology chapter (chapter 4), I presented a diagram for participant verification, representative of the previous interview, at the start of each meeting. Carrie took a keen interest in these diagrams, and referred back to them with me as we discussed differences in her preferences from the previous session. These diagrams were a useful tool in instigating conversations that supported Carrie’s developing reflexivity. For example, when referring back to her interest in teaching using her concept map, a conversation resulted where she compared her interests in different types of teaching. Here, she presented evidence for prioritizing one type over another, preferring primary school teaching over secondary because of the potential for variety in subjects taught and so forth. Having all previously
considered career ideas in front of us in the form of a concept map enabled this kind of comparison to take place.

Figure 32: Carrie’s Career Map, Interview 2
8.4 Chapter Summary

In Chapter 4, I argued that in order to really understand the career decision making of young people from backgrounds such as those who took part in this study we need an approach that incorporates three aspects: youth work practice, naturalistic inquiry and a critical framework that maps individuals within the social structure of society. Through using this approach, I have been able to generate data that captures and values young people’s voices whilst simultaneously interpreting these voices as located within the structural conditions within which participants were operating. I have sought to identify how these young people’s perceptions of career opportunities were shaped through a process of social reproduction mechanized by cultural capital transferred to the habitus via social networks. Furthermore, reflexivity has been understood to be formed within this context and its potential shaped by its presence within the habitus of participants.

With this in mind, the key contributions to the youth transition literature have been highlighted; these centre on the need for a structurally embedded and youth focused approach that presents an understanding of why young people from disadvantaged backgrounds often make career related choices that are not advantageous to them in the long term, and the extent to which reflexive agency is possible in this environment. Furthermore, it has been demonstrated through this thesis that, although reflexivity demonstrates the potential for social mobility (and agency), as argued by Beck, the capacity to do this is unevenly distributed - risk affects people differently and to different degrees (Beck, 1992, 1998). In this sense, we can argue that reflexivity can become part of the reproduction process that it is meant to disrupt. This is because reflexivity is part of a culturally produced habitus that is situated and formed in the structure of fields, capital that has been demonstrated. What has been shown, then, is that although there are students who possess the potential for social mobility, and that their capability for reflexive thinking is important for this, this is not enough to disrupt the structures of disadvantage mapped through the concepts of field, habitus and capital. This thesis has demonstrated that, even in this new transition environment of post modernity,
structural disadvantage is still very much present, but that there is potential for agency through reflexivity given the right conditions and time.
Chapter 9: Recommendations

This chapter will present my response to the two sets of research questions upon which this thesis is based, the contribution to knowledge in relation to the youth transition literature, and recommendations for policy and future research. It asks some thought provoking questions for policy makers and practitioners before outlining some suggestions for future research.

9.1 Addressing the Research Questions

In addressing the research questions, I will first answer those that provide a theoretical understanding of the research problem, informed by the conceptual framework introduced in chapter 3. Then I will address the original question that was presented in laymen’s terms in chapter 1; in doing so I will provide a more holistic answer to the research problem.

9.1.1 Addressing the Theoretical Question

The first question is:

How do the fields that young people occupy shape their habitus responsible for career decision making? And to what extent is reflexive agency possible in transcending young people’s social position and achieving social mobility?

In addressing the first of these two questions, it was found that cultural capital in the form of career knowledge and advice transferred through the social network of participants was central to shaping the habitus responsible for informing career decision making. This cultural capital was reflective of
that available within the fields’ participants and their social networks inhabited. Due to the location of these fields in a disadvantaged area, the cultural capital available tended to be limited in that it related only to a narrow selection of labour market occupations typical in these fields.

This knowledge regarding career and college options was further limited by participants requiring trust in their relationships with others - the subsequent networks of intimacy acted as a mechanism for the transference of this form of cultural capital to their habitus. The structure of social networks that resembled networks of intimacy was fairly insular, and they predominantly held bonding rather than bridging capital. Participants often only considered career ideas that were informed by network members with whom they held relationships where trust was present. This appeared to be a way of avoiding the risk of failure. It also resulted in some cultural capital not being utilised and/or accessed due to an undeveloped or problematic relationship with a potential network member. This process was then further maintained by the school, who valued the forms of capital participants' were using in making career related decisions. They did this by: a) only offering qualifications in the school 6th form that directly related to this capital (e.g. vocational qualifications that can be seen as highly gendered); and b) limiting the availability of information regarding other post 16 colleges in the area. This was a direct result of the school's position in the educational market place and the need to ensure an income stream for the post 16 sixth form college, which depended on enrolment numbers.

The second question is concerned with the potential for reflexive agency in transcending young people's social position and achieving greater freedom in their career decision making. Here, it was found that reflecting upon career ideas in a way that may enable social mobility was rare and unequally distributed. Young people needed support to engage in reflexive thinking when considering their career related decisions, and certain conditions were required to facilitate this process. The research space was found to be an
example of how young people could be supported to develop reflexive thinking; the conditions of this space were:

- The opportunity for young people to engage in conversations about their future over a prolonged period of time
- That an approach was taken that enabled trust to be developed
- The presence of a person external to the school and perhaps the community field
- A focus on questions regarding decisions being considered and why
- Time given to exploring how these decisions were being influenced and what role network members played

Having answered the theoretical questions developed following the presentation of the conceptual framework, I will now return to the original question posed at the start of the thesis.

9.1.2 Addressing the Non-Theoretical Question

The second question is:

How are the career related choices of young people from disadvantaged backgrounds shaped during their transition towards the end of compulsory schooling?

This research has highlighted that the participants’ career related decisions were strongly shaped by the views of people they knew, many of whom they had significant relationships with as a result of spending time in the same places. These people were mostly family and sometimes friends. Relationships were strong, and such people were important to participants; they felt that they could trust their opinions and the decisions they had made in their life, and that they would not lead them to destinations where they felt
unsafe. It was through these people that participants constructed their understanding of possible futures, what types of jobs they might enjoy or be good at, and whether they would be able to handle certain situations they might encounter. When participants asked questions of themselves or of the occupation they had in mind, these people were important sources of information. The school supported this kind of thinking, encouraging participants to stay with what they know and attend the school 6th form, which only offered vocational qualifications in the range of careers these young people knew about.

Those young people who aspired for something different and held the potential to achieve this were rare; they sought understanding and information regarding what an alternative future might look like through the people they knew, but, unlike others, were prepared to look outside of trusted sources to find this. However, the environment was limited in providing answers to this, and they were reluctant to consider untested pathways. Exploring alternative routes to this imagined future was done in a considered way, a way that can be supported through strategies aimed at creating space for such dialogue.

9.2 Contribution to Knowledge

This thesis has adopted an approach to looking at young people’s career decision making that is both theoretically informed and empirically grounded, and I have demonstrated the value of this approach throughout. The analysis generated using this approach has led me to the following conclusions - each of which makes an important contribution to the youth transition literature:

- That whilst reflexive thinking may be used by some young people from disadvantaged backgrounds as a means to achieve social mobility, this possibility is still very much defined by their location in the social structure.
• Reflexivity is not available to all young people, but is a form of habitus unequally distributed, and this is likely to be in line with wider inequalities in society.

• That reflexive thinking and agency can be nurtured 'against the odds' through an approach which: a) involves a trusting relationship; b) listens to what they have to say; and c) uses multiple modes of communication (e.g. visual, verbal) - as appeared to be the case for some during this research process.

9.3 Implications of this Research for Policy, Practice and Research

In considering the implications of the research findings, the following six problems have been identified as hampering both open decision making and the enablement of social mobility for young people in situations such as those involved in this research:

1) Some young people from disadvantaged backgrounds have a fairly narrow understanding of their local labour market.

2) Young people tend to only listen to those who they have developed a relationship with and who they trust.

3) Young people are reluctant to risk pursuing a job outside of their defined comfort zone.

4) Schools that encourage their students to attend post 16 colleges/sixth forms that are 'safe' but that only offer a narrow range of qualifications that mirror the interests of their students are accentuating this process further.

5) Staff members who believe they are nurturing their students by offering 'safe' environments that minimise the risk of failure may also be adding to the problem.

6) An education system that rewards schools for exam performance encourages schools to offer qualifications and options that they see as relevant to their students as a means of enhancing this performance. This serves to narrow the possible range of career
and post 16 options students are able to pursue.

9.3.1 Questions for Policy Makers, Practitioners and Researchers

Rather than presenting a number of recommendations for policy, practice and research, I will outline instead some questions for consideration. It is hoped that these questions may be critically reflected upon in relation to the contexts surrounding policy, practice and research so that solutions appropriate to these environments may be developed.

9.3.1.1 Prompt Questions for Policy Makers

In order to create an environment where schools may be supportive of students in managing the problems identified above, I suggest here that policy makers consider the following questions:

- How might occupational awareness be developed?

Young people’s career ideas are only as broad as the information they have of the labour market. Exposure to industry and further education providers can be very beneficial in developing occupational awareness, but schools sometimes struggle in providing impartial career guidance due to their position as a provider of education within a market structure. Students appear to be unaware of, or are unconcerned with, the availability of different occupations within the local labour market.

- How might professional relationships be strengthened?

When trust was developed with professionals, the potential for them to be influential in supporting young people with their decision making was greatly
enhanced. Time and opportunity for these relationships to develop would be hugely beneficial in addressing the problems outlined.

- How might these young people’s comfort zone be expanded?

It is tempting for young people to choose in ways that feel safe, especially considering their perspective regarding the turbulent transition environment faced. Partnerships, such as links with industry, can be powerful in developing familiarity and confidence regarding occupations and pathways. A space that enables young people to navigate and explore decision making in relation to their comfort zone can support the negotiation of these tensions.

- How might a reflexive space be created?

Reflexive thinking can, in the long term, enable social mobility. The conditions needed for young people to engage in reflexive thinking were: time to develop a relationship with someone external to the school and perhaps community; to engage in questioning that provokes thinking around why certain decisions are being made; and to explore resources that may inform these decisions. How might policy support schools in the provision of such spaces for pupils?

- How might members of staff be encouraged to support students in expanding their comfort zone?

Perceptions of young people as vulnerable and in need of nurturing can be constraining, as this may result in them not being supported or encouraged in pursuing a wide range of career pathways. For them to stand the best chance of maintaining a post 16 destination, preparation for a range of pathways is likely to be beneficial.

- How might schools be encouraged to provide qualifications to suit a wider range of possible career pathways?
It makes sense for schools to offer students the opportunity to study subjects assumed to be popular so that competitive exam results may be achieved. However, when responding to student demand in this way, an over-emphasis on vocational courses can significantly reduce the choice of pathways available to young people. If school were to promote A-levels (which hold greater transposable capital), there would need to be considerable support for students, which would need to be fully resourced. Many schools are not in a position to offer this level of support.

9.3.1.2 Questions for Practitioners

In order to create an environment in school where young people may be supported to manage the problems identified above, I suggest here that staff in school consider the following questions.

• How might young people’s understanding of a range of occupations available within a range of industries be developed?

Young people only consider occupations they have an awareness of, and benefit from instances where they are able to visualize an occupation through opportunities to engage in work experience, observation, conversation and so on. Such opportunities can be very influential in shaping career ideas. Both structured work experience and informal dialogue have been shown to be important in developing occupational awareness.

• How can relationships be developed with key professionals?

When relationships with key professionals are developed, the potential for them to be influential in supporting young people with their decision making was enhanced. Time and attitude seemed to be central to this relationship. Opportunities for the development of these relationships could be structured
or impromptu. Importantly, the availability of such professionals to develop such relationships needs to be resourced.

- What might support young people in exploring ideas that are outside of their defined comfort zone?

The avoidance of risk can be detrimental to young people pursuing opportunities and pathways that are varied. How can confidence be strengthened? With preparation, the associated risks can be reduced and the potential for failure managed. The more detail and awareness young people have regarding what to expect, the more likely they are to be successful in what they choose to pursue. Young people are more likely to listen to someone that they feel comfortable with. Visiting colleges and industry is a powerful way of increasing confidence in a new idea.

- How might a space be created that enables ability and willingness to engage in reflexive thinking?

Reflexive thinking can, in the long term, enable social mobility. Opportunities to engage in reflexive thinking were both formal and informal. Informal opportunities came through timed reflection following college open days, work experience placements, and drop in sessions. In relation to formal reflexivity, the conditions needed for young people to engage in reflexive thinking were: time to develop a relationship with someone external to the school and perhaps community to engage in questioning that provokes thinking around why certain decisions are being made; and to explore resources that may inform these decisions.
9.3.1.3 Recommendations for Future Research

Here, I will briefly outline some thoughts for future research.

• Having explored how the environment these young people are located in produces certain forms of decision making, and, indeed, forms of reflexivity, it would be useful to unpack how this shapes their understanding of their future self. This might involve incorporating a theoretical framework that focuses on identity, which would enable the consideration of how individuals such as Carrie are able to imagine a different kind of future.

• There appears to be a relationship between engaging in reflexive thinking and the utilization of the social networks in constructing career ideas. Mapping both the social network of a group of participants and the development of this network over time would be interesting. Further research could also look at the role of bridging capital in enabling the process of reflexivity and, ultimately, the potential for social mobility.

9.4 Chapter Conclusion

As stated in chapter 1, the purpose of this thesis was to unpack young people's career decision making; this has been achieved by addressing the two sets of research questions upon which this thesis is based, and as detailed at the start of this chapter. My answer to these questions has detailed the processes via which young people's career pathways are constrained and transcended; from this, a contribution has been made to the youth transition literature. This has only been possible with an approach that prioritizes the voices of young people and with a theoretically based approach capable of presenting some of the complexity and structural inequality present within their transition experiences.
The wider implications of the study's findings have been presented through a series of questions for policy makers and practitioners. It is recognised that a political environment that structures the position of educational institutions within the educational market is responsible for several of these problems. However, I am hopeful that some change is possible by considering the questions posed. Unfortunately, the potential for social mobility is only possible for a small number of participants who are well positioned within their fields and have the kind of habitus that is ready to receive support in utilising reflexivity to transcend their current social position. Although a slow and selective process it is one that is ultimately hopeful, considering the powerful structures in which these young people and the fields they occupy are embedded.
Bibliography


Appendix 1 – participant information sheet

Young people’s thoughts on career choice influence

Participant information Sheet

You are invited to take part in a study; the data that you create may be used within my PhD. My PhD is about what young people think influences them when choosing potential career paths.

Before you decide whether you would like to be involved it is important for you to understand why the pilot study is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. Please ask if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information. Take up to two weeks to decide whether or not you wish to take part. Thank you for reading this.

The research is based at:

School of Education, The University of Manchester, Oxford road, Manchester, M13 9PL

My name is Danielle White and I will be the researcher

Title of the study

Young people’s thoughts on career choice influence

What is the aim of the study?

For you to help design and create information for a piece of high quality research which explores the influences impacting upon career choice throughout year 10 and year 11.

Why have you been chosen?

The study aims to work with a range of young people from across year 10 so that a variety of experiences can be explored. You have been chosen because you will be able to make a valuable contribution to the research.

If both you and your parent or carer is happy for you to be involved you will be one of 10 young people taking part in this study.

What would you be asked to do if you took part?

You would be introduced to the process of designing research and be asked to share your thoughts over the next two years on what is influencing you when choosing potential career paths. A range of interesting methods of
collecting this information will be used such as the use of various new technologies.

What happens to the data collected?

The data you generate will be used to design the PhD research and may also be used within the PhD itself. Parts of the data may also be fed back to the school but at no time will your name be mentioned.

How is confidentiality maintained?

Anything we do as part of the interview sessions will be downloaded onto my laptop and paper files will be destroyed. My laptop is kept in a securely locked room at the university and only I have access to it. When parts of the recordings are written up your name will not be included in any of it. The files will be kept for the length of time that they are involved in the study.

What happens if I do not want to take part or if I change my mind?

Participation in this study is voluntary; so you are free to withdraw your consent at any point.

If you do decide that you would like to take part you will be given this information sheet to keep and be asked to sign a consent form. However, you are still free to withdraw consent at any time without giving a reason, this will not reflect badly on you in any way.

Will I be paid for participating in the study?

Unfortunately you will not be paid for your time

What is the duration of the study?

The study will take place over two years and will involve 8 interviews of up to one hour each

Where will the study be conducted?

The study will take place in school

Will the outcomes of the study be published?

It is possible that parts of this study may be included within the final PhD, this will be available in the university library and might be made available online. Parts of the study might also be communicated back to the school verbally. You will also be welcome to receive information regarding the study findings.

Criminal Records check (if applicable)
I hold a current and clear criminal records check as required to work in school

**Contact for further information**

If there is any part of this research that you would like to discuss please feel free to contact me by email: daniellewhite-2@postgraduate.manchester.ac.uk

**What if something goes wrong?**

If you need any help or advice during the research period please feel free to contact either myself at the email address above or Ms D at your school
If a participant wants to make a formal complaint about the conduct of the pilot study they should contact the Head of the Research Office, Christie Building, University of Manchester, Oxford Road, Manchester, M13 9PL
Appendix 2 – parent / carer information letter

Dear Parent or Carer,

My name is Danielle White and I am a student researcher at Manchester University; I also work voluntarily at NG School and 6th form.

XXXXX has been selected to be involved in a piece of work which looks at what young people believe affects them when choosing potential career paths. The project will take place over two years and XXXXX will be invited to take part in 8 sessions during this time. XXXXX is one of ten year 10 students who have been selected for the study as it was felt he/she would be able to make a valuable contribution to the research.

Involvement in the study is voluntary but it is hoped that the sessions will prove to be a useful exercise for XXXXX in terms of both contributing towards the design of the research as well as exploring a range of career ideas.

If you are happy for XXXXX to be involved in the research please sign and return the enclosed consent form to the school by the XXXXX If you require any additional information please feel free to contact me either by phone on 07737739792 or on the email address below:
danielle.white-2@postgraduate.manchester.ac.uk

Kind regards

Danielle White
PhD student at Manchester University
Appendix 3 – parent / carer information sheet

Young people’s thoughts on career choice influence

Parent or Carers Information Sheet

Your son or daughter is being invited to take part in a study; the data that they produce may be used within my PhD. My PhD is about what young people think influences them when choosing potential career paths.

Before you decide whether you would like to allow your son or daughter to be involved, it is important for you to understand why the pilot study is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. Please ask if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information. You may take up to two weeks to decide whether or not you wish to take part. Thank you for reading this.

The research is based at:

School of Education, The University of Manchester, Oxford Road, Manchester, M13 9PL

My name is Danielle White and I will be the researcher.

Title of the study

Young people’s thoughts on career choice influence

What is the aim of the study?

For young people to be supported in the design of a piece of high-quality research which explores the influences impacting upon career choice throughout year 10 and year 11.

Why has your son or daughter been chosen?

The study aims to work with a range of young people from across year 10 so that a variety of experiences can be explored. Your son or daughter has been chosen because it is thought they will be able to make a valuable contribution to the research.

If both you and your son or daughter is happy to be involved they will be one of 10 young people taking part in this study.

What would they be asked to do if they took part?

They would be introduced to the process of designing research and be asked to share their thoughts over the next two years on what is influencing them
when choosing potential career paths. A range of interesting methods of collecting this information will be used, such as the use of various new technologies.

What happens to the data collected?

The data that they generate will be used to design the PhD research and may also be used within the PhD itself. Parts of the data may also be fed back to the school but at no time will your son’s or daughter’s name be mentioned.

How is confidentiality maintained?

Anything we do as part of the interview sessions will be downloaded onto my laptop and paper files will be destroyed. My laptop is kept in a securely locked room at the university and only I have access to it. When parts of the recordings are written up, your son’s or daughter’s name will not be included in any of it. The files will be kept for the length of time that they are involved in the study.

What happens if I do not want my son or daughter to take part or if I change my mind?

Participation in this study is voluntary; so you are free to withdraw your consent at any point.

If you do decide that you would like your son or daughter to take part you will be given this information sheet to keep and be asked to sign a consent form. However, you are still free to withdraw consent at any time without giving a reason; this will not reflect badly on you in any way.

Will my son or daughter be paid for participating in the study?

Unfortunately they will not be paid for their time.

What is the duration of the study?

The study will take place over two years and will involve 8 interviews of up to one hour each.

Where will the study be conducted?

The study will take place in school.

Will the outcomes of the study be published?

It is possible that parts of this study may be included within the final PhD; this will be available in the university library and might be made available online. Parts of the study might also be communicated back to the school verbally. You will also be welcome to receive information regarding the study findings.
**Criminal Records check (if applicable)**

I hold a current and clear criminal records check as required to work in the school.

**Contact for further information**

If there is any part of this research that you would like to discuss, please feel free to contact me by email: danielle.white-2@postgraduate.manchester.ac.uk

**What if something goes wrong?**

If you need any help or advice during the research period, please feel free to contact either myself at the email address above or Ms D at your son’s or daughter’s school.

If a participant wants to make a formal complaint about the conduct of the pilot study they should contact the Head of the Research Office, Christie Building, University of Manchester, Oxford Road, Manchester, M13 9PL.
Appendix 4 – participant consent form

Young people’s experiences of transition

CONSENT FORM

If you are happy to participate please complete and sign the consent form below.

1. I have read the attached information sheet on the above study and I have had the chance to think about the information and ask questions. I confirm I am happy with the answers given.

2. I understand that taking part in this study is voluntary and that I can stop being involved at any point without giving a reason.

3. I understand that the interviews will be recorded using a digital recorder and livescribe; this program records both drawings and sound.

4. I agree to allow quotes to be used; I understand my name will not be used with them.

6. I agree that any data collected may be passed to other researchers

7. I agree that any data collected may be published in academic books or journals; although my name will not be included.

I agree to take part in the above project

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Appendix 5 – parent / carer consent form

Young people’s thoughts on career choice influence

CONSENT FORM

If you are happy with your son or daughter participating please complete and sign the consent form below.

1. I confirm that I have read the information letter on the above study and have had the opportunity to consider the information and ask questions and had these answered satisfactorily.

2. I understand that taking part in this study is voluntary and that my son or daughter can stop being involved at any time without giving a reason.

3. I understand that the interviews will be recorded using a digital recorder and livescribe; this programme records both drawings and sound.

4. I agree to allow quotes to be used; I understand my son’s or daughter’s name will not be used with them.

5. I agree that any data collected may be passed to other researchers; I understand that my son’s or daughter’s name will not be passed on.

6. I agree that any data collected may be published in anonymous form in academic books or journals.

I agree that my son or daughter may take part in the above project

Name of parent or carer ___________________________ Date ___________ Signature ________________

Name of person taking consent ___________________________ Date ___________ Signature ________________
Appendix 6 – participant appointment card

APPOINTMENT CARD

Has an appointment with Dani from Manchester University

On............................ at ......................

Thank you

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HEAD OF YEAR 10

Manchester Leadership Programme
## Appendix 7 – final results of participants

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4 = Mark  
5 = Tom  
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9 = Kirsty  
10 = Zara  
11 = Jack  
12 = Christina  
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## Appendix 8 – final destinations of participants

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Appendix 11 – Carrie’s career map, interview 3
Appendix 12 – Carrie’s career map, interview 4